

Threatening in English

A mixed method approach

Julia Muschalik



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Threatening in English

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Introduction

The present study investigates one of the less pleasant actions that people perform using language: threatening. While, to some extent, threatening appears to be a straightforward and well-defined speech act, empirical research on its precise manifestations, i.e. its forms and functions, is surprisingly scarce. The central aim of the present volume is to report on such research and to provide more insights into the nature of threatening gained by investigating a corpus of authentic American English threat utterances.

1.1 Taking stock: Existing views on threatening

It has been repeatedly claimed that it is nearly impossible to consistently describe verbal threats due to their heterogeneous syntactic form and their indeterminate semantic content (cf. Fraser 1998; Limberg 2008, 2009; Storey 1995; Solan & Tiersma 2005). In a paper on threat responses, Limberg (2009: 1378), for example, asserts the clear verdict that “[t]hreats do not come in a standardized linguistic format.” Initially, this might not be surprising since speech acts are generally understood as defined by their function rather than their form (Jucker 2009: 1617). Yet, the same literature often lists typical features or supposedly preferred syntactic forms (cf. Fraser 1998; Limberg 2009). Fraser (1998), for example, attempts to identify common formal features of threats: he notes that “a threat typically takes the form of a declaration, with the speaker as the agent (‘I’m going to get you’), with a condition possibly present” (Fraser 1998: 165) and that “most direct verbal threats are conditional: either the addressee is to satisfy some condition(s), or the speaker will bring about an unfavourable state of the world” (Fraser 1998: 167), but “threats are not usually issued with both conditions being explicitly articulated” (Fraser 1998: 161). Furthermore, he argues “there are several syntactic forms, all of which carry approximately equivalent threats” (Fraser 1998: 167), which is similarly proposed by Harris (1984: 248). In other words, in the literature we find both assertions about the absolutely indeterminate form and content, but also confident claims about the typicality of certain elements, or even ideas of restricted sets of possible realizations. Now, what are these claims and assertions based on if the object of study is considered as fuzzy as the present one?

A possible explanation is of course the predominantly functional understanding of speech acts in general and threatening in particular. As was already mentioned, at first sight, the verbal or non-verbal action of threatening appears “to be a very simple, uncomplicated and uncontroversial” concept (Storey 1995: 74). Threats are issued “in order to make [a target] behave or feel in a particular way” (Storey 1995: 74) or to “[coerce] and [manipulate] the target into (not) doing something” (Limberg 2009: 1376). With such functional definitions, the form of a threat may appear as of secondary importance. It seems, however, that language users not only conceptualize threats with a clear function or purpose, but also expect a fixed set of certain linguistic elements to occur in a typical threat. And, as research on other speech acts suggests, “many speech acts exhibit typical surface patterns or they occur regularly with a small range of lexical items” (Jucker 2009: 1617).

In her *Threatening Communications Survey*, Gales (2010) investigates the expectations of scholars and language users with the regard to the typicality of linguistic features in threatening language. As part of the survey, a group of 103 university students was asked to list the “kind of language [they] think is the [most common] in threats” (Gales 2010: 272). Additionally, the respondents were given a choice of three different types of threats – conditional threats, direct threats, and veiled threats, each type illustrated with an example – and were asked to indicate which type they thought was the most common by circling this option. (Gales 2010: 272, Appendix). The answers reflect overall rather homogeneous expectations: a majority of students (80%) expected some form of *violent physical action verbs* to be part of a typical threat, as well as different kinds of *profanity* (> 70%), and more than a third of the students expected *2nd person pronouns* to occur (> 35%) (Gales 2010: 95). Arguably, the answers reflect rather vague and dissimilar criteria, but their degree of uniformity does not mirror a formal heterogeneity as proclaimed by Limberg (2009) and others. With regard to the most common type of threats, a majority of the students (54%) saw conditional threats as the most typical, followed by veiled threats (37%), a term which refers to an indirect form of threatening, and only 9% of the students saw direct threats as the most common form of threatening (Gales 2010: 94). Taken together, the results seem to be slightly inconsistent. Although the students predominantly chose conditional threats as the prototypical threat type, they did not list conditional clauses or lexical elements typically associated with conditionals, such as the conjunctions *if* and *or*, as typical linguistic elements of threats. Gales herself refers to these inconsistencies as “interesting” about her results (Gales 2010: 96, in a footnote).

As was already mentioned, such rather inconsistent views are mirrored in most of the research on threatening language: threats are described as indeterminate – and yet, a number of formal elements are listed as typical or less typical. What the majority of the existing accounts have in common is that the examples provided to

illustrate the proposed typicality are mostly fabricated (cf., e.g., Fraser 1998; Storey 1995) or compiled in an unsystematic way (cf., e.g., Harris 1984; Yamanaka 1995). Consequently, the generalizations arrived at are mainly based on either intuition or on existing general theories of speech acts, which were also predominantly formed on the basis of intuition and introspection themselves. To the best of my knowledge, none of these studies pay any attention to the question of how their generalizations perform if they are tested against a larger corpus of speech data obtained from naturally occurring speech.

Already a first inspection of the data analyzed for the present study, reveals that the examined threats do not readily fall into typologies as generic as the ones proposed by Gales (2010, 2011) and others who distinguish between categories such as direct, veiled/indirect and conditional threats (see Chapter 2 for a more thorough overview of existing typologies). For example, if we try to consistently apply this typology to the threats in (1) to (4), how should these utterances be categorized?¹

- (1) You will burn in hell for what you've done.
- (2) I will take care of him personally.
- (3) If she doesn't understand who I am or doesn't get to the phone right now, I will make sure I catch up with her later.
- (4) If you call the police, I will kill you.

What is the difference between the threat in (1) and (2)? Is one more or less *direct* than the other? And is the threat in (3) less *direct* than the one in (4) because the speaker in (4) announces physical violence using the verb *kill*? Or are both just conditional threats regardless of their directness?

These few examples should serve to illustrate that none of the existing accounts give any working definition or operationalization of their categories that would allow for a consistent application. Not only do most typologies of threats fail to be consistently applicable to authentic data, there is also a general lack of empirical studies that primarily focus on the form of threats. Instead, threatening language has often been researched as a corollary of other language uses or as a means of attaining specific communicative goals (cf. Benoit 1983; Culpeper 2011; Harris 1984; Limberg 2008, 2009). The focus of most studies was not on simply creating an inventory of the linguistic features in threatening utterances, but on an examination of the precise contexts in which speakers use threats. Consequently, most

1. In the following, all examples are taken from the corpus, unless otherwise indicated. All utterances were included in the corpus in the exact form they are quoted in the respective judicial opinion and were not 'cleaned up', so there will be spelling errors and other orthographic peculiarities.

of the formal features that have previously been discussed as typical of threatening language are presumably considered prototypical as a result of a focus on different functional aspects of threatening. A number of studies rooted in sociology and psychology, for example, focused on the use of threats as an instrument of social power and influence and have highlighted the conditional nature of threats (cf. Beller 2002; Beller et al. 2005; Hepburn & Potter 2011). In comparison, applied studies on threat assessment have often taken a more practical approach, focusing on linguistic features that are seen as possibly revealing the seriousness of a threatening message, such as verbal aggression markers and authorial stance (cf., e.g., Davis 1997; Gales 2010; Milburn & Watman 1981). One possible consequence of such a predetermined focus on individual features and their respective function is that other forms “that *do occur* [...] are overshadowed or completely masked, creating an incomplete understanding” of threatening language (Gales 2011: 28, original emphasis).

In fact, the scarce empirical studies on threatening language reveal that a number of expectations about the frequency of particular linguistic features in threats are not confirmed by corpus-based studies. Gales (2010: 99) reports that many of her respondents’ expectations were not met by her corpus data. For example, less violent verbs and profanity expressions were used by speakers, but more personal pronouns and references to a specific time frame were attested. She summarizes that some of the investigated “categories demonstrate a fairly large divergence from what was expected to what exists in the authentic threatening language” (Gales 2010: 99). Furthermore, her corpus study reveals that another distinctive criterion fails to be effective: the difference between realized and so called empty threats, i.e. threats that are not acted upon by their speakers. Contrary to common assumptions,

the distribution of linguistic markers and their corresponding functions does not divide neatly along that realization line – a finding also contrary to reported ideologies about how threatener intent is linguistically manifested. (Gales 2011: 28)

What this brief overview of previous works on threatening primarily illustrates is that a lack of empirical studies and a lack of studies that examine threatening language without any preconceived expectations, has led to “a complete lack of understanding of the discursive nature of threatening language and a lack of agreement, even, as to how speakers successfully threaten,” as Gales (2010: 2) emphasizes. The present study attempts to fill this academic void, at least partly.

1.2 Empiricism and pragmatics: Some relevant research perspectives

The last decade has seen an increasing appreciation of a range of empirical methods in pragmatic research; from the incorporation of corpus linguistic methodology (see, e.g., Adolphs 2008; Aijmer & Rühlemann 2015; Jucker et al. 2008; Rühlemann 2007) to experimental paradigms (see, e.g., Breheny 2011; Noveck & Reboul 2008; Noveck et al. 2004) and the development of different computational methods (see, e.g., Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al. 2013, for a computational framework of identifying politeness in requests), to name but a few examples. What these accounts have in common is their strict reliance on authentic language data, the usefulness or even necessity of which has been the topic of numerous debates in the last decades (cf., e.g., Beebe & Cummings 1996; Kasper 2008; Kasper & Rose 2002).

For a number of reasons, the type of data and the methods of data collection are particularly relevant issues in speech act research. It has been shown that, for example, elicitation of speech acts crucially biases results (cf., e.g., Flöck & Geluykens 2015). At the same time, the analysis of randomized collections of naturally occurring speech can be tricky because the occurrence of particular speech functions is unpredictable in context. This means that even if a large amount of natural speech is randomly collected, a particular phenomenon might not or only rarely occur (cf. Kasper 2008: 282). This unpredictability of speech functions gives rise to the next problem for researchers, i.e. how to identify a particular function, especially on a large scale. Language functions are rarely associated with a fixed set of forms, which makes corpus inquiries using search strings difficult in most and impossible in some cases (cf. Jucker et al. 2008; Jucker 2009; Rühlemann 2007).

These problems are summarized by Jucker (2009). He discusses different approaches to research on the speech act of complimenting and concludes that

[an] analysis of compliments always presumes that the researcher knows what a compliment is. Thus even a field linguist cannot set out in his or her investigation of compliments without precise reflections on what constitutes the nature of a compliment. (Jucker 2009: 1620)

As Jucker describes, the “field linguist”² analyzes data “that has *not* been elicited by the researcher [...] but that occurs for communicative reasons outside of the research project in which it is used” (Jucker 2009: 1615). The biggest problem is that often the field linguist does not know what to look for in the data. With a speech act seemingly as indeterminate in its form and content as threats, the problem appears

2. Jucker borrows a set of designations from Clark and Bangerter (2004), who discuss “field”, “armchair” and “laboratory” as the three competing paradigms in linguistic research.

to be even more severe. Can it be solved? Jucker presents a simple solution when he argues that

[the] only alternative would be to investigate only those entities that are named “compliment” by the members of a speech community (see, for instance, Watts 2003, who proposes such a method to investigate politeness).

(Jucker 2009: 1620)

This alternative is pursued by the present study: it investigates a corpus of authentic utterances that have been independently identified by the speech community as threats. In a way, the approach bears resemblance to first-order impoliteness studies and utilizes a specific type of *metalinguage* (cf., e.g., Eelen 2001; Haugh 2012; Watts 2003; Watts et al. 1992): judicial labels. More precisely, the corpus is composed of utterances that were extracted from judicial opinions, in which they are quoted as evidence. In cases where a particular statement is regarded as potentially threatening by at least one person (i.e. the plaintiff), it has to be decided whether or not the respective statement constitutes a legal offense. As part of the legal analysis, the statement in question is often quoted verbatim. Since these threats were uttered outside of any research context, the present study may be regarded as a work in “field linguistics” in Jucker’s view, but with the advantage that the collected data have been annotated by members of the speech community. By analyzing a set of authentic utterances that have been labeled “threat” by language users, the preliminary issue of what ‘constitutes the nature of a threat’, as Jucker put it, can be circumvented. Instead, the analysis can focus on a different set of related questions raised by Gales, which can be subsumed as: How do speakers threaten?

1.3 Scope and structure of this study

To sum up, the aims of the present study are twofold. First, formal realizations and functional aspects of threatening are investigated. Regarding the formal realizations, an inventory of features is compiled, testing many of the recurrent assumptions about the typicality of certain formal features which have not yet been subjected to empirical investigations. A quantitative analysis will show how often speakers use specific features and how they combine these features in their threats. This analysis will test whether any recurrent structure can be identified. Together with a qualitative discussion of relevant examples, a minute description of the formal features of the threats will be presented. On the basis of these findings, generalizations about common characteristics of threatening language will be developed. Concerning the functions of threats, it will be investigated whether any potential formal pattern can be traced back to any underlying functional differences, or in

other words, whether speakers always threaten in the same way and for the same reasons. The results on the features of threatening will be used to further investigate the threats' functions and, ultimately, to see whether the threats' form can be used as a predictor of their function.

The second aim of the present work is a methodological contribution to the field of pragmatics, with regard to both data collection and data analysis. Instead of relying on data obtained in artificial settings or by introspection, the threats in the analysis are obtained from a corpus of natural speech. Both formal features and functional characteristics are analyzed qualitatively by discussing relevant examples, but also quantitatively, using innovative computational methodology and statistical analyses. It will be shown how a combination of these different methods can be used to provide an adequate account of threatening in English in particular, but also advance pragmatic research in general (see, e.g., Dörnyei 2007 for a detailed discussion of the general dis/advantages of mixed method approaches in linguistic research). Specifically, the quantitative analyses should demonstrate how new analytical tools, such as cluster analysis or conditional inference trees, might enrich the toolkit traditionally employed in pragmatic research. Using a different number of statistical analyses to test pre-existing qualitative claims has proven useful to reveal a number of new conclusions and substantiate some existing notions about the form and function of threats in English.

The present book is structured as follows. In the first part, the scene is set by briefly examining some basic concepts of threatening and some of the relevant issues in previous research, i.e. the theoretical background against which the study has been designed (Chapter 2). Then, some methodological considerations are illustrated and discussed in relation to the procedure of the present study, including a discussion about the nature and usefulness of the data, a full description of the data collection process and the resulting data set (Chapter 3).

The first part of the empirical investigation presented in Chapter 4, concerns formal features of threatening language. This includes a description of the selection criteria for the analyzed features (Section 4.1), an operationalization of these features as variables for the present analysis, and a statistical analysis of their frequencies and distribution (Section 4.2–4.6). In a last step, the overall co-occurrence of all features is investigated by means of an unsupervised hierarchical cluster analysis, in order to detect potential patterns of feature combinations in the data (Section 4.7).

The second part of the analysis focuses on functional aspects of threatening. Section 5.1 discusses the existing accounts of the functions of threats with regard to the present data. After these preliminary considerations, a distinction between two macro-functions of threatening will be proposed, based on whether the threats are uttered in anticipation of a certain event or in reaction to it. The twofold distinction will be taken up for further discussion and used as a basis for a typology of two

general threat types (Section 5.2). In order to further investigate the validity of this typology, the structural features discussed in the first part of the analysis will be re-examined with regard to their distribution across the two categories, in order to investigate whether the two proposed functional threat types also differ in their formal realizations (Section 5.3). The relationship between formal and functional aspects is examined in more detail in Section 5.4, where the general suitability of the examined formal features of threats as a predictor of the threat's type is tested by means of fitting two related statistical models. In the last section of the chapter, the overall results are discussed in relation to previous findings (Section 5.5).

The book ends with a summary of all findings with regard to the question of how speakers threaten, proposes some generalizations on the basis of these overall findings, and points to potential for future research (Chapter 6). First, the most important findings are reviewed and summarized (Section 6.1). Subsequently, Section 6.2 discusses these findings in light of recent research on the strategic use of non-conventional indirectness and verbal (im)politeness as the most *rational choice* for the speakers. In the last section, some unanswered questions are brought up and are used to point to potential for future research endeavours.

Threatening

Basic concepts and issues

The present approach is best described as data-driven or inductive, i.e. conclusions will be predominantly drawn from and based on observation of the data rather than based on existing theories. However, some of the concepts, categories of analysis and parts of the terminology have been adopted from existing research on threatening language and speech acts in general. The following chapter introduces these fundamental notions and sets the theoretical frame of this study.

2.1 What is a threat?

The Oxford English Dictionary (*OED Online*) defines a threat utterance as “a declaration of hostile determination or of loss, pain, punishment, or damage to be inflicted in retribution for or conditionally upon some course”,³ and the act of threatening is defined as “to press, urge, try to force or induce; esp. by means of menaces”.⁴ On the face of it, the two definitions appear to be straightforward and, to that effect, most language users will presumably not struggle for an answer when asked what a threat is (cf. Storey 1995: 74). Yet, defining the speech act of threatening consistently has troubled numerous researchers, not least “[due] to their variation in semantic as well as syntactic form” (Limberg 2009: 1378).

Most of the existing studies on threats and threatening language can be described as “armchair” approaches: “approaches that do not analyze actual language data but work with reflections on language” (Jucker 2009: 1615). Furthermore, the greater part of these studies can be characterized as philosophical, in the sense that introspective reflections and qualitative in-depth discussions of mostly fabricated examples were used to develop definitions in the form of general rules or preconditions of performing the speech act (cf. Jucker 2009: 1615). Such approaches as developed by, for example, Fraser (1998), Storey (1995), or Yamanaka (1995) are closely modeled after Searle’s (1969) notion of *felicity conditions*. Fraser (1998: 160), for example, defines

3. “threat, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 25 February 2016.

4. “threat, v.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 25 February 2016.

the illocutionary act of threatening as occurring when a speaker intentionally expresses through an utterance:

- C1 – The speaker's intention to personally commit an act (or be responsible for bringing about the commission of the act);
- C2 – The speaker's belief that this act will result in an unfavourable state of the world for the addressee[.]

to which he later adds a third condition "C3 – The speaker's intention to intimidate the addressee through the addressee's awareness of the intention in C1" (Fraser 1998: 161). Fraser further claims that the form of a threat is of secondary importance: "a threat need not be in a particular form or phrasing, it may be issued by suggestion or innuendo, and certainly need not contain all the elements of the definition" (Fraser 1998: 169). As is evident from the quotes, Fraser's definition is rife with terminology that could hardly be operationalized in a consistent way. Intentions, beliefs or awareness are all concepts that cannot be observed or measured by an external analyst (cf. Adolphs 2008: 45).

In a comparable way, Storey (1995) defines "three main types" of threats based on speaker motives: *warning threats*, which inform the addressee of possible consequences of particular behavior, but are ultimately to the addressee's benefit, *pure threats*, which are to the benefit of the speaker and are used to coerce the addressee into doing something, and, thirdly, *frightening threats*, which are similar to the latter type with the exception that no coercion is involved. Her typology is solely based on what the speaker attempts to achieve with the threats and she concludes that "[the] form, intention and ability to carry out the intention of the threat do not appear to be necessarily relevant" (Storey 1995: 80).

As was pointed out above, concepts such as intentions, beliefs or speaker goals are not observable for an outside analyst and cannot be used as the basis for a context-independent definition of threats. Such a definition, however, would be desirable for two reasons. First of all, as a starting point to see how any of the presumed generalizations perform if they are tested against a larger corpus of speech data obtained from naturally occurring speech. And secondly, to ensure that the theories of threatening that build on these generalizations are indeed that and not circular micro-theories, sufficient to explain just the set of examples they were derived from.

It has to be stressed that the functional approach Fraser and Storey, for example, pursue is not problematic per se. In fact, most of the existing speech act studies have used introspective reflections as a starting point, and with good reason. Jucker (2009: 1619), for example, considers a philosophical approach especially fruitful with regard to exploring the "nature" of a speech act, i.e. what it means to perform a given speech act. An answer to this question, he argues, can often at first only be

found by introspection. The problem most of the above-mentioned approaches then face, is an unfortunate unclear division of labor: while philosophical approaches can and should definitely set the agenda for empirical investigations, it is the latter that should deliver on generalizations. The discussion of a small set of fabricated examples does not suffice to present general insights into the workings of a speech act. Yet, often the examples that are given are not presented as individual instances but are discussed as generalizable representatives. As a consequence, in addition to functional reflections, we often also find confident statements about the ‘typical form’ these functions take on. Fraser (1998), for example, offers a range of views on formal properties of threats:

A threat is never explicitly stated and must always be inferred. (167)

So how are threats made? The simplest way is to utter a declarative sentence with the speaker as the agent of the unfavourable act. ‘I’m gonna cut you bad’ and ‘I will get you later’ are illustrative. Interestingly, it is not possible to have a direct, impersonal threat. (167)

[...] most direct verbal threats are conditional [...] (167)

The critical point for a direct verbal threat is that the speaker expresses intention to perform the unfavourable act, typically signaling this intention by using will, am going to, have to and the like. (168)

[...] even a direct threat typically only makes explicit the menacing act [...] (171)

Naturally, these claims are also derived from introspection and their generalizability is at least questionable. Although Fraser stresses the irrelevance of a threat’s form, he asserts that there are such things as an ‘explicit’ form, a ‘simple’ form, ‘impossible’ forms, and a ‘direct’ form, all of which presuppose some preconceived idea of the form of the speech act. Of course, another underlying issue that presents itself in these excerpts is the question whether form is really as irrelevant to the act of threatening – and its function – as these researchers claim.

The nature of the relation of form and function has been at the core of speech act research from its very beginnings (cf., e.g., Collavin 2011). It has shaped much of the existing research either in its directionality – as in the distinction between form-to-function mapping and the reverse of function-to-form (cf., e.g., Schneider & Barron 2008: 20) – or even its scope (cf. Rühlemann & Aijmer 2015). And it is essentially the relation between form and function of a speech act that gives rise to another central issue in speech act research: the issue of *indirectness* or the question “to what extent lexico-grammatical phenomena are part of what constitutes illocutionary force” (cf. Adolphs 2008: 26). Consequently, defining any speech act also involves addressing this issue.

In general, the notion of *form* is used to denote the lexico-grammatical properties or linguistic structure of a threat, for example sentence type or specific elements, such as adverbs or particles. The notion of *function*, however, is often not defined in a consistent way. For one, the notion is used in the sense described above, which could also be termed *illocutionary force* in the sense of Austin (1971) or Searle (1969, 1976), i.e. what language users do or intend to do with an utterance in interaction. According to Fraser (1998), for example, an utterance has the function of threatening an addressee when it fulfills the above-mentioned criteria C1 to C3. One way of conceptualizing ‘indirectness’ is linked to this idea of function: directness and indirectness are seen as the extent to which a function, e.g. threatening, manifests itself in a particular form (cf. Adolphs 2008: 26).

On the other hand, the notion of function is also used in a sense that has been elsewhere described as *situational function* or *communicative purpose* (cf., e.g., Halliday 1979), i.e. what role an utterance with a specific illocutionary force carries in a given context. With regard to this, Fraser (1998: 159) elaborates that “[threats] are made for a variety of reasons” and goes on to list different examples of these reasons, such as intimidation.

For reasons of feasibility, I will not discuss these issues here in principle seeing that they are also not central to my own inquiry and have been addressed much more thoroughly by a number of other recent studies (cf., e.g., Terkourafi 2007, 2011a, 2011b). Instead I will focus on how these notions are applied to threats. By way of example, I will review the existing accounts of threatening language in order to motivate the present endeavor. In what follows, the notion of *form* will be used to refer to the lexico-grammatical properties of threatening utterances. The notion of *function* will be primarily used in the sense of communicative function, i.e. to refer to what speakers do or attempt to do with a threat utterance. This is synonymous with what Fraser above describes as ‘reasons for’ uttering a threat. It is possible to immediately focus on these communicative functions because the function of each utterance in the sense of its illocutionary force has been assigned by the language users themselves prior to this study, i.e. the utterances in questions have been labeled *threat* by at least one language user (cf. Chapter 3). Lastly, the notions of ‘indirectness’ and ‘directness’ will be replaced by the notion of *pragmatic explicitness*, “which is based on the transparency of three things: the illocutionary point, the referent(s), and the propositional content” (Culpeper 2011: 148).

In the following, I will start by examining the existing definitions of threats and threatening language for formal features that are typically associated with the ‘illocutionary point’ in question (Section 2.2). The list of these features will form the basis of the formal analysis carried out in Chapter 4. Following this, I will review the existing positions in the literature on the function of threats, which will be

taken up for discussion and further analysis in Chapter 5 (Section 2.3). Although the analysis proceeds from the formal aspects of threats to their communicative function, both formal and functional aspects of threatening will be viewed as complementary perspectives and findings will be interpreted jointly (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the general approach).

To summarize, the main motivation for the present approach arises from the fact that a discussion of repeatedly attested lexico-grammatical properties demands far less decisions from the researcher that could later be criticized as too subjective in nature: either a form can be attested as present – and associated with a given communicative function – or it is absent, which allows a more replicable approach to the notion *in/directness*. The presumed advantages of approaching the issue of function by first looking at recurrent forms have been acknowledged by a number of recent studies (see, e.g., Aijmer & Rühlemann 2015 for an overview). In her 2008 monograph on *Corpus and Context*, Adolphs summarizes this stance as follows:

Many of the elements that have traditionally been dealt with through pragmatic frameworks, such as issues of politeness and indirectness, could be discussed in terms of their recurrence and patterns in relation to individual lexical items and phrases. (Adolphs 2008: 10)

This, the author suggests, could help to solve some of the most notorious problems in pragmatic analysis, as

[...] much of the discussion about inference procedures and felicity conditions becomes secondary or altogether unnecessary. (Adolphs 2008: 10)

In her account, Adolphs (2008) contrasts a pragmatic approach to a given speech act with a corpus-linguistic one. However, although the latter is suspected to cope more successfully with certain pragmatic issues, as described above, Adolphs stresses that, ultimately, “in order to arrive at better descriptions of language functions, we need to start with a functional categorization as an organising principle” (Adolphs 2008: 44), highlighting again the importance of functional approaches. Now, as was explained earlier, the main advantage of the kind of data analyzed for the present study is that they already come with a preliminary functional categorization. More precisely, the necessary organizing principle is deduced from an authority that is commonly held to aspire to a maximum degree of objectivity: judicial argument. Therefore, we can and shall start our analysis by looking at the form of threats we find discussed in the literature.

2.2 The form of threats

As has been already mentioned, although it is repeatedly claimed that the form of threats is largely inconsistent, we find some structural characteristics frequently described in the literature as typical formal elements of threats. The formal characteristics that will be taken up for discussion here are seen as the lexico-grammatical features that typically express the ‘illocutionary point’ of threatening or the ‘who-does-what-do-whom’ of a threatening scenario. These formal descriptions have been largely derived from functional definitions, such as the ones described above. Some characteristics, however, are also asserted based on the analysis of existing corpus data or evidence from the present data set.

As was already mentioned, the concept of (in)directness that underlies the present study is one of *pragmatic explicitness*: I predominantly look at forms that are mentioned in the literature as typically expressing “the illocutionary point, the referent(s) and the propositional content” of a threat (Culpeper 2011: 184). If these variants of these forms are present in an utterance, this utterance can be characterized as (more) *explicit* with regard to this feature. Equally, if no variants of the forms are present in an utterance, this utterance can be considered *implicit* or (more) *vague*. It has to be stressed that *in/directness* is thus conceptualized as gradable and not categorical, which is also in accordance with the probabilistic view on form and function of threats that is highlighted by the statistical analyses in Chapters 4 and 5.

In the following, I will present a step-by-step, condensed overview of the formal properties or lexico-grammatical features that are most frequently associated with threats and threatening. A more detailed critical discussion of theoretical considerations for each formal feature with reference to examples from the present corpus can be found alongside the operationalization of each feature as a variable for the analysis in Chapter 4.

2.2.1 Conditionality

One of the formal elements most frequently associated with threats is conditional language (cf. Kent 1967: 30; Limberg 2009: 1379). A generic conceptualization of threatening, such as the one found in *Webster’s* dictionary, paraphrases the meaning of the verb ‘threaten’ as “to say that you will harm someone or do something unpleasant or unwanted especially *in order to make someone do what you want*” (Merriam-Webster “threaten”, *v.*, own emphasis).⁵ Other generic definitions include

5. “threaten.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 27 March 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threaten>>.

related aspects of ‘menace’ and ‘manipulation’, or ‘imposition’ by means of this menace (cf. Gales 2010; Harris 1984; Milburn & Watman 1981). This mirrors the widespread understanding of threats as a “linguistic strategy [...] used to manipulate or even coerce [a] target into (not) doing something which has an undesirable outcome for [the target]” (Limberg 2009: 1378), which ultimately benefits the speaker (Fraser 1998: 166). In line with this view, some studies have explicitly focused on so-called *conditional threats* (cf. Harris 1984; Limberg 2008, 2009).

The term *conditional*, in this context, is often used without clearly defining whether this includes all semantically conditional expressions or only threats that contain conditional clauses. According to Limberg, threats of this kind “consist of two parts: (1) the speaker’s injunction against the addressee [...]; and (2) the prediction/intention of negative consequences that the speaker will inflict upon the addressee if s/he does not comply” (Limberg 2009: 1379). Despite the fact that most of these studies refer to conditionality only as an “implicative ‘if-then’ form” (Limberg 2009: 1376), the majority of cited examples include conditional *if*-clauses. An *if*-clause is a syntactic structure that is considered “the canonical [...] construction” for conditionals in English (von Fintel 2011: 1516), which often leads to an expectation that ‘typical threats’ contain such an *if*-clause as an expression of the demands and consequences associated with a threat.

2.2.2 Futurity

Another structural feature often associated with threats is the reference to a future point in time or the expression of an intention on the side of the speaker (cf. Benoit 1983: 306; Fraser 1998: 161; Turner & Gelles 2003: 98). This presumably follows from the conceptualization of threats as announcing an impending, i.e. not-yet-existing harm. The act of threatening involves a declaration of “a future action or omission, or a sequence of such actions or omissions, by the speaker” (Salgueiro 2010: 217). According to Fraser (1998: 168), “the speaker expresses intention to perform the unfavourable act, typically signaling this intention by using *will*, *am going to*, and the like.”

The expression of speaker intentions can be linked to a probably innumerable variety of linguistic forms (hence Fraser’s use of the indeterminate expression “and the like”), while the number of possible linguistic forms to refer to a future point in time is more restricted. As a consequence, the two categories are often conflated. In most of the existing accounts of threats, it is expected that utterances contain some expression of futurity, not only to refer to an impending menace, but also to express an intention on the side of the speaker. This is nicely reflected in the fact that, for example, almost all of Fraser’s (1998) examples contain a variant of *will* or *be going*

to.⁶ However, due to the potential overlap of futurate expressions and expressions of intent, the category cannot be seen as strictly referring to tense structure.

2.2.3 Violent verbs, participants and orientation of a threat

A third element, closely related to the preceding two and strongly associated with threatening, is the expression of violence or harmful actions in threat utterances. Some of the previously mentioned philosophical accounts of threatening have compared the act to the allegedly neighboring speech acts of warning and promising (cf., e.g., Fraser 1998: 166). Warning and promising are characterized as aimed at the benefit of the addressee. In comparison, threats are seen as detrimental to the addressee.⁷ This is reflected in a number of definitions. A threat is described as an announcement of an “unfavourable” (Fraser 1998: 167), “undesirable” (Limberg 2009: 1378) outcome, which is to “punish or hurt the hearer” (Benoit 1983: 305) or “harm someone” (Merriam-Webster “threaten”, *v.*).⁸ The type of harm is not necessarily specified. Generally, it “can differ in [its] level of severity, ranging from reasonable, less dramatic [acts], to more serious and even life-threatening acts” (Limberg 2009: 1378). Additionally, it might be in the addressee’s own judgement which consequences are unfavorable (cf. Fraser 1998: 163). Consequently, the severity of the different types of negative outcomes is probably best described as scalar, but life-threatening situations can clearly be seen as one extreme end of the scale, or “the most excessive form of threat” (Limberg 2009: 1378, in a footnote).

As was already mentioned, one of the few examples of a corpus-based approach to threatening language is a study conducted by Gales (2010). As part of this study, Gales carried out a *Threatening Communications Survey*, where respondents were asked to list typical elements of threats. Despite the fact that she does not explicitly instruct her respondents on the seriousness of the threats in her survey,⁹ the

6. Fraser’s list includes utterances like ‘If I don’t get national press coverage within one hour, one of the hostages will die’ (1998: 160), ‘I’m gonna cap you’ (163), or ‘If you don’t stop talking, I’m going to punish you’ (167).

7. Storey’s (1995) previously mentioned warning type threats are an exception.

8. “threaten.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 27 March 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threaten>>

9. Gales (2010: 272) instructs the respondents to “[take] a minute and think of a typical threat you might hear (e.g., on a popular television show such as 24, CSI, the Sopranos, the Wire, etc.).” This selection of TV shows – the plots of which all share *crime* as a central element – is likely to have strongly influenced the participants in their choice of linguistic features, which she herself discusses (see Gales 2010: 94).

respondents' replies seem to depict life-threatening or at least serious scenarios, similar to the ones in the present study. As was already mentioned, more than 80% of the respondents listed *violent physical action verbs* (Gales 2010: 96) as typically part of threat utterances.

Another structural feature related to the verbs used is the agency of a speaker. Fraser (1998: 166) stresses that a defining property of threats is that the speaker has to control the (detrimental) outcome. From this he concludes that "[the] simplest way [to threaten] is to utter a declarative sentence with the speaker as the agent of the unfavourable act" (Fraser 1998: 167). Gales (2010) does not explicitly investigate the grammatical role of an agent in threats, but she claims that utterances are often oriented towards the speaker, which can be seen as related to the question of agency (cf. Gales 2010: 100).

To summarize, threats are often depicted as utterances which are oriented towards the perspective of the speaker, expressing some harm, often in the form of verbs that lexicalize actual physical or psychological violence and with the speaker as the agent of this action.

2.2.4 Other common features: Pronouns, taboo words, weapons

Another structural characteristic of threats Gales (2010) mentions is the distinctive use of pronouns. According to her, most of her respondents expect an increased use of second person pronouns as part of threatening utterances. She suggests that this is done by speakers to express a "heightened sense of personalization or focus placed on the victim of the threat" (Gales 2010: 100). Traditionally, first and second person pronouns are viewed as embodiments of the speaker roles in a conversation, i.e. "the persons with the roles of speaker and addressee respectively" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 425). In the context of threatening, the speaker is most likely identical with the threatener and the addressee is predominantly also the target of the threat. While personal pronouns generally occur very frequently in interpersonal discourse and spontaneous face-to-face interaction (cf. O'Keeffe et al. 2011: 44), it is expected that threats specifically contain more references to the addressee or target of the threat.

A more general view would be to identify threatener and target as the 'referents' in a threat and the use of personal pronouns as a form of reference. The more clearly threatener and target are referenced in a threat, for example by means of personal pronouns, the more explicit is the threat, in the above-mentioned sense of pragmatic explicitness (cf. Culpeper 2011: 184).

Another element that has been repeatedly associated with threats is the use of swear words, such as insults or other offensive expressions (cf. Gales 2010: 25, 83,

95). This is presumably a reflection of the conflictive nature of threats (cf. Leech 1983: 105; Limberg 2008: 155). Swear words, insults or taboo words used for intensification are seen as reflecting the violent character of threats and can, thus, probably be expected to be even more frequent in life-threatening scenarios (cf. Davis 1997: xiii).

Lastly, one element that is also mentioned to be typically used in threats against the life of some target is the reference to weapons, such as firearms, explosives, ammunition. Turner and Gelles (2003: 18), for example, describe the repeated mention of weapons as an indicator of how violent a threatener is. The mention of weapons can probably be regarded as a specific variant of a more general expression of 'harm' in a threat, which was described above.

2.2.5 Summary: The form of threats

To come back to the initial question of how to define a threat, a generic definition that summarizes the above-mentioned formal properties is given by Milburn and Watman (1981: 8), who suggest that a threat is "some variation of the following formula: 'If you do A, I will do B,' where 'A' is detrimental to the threatener and 'B' is detrimental to the target." This definition contains all the elements that were just discussed: an expression of conditionality, and expression of futurity, a verb that lexicalizes some detrimental action, and references to both the speaker/threatener and the addressee/target. Additionally, the wording 'some variation of' allows for a wide range of utterances to be described with this formula. Likewise, the additional use of swear words and/or mention of weapons can be described as modifications of the basic formula. In the following, this account will be used as an underlying formal working definition of a threat. However, it has to be stressed that it is not expected that all threats correspond closely to this formula. But to establish a baseline will help to empirically assess the appropriateness of generalizations like "[t]hreats [...] tend to be made indirectly" (Solan & Tiersma 2005: 204).

The use and variation of linguistic patterns and formulae has been extensively researched for a number of speech acts, including compliments (cf., e.g., Manes and Wolfson 1981; Holmes 1988, 1995; Jucker et al. 2008; Jucker 2009), apologies (e.g., Aijmer 1996; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984; Deutschmann 2003), or requests (e.g., Aijmer 1996; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Blum-Kulka 1987; Holtgraves & Yang 1990), to name but a few. Although it is generally acknowledged that speech acts are primarily a functional rather than a formal category, the number of speech acts that are realized in a fixed form or "occur regularly with a small range of lexical items" is no small measure (cf. Jucker 2009: 1617). The fixedness of such realizations can be best described as scalar. At the one end there are extremely formulaic realizations or routine formulae with distinct pragmatic functions such

as *thank you* or *sorry* (cf., e.g., Aijmer 1996; Deutschmann 2003; Jautz 2013), and at the other end there are lexical items or syntactic structures which might be preferred in realization, but are not conventionalized in a fixed realization pattern (e.g. preverbal *please* as a request marker, cf. Stefanowitsch 2003). In the literature on speech acts, such lexical items or structures have sometimes been described as “explicit illocutionary force indicators” (Searle 1969: 30) or “illocutionary force indicating devices” and “IFIDs” (Levinson 1983: 238).

Accordingly, in the subsequent analysis, it will be tested whether any of the above-mentioned forms typically associated with threats *in theory* actually qualify as conventional forms of threatening or as conventional markers of threats, i.e. IFIDs, in terms of their frequency. That an expression is conventionally associated with threatening will thus be understood as “a relationship holding between utterances and context, which is a correlate of the (statistical) frequency with which an expression is used in one’s experience of a particular context” (Terkourafi 2005: 213).

2.3 The function of threats

In a next step, I will discuss an overview of the communicative functions that have traditionally been assigned to or associated with threatening. Again, this section is meant to provide a first overview. The critical discussion will be continued alongside the concrete analysis with reference to examples from the present corpus (see Chapter 5).

As was discussed in the preceding part, the *form* of threats is often described as diverse and indeterminate. At the same time, the *function* of threats is depicted as much more uniform in the literature. With a view to existing studies, it seems that research predominantly focuses on ‘manipulation’ as a/the main communicative goal of threatening. Accordingly, threats have been labeled “intensified directives” (Harris 1984: 250), “intensified form of attempted behavioural influence” (Hepburn & Potter 2011: 99) or “speech acts [...] uttered by a person to manipulate an addressee’s behaviour” (Beller 2002: 113).

From a more general perspective, threats have been analyzed as a type of “communicative strategy that deliberately creates social conflict with the addressee, thus causing disharmony between the interlocutors” (Limberg 2009: 1376). The conflict, as is often argued, mainly arises from the fact that threats aim at getting the addressee/target to do something s/he would not voluntarily do or does not want to do at all (cf. Limberg 2009: 1382; Harris 1984; Beller et al. 2005; Benoit 1983). This form of manipulation has elsewhere been characterized as an attack on both the hearer’s positive and negative face, in the sense of Brown and Levinson (1987). It has been claimed that, by coercing an addressee into some behavior by means of

threatening him or her, a speaker interferes with the addressee's freedom of action and diminishes or attacks the addressee's self-image (cf. Biscetti 2015: 300; Limberg 2009: 1382). The fact that Culpeper (2011: 135–136) included threats on his list of *conventionalized impoliteness formulae*, along with other forms such as insults, silencers and negative expressives, reflects such an inherently offensive character. But what exactly is a threat's function then? Do speakers always aim for the same goals, i.e. exercise *impoliteness*, when they utter a threat?

As can be seen from this brief overview, the literature on the function of threats is largely dominated by three concepts: threats as a means of manipulation, threats as a form of (verbal) impoliteness and threats as an exercise of power by a speaker. Due to their interrelated nature, it is difficult, if not impossible, to precisely disentangle these concepts and review their role in threatening separately. One extremely simplified way of illustrating the relationship of all three concepts is this: a speaker has or achieves *power* over their addressee by uttering a threat that is intended to *manipulate* a target's behavior in some way, and this is often perceived as a strategic form of face attack or *verbal impoliteness*, which in turn equips the speaker with more power (cf. Limberg 2009: 1378). The question is, does the speaker have to be already equipped with power in order to manipulate their target, or is at least part of a threat's function the gaining of such power by attacking the addressee's face? In other words, are threats mainly a function of power *behind* or power *in* discourse?¹⁰

The issues touched upon here – particularly verbal impoliteness and power – again reach much farther than the scope of the present book and cannot be addressed in principle. Instead, they will be dealt with in close regard to the object of study, namely threats. The two subsequent sections will concern the function of threats as a means of manipulation and as a more general form of verbal impoliteness.

2.3.1 Power and demands: Threats as a tool of manipulation

Limberg (2009: 1378), drawing on previous accounts of threatening, defines the functional features of verbal threats¹¹ as

10. The distinction between power *behind* and *in* discourse was initially introduced by Fairclough (1989) and is adopted here from Culpeper (2011: 225).

11. In a footnote, Limberg (2009: 1377) explains that he uses the generic term 'threat' although his study "focuses on the conditional form". Nevertheless, this distinction is not made consistently throughout the paper and many of the claims are presented as valid for threats in general. The section the above-cited account is taken from is captioned "(Conditional) threats", which again suggests generalizable insights and not the discussion of a specific sub-type.

their directive and manipulative force, the possible infliction of undesirable consequences as a result of non-cooperation, the (momentary) assertion of power, and the emotional discharge of the speakers involved [...].

In this quote, the author points to different aspects of threats that are subsequently described as intricately linked: (i) the directive/manipulative force of a threat, (ii) the contingency of an impending menace or punishment upon the target's compliance and (iii) the assertion of power by the speaker. Although this is not explicitly stated, it can be deduced from Limberg's subsequent line of argumentation that the directive/manipulative force of a threat, according to him, arises mainly from the expressed contingency and the speaker's power (Limberg 2009: 1379). Limberg takes the stance that the strength of an utterance's manipulative force corresponds to the way in which the speaker conveys that an impending menace is contingent upon the target's behavior. According to this view, conditional threats convey a greater directive force because they express a relation between demands and consequences more explicitly. In comparison, non-conditional threats express this relation less explicitly and are, as is argued, less forceful. To illustrate his point, Limberg contrasts an example of a threat that contains a conditional clause in the form of 'If you (don't) do X, I will (not) do Y' with a non-conditional threat in the form of 'I will do Y'. The latter, he argues, conveys a minimized directive force (Limberg 2009: 1379). This is a point that is similarly made by Fraser (1998: 167), who contends that, consequently, "most direct verbal threats are conditional". Although we are now looking at the function of threats, it is clearly evident that the relation of form and function remains vital.

The idea of a correspondence between the directive force of a threat and the explicitness of conditional clauses has been similarly suggested by various scholars. For example, early research on the effect of threats in bargaining situations suggested that a non-conditional statement is less efficient as a threat (Kent 1967: 31). The claim is based on findings from the field of social psychology. In a study on the effects of the wordings of threats on the likelihood of a target's compliance, it was shown that 'high threats', i.e. conditional threats in Limberg's sense, were significantly more likely to achieve compliance by the targets than 'low threats', i.e. non-conditional threats in Limberg's sense (cf. Freedman 1965).¹² Other studies, mainly from the fields of sociology and psychology, have suggested similar effects (cf. Beller 2002; Beller et al. 2005; Benoit 1983; Schlenker et al. 1970).

12. It should be noted, however, that the cited study investigates cognitive dissonance in children and the participants of this study are around the age of 10. The effect thus presumably rather points to the children's inability to infer negative consequences or contingency from less explicit wordings at a rather young age than to the efficiency of conditional threats.

From these claims, one could be inclined to expect that, given that the primary function of a threat is indeed a form of manipulation, a speaker should always opt for a threat that explicitly denotes an impending menace as contingent upon the addressee's behavior in order to maximize its directive and manipulative force. And this, as I have previously mentioned, is indeed what most of the literature assumes to be the standard form of a (direct) threat (cf. Section 2.2.1).

Of course, intended manipulation is not only a question of a threat's form. The fact that threats may influence a target's behavior has also been described as inextricably linked to the notion of *social power*.¹³ Brown and Gilman (1960: 255), for example, describe power and control, which is a form of manipulation, as mutually dependent: "One person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other." Similarly, Watts (1991: 62) defines the exercise of power as follows: "A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's initially perceived interests". This appears to describe a bilateral relationship: a powerful speaker can manipulate an addressee's behavior and the fact that the addressee is being manipulated gives power to the speaker. So is power a prerequisite for threats to function as a manipulation?

If power over someone and manipulating their behavior are closely associated, it comes as no surprise that threats have been identified as 'power-laden' devices. Gales (2010: 2), for example, sees them as "socially-construed linguistic acts of power between two parties – the threatener and the threatened." Following Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence', she argues that the act of threatening itself "endows one actor with power over the other" (Gales 2010: 44). According to this view, a power asymmetry arises from uttering a threat. That threats can function as an exercise of power *in discourse* has been proposed similarly by various scholars (Culpeper 2011; Harris 1984; Limberg 2008, 2009). At the same time, it has also been suggested that the exercise of power *in discourse* is necessarily rooted in or arises from power *behind discourse*, i.e. institutional power or social hierarchies. Consequently, it has been claimed that a speaker who is more powerful in comparison to their addressee will threaten more frequently and with greater success (Culpeper 1996; Fraser 1998; Harris 1984; Limberg 2008, 2009).¹⁴

Such a view conceptualizes threats as an intensified form of exercising one's power over another person, mostly to counter "persistent resistance" (cf. Limberg 2008: 156). This has been identified as a strategy, for example, in courtroom

13. The term *social power* is used here in the sense of Brown and Levinson (1987). See Section 2.4 for a more detailed discussion of the *social context* of the present threats.

14. This view takes its most extreme form in the opinion that a threatener who does not have the power to bring about the threatened state of affairs does not utter a threat that is – in the words of Austin – 'felicitous' (Shon 2005: 831).

interaction (Harris 1984; Lakoff 1989), military discourse (Bousfield 2007; Culpeper 1996), or police-citizen encounters (Limberg 2008). However, there is a risk of a logical fallacy here that has mostly been overlooked: much of the linguistic research on this function of threats has been conducted in institutional or 'quasi-institutional' settings. One reason for this is that it is expected that threats rarely occur predictably in informal or ordinary interaction (cf. Harris 1984: 247). Institutional contexts are seen as having the advantage that "the power distribution between speakers is often disproportionate, which can encourage displays of inappropriate, salient behaviour" (Limberg 2008: 156). Now, considering the distinction of power *in* and power *behind* discourse, it seems unclear if the findings from the above-mentioned case studies will hold in settings any power imbalance (*behind* discourse). It is at least conceivable that systematically comparing different power constellations (*behind* discourse) would allow us to gain more insight whether threats are realized differently by powerful or powerless speakers. This remains to be empirically tested, but is often entirely ignored in the discussion of findings in the literature.

Although it has been suggested that the specific type of data in institutional contexts restricts the generalizability of findings (cf. Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 2005: 28), the results of the above-mentioned studies are therefore often presented as generally valid. Limberg (2009: 1379), for example, argues that the existing

[e]mpirical evidence on forceful speech acts such as threats has shown that people in power use threats significantly more often than those who are not in powerful positions (cf. Culpeper, 1996; Harris, 1984; Song, 1995). Moreover, targets complied more often with threats from a high-status speaker than from a low-status speaker (Faley and Tedeschi, 1971). [...] This raises the question as to whether threats are necessarily a power-dependent act. (cf. Vanderverken 1990)

The author – as well as others – goes on to highlight the possibility of a less-powerful speaker uttering a threat *in theory*, but he concludes that "one will hardly ever come across a threat in a real life situation in which a recruit threatens his/her drill sergeant or a defendant reprimands a judge" (Limberg 2009: 1380).

It is noteworthy in this context that studies which regard threatening as a primary means of manipulating and influencing a target, as for example in bargaining or instructive situations, have two things in common: for one, their predominantly institutional character, and secondly, that these situations mostly arise from comparable communicative situations. In the majority of cases, the speaker pursues a specific *interactional goal*, which can be either concrete like getting someone to sign a contract, or more abstract like exercising control over someone and/or achieving obedience (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2005: 107). After all, it might be these shared interactional goals that make the situations investigated in these studies comparable and not the use of threats. Consequently, it might be that speakers equipped with

institutional power (i.e. power *behind discourse*) threaten more frequently and that threats are “a power-dependent act”, as Limberg (2009: 1378) puts it. This seems entirely plausible, but as was already mentioned, to the best of my knowledge, there is no study yet that empirically tests such an effect across different contexts, i.e. less formal settings and contexts with varying power constellations.

In summary, it appears that one way of classifying the function of threats is to consider them ‘power assertion devices’ in the sense of Gales (2010, cited above). According to such a view, the functions of a threat are to either momentarily create or highlight an existing power asymmetry between interlocutors and thereby manipulate the addressee into doing something s/he would not have done voluntarily. The former would be a function of power *in discourse*, the latter would be a function of power *behind discourse*.

Having said that, threats are not the only linguistic device that has been linked to the exercise of power over an interlocutor and their function can thus be described from another, maybe more general perspective. The subsequent section will concern such a general perspective and discuss the function of threats as an exercise of linguistic *impoliteness*. I want to remind the reader that, as before, this discussion is in close regard to the object of study, namely threats. It is beyond the scope of the present inquiry to principally discuss the general framework of impoliteness, but discussing a selection of its theorems with regard to threatening will be useful to further disentangle some views on the functions of threats. A potential downside of this approach is, of course, that the discussion appears at times somewhat abbreviated. In Chapter 5, the discussion will be taken up and, ultimately, the present findings will be used as pointer towards potential future research (Chapter 6).

2.3.2 Power and face: Threats as an impoliteness strategy

The framework of *impoliteness* (cf. Bousfield 2008; Bousfield and Locher 2008; Culpeper 1996, 2005, 2011) is often portrayed as a direct counterpart to its predecessor, the theory of linguistic *politeness* (cf., e.g., Brown & Levinson 1987; Leech 1983; Watts 2003). Both are built on the central assumptions that humans have “an emotionally sensitive concept of the self”, the *face* (Culpeper 1996: 350), and that communication involves strategies to maintain, promote or attack this face (Culpeper 1996: 350; Limberg 2009: 1377).

The existence of conflictive communication is of course not a recent discovery. There are a number of studies on conversational *rudeness* or hostile communication which pre-date the construction of an impoliteness framework (cf., e.g., Kasper 1990; Kienpointner 1997; Lakoff 1989). Yet, it is only rather recent that the deliberate and systematic use of face attack has been investigated as an integral part of

communication, instead of simply regarding such behavior “as the marked, abnormal, and irrational counterpart of politeness” (Kienpointner 1997: 251).

Parallel to ongoing discussions about *verbal politeness*, there is “no solid agreement” (Locher and Bousfield 2008: 3) on a uniform definition of *verbal impoliteness*. Despite the differences in conceptualizing impoliteness, according to Culpeper (2011: 20), most definitions contain “two notable commonalities”: the notions of *face* and *intentionality* (cf., e.g., Culpeper et al. 2003; Culpeper 2005, 2011; Locher and Bousfield 2008; Watts 2003). Yet, the various approaches find different answers to questions of

how central face is in accounting for impoliteness phenomena, what kinds of face are involved, and also whether other concepts are needed to account for it fully.

(Culpeper 2011: 21)

and, similarly,

whether impoliteness can only be said to have taken place if the behavior concerned was (or was perceived to be) intentional, and [...] how it interacts with perception of the degree of offence taken.

(Culpeper 2011: 21)

Especially the concept and role of *intentionality* is still subject to numerous debates, i.e. the question of whether or not a speaker must act intentionally to be considered to exercise verbal impoliteness. While there is no general answer to this question (yet), in the specific case of threats as a form of verbal impoliteness, most studies place special emphasis on strategic, intentional or instrumental use of verbal strategies to attack face (cf. Culpeper 2011: 49 or, e.g., Beebe 1995: 166; Bousfield 2008: 68).

Furthermore, similar to its counterpart politeness, linguistic impoliteness has been conceptualized as *relational*, i.e. impoliteness emerges in interaction and is dependent on speaker, addressee and context (cf. Culpeper 2011; Spencer-Oatey 2005, 2011). For this reason, it has been argued that no inherently impolite utterances exist (cf. Locher 2006: 251; Locher and Watts 2008: 78). At the same time, it has been claimed that there is a difference between impoliteness strategies that are *context-tied* and those that are *context-spanning*; while the former are only impolite in specific contexts and will likely be innocuous in others, the latter are by default perceived as impolite in many different contexts but can also be used in a non-impolite way (cf. Culpeper 2011: 117, who adopts the distinction from Tracy and Tracy (1998)).

In most of the comprehensive approaches to verbal impoliteness, threatening has not been specifically addressed as a type of output strategy (cf. Bousfield 2008; Culpeper et al. 2003; Culpeper 2005; Lachenicht 1980). Limberg (2009: 1382), discussing Culpeper’s (1996, 2005) list of strategies, notes that

[v]erbal threats are not explicitly mentioned in the provisional and non-exhaustive list of strategies for impolite utterance tokens. Nevertheless, they are related to some of the output strategies listed under “negative impoliteness”, such as “frighten”, “emphasizing your relative power” and “invading the other’s space”.

(Culpeper 1996: 358)

Given what we have previously noted on the function of threats as a means of manipulation and an inherent power-assertion device, we can tentatively conclude that one way of characterizing threats is by describing them as *context-spanning negative impoliteness* or *bald on record impoliteness* or maybe a mixture of the two, since Culpeper (2005: 42) claims that “these ‘super strategies’ rarely occur singularly but are more often mixed”.

That threatening is an example of *context-spanning impoliteness* is reflected in the fact that Culpeper includes threats on his preliminary list of conventionalized impoliteness formulae (Culpeper 2011: 135–136). Similarly, Biscetti (2015: 302) points to the ‘contextually independent’ aggressive nature of threats. Interestingly, the following threat tokens from his corpus of conventional impoliteness formulae are listed, which were obtained from diary reports of impoliteness events:

[I’ll/I’m/we’re] [gonna] [smash your face in/beat the shit out of you/box your ears/
bust your fucking head off/straighten you out/etc.] [if you don’t] [X]
[you’d better be ready Friday the 20th to meet with me/do it] [or] [else] [I’ll X]
[X] [before I] [hit you/strangle you] (Culpeper 2011: 136)

As can be seen, these impoliteness formulae contain all the elements that were previously described as traditionally associated with threatening language: expressions of conditionality, futurity, descriptions of violent actions, swear words and taboo language. Of course, the list is not meant to be exhaustive: “[s]quare brackets are designed to give an indication of some of the structural characteristics of the formulae” and “finer grained structural analyses are possible including a consideration of the degree of optionality each element has” (Culpeper 2011: 134). Yet, there seems to be a strong association of these elements with the exercise of impoliteness.

In summary, the view on the function of threatening reconstructed above takes a superordinate function like ‘face attack’ as a starting point. This function is then utilized by speakers in various contexts, some of which have already been mentioned: army training, for example, where threats are used to enforce recruits’ obedience, different forms of communication with children, where either children use threats to negotiate with each other or caregivers use threats to enforce obedience, or citizen-police encounters and courtroom interaction, where either civil obedience and compliance is enforced or participants are trying to oppose this obedience. What all of these scenarios have in common is that threats are used to

enforce behavior, which brings us back to the (presumably subordinate) functions of impoliteness, namely ‘manipulation’ and/or ‘power-assertion’.

These specific functions of impoliteness have also been subsumed as *coercive impoliteness* (Culpeper 2011: 225). Coercive impoliteness “involves coercive action that is not in the interest of the target, and hence involves both the restriction of a person’s action environment and a clash of interests” (Culpeper 2011: 226). As has been elaborated already, coercive impoliteness can be used to “get power over actions (to get someone else to do something or avoid doing something yourself)” (Culpeper 2011: 227), which is a fitting summary of most of the accounts of the function of threats.

Something that has not been systematically addressed with regard to threats yet is that impoliteness can have other functions besides a coercive one as described above. Building on earlier models of conversational rudeness by Beebe (1995) and Kasper (1990), Culpeper (2011: 252) distinguishes “three key, specific functional types of impoliteness events: affective impoliteness, coercive impoliteness and entertaining impoliteness.” *Entertaining impoliteness* will be disregarded in the present context because it mainly concerns forms of “entertainment at the expense of the target of the impoliteness” (Culpeper 2011: 233), which, according to Culpeper, is typically found in TV game shows and the like. *Affective impoliteness* leans on a function Beebe (1995: 154) describes as “to vent negative feelings”. If we go back to Limberg’s initial definition of typical functional elements of threats, we find a similar wording: apart from “their directive and manipulative force” and “momentary assertion of power”, Limberg (2009: 1378) also mentions “the emotional discharge of the speakers involved”, but does not address this aspect again in his analysis of threats. If threatening is understood as an announcement of harm to another person, if it is described as ‘conflictive’ or hostile, it is unclear why the aspect of venting one’s feelings with threats has not yet been examined more closely.

Culpeper (2011: 221) suggests that affective impoliteness is a form of hostile, verbal aggression that is connected to heightened emotions, such as anger or frustration, and that becomes a form of impoliteness the moment it is directed at someone: “[t]argeted anger is strategic, instrumental affective impoliteness” (Culpeper 2011: 222). It appears that threatening is not only a form of coercive impoliteness but involves affective impoliteness as well, especially since the functions are not mutually exclusive and often impoliteness strategies serve more than one function (cf. Culpeper et al. 2003: 1561).

2.3.3 Summary: The function of threats

Taken together, what is the function of threats then? According to Fraser (1998), for example, there are an indeterminate number of different reasons for speakers to utter a threat,

such as anger or meanness [...], to intimidate [...], to bring about a desired result [...], as a challenge to authority [...], to call attention to oneself and perhaps get help [...], to save face when embarrassed [...], to show seriousness of purpose but without malice [...], to promote movement in negotiations [...], and to be humorous [...].
(Fraser 1998: 159)

It is evident that in order to assign such fine-grained functions to instances of threatening, a researcher would need insight into the speakers' motives and/or emotional state or state of mind. Was it the speaker's intention to frighten the hearer? Can that be considered meanness? Was the speaker serious? As these questions illustrate, any outside analyst will most likely not easily obtain definite answers. Consequently, such an analysis of the function of threats would necessitate a degree of subjective speculation and generalization that is unwanted in the present study, although it can certainly yield interesting results.

One possible solution to this predicament, as we have seen in the previous sections, would be to take a more general perspective and conceptualize threatening more generally, i.e. with one superordinate function as a form of verbal impoliteness. Accordingly, a threat can be described as a deliberate and conscious exercise or assertion of power, which is intended to manipulate an addressee and/or functions as an outlet for negative emotions. Such a general definition has the advantage that it can most likely be applied to all threats in the corpus. A question that immediately arises and that has not yet been addressed systematically, however, is whether there are any observable differences between threats that serve a coercive function, i.e. those that are intended to manipulate the addressee and those that serve an affective one, i.e. those that functions as an outlet for negative emotions.

This question will be probed in the present analysis. It will be tested whether any of the above-mentioned functions typically associated with threats *in theory* actually qualify as accurate descriptions of a threat's function in the corpus. Again, the approach taken will be data-driven, i.e. purely based on the information available in the data. The aim is a detailed, yet generalizable account of the communicative functions that speakers assign to threats. Instead of speculating about detailed moves and motives on the side of the speaker, I will focus on common denominators between the individual uses and speakers' own accounts of what they are doing. The approach is modeled after comparable analyses by, for example, Jautz (2013: 68), who argues that any functional analysis of speech acts should ideally

be data-driven so that “[r]ather than imposing (too many) preconceived linguistic categories, the data at hand is used as a guideline for a categorization of functions”. This way, the functions “are based on what is explicitly mentioned as a reason for or function of” (Jautz 2013: 68) the given speech act.

What we have established at this point is a set of forms that, according to the existing research, typically occur in threat utterances. This list can and will be put to the test: by means of attesting the absence or presence of these forms, we will be able to (a) determine the threats’ (in)directness without operating with complicated concepts like intentions, beliefs or awareness and (b) investigate whether any of these forms actually are as typical for threatening as the literature makes us believe. In addition to that, we preliminarily assume that threats are a form of verbal impoliteness and, as such, most likely carry two general functions: a coercive function and an affective function. This, too, will be put to the test: can these functions be identified in the data? And are threats of the same type or with the same function similar to each other and dissimilar to the other type/function?

What we have not established so far is the role of context in all of this. As was already mentioned, research on various comparable phenomena has suggested that “(im)politeness is not inherent in particular forms of language” but rather “a matter of the participants’ evaluations of particular forms as (im)polite in context” (Culpeper 2008: 20). In Chapter 3, we will look more closely at how the nature of the present data immanently provides us with some insight into the hearer’s evaluation of the utterances – but what about the general context of the threats? How do we account for whether they were uttered by former spouses, by stranger on the street, or former employees? As this will most likely also influence the results to some extent, in a last step, this present chapter will briefly investigate one particular type of context: the nature of the relationship between threatener and target.

2.4 The context of threats

When we talk about *context*, the term is often used to comprise a range of widely distributed variables that surround an utterance and potentially influence its realization: from the concrete spatial environment and the situational parameters, to the mode of communication and the social identity of speaker and hearer. Although the present study was deliberately designed in a way that allows for the greatest degree of generalizability, a pragmatic study that disregards any influence of such contextual variables can hardly be considered complete. To an extent deemed possible and practicable with the data at hand, this shortcoming will be addressed in the following section.

It was already discussed in the previous section that impoliteness is presumably *relational*, i.e. it emerges in interaction and is dependent on exactly those contextual factors we have just mentioned (cf. Culpeper 2011; Spencer-Oatey 2005, 2011). If we conceptualize threats as an impoliteness phenomenon, it can thus be assumed that their form (and function) is also influenced by these factors and if we exclude any notion of social reality, our results are very likely to create a distorted picture of the object of study. Now, how can the context of each threat be taken into account without running the risk of creating not a general account of threatening but a detailed description of every situation in which individual speakers threaten in the present corpus?

As before, one possible solution is to look for common denominators. The general idea being that ‘zooming in’ on particular feature constellations or situations in follow-up studies will be much easier once we have established some more general properties of threatening. For now, we will therefore focus specifically on the social context of the threats and later incorporate this as one additional variable in the analysis: the type of relationship between threatener and target. We tentatively assume that the nature of the relationship between threatener and target conjoins two of the most notorious contextual influence factors in (im)politeness research: the micro-social variables of power and distance.

2.4.1 Power and distance as social context

It is commonly accepted that the linguistic choices of speakers are influenced by many different social variables. On one side, the speakers’ gender, age, region, socio-economic status or ethnicity influence their linguistic choices, which are often classed together as macro-social factors. On the other side, micro-social factors like absolute and relative power or social distance determine variation (cf. Schneider & Barron 2008: 16). For many speech acts such as apologies, requests, compliments, or refusals, both micro- and macro-social variation are well researched. Incidentally, what precedes any research project on the influence of either macro- or micro-social factors on the realization of a given speech act, is an inquiry into “the strategies and linguistic means available for realising [the given] speech acts” (Schneider & Barron 2008: 4). Or in other words: to measure and assess variation, a baseline is needed. As was already argued extensively, with regard to threats, there is no clear (empirical) baseline yet, which is an academic void the present study seeks to fill.

The decision to incorporate power and social distance as contextual variables in the analysis is motivated by two givens of the present study: as has been argued, both variables presumably play a central role in conflictive speech acts and, more importantly, the information needed to operationalize the variables is available from

the data. The corpus under investigation does not always provide complete information on a number of other variables, such as information on gender, age, region, socio-economic status or ethnicity of both threatener and target.¹⁵ In order to ensure a sound analysis, the information at hand was used to create a variable that allows for exploratory insight in both different power and distance constellations. This section is not meant as an essential contribution to the power debate, but focuses on a discussion of the present data in light of what is commonly assumed about this type of macro-social variation. Any conclusive results on how exactly more powerful or powerless speakers might use their linguistic repertoire differently to threaten a target can only be gained from more complex and potentially experimental research designs (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of potential future research).¹⁶

As part of their politeness framework, Brown and Levinson (1987: 74) initially distinguish between three social variables, which presumably influence the production and interpretation of communication: relative power, social distance, and absolute ranking of imposition of an act. These initial definitions have been criticized and/or refined, their scope has been adjusted and their role in communication was and is much debated (cf., e.g., Spencer-Oatey 1996). Over the last decades, the two concepts of power and distance, often referred to as P and D, have been established as commonly agreed upon variables of micro-social variation (cf., e.g., Barron & Schneider 2009: 427; Schneider 2010: 249–250). And although notions of power and distance appear to be involved in any type of interaction, with regard to impoliteness, the notion of power appears to be specifically important (cf. Culpeper 2008; Locher & Watts 2008).

In simplified terms, power is believed to essentially comprise a contrast of equality (symmetrical) and inequality (asymmetrical) of the social status of speaker and addressee, and distance is conceptualized as a continuum of closeness between interlocutors, with values ranging roughly from strangers to intimates (cf. Schneider 2010: 250). Distance is often described as a more context-independent or absolute value that is defined by various components of a relationship, such as perceived similarity between participants, length of acquaintance, positive/negative affect, frequency of contact, or familiarity (Spencer-Oatey 1996: 7).¹⁷ In comparison, power is often defined as relative to participants and context and has sometimes

15. Although information on mode and medium of the threat were available, these were excluded as variables from the analysis, since the data are predominantly oral and a first inspection did not yield many telling findings.

16. On a similar note, Culpeper (2008: 18) observes that the notion of power “looms like the many-headed Hydra in a voluminous literature”. It can hardly be addressed comprehensively here.

17. These factors are weighed differently by scholars, and there is no unitary definition that includes all of them (Spencer-Oatey 1996: 7).

been sub-classified into ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ power. While absolute power is often associated with notions such as social hierarchy, status or rank, relative power is often associated with dominance in a given conversation (Spencer-Oatey 1996: 8–10). We have addressed this earlier as the difference between power *behind discourse* and power *in discourse* (see Section 2.3).¹⁸ These two forms of power and their exercise are closely interwoven, but do not influence each other in a fixed way. Locher and Bousfield (2008: 9), for example, hold that “power is highly dynamic, fluid and negotiable. Even interactants with hierarchically lower status can and do exercise power [...]”¹⁹

These negotiations that Locher and Bousfield describe, are part of the ‘relational work’ participants are engaged in as part of communication (cf. Locher & Watts 2008: 78), sometimes also referred to as “[t]he process of defining relationships in interaction” (Locher 2004: 51). Existing models of impoliteness have different approaches to how exactly relational work, and notions such as power and distance can be incorporated into their analyses. One thing that is commonly agreed upon, however, is the fact that impoliteness and power are closely interwoven (cf. Culpeper 2008: 18). And threats, as was already discussed, are often described as an example of a power exercise (cf., e.g., Culpeper 2011: 135–136; Harris 1984: 251; Limberg 2008: 155, 2009: 1376). We can conclude from this that threats will be influenced by the nature of the relationship of the interactants – but how exactly?

Culpeper (1996: 354) argues that “[a] powerful speaker has more freedom to be impolite” – and, accordingly, it has been repeatedly claimed that this is true for threats as well. Harris (1984: 251), for example, notes that

for a threat to be effective, the speaker must have real power to bring about the stated consequence, which suggests an asymmetrical situation or at least one where real power is involved. Thus threats tend to occur where such power exists, whether the situation is a mother controlling her own child, a manager threatening to dismiss his employee, or a trade union leader threatening to cripple the country.

In spite of her own findings, Harris (1982: 251) notes that threats primarily function as a momentary assertion of power by the speaker and as such could theoretically be used by both powerful and powerless participants, but she considers the latter scenario less likely. Similarly, Limberg (2009: 1380) concludes that while threats may be a power-manipulating device in theory, “one will hardly ever come across a threat in a real life situation in which a recruit threatens his/her drill sergeant or

18. In the following, the terms *absolute* and *relative power* will be used interchangeably with power *in discourse* and power *behind discourse*.

19. In light of the present data set, both P and D are discussed here from the point of view of standardly known values in American English.

a defendant reprimands a judge". In other words, what Harris, Limberg and others have suggested is that a more powerful speaker is more likely to exercise this power by threatening their addressee, who in turn is more likely to comply if s/he is less powerful and that these two aspects depend on one another. Interestingly, in his own investigation of threat responses, Limberg (2009: 1390) finds "a higher tendency towards compliance [of addressees] in those scenarios in which the speakers have an equal power status." This would contradict the initial idea that more powerful speakers utter more successful threats. According to him, this indicates that 'friendship' is a greater leverage and, thus, participants feel more obliged to cooperate/comply. Since this is also a conflation of power and distance, I would like to stress again that only more detailed research that includes different power- and also distance-constellations could verify such observations. In comparison, Culpeper (2008: 39) doubts the underlying assumption that the exercise of power or the use of impoliteness presupposes a power-asymmetry between speakers. The idea that impoliteness is dependent upon aspects of the relationship of interactants, however, remains unquestioned.

Now, how do these insights from existing research translate into predictions for our analyses? For one, a common assumption seems to be that speakers equipped with more relational power or power *behind discourse* threaten more regularly, because their socially higher ranking implies a greater entitlement to impose their will on others (cf. Culpeper 1996; Harris 1984; Limberg 2009). As a consequence, some authors also assume that this general disposition will be reflected in a higher frequency of threats uttered by more powerful speakers (cf. Harris 1984; Limberg 2009). With regard to the form of threats, the consensus seems to be that more powerful speakers can also threaten more directly. For the present study, this translates into the hypothesis that threats by more powerful speakers generally contain more of the formal features that were discussed earlier to mark threats as more pragmatically explicit.

With regard to social distance, the predictions are less straightforward. None of the above-mentioned studies explicitly addresses the influence of social distance on threats. In the discussion of his results, Limberg (2009) mentions in passing that speakers who are closer to their targets have greater leverage over them and, thus, presumably threaten more successfully. Following the logic of the previous argument with regard to more powerful speakers, this could be taken to indicate that such speakers will also threaten more frequently. There are no clear predictions with regard to the influence of social distance on the degree of pragmatic explicitness and it is unclear whether the prediction about the general frequency of threats is justified by existing research. In fact, most studies on social distance suggest that the influence of social distance as a variable is not linear (cf. Spencer-Oatey & Žegarac 2017; Wolfson 1990).

As was already discussed, in order to empirically verify the claims about power and distance and threats, future studies need to compare the use of threats across different power constellations and possibly also across different degrees of social distance. More generally, to be able to properly manipulate the P and D variables and compare different scenarios necessitates experimental data, which the present study unfortunately lacks. Nevertheless, a first inspection of the general relationships of threatener and target should allow for preliminary insight into the influence of the relation of threatener and target, which will later be investigated more closely.

2.4.2 P and D combined: The relationship of threatener and target

The threats analyzed for the present inquiry were uttered in wide variety of contexts, i.e. produced by a broad range of different speakers both orally and in writing and addressed a range of different targets for varying reasons. The threats were uttered as part of fundamentally different conflicts, including personal ones, such as custodial disputes or arguments between neighbors or family members, but also political controversies or disputes surrounding more general social issues, for example, abortion rights or compulsory military service. This great variety of different contexts is seen as a major advantage of the data, because it is assumed that the threats serve a range of different functions and, presumably, these different contexts also span a range of different P and D constellations. At the same time, we need to find a way to factor in these different contexts without allowing for too many fine-grained feature constellations that might restrict the generalizability of our findings. This was attempted by transforming the relationships of threatener and target into a binary contrast by reference to the dimensions of P and D: personal and non-personal relationships. The notion of power is restricted to power *behind discourse* or *absolute power*²⁰ and for both P and D, the scalar differences are also reduced to binary contrasts. Personal and non-personal relationships are conceptualized as a contrast of socially more powerful speakers (+ P), such as judges, politicians, or teachers, and socially less or equally powerful speakers (– P), such as spouses, siblings, friends or acquaintances, and as a contrast of maximal distance (+ D), as between strangers, and minimal distance (– D), as between close acquaintances, friends, or family members (cf. Schneider 2010: 250). By classifying the relationships in this way, we are able to test the above-mentioned predictions and gain some first insight into how social context might influence the form and function of threats. From the initial results, further hypothesis for each of the parameters can be deduced and

20. As was previously discussed, it is assumed that differences in absolute power will result in differences in relative power.

tested in follow-up studies. The classification will be solely based on the contextual information available from the judicial opinions (see Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation and exemplification of the coding procedure).

For our purpose, the threatener-target-relationship is considered *non-personal* if the target is either not personally known to the threatener or addressed as a mere representative of a company, an office, or a group of people, or even a representative of a certain belief or position.²¹ Non-personal relationships include relationships with legal professionals, medical professionals, employees/employers of companies, and state or government officials. If, however, threatener and target know each other personally, share a personal history, or if their conflict concerns personal matters, the threatener-target-relationship can be described as *personal*. Personal relationships include relationships with spouses, friends, classmates, colleagues, relatives, or close family members

The majority of non-personal relationships can be characterized as *more distant* in all of the previously mentioned aspects: perceived similarity between participants, length of acquaintance, positive/negative affect, frequency of contact, or familiarity (cf. Spencer-Oatey 1996: 7). Additionally, the power-asymmetry *behind discourse* in non-personal relationships will often be greater: the threatener is predominantly communicating with administrative bodies or officials, and often takes the role of a customer/employee/member of the public. In other words, these scenarios involve a power imbalance that is often institutionally determined.

In comparison, personal relationships are characterized as *less distant* with regard to the previously mentioned aspects: participants perceive more similarity between each other, know each other longer, have positive or negative feelings for each other, are more familiar and are more regularly in contact. This does not necessarily entail a great degree of intimacy. It just means that participants share some personal background.²² Personal relationships are often with family members, spouses, colleagues, or friends. Within these more symmetric social structures the distribution of power *behind discourse* is often more balanced.

To summarize, it is assumed that a *personal* relationship between threatener and target is characterized by a minimized distance and a rather equal power status, whereas a *non-personal* relationship often involves an increased social distance and a greater imbalance of power *behind discourse*.

21. This would be the case, for example, in anti-abortion conflicts.

22. This cut-off point resembles an often-used dichotomy that reduces the different degrees of social distance to the contrast of maximal distance (+ D), as between strangers, and minimal distance (– D), as between close acquaintances, friends, or family members (Schneider 2010: 250).

Data & methodology

I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.
(Sherlock Holmes, “A Scandal in Bohemia” by Arthur Conan Doyle)

The ideal research method for the investigation of speech acts [...] does not exist. There is not even a method that is in a general way better than all the others.
(Jucker 2009: 1633)

In this chapter, I will first present and discuss some of the general approaches to data collection and analysis in pragmatics with regard to the present study. Subsequent sections will then explain the specifics of the methods used in the present study in more detail.

3.1 Methods in empirical pragmatics: Constraints and implications for the present study

The choice of data and methods in empirical pragmatics has been at the heart of a growing number of heated debates among researchers over the past decades. It has been repeatedly suggested that not only the type of data analyzed, i.e. written versus spoken discourse, but also the particular data collection procedure has a strong impact on potential results, which is often difficult to control (cf., e.g., Beebe & Cummings 1996; Clark & Bangerter 2004; Golato 2003; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig 1992; Jucker et al. 2008; Jucker 2009; Kasper 2008; Schauer & Adolphs 2006; Yuan 2001). Especially in the case of speech acts researchers are confronted with a set of methodological challenges if they want to investigate language use “in the field” or “in a laboratory”, i.e. attested data that is either observed or elicited (cf. Jucker 2009; O’Keeffe et al. 2011). The most important obstacles can be summarized as arising from three interrelated problems: elicited data are potentially biased (cf., e.g., Flöck & Geluykens 2015), the occurrence of specific language functions is unpredictable in naturally occurring discourse (cf. Kasper 2008: 282) and, due to their mostly indeterminate form, “[speech] acts are not readily amenable to corpus linguistic investigations” (Jucker et al. 2008: 273). All of these problems also presented themselves in the present study and had to be addressed by adjusting the research design in a way that will be briefly outlined in the following section.

The primary concern of empirical research design in pragmatics is the proper adjustment of data and methods to questions, as in all empirical research (cf. Jautz 2013: 51; Kasper 2008: 280). Instead of choosing data and method as a matter of principle, “[it] is [...] important to discuss the individual methods in relation to the questions that they are supposed to answer” (Jucker 2009: 1619). The starting point of the present inquiry is the overarching question of how speakers threaten, i.e. which form these threats take and what function they serve. One of the aims of the present work is to investigate claims that have been made in the literature about the typicality of forms and functions of threats, but which have seen little verification in previous empirical studies. This aim calls for an analysis of “attested” language data, i.e. authentic language that is either elicited or collected (cf. Bednarek 2011: 540; O’Keeffe et al. 2011: 21).²³

The most common types of elicitation methods are questionnaires such as discourse completion tasks (DCTs), as well as interviews and role-plays (cf., e.g., Bednarek 2011: 540; O’Keeffe et al. 2011: 21). These methods have proven to be effective for research on a large number of different speech acts (cf. Beebe & Waring 2004; Billmyer & Varghese 2000; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Eisenstein & Bodman 1986, to name but a few examples). One of the advantages of DCTs is that the method allows for research on speech acts that are otherwise “very difficult to obtain” (O’Keeffe et al. 2011: 23). In other words, the method presents a solution for the problem of unpredictable occurrence of speech acts and, inherently, for the problem of an indeterminate form. However, the main criticism that has been raised against DCTs and other elicited data is that the results often allow for an insight into ‘politic behavior’ (cf. Watts 2003), i.e. what participants suspect as appropriate or expected rather than what they would actually produce in a real-life setting (cf. Kasper 2008; Schneider 2012).

For the case of threatening, we would expect such an effect to produce a skewed image of the speech act for a number of reasons. First of all, threatening has previously been characterized as ‘conflictive’, i.e. threats are, “by their very nature, designed to cause offence” (Leech 1983: 105) or “causing disharmony between the interlocutors” (Limberg 2009: 1376). It is expected that informants are aware of this and are less likely to produce natural utterances, which has been suggested similarly for other types of verbal impoliteness (cf. Culpeper 2011; Jay

23. The distinction resembles the distinction between “laboratory” and “field” methods, a designation originally introduced by Clark and Bangerter (2004) and discussed in detail by Jucker (2009) in a position paper on speech act research. Jucker argues that instead of contrasting the “armchair”, “field” and “laboratory” paradigm, the usefulness of all three methods should be acknowledged, but with regard to their respective scope. In other words, the appropriateness of data selection and methods should always be evaluated in the context of the respective inquiry.

2009).²⁴ Secondly, to induce (verbally) conflictive behavior in an experimental setting “is fraught with ethical problems” (Culpeper 2011: 8), since the researcher would need to create a conflictive setting. It is for these reasons that DCTs and similar elicitation procedures were ruled out as methods of data collection for the present study.

Collected or corpus data appear to be one alternative. Yet, this brings us back to the problem of the unpredictability of a speech act’s occurrence and the problem of its indeterminate form. Leech (1983: 105) claims that threatening and other conflictive illocutions are marginal phenomena in communication. Similarly, Culpeper (2011: 9) assumes that “naturally occurring impoliteness is relatively rare in everyday contexts and thus difficult to collect for data analysis.” And Harris (1984: 247), accordingly, contends that “[there] must be very few contexts in which threats are used frequently and predictably.” In other words, a randomly collected or already existing corpus of authentic communications, even one as large as the spoken component of COCA (Davies 2008–), may not contain any threats after all (cf. Kasper 2008: 282), especially if you consider that the spoken data in COCA come from transcripts of live TV and radio shows, where genuine threats will be very rare. And even if they are not, “speech acts can only be found in large corpora if they appear regularly with standard illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) or in largely routinized forms” (Jucker et al. 2008: 273).

Jucker et al. (2008), Jucker (2009), or Aijmer and Rühlemann (2015: 9) suggest that an alternative corpus search could be based on speech act verbs or meta-communicative descriptions of language functions. An exploratory corpus search for the speech act verb *threaten* in COCA, however, quickly reveals that the verb “(to) threaten” is not used meta-communicatively, i.e. the majority of instances found in a random sample are mostly connected with natural causes or prospective danger that cannot be influenced by human agents, such as “The volcano *threatens* to erupt”. At the same time, Fraser (1998), for example, discusses the verb’s general inability to occur in a performative such as *I threaten you with punishment*, which is not supported by the present data.

As we have seen, in the literature on the topic there are no attested routinized forms or IFIDs that regularly occur with threats and that could be used as a starting point for search inquiries. For these reasons, both the collection of random discourse and the use of already existing corpora of spoken discourse are also ruled out as methods.

24. An additional factor might be what is known in social psychology and sociology as *social desirability bias*, which causes informants to answer survey questions in a way they deem socially more acceptable (see, for example, Crowne and Marlowe 1960).

In order to circumvent the above-described data collection problem, some scholars have instead resorted to different types of *institutional discourse* (cf. Kasper 2008: 282): courtroom discourse, police-citizen encounters, military discourse or children-caregiver interactions have been used to record instances of threats (cf. Baratta 2014; Benoit 1983; Bousfield 2007; Harris 1984; Limberg 2008, 2009). Threats are assumed to be more frequent in such contexts, because of an inherent power-imbalance between the interlocutors, “which can encourage displays of inappropriate, salient behaviour” (Limberg 2009: 156). Harris (1984: 247) highlights the possibility of “a natural control over the semantic content” of the threats as an important advantage of this procedure. Harris suggests that controlling for the social role of both the person threatening and the person being threatened increases comparability and transparency in the analysis, not unlike in an experimental setting. This has been suggested similarly by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (2005). However, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (2005: 28) stress that

[the] features that ensure a high level of comparability are also those features that might restrict a broader interpretation of studies in institutional talk to other discourse. In institutional talk [...] participants have fixed roles and fixed goals, and while this promotes comparability across interactions, findings may not apply to other settings.

In line with this, I argue that the observation of threats in an institutional setting alone constrains the generalizability of previous findings, because threateners might pursue very similar *interactional goals* (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2005). In order to avoid depicting the characteristics of only one particular communicative situation, the possibility to collect data from only one type of institutional setting was also excluded.

In his discussion of research on the speech act of complimenting, Jucker (2009: 1620) suggests that if the above-described methods have to be excluded from a research design, “[the] only alternative would be to investigate only those entities that are named ‘compliment’ by the members of a speech community”.

In the present case this alternative means using utterances that have been named “threats” by members of a speech community. The type of data chosen for the present analysis is exactly this: all utterances were originally produced outside of the research project and with a communicative end, and, most importantly, they were named “threat” by at least one language user and initially ratified as such by a second entity, because all utterances in question are the subject matter in legal disputes dealing with their legal status as threats. In a way, the present approach can thus be described as a *first-order* approach (Watts et al. 1992), because the insight into a speech function is based on a judgement of the speech community itself. With an additional twist, though: the judgement by participants is cross-validated by another entity, namely a legal entity.

In the context of (im)politeness research, first-order approaches are commonly juxtaposed with *second-order* approaches, which discuss speech behavior from a more abstract or scientific point of view. This initial distinction by Watts and colleagues (1992) was further developed and discussed by a number of researchers (cf., e.g., Eelen 2001; Haugh 2012, 2013; Locher 2006), and is deconstructed by Haugh (2012) as follows:

A first-order approach is grounded in the participants' interpretations, while a second-order approach is grounded in that of the analyst. Once again, an ontology grounded in the participant and analyst respectively does not form a natural dichotomy. Indeed, one person may simultaneously be both a participant and an analyst. Instead, they have their own internal contrasts, namely, with the understandings of non-participants and lay observers respectively. (Haugh 2012: 123)

What Haugh contrasts here are essentially four, not only two, perspectives: the perspectives of participant and non-participant, and the perspectives of lay observer and analyst. Participant and non-participant judgements comprise *emic* and *etic* judgements, while analyst and lay observer can contribute a theoretical and atheoretical analysis of linguistic behaviour (Haugh 2012: 122). For the present case this results in a majority of metapragmatic evaluations from two perspectives, first and second order: an *emic participant perspective*, which is contributed by the plaintiff, who is often also the target of a threat and a *theoretical analyst perspective*, which is contributed by legal officials who are involved in the case, often lawyers, judges or other judicial officials.

3.2 Judicial opinions as a data source: The case of criminal threats

Under specific circumstances, threatening another person can constitute a criminal offense and can as such become the issue of a legal dispute. This is the case if, for example, a person utters the intent to in any way harm another person's fundamental rights, such as freedom or health, or if the speaker threatens a specific person, such as public officials or authorities. In cases where allegedly threatening statements become the object of a legal dispute, the finder of fact has to determine whether an indictment is justified (cf. Solan & Tiersma 2005: 198).

The argument such a decision is based on is summarized in a judicial opinion. Judicial opinions are written lawful documents, which provide the reasoning of a legal decision reached by a judge or a judicial panel. In common law systems, an opinion can achieve the binding character of a precedent and become itself part of the legal code. Usually, a judicial opinion summarizes all relevant facts a decision is based on; this includes procedural information and legal argumentation or

interpretation of the law, as well as a description of the circumstances of a case and the relevant evidence (cf. *Black's Law Dictionary*, 2009). In threatening cases the statement in question is part of the evidence.

For this study, a sample of 266 judicial opinions from criminal cases tried in the United States was randomly collected from the electronic database *Westlaw* (www.westlaw.com). The sample was obtained using a combination of search strings, regular expressions, keyword searches, and hyperlinks in the documents which link to related cases in the database.²⁵ The cases these opinions decided are from U.S. federal courts as well as courts from a number of different states, and were tried over a timespan of almost 100 years, the oldest being from 1918²⁶ and the most recent from 2013.²⁷ Due to the incomplete digitalization of, however, the majority of cases were tried in the last 40 years.²⁸ Using a sample that covers a large timespan, from a number of different regions across the US, and which is concerned with different types of offenses establishes a data set as diverse as possible with regard to case and parties involved. Thus, the previously described danger of being limited to only a few institutional settings is minimized.

The opinions included in the corpus are predominantly from appellate decisions, i.e. decisions that are revisited because they have previously been contested by at least one of the parties involved in the dispute (cf. *Black's Law Dictionary*, 2009). Opinions from appellate decisions were chosen for their greater amount of detail with regard to the exact circumstances of a case; they more regularly contain detailed descriptions and verbatim quotes of the disputed threat(s). A majority of the opinions in the corpus contained more than one indictment; either several potential threats were evaluated or additional criminal offenses were involved.

From the set of 266 opinions, a total of 301 alleged threat utterances were extracted. Both the corpus of judicial opinions as well as the threat utterances extracted from these opinions will henceforth be referred to as Corpus of Judicial

25. Special thanks to Sara Gras and Lawrence Solan from Brooklyn Law School, who provided me with access to the database and guided me through the initial jumble of legal terminology and the various options of searching for relevant case files. I used keywords such as 'criminal threat', 'context', 'infer', or 'ambiguous' in order to find the first set of opinions. Additionally, I searched for the respective statutes from the various criminal codes that deal with threats as part of the US penal code. The more wordings I gathered from the opinions, the more refined the search strings became. A large proportion of cases was subsequently collected by means of utilizing the hyperlinks in the documents that electronically refer from one case to all cited cases.

26. *Ragansky v. U.S.*, 253 F. 643 (1918)

27. *State v. Locke*, 175 Wash.App. 779 (2013)

28. Apart from the missing data on some of the decades, the terms of the platform also did not allow for stratified random sampling that controls for an even distribution across decades.

Opinions or CoJO. The analysis focuses exclusively on verbal threats and utterances were only extracted where they could be identified as complete and verbatim quotes. In most cases, the quotes were inserted in the running text of the case description and highlighted as quotes by means of italics or citations marks, as is illustrated in the screenshot in Figure 3.1.

I.

In December 1987 the defendant sent a letter to the chambers of Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor providing as follows: "To O'Connor: Since the court insists upon violating my kids' rights to life (survive), you are all now notified that either Brennan,¹ Stevens² or Kennedy³ is to die." The letter was viewed as a possible threat and led to an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI determined that the defendant was involuntarily committed at the Veterans' Administration Hospital at Perry Point, Maryland. In the course of an ensuing interview, Roberts gave an indication

Figure 3.1 Screenshot of an opinion with quoted threat

Metadata, such as the footnotes in the quote illustrated above, were not extracted. All quotes were transferred into a spreadsheet for further annotation in the exact form they are quoted in the respective judicial opinion. This means they were not edited, even if they contained spelling errors or other orthographic peculiarities.

Regardless of their legal status, all extracted utterances are treated as threats in the following analysis, because at least one language user considers them to be one. The object of all legal disputes is the question whether an utterance constitutes a criminal offense, but the answer to this question has no bearing on the present analysis, and was therefore not included as a parameter in the analysis, even if it is conceivable that a follow-up study additionally may look into the differences between legally valid threats and those that have been considered as legally non-threatening. There are a number of qualitative and interdisciplinary studies that attempt to analyze the linguistic structure of threats with regard to their legal status (cf., e.g., Shuy 2005, 2008, 2010; Solan & Tiersma 2005; Tiersma & Solan 2012). It has to be noted, however, that the factors which influence a legal decision presumably go far beyond the mere wording of a statement and are, thus, hardly predictable.²⁹

²⁹. This has been suggested similarly by Gales (2010), who found that a distinction between threats that are subsequently realized by speakers and threats that remain empty does not discretely translate into structural differences.

The 301 extracted quotes form the unit of analysis for most of the subsequent investigation. The threats were uttered in a broad variety of contexts, including personal conflicts, such as custodial disputes or arguments between neighbors or family members, but also in light of political controversies or as a reaction to more general social issues, such as abortion rights or compulsory military service. In total, 196 threats were originally produced orally and either recorded or reported word for word by a witness as part of the evidence. The remaining 105 threats were originally produced in writing and also admitted as part of the evidence. The length of the threats in number of words ranges from 2 words (*You die!*) to 496 words, with a mean length of 34.5 words and a median of 19 words. All key data of the corpus are summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Summary of key data ‘Corpus of Judicial Opinions’

CoJO	Total	Mean length (in words)	Median length (in words)
Opinions	266	–	–
No of extracted utterances	301	34.5	19
spoken	196	23	16
written	105	56	30

As can be seen from the table, the majority of threats are rather short; more than 50% of the data consist of less or equal 19 words. In comparison, the written threats included in the corpus are twice as long as the spoken threats. The range of spoken and written threats of varying length that were included in the corpus can be seen as additionally increasing the representativeness of the sample and neither mode nor length were included as predictors in the analysis.

In summary, using judicial opinions as a data source has several advantages in comparison to other methods of data collection:

- all extracted utterances are **authentic**, i.e. they were originally produced by a language user outside of the research project and with a communicative end,
- the sample is considerably **representative** with regard to various dimensions: the utterances are produced by a wide range of English speakers from different time periods and different regional areas, the severity of the threats ranges from more severe to more trivial threats, and, similarly, the interactional goals the speakers try to pursue with their threats range from more superordinate goals, such as dominating interlocutors, to more concrete aims, such as gaining personal advantage,
- the utterances are already **pragmatically annotated**, i.e. at least one participant/non-participant has named the utterances “threat”, which is ratified in a second

step by an analyst, i.e. a legal entity; in other words, a function (in the sense of *illocutionary force*, cf. Section 2.1) has been assigned to all utterances prior to and outside of the present analysis,

- judicial opinions provide **detailed contextual information** that other corpora lack, i.e. in addition to the utterances, the opinions contain a minute description of the situation in which the utterance in question was produced, by whom it was produced and to whom it was addressed.

The type of data used for the present study can be best described as a hybrid of ‘corpus’ and ‘notebook’ data (cf., e.g., Adolphs 2008; Manes & Wolfson 1981). CoJO can be designated a corpus because the threats are sampled from an existing electronic collection of discourse, and all utterances exist outside of the research project as part of the judicial opinions. At the same time, CoJO contains ‘notebook’ data because the majority of the orally produced threats in the corpus were collected as witness statements, i.e. from recollection of one of the parties involved or from other witnesses.³⁰ Consequently, despite its advantages, the method also faces some of the drawbacks of both the corpus and the notebook method.

Like many corpora, CoJO is a mediated record, i.e. a speech event (written or spoken) is transcribed, and the transcription is “capturing only a limited and limiting aspect of the reality of that event” (Knight & Adolphs 2008: 175). As a consequence, CoJO does not contain information on any paraverbal and nonverbal signals. In the present case this might be relevant, because previous studies on prosodic aspects of emotionally laden speech have revealed that strong emotions, such as anger and frustration, are often associated with a specific prosody (cf. Polzehl et al. 2011; Xu & Kelly 2010). Due to the conflictive nature of threats, we would expect similar effects in the present case. However, exploratory research by Watt et al. (2013) on the inference of threats from the tone of utterance presumably indicates that prosody is not necessarily a decisive factor for the perception of threats. In order to empirically verify Watt et al. 2013 assumptions, I would nevertheless suggest that experimental follow-up studies on threatening language should factor in paraverbal and nonverbal signals.

One problem that is typically associated with the notebook method is that the participants’ recollection of an utterance may be inaccurate. It has been shown that informants who keep notebooks often only notice particularly stereotypical forms of a speech act, or that they do not recall every detail of an utterance. Consequently,

30. Out of the 196 spoken threats, only 25 were recorded via answering machines, mailboxes or other recording devices and the record was transcribed by a member of the court. The remaining quotes were put on record by one of the witnesses of the case. This includes the threatener and the target, but also bystanders or overhearers.

they adapt their recollection also to a stereotypical form (cf. Jucker 2009: 1621). The fact that a large proportion of the threats in CoJO are reproduced in the witness stand of a criminal trial may intensify this effect.³¹ Additionally, it has been noted that speakers sometimes differ in their perception of a speech event and assign speech act labels inconsistently (Jucker 2009: 1620). Again, due to the adversarial nature of a legal dispute, this effect may be intensified in the situation at hand. At the same time, however, the utterances have been accepted as evidence in a judicial setting, which we conceptualized as a *second-order* judgement by an analyst that highlights the *first-order* judgement's reliability and suggests that the statements in question are regarded as somewhat accurate records of what has been said.

Apart from the general drawbacks of corpus and notebook data, two additional constraints need to be discussed which might arise from the data source itself. Firstly, the threats in the present corpus predominantly involve life-threatening scenarios. Limberg (2009: 1378) refers to such scenarios as "the most excessive form of a threat" and thus considers them to be only of marginal importance in everyday communication. Secondly, the fact that the sample is built from criminal threats may indirectly imply that a certain part of the population is overrepresented in the corpus, namely those who are prone to physical and psychological violence. Both constraints can be countered by the argument that, while it may be true that threats of violence are not common among the entire population or in everyday discourse, the general mechanism of threatening is (cf. Storey 1995: 74). I agree with Limberg's premise that criminal threatening does not fall into the category of common everyday interactions, but in spite of their extreme character, I consider the threats in CoJO as a good point of departure to assess the general formal and functional repertoire employed by speakers to perform this type of speech act. As was argued already, many of the present findings can be understood as exploratory. For now, we tentatively assume that, while the nature of the threatened harm might depend on the situation and the judgement of the target and can also involve harmless "menaces", the underlying mechanism of announcing some action that is in one way or another detrimental to the target appears identical across all scenarios. While the present study therefore operates on the assumption that our results are generalizable across different threatening scenarios, this assumption is, of course, ultimately open to empirical verification. Future research would need to test whether to threaten someone with, for example, the loss of dessert privileges or

31. There are a number of factors that might influence a witness' recollections of statements and events apart from the lack of memory. It is likely that a witness in a criminal case is under great pressure, especially if s/he is the target of the threat in question. For an overview on the effects of accuracy of witness testimony and recollection from a psychological perspective see, for example, Bull et al. (2009).

with actual with physical violence really constitutes variants of the same underlying mechanism (see Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of potential follow-up studies).

3.3 Research design of the present study

The aim of the present study is to answer the overarching question of how speakers threaten. This question will be answered by analyzing authentic data with regard to two related aspects: the linguistic form of the threats and their communicative function. A distinction that is often used to set the methodological agenda in speech act research is one of directionality: studies are described as concerned with either form-to-function mapping or the reverse of mapping function-to-form (cf. Schneider & Barron 2008: 20). Most of the existing research either begins by defining a speech act in terms of its communicative function(s) or by looking at a specific form or a set of forms known to conventionally realize the speech act, and then survey its uses. Schneider and Barron (2008: 20) describe these two approaches as rooted on two out of five distinct levels of analysis: the *formal level* and the *actional level*. According to the authors, an analysis of the formal level is characterized by a form-to-function mapping, while an analysis on the actional level is focused on a function-to-form mapping. The formal level “concerns the analysis of linguistic forms” and “is aimed at determining the communicative functions these forms may have in discourse” (Schneider & Barron 2008: 20). In comparison, the actional level concerns “both the ‘conventions of means’ (i.e. speaker strategies) and the ‘conventions of form’ (i.e. linguistic devices)” (Schneider & Barron 2008: 20).

According to this view, the present study is best described as located in-between these two levels or, maybe more accurately, as bi-directional. The analysis primarily concerns “conventions of form”, i.e. a description of the forms that are used to realize the function of threatening, but it also “takes [these] forms as its starting point” and investigates “the communicative function these forms have” (Schneider & Barron 2008: 20). The subsequent analytical steps are informed by findings from previous ones, and the overall results are subject to a two-way interpretation: formal and functional. This approach was chosen because the present study subscribes to the view that only by going back and forth between these two levels of analysis, a complete and representative view of the speech act can be achieved. Or, as Schneider and Barron (2008: 20) put it: “research on the formal and actional levels represent complementary pragmatic perspectives.”

Another aim of the present study that has considerably shaped its design is a methodological contribution to the field of pragmatics. Linguistic research is currently experiencing an ongoing paradigm shift that manifests itself in all

sub-disciplines, not least in the field of pragmatics. Apart from a general turn towards empiricism, slowly but steadily, a range of quantitative methods are being introduced. Ideally, these methods complement rather than replace existing more qualitative methods (cf. Gries 2013: 4; Levshina 2015: 2). The reciprocal influence of qualitative and quantitative methods has proven very effective for the investigation of a growing number of linguistic phenomena “from usage-based morphology to Cognitive Semantics, and from phonology to discourse analysis” (Levshina 2015: 2). However, although there is also a growing appreciation of “field” and “laboratory” research in pragmatics (cf. Jucker 2009), the adoption of more advanced methodology to analyze pragmatic phenomena appears to progress only slowly. Most studies are confined to using descriptive statistics, and fewer studies employ more advanced methods of statistical modeling. Some of the causes of this ‘methodological road block’ have been discussed in the introductory section to this chapter. It is often proclaimed that “pragmatics involves a systematic many-to-many mapping between form and meaning” (Cummins and DeRuiter 2014: 133), which allegedly renders the use of quantitative methods complicated if not impossible. And the view that actual language use is simply too unpredictable or too messy to be accounted for with statistical models is still prevalent, not only in the field of pragmatics (cf. Gries 2013: 4).

The present study challenges such a view by testing the usefulness of different analytical tools for pragmatic analysis. While this endeavor offers new perspectives on the object of study and on quantitative research on an essentially qualitative object of study in general, there are still some perspectives it does not offer. The analysis does not include a detailed qualitative discussion of threats in terms of speaker moves, motives and strategies, nor are the threats coded for directness or emotionality of speaker strategies, as has been done for other speech acts such as thanking, apologizing or requesting (cf., e.g., Aijmer 1996; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). These analytical steps were excluded because the existing coding categories, as informative as they are, are also often subjective and hardly replicable (cf., Jautz 2013: 11, in a footnote, on Aijmer’s (1996) categories; Jucker et al. 2008 on issues of intercoder reliability; Stadler 2011 on coding speech act explicitness). Similarly, the discussion on contextual influence and macro-social variables, such as P and D, will, to some readers, at times feel a bit abbreviated. This has been argued for in the respective sections. And while I think that, in the case of exploratory research on such a fuzzy object of study, the advantages of a strictly empirical approach outweigh the disadvantages of cutting the theoretical discussion short, it is a flaw I am well aware of and that will need to be addressed at some point.

The analysis proceeds from a simplified descriptive analysis of linguistic forms. For all analytical steps, a basic and reproducible coding is used, which consists of clear-cut categories that emerge from the data rather than being imposed

as a predefined theoretical construct by the researcher. Operating on a basic corpus-linguistic principle that the frequency of features is an indicator of their relevance for speakers (cf. Adolphs 2008: 10), the analysis starts by considering what is present in the utterances (and what is not). Likewise, the function of threats is reduced to a contrast of two contextual settings, which can be determined without taking speaker intentions or relational specifics into account. It is only on the basis of the actual findings that any possible overarching strategies of speakers are discussed (cf. Chapter 6).

While reduction potentially runs the risk of oversimplification, it also allows for a first data-driven generalization that can still be expanded by future research based on empirical findings. Some potential perspectives on future research will be discussed in the final chapter. It is hoped that the study will provide a new perspective on quantitative studies of both threatening and speech acts in general.

The form of threats

The first part of the analysis concerns the form of threats. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the prevailing opinion in the literature appears to be that a threat's form is largely indeterminate. Yet, as was pointed out, the same literature also makes confident claims about typical formal features or even rigid patterns that are used to realize threats, both of which have not yet seen any empirical verification (cf. Section 2.2). The subsequent analysis aims at this verification. A list of formal features was compiled which are commonly associated with threats, and it will be tested whether their assumed prototypicality can be confirmed by the data.

As previously stressed, starting with an inventory of forms allows for any typology to emerge from the data rather than being imposed as a predefined taxonomy of, for example, *direct*, *indirect* and *conditional* threats (cf. Gales 2010). More specifically, a data-driven investigation of frequency and combination of forms that are associated with “the illocutionary point, the referent(s), and the propositional content” of threatening (cf. Culpeper 2011: 184), which will allow us to distinguish between different degrees of *pragmatic explicitness*.

The specific questions that are addressed in the present part of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Are there typical features that occur in the majority of threats and do these correspond to generalizations we find in the literature?
- How frequent are the features and how are they distributed? Is any feature so frequent as to reach the status of a pervasive conventional feature of threatening language?
- How do the features relate to each other, i.e. do some of them regularly occur together? Are these patterns meaningful?

In order to answer these questions, I will first present the general methodology and a summary of the linguistic features discussed in Section 2.2, which form the basis of the coding scheme (Section 4.1). The operationalization of each feature as a variable will be presented consecutively. Taken together, the results amount to a detailed description of the linguistic structure of the threats in CoJO, with regard to conditionality (Section 4.2), futurity (Section 4.3), the verbs used (Section 4.4), and a selection of other commonly found features, such as pronouns and taboo language (Section 4.5). All variables are analyzed and discussed in terms of both

their frequency and distribution. Additionally, the influence of the relation between the threatener and the target of a threat is analyzed, in order to account for one relational aspect of threatening (Section 4.6). In the last section, all variables are reexamined with regard to how they are combined in the threats. The results are discussed in their entirety to answer the question of how speakers threaten (Section 4.7).

In the following chapters, all examples are taken from CoJO, unless otherwise indicated.³² The entire corpus can be found in the appendix.

4.1 Methodology

In order to avoid overemphasizing some linguistic features while overlooking others, the features chosen for the analysis of threats in CoJO are meant to cover a broad range of linguistic forms. The selection of features is motivated by the generalizations about the lexico-grammatical properties of threats that were presented in Chapter 2.

Table 4.1 presents a condensed overview of all features that will be operationalized as variables in the analysis, together with exemplary sources, descriptive quotes, and examples from these sources.

Table 4.1 Overview of formal features

Lexico-grammatical property	Source	Quote or examples used in the literature
Conditional language	Fraser 1998: 165, 167; Gales 2010: 104; Harris 1984: 249; Kent 1967: 31; Limberg 2009: 1378; Milburn & Watman 1981: 8; Salgueiro 2010: 217	“They may be conditional or unconditional; and they may be explicit or implicit. [...] these variations are not unrelated, in that what appears to be an unconditional threat may often mean that the condition is implicit.” (Harris 1984: 249) “A threat traditionally has been defined as some variation of the following formula: ‘If you do A, I will do B,’ where ‘A’ is detrimental to the threatener and ‘B’ is detrimental to the target.” (Milburn and Watman 1981: 8) <i>If you don’t move your car, I will have to give you a ticket</i> (Limberg 2009: 1381); <i>If you don’t stop talking, I’m going to punish you.</i> (Fraser 1998: 167)

32. All utterances were included in the corpus in the exact form they are quoted in the respective judicial opinion and were not ‘cleaned up’, so there will be spelling errors and other orthographic peculiarities.

Table 4.1 (*continued*)

Lexico-grammatical property	Source	Quote or examples used in the literature
Intentionality & futurity	Benoit 1983: 305; Fraser 1998: 168; Gales 2010: 96, 105; Salgueiro 2010: 217; Yamanaka 1995: 52	“[...] the speaker expresses intention to perform the unfavourable act, typically signaling this intention by using <i>will</i> , <i>am going to</i> , <i>have to</i> , and the like.” (Fraser 1998: 168) “[...] threats [...] must describe a future action or omission, or a sequence of such actions or omissions, by the speaker.” (Salgueiro 2010: 217) <i>Hand over your money or I will shoot you.</i> (Yamanaka 1995: 50)
Violent verbs	Gales 2010: 96; Salgueiro 2010: 217;	“[...] a threatened future action is detrimental to the receiver [...]” (Salgueiro 2010: 217) “kill, die, hurt, beat, destroy, slice, murder” (Gales 2010: 96) <i>Look, I don't want to cancel all my credit cards and I hate waiting in line at the DMV, so give me back the wallet you stole from my car or I'll break your fucking neck.</i> (Gales 2010: 94)
Agency	Fraser 1998: 167	“[...] with the speaker as the agent of the unfavourable act.” (Fraser 1998: 167) <i>I will get you later.</i> (Fraser 1998: 167)
Orientation of threat	Gales 2010: 100	“[...] it also raises an interesting question about the primary focus of threatening communications – i.e., is the focus of a threat typically on the recipient [...], or on the threatener [...]?” (Gales 2010: 100)
Personal pronouns	Gales 2010: 96, 100	“you, you all” (Gales 2010: 96) “[...] heightened sense of personalization or focus placed on the victim of the threat through the second person pronoun.” (Gales 2010: 100) <i>If I were ya'll I would be real afraid.</i> (Gales 2010: 100)
Swear words and profanity	Davis 1997: xiii; Gales 2010: 25, 83, 95–96	“[...] the use of profanity and other foul and offensive language often goes hand in hand with violent behavior.” (Davis 1997: xiii) “shit, fuck, Chink, gook” (Gales 2010: 96)
Mentions of weapons	Turner & Gelles 2003: 18, 73	<i>This gun gives me pornographic power.</i> (Gales 2010: 38)

In order to analyze the form of threats, we need to look for a fixed set of formal equivalents of the different features outlined above. As was pointed out in Chapter 3, a strictly formal analysis necessitates simplification. As a consequence, the list of variants that realize a given feature will not always be exhaustive. As variants, I chose a range of clearly identifiable surface forms which, according to the standard literature, most commonly realize the features in question.

After a brief elaboration on the unit of analysis and the general coding procedure, every feature will be operationalized, i.e. individual definitions, levels, coding decisions, and borderline cases will be discussed for each variable separately.

4.1.1 Unit of analysis

As was mentioned in Chapter 3, the length of the threats in CoJO varies greatly, with the shortest utterance consisting of only two words and the longest consisting of nearly 500 words. The unit of the present analysis is this entire sequence. The coding decisions for each utterance involved attesting a feature as either present or absent. Repetitions of the same feature were disregarded.

One of the variables, namely *TYPE OF VERB*, was approached differently. Here, the focus of the analysis was put on only particular parts of the threat utterance, while other parts were disregarded. This approach was chosen because, unsurprisingly, the majority of utterances in CoJO contain more than one verb, many of which are used to denote actions that are not directly related to the announced detrimental action that is either carried out by the speaker/threatener or affecting the addressee/target. Rather these verbs describe, for example, trigger scenarios or ground circumstantial information, as in Example (1) below.

- (1) If Al keeps it up, he's going to get his ass kicked.

Although the utterance in (1) contains two clauses with two predicates, only one of them denotes a future action that is harmful for the target, namely '*going to get his ass kicked*'.³³ The first clause can be analyzed as describing a prerequisite of the scenario. Now, in order to classify only those verbs that appear relevant for the analysis, most of the utterances had to be segmented in order to clearly identify the sequence that denotes "a future action or omission, or a sequence of such actions or omissions, by the speaker" (Salgueiro 2010: 217). This part of each utterance is seen as the central element that corresponds to the definition of a threat's illocutionary point – i.e. the announcement of an unfavorable action – and the analysis of the verbs used to threaten will focus on this central element of each threat.³⁴ A more detailed description of this sequencing procedure with illustrating examples will be given in Section 4.4.

33. Here, the term *predicate* is used in a broad sense to refer to "everything in the sentence except the subject" (Aarts 2008: 9).

34. This kind of segmentation is roughly modeled after an analysis of requests by Blum Kulka et al. (1989), where in each request sequence, a *head act* is identified that is "the part of the sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other element" (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 17).

4.1.2 Coding

After selecting the above-mentioned linguistic features for the analysis, each of them was transformed into a categorical variable. The final coding included the following 12 variables: CONDITIONALITY, FUTURITY, TYPE OF VERB, AGENT, PATIENT, SPEAKER ORIENTATION, HEARER ORIENTATION, IMPLICIT HEARER ORIENTATION, 1PP, 2PP, TABOO LANGUAGE, and MENTION OF WEAPONS.³⁵ For the agent and patient roles, the different types of orientation, personal pronouns, as well as taboo language and mention of weapons, the coding decision was always binary, i.e. it consisted in attesting the feature as either present or absent in a given threat utterance. The remaining variables were coded with three to six levels, depending on the amount of variants chosen for the analysis. The variants represent different forms of realizing futurity and conditionality, and different types of verbs. Since I was also interested in the absence of particular features, non-occurrence of a variable was included as a level.

All the variables chosen for this analysis were coded by examining the threat utterances in isolation and without taking any additional contextual information into account that was indicated in the opinions. The coding was carried out manually and involved 12 variables for each of the 301 threat utterances, which amounts to a total of 3612 coding decisions. In order to increase the consistency and reliability of these decisions, the process was repeated two times six months apart. Apart from minor deviation, the second and third coding were consistent with the initial coding decisions. An overview of the coder reliability as indicated by consistency of coding decisions is illustrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Coder reliability measured as consistency of coding decisions

	Coding 1	Coding 2	Coding 3
No. of decisions	3612	3612	3612
No. of deviations		25	6
(from Coding 1)		0.7%	0.2%
of that			
1PP		8	–
2PP		–	2
Conditionality		4	–
Futurity		9	1
Patient		4	3

35. Initially, the coding scheme comprised 19 variables, which were used for a first test coding that was conducted in October 2013, with only 100 observations. The results were used to refine the coding by eliminating variables that could not be consistently operationalized or that were somehow redundant, i.e. possibly confound with other variables.

In cases where the coding varied, the decisions were re-examined to resolve the issues. Most of the variation turned out to be simple coding errors except for a small number of cases, where the issues were resolved by consulting a standard description of English grammar.³⁶ None of the instances that had to be re-examined were excluded from the analysis, since all of the issues could be resolved and used as decisions in principle.

The data were analyzed using R, a software program for statistical computing and graphics (R Core Team 2015). The findings on frequency, distribution, and co-occurrence of variables will be presented in the form of tables and figures (bar plots and mosaic plots). In order to assess the statistical significance of the findings, standard procedures were applied, such as *Pearson's Chi-squared test*, with Yates' continuity correction where applicable, or *Fisher's exact test*, depending on the number of observations. The results are stated in the continuous text or as part of a plot's caption. Where the calculated p-value is below .05, the distribution of features or the differences in distribution are seen as statistically significant. However, since we have an intermediate number of observations compared to the number of investigated variables, results that are statistically insignificant will also be discussed. Qualitative interpretations of the findings are presented and discussed along with examples from the corpus.

4.2 Conditionality

As was discussed in Section 2.2.1, conditional language is strongly associated with threatening. Almost all of the (mostly fabricated) examples used in the literature contain some form of conditional construction, as in the examples below.

(2) If you don't pay me back, I'll know where to find you. (Watt et al. 2013: 106)

(3) Stop talking or I'm going to punish you. (Fraser 1998: 167)

In Example (2), the alleged threatener makes use of a conditional clause introduced by *if*, and Example (3) consists of an imperative clause followed by a declarative clause, joined by a coordinating conjunction. While (2) is regarded as the prototypical form of a conditional in English (von Stechow 2011: 1516), the construction used

36. During the second coding period, the coding of the patient role had to be revisited for four observations because it was inconsistent as to whether or not the subject in threats like *You will die* carries the role of the patient. However, "a prototypical patient is affected by an action performed by some causer, especially an agent" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 231) and there is no agent present in these examples. Therefore, the subjects in question were not coded as carrying the patient role.

in (3) is another conventional way for speakers to present a negative consequence ('punishment') as causally linked to the addressee's compliance with a directive ('stop talking') (cf., e.g., van Rooij & Franke 2012).

Although it might seem intuitive to regard threats with a structure like the Examples (2) and (3) as typical, there are two main problems with how the relation of conditional language and threatening is often described. First, in most of the studies that deal with conditionals in threatening language, there is rarely any systematic division of functional and formal aspects of conditional language or their interrelation. It seems that the widespread use of examples like the ones in (2) and (3) and the coinage of the term *conditional threat* (cf. Benoit 1983; Gales 2010, 2012; Harris 1984; Limberg 2009) have inspired the assumption that the use of conditional language is a salient formal feature of threat utterances in general. As was argued in Sections 2.2.1 and 2.3.1, it has often been overlooked, or at least not properly emphasized that the increased use of conditional threats in particular situations might also be an effect of said situations and not an indication of the prototypicality of conditional language for threats in general.

It is noteworthy in this context that studies which regard threatening as a primary means of manipulating and influencing a target, as for example in bargaining or instructive situations, predominantly concern situations where two or more participants try to negotiate power asymmetries, often in institutional or quasi-institutional settings. Existing studies primarily investigate communicative settings that involve a clear power imbalance between the participants – magistrates and citizens, military officers and recruits, police officers and citizens – and threats are used by the more powerful interactant to enforce their power (cf., e.g., Culpeper 1996; Harris 1984; Limberg 2008, 2009). However, in these contexts, threatening is merely one communicative strategy among others (cf. Benoit 1983; Limberg 2008).

Of the few studies that investigate threats in more informal settings, the majority also involve comparable power asymmetries, for example in children's interaction with family members or caregivers (cf. Benoit 1983; Hepburn and Potter 2011). In these studies, threatening is also regarded as "an intensified form of attempted behavioural influence" (Hepburn and Potter 2011: 99), and conditional language is a means of such influence. To define threats as generally conditional in their nature or describe conditional language as a prototypical feature of threats, by implication, limits the function of threats to manipulation and influence. As was discussed, it is, however, at least questionable whether threats do not serve at least two distinct functions as a means of manipulation and a form of emotional outlet (cf. 2.3.2).

Another problem is that, even if an analysis of conditionality is seen as purely functional, the notion of *conditionality* has rarely been operationalized in a consistent way, which leads to a number of misunderstandings. It is unclear whether the term is used in a purely functional sense, i.e. whether we are talking about the fact

that threats are used to enforce certain conditions and manipulate a target by making some future detrimental action dependent on the target's behavior. Similarly, it is unclear whether such conditionality should be inferable from the communicative context, which could render every threatening statement 'conditional' in the widest sense. It is evident, that any attempt at a definition seems to be a matter of form, of function, or of both. Yet, most examples cited in the literature illustrate their point with the most explicit variant of expressing the conditional nature of two statements, namely with an *if*-clause, which presumably leads to the aforementioned problems. For the purpose of this study, conditionality had to be operationalized in a way that allows for a clear distinction between functional aspects and purely formal equivalents. The present section focuses on the latter.

4.2.1 Operationalizing CONDITIONALITY³⁷

As von Fintel (2011: 1516) notes, a conditional is "a two-part sentence consisting of an 'antecedent' (also: 'premise', 'protasis') [...] and a 'consequent' ('apodosis')".³⁸ Most definitions are in line with this view, yet, structurally, the two parts and their relation can be realized in various ways. In order to arrive at a clear operationalization, the discussion about the different types of modality in conditionals and the semantics and interpretation of the preposition *if* will be disregarded (see von Fintel 2011, for a short overview). Instead, we will focus on two types of structures that contain explicit realizations of protasis and apodosis, regardless of mood and tense structure of the respective clauses:

- i. all conditional constructions (i.e. protasis and apodosis) with the conjunction *if*, and
- ii. specific coordinated or juxtaposed constructions of both protasis and apodosis with a conditional interpretation (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 759).

The latter constructions predominantly express protasis and apodosis in the form of <imperative AND/OR declarative>³⁹ and have been discussed in the literature as *pseudo-imperatives* (cf. Clark 1993; van Rooij & Franke 2012) or *IoD*- and *IaD-constructions* (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 937; Kaufmann 2012: 221).

37. In the following, small caps will be used to refer to a variable and a typewriter font will be used to refer to the individual variants, e.g., CONDITIONALITY and explicit conditional. Additionally, italics will be used when referring to a specific form, e.g. *if*.

38. Henceforth referred to as protasis and apodosis or precondition and consequence.

39. Apart from the coordinators *and* and *or*, the corpus also contains variants, such as *or else*, *or otherwise*, and *and then*.

Kaufmann (2012: 221) argues that IoD- and IaD-constructions “tend to receive a conditional-like interpretation when the first coordinand [...] is imperative in clause type, and the second declarative.” The sequence of coordinands was not a criterion for this analysis, but both coordinands have to be present and have to be linked by the aforementioned conjunctions for the expression to be coded as containing a type of conditional.

In the present study, CONDITIONALITY is defined as expressing both, a protasis *p* and an apodosis *q*, conjoined with either the conjunction *if*, as in Example (4), or with the conjunction *and*, as in Example (5), or the disjunction *or*, as in Example (6). Both Examples (5) and (6) allow for an interpretation of “*q* as a consequence of *p*”, although they do not express this relation in the same way as Example (4). As an illustration, protasis and apodosis are labeled and bracketed in the examples.

- (4) If [you ever touch my daughter again [PROTASIS]], [I’ll have you permanently removed from the face of this Earth [APODOSIS]].
- (5) [Yell at me again [PROTASIS]] and [see what happens [APODOSIS]].
- (6) [Mind your own business [PROTASIS]] or [you’re going to get hurt [APODOSIS]].

Semantically, the three examples all clearly state conditions under which a (negative) consequence for the target will (not) occur. Clark (1993: 79) argues that constructions like the ones in (5) and (6) are essentially “synonymous with, or derived from the same underlying string as, conditionals.” Following this line of argumentation, the examples can be paraphrased as *If you yell at me again you will see what happens* (5) and *If you don’t mind your own business you’re going to get hurt* (6).⁴⁰

In Example (4) the conditional consequence is expressed with *will*, a typical context of use for this modal (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 191). Its meaning in this particular context is ambiguous between an expression of volition and an expression of futurity, i.e. a deontic modality (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 192). In the Examples (5) and (6) the conditional consequences are expressed with a present futurate (‘see what happens’) and a *be going to*-construction (‘you’re going to get hurt’). Both of these are typically used to express futurity in present day English (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 208) and can be seen as expressions of the apodosis as a future consequence (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 738).

40. Although this only concerns us marginally, it should be noted that the paraphrases of both examples already point to some of the subtle differences between IaDs and IoDs that have been discussed extensively in the literature (cf., e.g., Franke 2010). It also has to be mentioned that not all IaD and IoD constructions can be interpreted as threats, but that the threatening force presumably derives from the detrimental nature of the declarative (cf. Huddleston 1988: 133).

There are many examples in the corpus where conditionality is presumably inferable, especially if the threat utterance in question contains an imperative, as in the Examples (7) and (8).

- (7) Put all your money on top of the counter. I have a gun. Just do it now.
- (8) Stay out of my way. This is your last warning.

In both examples, the speaker utters an imperative followed by a declarative clause and, respectively, another imperative clause that is a modification of the initial imperative (7). Compliance with the imperatives *Stay out of my way* and *Put all your money on top of the counter/Just do it now* like in other IaD and IoD constructions, is likely to be interpreted as the protasis and the (negative) consequence that results from non-compliance can be interpreted as the apodosis. Yet, the apodosis is not readily identifiable. Without a conjunction or disjunction linking the imperative and the declarative, there is no linguistic surface expression of a conditional relation between compliance/non-compliance, i.e. protasis, and any sort of (negative) consequence for the target of the threat, i.e. apodosis.

In other words, although the examples in (5) to (8) all contain an imperative and a declarative clause, Examples (7) and (8) are different from Examples (5) and (6) in that they lack a conjunction or disjunction that links both clauses and an expression of volition or futurity in the declarative clause. And although they, too, can roughly be paraphrased as *if...then*-conditionals, as in *?If you do not put all your money on top of the counter, I have a gun* (6) and *?If you do not stay out of my way, this is your last warning* (7), it seems that, without either an expression of futurity in the declarative or a conjunction linking both parts, their interpretation necessitates at least one more interpretive step. For this reason, examples of this kind were coded as non-conditional. The same goes for utterances that contain only one of the components, i.e. bare imperatives, as in the Examples (9) and (10), or statements that seem to express only a (negative) consequence, without any protasis, as in the Examples (11) and (12).

- (9) Get up. Give me the money. Open the drawers.
- (10) Keep your human trash off my property.
- (11) There will be trouble. You will be sorry.
- (12) You'll end up with plugs in you just like Thelma.

It can be seen that transforming the Examples (9) to (12) into *if...then*-conditionals does not work in the same way as it does with the previous examples. We end up with fragments like *?If you do not get up, give me the money, and open the drawers...* or *?(Then) there will be trouble and you will be sorry....* Examples like this again highlight the importance of differentiating between functional and formal aspects

of the analysis and the importance of a clear operationalization of the variable in question. To code these examples as *non-conditional* is not to say that they cannot be interpreted as conditional in a sense, but that they do not express both protasis and apodosis in the same way.

Additionally, a number of utterances make use of the expression (*had*) *better* and its variant (*had*) *best*, as in Examples (13) to (15). *Had better* is formally a modal, and constructions like this are regarded as typical expressions of advice or “subjective, giving the speaker’s judgement as to the best course of action” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 196). The comparative (or superlative) embedded in the construction is often interpreted as highlighting one type of behavior or action on the side of the addressee as more desirable or preferred from the point of view of the speaker (Mitchell 2003: 137; Palmer 1990: 82). Because of this evaluative meaning component, the construction is “often used not so much for expressing pure advice but for directing others’ behaviour” (Mitchell 2003: 143). The normative evaluation is also seen as a strong hint at possible negative consequences and, according to such a view, a warning or a threat is always inherent in statements of this kind (Mitchell 2003: 146). In the context of threatening, statements with *had better* presumably resemble weak imperatives in the form of advice or recommendations.⁴¹ And, as with imperatives, different combinatory patterns are found.

- (13) You better not snitch or tell.
- (14) You better not go home alone. We’ve got our eyes on you.
- (15) I’m trying to do the Aubuchon’s a favor. They best realize that. I’m 42 years old, and I’ll not be locked in prison the rest of my natural life. They best think about it. Their sister didn’t!!!

Utterance (13) is an example of what can be considered a bare advice construction, similar to the bare imperatives in Examples (9) and (10) (cf. Ervin-Tripp 1976). It seems that, again, any potential apodosis is omitted and has to be inferred by the speaker. In the Examples (14) and (15) the advice is conjoined with declarative statements of different kinds. In (14) the speaker uses a general declarative statement in combination with the advice, and in Example (15) there are two advice-structures with *best* combined with declarative statements, one of which contains an expression of futurity (*I’ll not be locked in prison for the rest of my natural life*). All utterances similar to examples like this are also classified as non-conditional in the present study.

41. The construction is described as a *weaker* imperative because, for example, Hudson (1990: 285) discusses *had better* as a modality marker that functions as a form of mitigating device for face threatening acts such as advice giving.

Apart from threats that can arguably be interpreted as expressing an implied conditional meaning, there are also a number of utterances that do not allow for a conditional interpretation in the same way, such as Examples (16) and (17).

- (16) Are your uniforms bullet-proof?
- (17) This is Inglewood 13, homey, and I'm Pequeno Peligroso.

It is obvious that both examples require contextual embedding to be interpreted as potential threats. They do not express any form of a readily identifiable protasis or apodosis and they cannot be paraphrased as *if...then*-conditionals in the same way as the examples examined earlier. Cases like this were also classified as non-conditional.

Consequently, the coding of CONDITIONALITY in CoJO included three variants; utterances with “*if... (then)*”-structures were coded as explicit conditional because of their status as canonical conditionals in English, the different realizations of IaD- and IoD-constructions were coded as implicit conditional, and utterances without any such expressions were coded as non-conditional. Table 4.3 summarizes the different variants, and illustrates each variant with examples from the corpus.

Table 4.3 Summary variants of CONDITIONALITY

Variant	Example from CoJO
explicit	If you ever touch my daughter again, I'll have you permanently removed from the face of this Earth.
conditional	I'm not going to be responsible for my behavior if you continue to aggravate me.
implicit	Yell at me again and see what happens.
conditional	Mind your own business or you're going to get hurt. We're Nortenos These are our apartments. You're outta here. You fucking bitch.
non-conditional	Put all your money on top of the counter. I have a gun. Just do it now. Your building will go boom.

As was outlined in Chapter 2, the variants summarized in Table 4.3 are seen as pragmatically explicitly realizations of the feature conditionality. Threats that contain any of these variants will be regarded as explicit with regard to this feature and threats that do not contain any of these variants will be regarded as vague with regard to this feature.

4.2.2 Results and discussion

A total of 87 conditionals were encountered in the data. Of these, 57 were coded as explicit conditional, and 30 were coded as implicit conditional. The remaining 214 threat utterances were coded as non-conditional. Figure 4.1 below plots the distribution of different types of conditionality in CoJO.

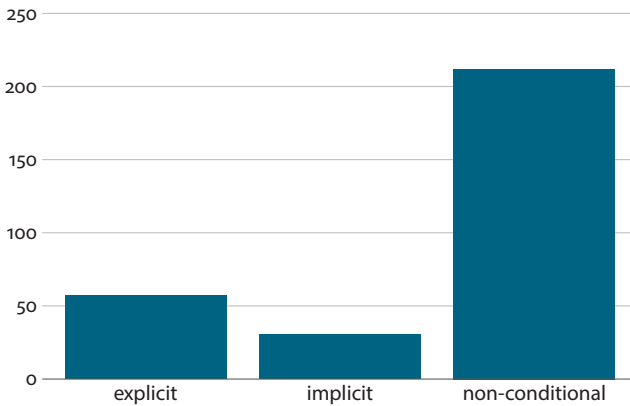


Figure 4.1 Distribution of CONDITIONALITY (N = 301)

The plot contrasts the proportion of explicit and implicit conditional against the proportion of non-conditional threats encountered in CoJO. As can be seen, roughly a third (28.9%)⁴² of the threats in CoJO contain either explicit or implicit forms of CONDITIONALITY, as previously operationalized. Of these, 65.5% contain an *if... (then)*-conditional (explicit conditional). In 34.5% of the cases speakers make use of IaD or IoD constructions (implicit conditional) ($\chi^2 = 187.02$, $df = 2$, $p\text{-value} < 0.0001$).⁴³

It can be seen that, contrary to the prevailing opinion in the literature, speakers do not regularly use conditional clauses – explicit or implicit – to threaten their potential targets. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed again that this is not to say that speakers do not convey to their targets some form of precondition(s) for their possibly detrimental actions, i.e. some form of protasis and apodosis. As should be clear from the discussion above, even these threat utterances that have been classified as formally non-conditional may carry a conditional meaning.

42. Percentages have been rounded and might thus not always add up to 100%.

43. For reasons of readability, the p-value was rounded to 4 decimal figures and only given as an estimate where it was below 0.0001.

The results can be interpreted to hint at two different things. Firstly, the lack of CONDITIONALITY might be an indicator of the fact that the ways in which speakers express the conditions of an impending harm are much subtler than the picture created with fabricated examples in the literature may convince us to believe. Or, secondly, it could be that manipulation and influencing a target by means of giving conditions and consequences are not the only or not the primary functions of threatening. To discuss these options, and in order to get a better understanding of the data, and especially an understanding of the utterances classified as non-conditional, in the following, we will take a closer look at some of the threats from CoJO before we turn our attention to the next variable.

Upon closer inspection of the threats from CoJO that were classified as non-conditional, it seems that there are different types of utterances in this category.⁴⁴ First, there are statements that can be best described as intention statements, i.e. statements that are uttered from the perspective of an agentive first person subject, mostly denoting the intention to perform a violent action, as in the Examples (18) and (19).

(18) I'll kill you, Mr. Haney, I'll kill you.

(19) I can make bombs and I will make bombs and blow up the president.

The speaker in (18) directly addresses his or her potential target, and the speaker in (19) mentions the target but seems to address a third party with his utterance. Both threats do not contain any mention of a condition that is attached to the speaker's announcement.

Then there are what I have earlier called bare imperative or advice-constructions and other directives as in Examples (20) to (22).

(20) Don't make me strap your ass.

(21) Can you please send me your daughter's address?

(22) Just remember what happened in Oklahoma City.

In all of the examples, the speaker/threatener directly addresses his alleged target; yet, there are some notable differences. While in (20) the speaker presumably implies that a particular behavior of the addressee ('make me') has a direct negative consequence for the addressee ('strap your ass'), the examples in (21) and (22) do not reference any behavior on the side of the addressee at all.

Third, there are bare statements of different kinds, most of which are also uttered from the perspective of the speaker but lack an expression of intention or

44. This broad classification is meant only with regard to the variable *conditionality* since additional linguistic properties of these utterances will be discussed separately.

volition, as in the Examples (18) and (19), and predominantly do not contain any direct address of the potential target, as in the Examples (20) to (22). Examples of this would be the utterances in (23) and (24) below.

(23) I get alarmed real easy.

(24) I also know where his kids go to school.

Both of these utterances seem to be mere statements about the state of mind of the speaker or his knowledge. And, again, their interpretation would require contextual embedding to be understood as threats. So, how do examples like this fit into the picture?

If we, at least temporarily, subscribe to the aforementioned prevailing opinion that the expression and recognition of some protasis and some apodosis should at least be part of the illocutionary point of threatening, threats like the examples in (23) and (24) are best described as vague with regard to the aspect of conditionality. There are, of course, varying degrees of vagueness, which has already been suggested by differentiating between the different types of non-conditional threats. The speaker in (20) at least insinuates some behavior on the side of the addressee and a negative consequence that follows from it. In comparison, examples like (16) or (23) cannot be interpreted in the same way.

If we interpret the findings with regard to the expectation that speakers will use some form of conditional language in their threats, it seems to be the case that speakers prefer the use of vague variants to express CONDITIONALITY. This is puzzling if the recognition of the demands and conditions of a threat are regarded as an essential part of its communicative goal. Why would speakers rather opt for a nonconventional and vague form of expressing their demands and conditions, thereby risking the threat's efficacy?⁴⁵ This apparent contradiction and "the puzzle of indirect speech" (cf. Terkourafi 2011a) is a widely debated topic. Much of what was discussed with regard to indirectness within the realms of politeness research cannot be readily transferred to impoliteness phenomena (cf. Culpeper et al. 2003; Culpeper 2008, 2011). We will return to this issue at the end of the present study, hoping to add some insight into possible strategies and motivations of threateners to prefer less explicit variants (cf. Chapter 6). Additionally, it was argued that the

45. With reference to Austin's (1971) conceptualization of *uptake*, Terkourafi (2011a: 2863) argues for the "intra-linguistic goal (understanding and being understood)" as the lowest common denominator even of conflictive communications. While I do not agree with various aspects of her argument, as will be discussed in later sections, I second her proposal "to distinguish between the listener's mental uptake [...] and its (optional) externalization later on" (2011: 2863). *To be understood* is, therefore, seen as a logical prerequisite for the efficacy of any threat from the perspective of any speaker.

findings allow for at least one other possible interpretation, namely that manipulation and influence are not the only communicative goals that are furthered by speakers by means of using threats. This too will be taken up for discussion at a later point.

In the next section, we take a closer look at the use of *will* and other modals and their potential to express futurity in threats.

4.3 Futurity

If verbal threats are understood as statements about detrimental future scenarios that are possibly dependent on certain conditions, it seems straightforward that another structural feature often associated with threats are expressions of intention and futurity (cf. Fraser 1998; Limberg 2009; Storey 1995). As was discussed in Section 2.2.2, it is expected that threatening utterances contain some reference to a future time or action, or contain declarations of the intent to carry out an action in the future, either by an agentive speaker, i.e. the threatener, or an affected target. Such expectations are mirrored in the majority of definitions of threatening. Salgueiro (2010: 217), for example, claims that valid “[...] threats [...] must describe a future action or omission, or a sequence of such actions or omissions, by the speaker.” In line with such expectations, the Examples (25) to (29) below all contain an expression that refers to a yet to be realized or hypothetical act in the future.

- (25) I’ll personally kill you when I get out of prison.
- (26) You will burn in hell for what you’ve done.
- (27) I am going to rob you. I have a gun. Give me your money.
- (28) Mind your own business or you’re going to get hurt. We’re Nortenos These are our apartments. You’re outta here. You fucking bitch.
- (29) When I get out the judge is dead.

Structurally, the examples use different ways to mark the described scenario as located in the future. Examples (25) and (26) both contain the modal *will*.⁴⁶ In Example (25) it is used in combination with an agentive first person subject, and in Example (26) *will* is used with a non-agentive subject in the form of a second person pronoun. In both cases, the use of the modal *will* places the action in the future, and the structures are nearly identical. Additionally, the speaker in Example (25)

46. Arguably, the *’ll* in Example (27) could also be a cliticized form of *shall*, but since *will* and *shall* are generally seen as equivalent in combination with a first person subject they are taken together in our analysis and the difference can be disregarded here (cf. Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 209).

specifies the point in time when the future action is supposed to take place by adding the temporal adverbial *when I get out of prison*. This sub-clause, however, can be regarded as optional for the futurate meaning because the use of *will* in the matrix clause already places the action in the future.

Examples (27) and (28) both contain a construction with *be going to*, again combined with either an agentive first person subject (27) or with a non-agentive subject in the form of a second person pronoun (28). In Example (29), on the other hand, the speaker uses the present tense and, similar to Example (25), additionally specifies a future point in time by means of the temporal location expression *when I get out*. In this case, however, the sub-clause is essential for the futurate meaning. A when-PP like this is one of “the most common and central temporal location expressions” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 698). It is how the speaker marks the future event as one “that [has] already been arranged, scheduled by human agency” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 132), and the use of present tense is quite common in these contexts. Such a structure is referred to as *present futurate* (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 131).

All three expressions – the use of *will*, the use of *be going to* and the *present futurate* – are standard ways to refer to a future time in English. However, their context of use is not limited to this function, and they are only some of the expressions that can be used to express futurity in English. In order to be able to consistently analyze them as expressing futurity, some aspects of their semantics and function, as well as some of the alternative expressions, need to be discussed in more detail.

There is much disagreement in the literature with regard to the function of the modal *will*. “Traditional grammar treats *will* (and, in the 1st person, *shall*) as a future tense auxiliary, proposing a tense system with three terms” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 208), namely past, present, and future. Alternative approaches rather “argue that *will* (and likewise *shall*) is an auxiliary of mood, not tense” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 209; cf. also Ziegeler 2013, for a more detailed discussion of a volitional, generic, and modal meaning of *will*). At the same time, other modals, such as *can*, *must*, *should*, *could*, *would*, *have to*, *had better*, and *might*, can arguably be used to express a similar futurate semantics (Börjars & Burridge 2010: 133). As a consequence – and as a prerequisite for a consistent operationalization of the present category – the variable FUTURE had to be defined in a way that leads to a practical disadvantage: the conflation of different functions of *will* on the one hand and the exclusion of a number of potential alternative expressions of futurity on the other. However, there is an important methodological advantage to this approach, namely to be able to specify a limited number of possible formal realizations. In the following, I will briefly present some additional arguments that seem to support the assumption that the conflation of different functions of *will* does not present an obstacle in this context.

For the purpose of the present analysis, *will* is treated as expressing futurity, and modals other than *will*, such as *could* and *would*, are excluded as synonymous variants. This decision is motivated by a number of criteria: first of all, in terms of their overall frequency in this particular function, all of the other modals rank behind the prototypical candidates *will/shall*, *be going to*, *be to*, and *present futurate* (cf. Haegeman 1983: 15). Secondly, the semantics of modals such as *should* or *might* are ambiguous between meanings such as, for example, ‘prediction’, ‘intention’, ‘permission’, ‘obligation’, or ‘ability’ (cf. Aarts 2008: 36; Collins 2009). It is possible to paraphrase their meanings, as illustrated with the Examples (30) to (33).⁴⁷

- (30) Someone might get hurt.
- (31) I could kill her and leave where she is now.
- (32) Ronald Reagan is the anti-Christ, he must be killed and I must kill him.
- (33) What does somebody have to do to change policy around here? Do you have to be – take matters into your own hands like the Black man in Missouri?

With the use of *might* in Example (30) a speaker can express ‘possibility’, as well as ‘prediction’, which could be paraphrased as something along the lines of “It is possible that someone will get hurt”. The use of *could*, Example (31), can express ‘ability’ or ‘possibility’ and ‘prediction’, as in, for example, “I have the ability to kill her and leave her where she is now” or “It is possible that I kill her and leave her where she is now.” Similarly, the use of *must* and *have to*, in the Examples (32) and (33), can be used to express ‘obligation’ rather than ‘prediction’. This should suffice to show that it is rather tricky, if at all possible, to definitely disambiguate the modals’ meaning without consulting the context or the speakers themselves. Consequently, modals that are ambiguous between a temporal (i.e. in our analysis both ‘intention’ and ‘prediction’) and a non-temporal meaning or that are not primarily used to express temporality were not analyzed as expressions of futurity.⁴⁸

Furthermore, if we replace the modals in the examples above with *will*, such as, e.g., *Someone will get hurt* or *I will kill her and leave her where she is now*, the predictive strength of these utterances presumably increases, which again seems to support the decision to treat *will* differently from the rest of this group (cf. Downing & Perucha 2014: 393). To illustrate this even further, let us look at Example (34) below.

47. Since this analysis focuses on the potential of *will* and other modals to express futurate meanings, the difference between various kinds of modal meanings, such as *deontic*, *epistemic*, and *dynamic modality* and their various subcategories were not considered. See, for example, Palmer (1986) for a more general discussion of *Mood and Modality*.

48. An exception would have been made in cases where one of these modals co-occurred with a temporal adverbial specifying a future point in time, but such a combination was not attested in the data.

(34) If Reagan came to Sheridan, I **would** shoot him.

Here the speakers use a *remote conditional*, which is a combination of “a modal auxiliary as the apodosis verb (usually *would*, *should*, *could*, or *might*) and a modal preterite or irrealis *were* in the protasis” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 748). Constructions like this are said to “[entertain] the condition as being satisfied in a world which is potentially different from the actual world” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 748). In other words, rather than announcing an imminent future, it seems that with these utterances, speakers map out hypothetical scenarios.⁴⁹

Such a view is additionally supported by frameworks that analyze the use of modals and other lexical and grammatical markers as expressions of *speaker stance* or numerous closely related phenomena (cf. Biber & Finegan 1989; Biber 2006; Englebretson 2007; Martin & White 2005). Gales (2010), for example, examines whether “any interpersonal functions of stance [are] reliable in helping to determine the level of intent in a threat” (Gales 2010: 5). Her approach regards the choice between linguistic alternatives, such as *could* and *will*, as indicative of the level of seriousness of a threat in terms of likelihood of its execution. As was already explained, the present analysis is interested in the linguistic structure of threats regardless of the actual intent of a speaker to perform the announced action.

Lastly, apart from functional differences, the strong overlap between modality and futurity might also be an indicator of the semantic inseparableness of these two categories. Leech (2004: 87) claims that this overlap is a consequence of “the nature of futurity”, since

[w]e cannot be as certain of future happenings as we are of events in the past and present, and even the most confident prediction about the future must reflect something of the speaker’s uncertainty and so be tinged with modality.

In other words, if a speaker refers to an action in the future, such a statement will always be a reflection of the speaker’s beliefs, because whatever is referenced has not yet happened and there is never more than an intention or a strong belief that it will. As was argued, a possible conflation of expressions of intentionality, or mood, and expressions of futurity is unavoidable to some extent and does not present an obstacle to this analysis.⁵⁰

49. The peculiar nature of threat utterances like the one in Example (34) also seems to be reflected in their perception and interpretation. It is precisely because of their more hypothetical character that, in a judicial setting, threats like this are often treated as issues of free speech. See, for example, *People v. Muro, Not Reported in Cal.Rptr.3d* (2006), where a conditional statement of this kind was interpreted as an instance of protected speech.

50. In her detailed discussion of *The Semantics of Will in Present-day English*, Haegeman (1983: 50) also describes ‘volitional’-*will* as one of two futurate meanings of the modal and refers to previous accounts by Jespersen (1954) and others to support her argument.

A way to further disentangle the category of FUTURITY is to strictly differentiate between structural realizations of tense and references to (metaphysical) time. Börjars and Burridge (2010: 133), for example, claim that “[tense] is a matter of verb form and there are two tenses in English: present and past. There are many different ways of referring to future events in English, but nothing that we can describe as the future tense.”

For these reasons, the analysis of FUTURITY in threat utterances cannot be seen as a strict analysis of tense structure, but rather as an analysis of different ways to linguistically refer to a future time. The question of whether this is done by means of expressing an intention or by means of locating an event in the future is seen as of secondary importance.

4.3.1 Operationalizing FUTURITY

In spite of the complicated nature of the English tense system, it is mostly agreed that there are at least five prototypical ways how a reference to future time can be expressed. As was just discussed, the forms typically listed include *will/shall*, *be going to*, *be to*, and the *present futurate*, i.e. the simple present and the present progressive form of verbs (cf. Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 131; Leech 2004: 86). The first three forms can arguably be used to refer to a future point in time without any additional time reference, while the latter two are often argued to “refer to the future only if they are accompanied by an adverbial of future time or if such an adverbial is understood” (Nehls 1975: 285). This seems to be illustrated by the Examples (25) and (29) cited above. In Example (25), the temporal location expression *when I get out of prison* further specifies the point in time, but the futurate semantics is additionally expressed by the use of *will* in the main clause. In comparison, the almost identical expression in (29) is presumably mandatory for the interpretation as futurate. Without the when-PP or an alternative temporal adverbial the futurate meaning does not present itself in the same way. In other words, the intuitive interpretation of a declarative sentence like *The judge is dead* without any more co-textual embedding would be a description of present events, rather than the announcement of a future scenario. From the perspective of discourse, it has been argued that in order for a present futurate to be interpretable, temporal location expressions that modify the utterance “need not be in the same sentence, but could also be in a previous paragraph, for example”, or that “extralinguistic factors such as register or context are also sufficient” (Bergs 2010: 217). These additional factors will be discussed in more detail in the results section. In any case, the present tense in this context is at least ambiguous, and this ambiguity could not be resolved without consulting the

context. Additional contextual information, however, was not factored in at this stage of the analysis. Only combinations of a present tense clause and a temporal location expression, either in the same sentence or in textual vicinity, were coded as present futurate.

The category of futurity, as operationalized in this study, includes the following forms: will (i.e. all instances of *will* and *shall*)⁵¹ be going to (i.e. all instances and variants of *be going to* and *be to*),⁵² and present futurate (i.e. present tense + temporal adverbial). The variable included no futurity as a fourth level in the analysis. Table 4.4 provides an overview of the different variants and illustrates these with examples from the corpus.

Table 4.4 Summary variants of FUTURITY

Variant	Example from CoJO
will	You will burn in Hell for what you've done. Now comes the Aryan shadow of death to let you know that your death is at hand. I, the Aryan shadow of death, shall execute you in the very most painful way. As the Lord said, every hair on your head is numbered. You will never again prosecute an Aryan.
be going to	Mind your own business or you're going to get hurt. We're Nortenos These are our apartments. You're outta here. You fucking bitch. To O'Connor: Since the court insists upon violating my kids' rights to life (survive), you are all now notified that either Brennan, Stevens or Kennedy is to die.
present futurate	I'm holding you responsible and I'm willing to take it to the most extent I can take it.... [M]y son is graduating in a week and I'm dealing with you, you little worm.
no futurity	I have a gun. (149_201) I'd like to stick a coat hanger in you. (82_103)

51. There are only three instances of *shall* in CoJO, all by the same speaker.

52. This category also includes all variants of *be going* such as *gonna* and orthographic variants of this form such as *onna* that were not further distinguished in the analysis. There is only one instance of *be to* in CoJO.

4.3.2 Results and discussion

Overall, 71% (213)⁵³ of the threat utterances in CoJO contain one of the variants of FUTURITY, and the remaining 29% (88) of the threats were coded as no futurity as previously operationalized. Of these utterances that were coded as realizing FUTURITY, the variants are distributed as follows: 54% will (115), 30.9% be going to (66), and 15.1% present futurate (32) ($\chi^2 = 71.744$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.0001$). Figure 4.2 plots the distribution in two different ways, in order to illustrate both the contrast between occurrence and non-occurrence of the variable in general, and the proportion of the different variants.

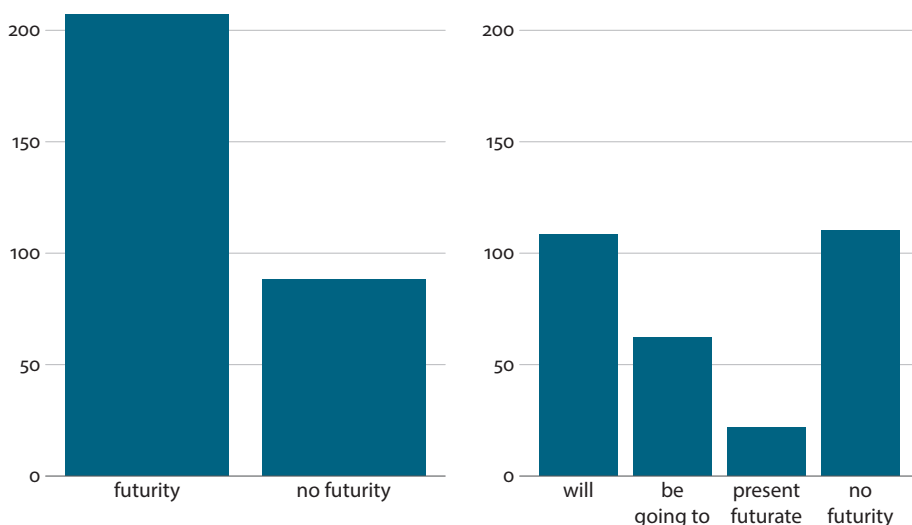


Figure 4.2 Distribution of FUTURITY (N = 301)

The left panel contrasts occurrence and non-occurrence of the feature. It can be seen that, in proportion to those threats coded as no futurity, more than twice as many threats express futurity with one of the variants operationalized above. The right panel shows the proportion of the different variants, again compared to the proportion of utterances coded as containing no futurity.

The graphs illustrate two general findings. Unlike with the analysis of CONDITIONALITY in the previous section, these results seem to correspond to the formal expectations derived from the literature. A solid majority of the threats contains some reference to a future point in time. At the same time, it seems to be the

53. Percentages were rounded and thus might not always add up to 100%. The raw frequencies are indicated in the brackets.

case that speakers predominantly chose the variant *will* in order to express such a reference and, in comparison, the other ways of realizing FUTURITY appear to be dispreferred. Let us look at some of the general properties of all futurate forms in order to discuss their distribution in more detail.

As has been pointed out by various scholars, the different ways of expressing futurity do not occur in free variation, but are syntactically and semantically restricted and “each of the different forms highlights some other aspects of futurity” (Bergs 2010: 218).⁵⁴ The semantic nuances are sometimes linked to differences in the predictive strength of the different forms, which can be described as scalar (cf. Bergs 2010: 217). On this scale, *will* is located at the one end, with the weakest predictive strength, and the present futurate forms at the other, expressing the strongest forms of predictions (cf. Bergs 2010: 218; Leech 2004). Under such an assumption, we will examine the distribution of the different variants and discuss the findings by looking at examples from the corpus, additionally taking into account general distributional properties of all variants.

At first sight, the predominance of *will* may not be very surprising, considering that the modal is the prime candidate among the different ways of referring to a future point in time (cf. Gotti 2003: 280; Haegeman 1983: 15). Furthermore, *will* is often considered to express a “neutral or colourless future” (Leech 2004: 87) that can be used in “a wide range of contexts” (Leech 2004: 89). Speakers can express their own intention and exploit the modal’s ‘volitional’ meaning, as well as its ‘predictive’ meaning, in cases where they state something about an addressee or a third person. Examples of all of these different uses can be found in CoJO, as illustrated by the Examples (35) to (39).

- (35) I’ll drive in my truck and come blow you away.
- (36) Someone will set off a bomb here someday.
- (37) You and all the Jewish women and children will be burned.
- (38) Your building will go boom.
- (39) Then they’ll have another Ruby Ridge.

In all five examples the respective speakers make use of the modal *will*, presumably in order to express a futurate meaning, but the utterances differ in some respects, including their focus on the speaker and/or other participant roles. The semantic roles

54. For a diverging view, see, for example, Palmer (2014 [1974]), who argues that there is no semantic opposition between *will* and *be going to* and that the forms can often be used interchangeably. Haegeman (1989: 308) holds against this that “when the sentences are contextualized [...] one construction will often be preferred over the other.” Since the present study is concerned with utterances in context, not the grammaticality of the utterances, her view was adapted.

expressed in the threats in CoJO will be addressed in depth in a subsequent section. For now it will be interesting to observe some general differences in the participant structures and how this affects the utterance's focus on the who-does-what-to-whom of the situation.⁵⁵

In Example (35) *will* is combined with an agentive subject, namely a first person pronoun that refers to the speaker. Of the 115 utterances that contain a use of *will*, roughly 56% (65) of the instances follow this structure. In other words, in more than half of the utterances with *will*, speakers refer to themselves as agents of the announced action. In this context, the modal *will* most likely expresses 'intention', as well as 'prediction'. All of these utterances represent what Fraser (1998: 167) considers the "simplest way" to utter a threat (cf. Section 2.1).

In Example (36) the speaker uses the generic or non-referential expression *someone* as the agentive subject of the sentence. Although the noun phrase has no identifiable referent, the subject in this example is clearly the agent of the action of setting off a bomb. In this example, the speaker distances himself from the action by making the agent a third – and in this case unidentifiable – person. Yet, both Example (35) and Example (36) announce a future action with a syntactically clearly identifiable agent. However, because the subject in (36) is not the speaker, i.e. encoded with a first person pronoun, the meaning of the utterance is presumably closer to 'prediction' than 'intention' in this example. The same goes for the remaining examples, where the modal is used with second and third person pronouns, respectively an inanimate entity (38), and the agent is not linguistically encoded in the utterance.

In Example (37) the speaker opts for a short passive that omits the internalized complement, in which the agent would be explicitly encoded (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1428). Pragmatically there can be a number of reasons for speakers to choose a short passive, but all of them are somehow about de-emphasizing the agent. One motivation for this might be that a short passive allows speakers to "avoid identifying the person responsible for some kind of situation" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1446).

In Example (38) the speaker describes the action with an active sentence, but since the subject is an inanimate entity, it is likely that there is an agent implied. The focus of the utterance, however, is on the action that is described as *go boom*,

55. As was explained in Section 2.2.3, the focus here is restricted to two established semantic roles, which presumably have the greatest relevance for the present analysis: the causer of an action, often denoted as agent, and the affected entity, predominantly denoted as patient (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 230). The counterparts of these roles would be most likely the threatener and the target.

which could be interpreted an onomatopoetic description of an explosion and not on a potential agent or causer.

Lastly, in Example (39) the speaker describes a resultative state rather than an action, thereby again de-emphasizing the role of a potential agent or causer and highlighting the affected entity *they*. By this, and by means of other strategies of de-emphasizing or omitting the agent of an announced action, speakers presumably distance themselves from the announced action. Regardless of these structural and semantic differences, however, *will* seems to express a futurate meaning, either as a ‘prediction’ or as a statement of ‘intention’.

The findings seem to confirm that *will* is not the object of very many contextual restrictions, which would at least partially explain its predominance. The variant appears to be particularly suitable for the speaker’s purposes of announcing “a future action or omission, or a sequence of such actions or omissions” (Salgueiro 2010: 217). One reason for this could be precisely the modal’s ambiguous and slightly indeterminate semantics, i.e. the fact that the modal *will* inherently expresses a volitional meaning and intentionality, while simultaneously referring to a future point in time (Gotti 2003: 287). Another factor influencing the speakers’ choice might be that *will* displays a weaker predictive strength, compared to the other variants. The meaning of the modal is both relatively stable and transparent in its futurate semantics and at the same time vague enough to enable speakers to distance themselves from the announced action.

Compared to the distribution of *will*, *be going to* appears less diverse in its structure and semantics. In the majority of cases, the construction *be going to* is combined with an agentive first person subject, either singular or plural, as in the examples below.

- (40) I’m going to take care of this.
- (41) I’m going to bring a gun to school tomorrow and shoot everyone and start with you. Maybe not you first.
- (42) we are going to choke all you pachookos.

Roughly 73% (48) of the overall 66 instances of *be going to* follow this structure. Compared to *will*, the agentive first person subject seems to be more common with *be going to*. In the remaining instances, speakers use a third person subject that can be either an agent that is not necessarily the same person as the speaker, as in Example (43), or the patient in a passive construction, as in Example (44).

- (43) White Power is going to get you.
- (44) If Al keeps it up, he’s going to get his ass kicked.

In Example (43) the speaker appears to announce the actions of a third party and s/he is not readily identifiable as identical with this agent. In this respect the utterance resembles Example (36) above. There too, the speaker uses a third party as the agent of an announced action, presumably in order to distance himself/herself from the announced action. The speaker in Example (44) minimizes his responsibility by using a short *get*-passive without an internal complement that explicitly references the agent (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1428), similar to the speaker in (37) above.

In two cases the speakers use another strategy to conceal the agent of an announced action: a construction with the dummy pronouns *it* and *there* (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 427). An example of this would be the utterance in (45) below.

- (45) I tell you what, you all better have my personal items to me by five o'clock today or it's going to be a lot of hurt people there.

Here, the speaker demotes the subject of the clause "a lot of hurt people" to a non-subject position (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 236). At the same time "hurt" is used only as a resultative attribute of "people", whereby the action of "being hurt" is completely omitted from the utterance. With a construction like this, the speaker avoids both identifying a specific action and its agent in the utterance.

Of the remaining utterances, only a small minority of four instances uses the expression *be going to* with a second person pronoun, as in the examples below.

- (46) Mind your own business or you're going to get hurt. We're Nortenos These are our apartments. You're outta here. You fucking bitch.
- (47) You fucking bitch. You're gonna die.

The speakers in both utterances place the focus on the affected entity. In Example (46) this is again achieved with a *get*-passive without a *by*-phrase and in Example (47) the speaker employs the monovalent, intransitive verb *to die* (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 219). Semantically, this non-agentive verb does not require a causer or agent to be present, as it denotes the action of becoming dead, as a result of both natural and unnatural causes. In the context of threatening, however, it is assumed that the speaker does not refer to a natural death, but rather to an unnatural cause. By omitting the cause or agent, the focus of the utterance is again shifted to the affected entity, which in this context is the target of the threat. Overall, expressions like this, with an omitted or de-emphasized agent, are less frequent with *be going to* than with *will*.

The differences in the use of both variants can presumably be explained with aspects of the general semantics of the expressions. As has been previously mentioned, the predictive strength of the futurate variants can be described as scalar, with *will* as the most versatile, but also semantically weakest variant, sometimes

paraphrased as “‘general’ prediction” (Bergs 2010: 218). The variant *be going to*, in comparison, puts “a stronger focus on the matrix time, i.e. the time when the utterance is supposed to be valid, and often [imply] plans underway” (Bergs 2010: 218). In other words, the focus shifts from the present to the future point in time. As Leech (2004: 92) notes,

one general meaning that can be attached to this construction, [...] is future fulfilment of the present. In fact, however, it is useful to discriminate between two meanings, the future culmination of present intention and the future culmination of present cause.

While it may be questionable whether what Leech describes are really two distinct meanings (cf. Haegeman 1989), the common denominator is what is of interest for the present analysis: according to this view, *be going to* describes the future as some result of the present, i.e. as either the outcome of a speaker’s plans or as the result of present circumstances. Speakers take a stronger and more determined stance if they characterize the future as predetermined in some way. The increased use of *be going to* with a first person pronoun suggests that speakers make such stronger declarations of intent or belief from their own viewpoint, rather than with respect to second or third persons.⁵⁶

The variant present futurate is the least frequent. Only roughly 10% of the utterances in the corpus are statements that use the simple present or present progressive to refer to a future point in time. Syntactically and semantically, these 32 utterances are heterogeneous and contain statements with agentive first person subjects, as well as with second and third person subjects, as illustrated in Examples (48) to (51).

- (48) I’m coming after you.
- (49) When I get out the judge is dead.
- (50) My eyes are dimming, but I think I know you. My memory is fading, too. It must be old age. I understand your eyes are failing—are dimming, and your memory fading permanently this week.
- (51) Yell at me again and see what happens.

In all four examples, the speakers state something about the future in the form of a factual assertion, rather than just entertaining possibilities. Because the use of present tense to refer to the future expresses such an aspect of factuality, it is seen

⁵⁶ Since the data contain only one occurrence of *be to*, the meanings and general use of this variant will not be discussed separately.

to be subject to “strict pragmatic conditions” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 189). If the events that the utterance refers to are somehow scheduled, naturally cyclic, or dependent on conditions, present futurate can be used (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 132). In the context of threatening, an utterance like Example (48) describes a future event as inevitable, already on its way and not just a possibility. A difference in predictive strength can be illustrated if we replace the present futurate with will. Compared to Example (49), an utterance like *the judge will be dead* can be described as a confident prediction rather than a factual statement, which is “pragmatically considerably weaker” because the modal *will* “requires less supporting evidence, less ‘epistemic warrant’” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 190). Although in some contexts it is possible to use the variants will and present futurate interchangeably without a difference in predictive strength (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 190), in the majority of cases, statements that contain the present futurate do not express possibilities but rather “take the occurrence of these events for granted” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 191). This is the reason why the use of the present futurate is associated with an even stronger predictive meaning, which involves aspects of planning and anticipation (Bergs 2010: 218, Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 131). Although both simple present and present progressive are subsumed as present futurate, they too differ in terms of their predictive strength, “and the present progressive is one of the strongest forms of prediction and also involves an element of planning” (Bergs 2010: 218).

The findings can be interpreted in different ways. For one, they reflect the general preference of native speakers to express futurity predominantly by means of the variants will and be going to (cf. Gotti 2003: 280; Haegeman 1983: 15). From this perspective, it is not surprising that instances of present futurate are rarely found in the data. Another possible interpretation would be that present futurate is even more dispreferred due to the heightened predictive strength of this variant. It might be that expressions using present futurate are too strong a commitment by the speaker instead of highlighting the temporal imminence of an expression.

In summary, the expression of futurate semantics seems to be an important property of threatening utterances. Even if speakers prefer expressions with a more general predictive character to expressions that presuppose a high degree of planning and determination, the majority of threat utterances in CoJO indeed contain some form of reference to a future point in time. With regard to both the frequency and distribution of the different variants of FUTURITY in CoJO, a possible interpretation would be that speakers differentiate between two aspects: temporal imminence of an announced action on the one hand and commitment or responsibility of the speaker on the other. Considering the present findings, it seems that a threatening utterance ideally is maximally explicit with regard to the temporal

imminence of an announced action, but at the same time rather vague with regard to commitment and responsibility from the perspective of the speaker.⁵⁷

In a next step, we will take a closer look at the verbs speakers use to denote actions in their threats, the participant structure of these verbs, and the orientation of the threats.

4.4 Violent verbs, participants and orientation of a threat

Together with CONDITIONALITY and FUTURITY, a third feature that was discussed in Chapter 2 as closely associated with threatening language is the use of verbs that lexicalize harmful or violent actions. Threatening is understood to involve the announcement of “a future action or omission, or a sequence of such actions or omissions, by the speaker” (Salgueiro 2010: 217) and it is often seen as a defining characteristic that the announced action is detrimental to the target, or respectively that its omission is beneficial (Fraser 1998: 166). The action is depicted as affecting the target in an “unfavourable” (Fraser 1998: 167) or “undesirable” (Limberg 2009: 1378) way. Or the action is intended to “punish or hurt the hearer” (Benoit 1983: 305) or “harm someone” (Merriam-Webster “threaten”, *v.*).⁵⁸ Additionally, it is seen as essential that the speaker is in control of the potential impending harm (cf. Fraser 1998: 166; Milburn & Watman 1981: 9). It has to be stressed again that the expressed ‘harm’ depends to some extent on the perception of the target and can vary in its severity (cf. Limberg 2009: 1378). As was outlined in Chapter 3, the data analyzed for the present study can be described as situated at an extreme end of a scale of severity, which refers to life-threatening actions, physical and psychological violence. As a consequence, it is assumed that the threats analyzed for this study will most likely include verbs that denote such violent actions. As was discussed in Section 2.2.3, the reliance on verbs to express a forceful semantic load is also reflected in Gales’ (2010) survey. The majority of her respondents indicated that they expect “violent physical action verbs” to be part of a prototypical threat (Gales 2010: 95).

57. It is interesting to note that in traditional speech act theory, threats have been characterized as paradigm cases of *commissive speech acts* in the Searlean sense, “which commit the speaker to some future course of action” (Levinson 1983: 240). If this were the primary function of threat utterances, the results would at least be surprising, since we would presumably expect speakers to express stronger commitment and not opt for weaker variants.

58. “threaten.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 27 March 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threaten>>

In order to operationalize the feature consistently, a formal equivalent of the above-mentioned components is needed. For the present analysis, the linguistic feature expressing the announced harm is a verb that denotes a more or less specifically violent or harmful action, with a clear participant structure, i.e. an implicit or explicit expression of who is the causer of this action and who is affected by it. The classification of the verbs of threatening comprises three variables: TYPE OF VERB, AGENT-PATIENT RELATION, and ORIENTATION OF THREAT. First, the verbs analyzed are classified as different types of violent verbs or ambiguous and non-violent verbs. In a second step, the participant structure of these verbs is analyzed, or rather two semantic roles, namely agent and patient, are identified, which are seen as the formal equivalents of the causer of an action and its affected entity. Lastly, it is additionally examined whether the utterances are oriented towards the speaker, the hearer, both, or neither of the two.

As was previously mentioned, the unit of analysis is the entire threat as quoted in the opinions. The coding of TYPE OF VERB and AGENT-PATIENT RELATION, however, does not take into account all the verbs and semantic roles present in an utterance. Instead, the focus is put on such verbs that qualify to express a possibly detrimental action either caused by the threatener/agent or affecting the addressee/target. Such verbs mostly co-occur with an expression of futurity and/or referential expressions, like proper names, or personal pronouns. If more than one verb is identified that meets these criteria, the verb with the strongest harmful meaning is selected for analysis, according to the classification below. Example (52) should illustrate the process.

- (52) To you all. This letter is going to be short and to the point. You all tried to send me to prison for 23 years. You tried to take me away from my family and the people who care about me, but you did not succeed in doing so, but did you really think you would? Now, just as if I would have been guilty of the crime I was accused of, I would have had to suffer consequences, you all must suffer consequences for what you have done in a way you never imagined. I am not going to tell you how or what these consequences are going to be, but since you all have such good imagination, I'll let you use it. I will be free in a matter of months. This letter is to nobody in particular but to whomever the shoe fits. Have a nice day. Sincerely, yours truly.

In a first step, all verbal expressions that relate to either the speaker/threatener or the addressee/target are identified in the utterance. In Example (52), the following sequences fulfill these criteria:

- i. You all tried to send me to prison for 23 years.
- ii. You tried to take me away from my family and the people who care about me, but you did not succeed in doing so, but did you really think you would?

- iii. Now, just as if I would have been guilty of the crime I was accused of, I would have had to suffer consequences, you all must suffer consequences for what you have done in a way you never imagined.
- iv. I am not going to tell you how or what these consequences are going to be, but since you all have such good imagination, I'll let you use it.
- v. I will be free in a matter of months.

Of this initial selection, the ones that contain a variant of FUTURITY – if there are any – are selected. For the present example, this would leave us with (iii), (iv) and (v), since both (i) and (ii) contain verbs in the preterite form. Consequently, both (i) and (ii) describe actions that happened in the past and that cannot be interpreted as an announcement of a future action.

In a next step, I further excluded all components that are not expressions of intent or announcements of future actions but rather modify the surrounding statements. In this analysis, the string in (iv) only serves to further specify an element of (iii) ('consequences'). This leaves us with the following two sequences that contain possibly relevant verbs for our analysis, highlighted in bold print.

1. *you all **must suffer consequences** for what you have done in a way you never imagined*
2. *I **will be free** in a matter of months.*

In a last step, the sequence in (ii) is eliminated. Although (ii) contains an expression of futurity and denotes an action or rather a state related to the speaker, the predicate does not express harmful content and does not explicitly relate the speakers action to an affected entity. The sequence in (i) contains an expression of a vaguely harmful event ('suffer consequences') and a clear indication of the undergoer of this event ('you all'), while the causer of this action is omitted. Consequently, the verb is coded as ambiguous, because 'suffer (consequences)' does not inherently express physical or psychological violence, but could also refer to various non-violent actions, for example legal measures.

In the following, TYPE OF VERB, AGENT-PATIENT RELATION, and ORIENTATION OF THREAT will be operationalized one by one and the findings will be presented and discussed. Although different aspects of these analyses overlap, they will be addressed separately.

4.4.1 TYPE OF VERB

In order to systematically account for the different verbs that occur in the threats, a classification was developed that distinguishes between different types of violent verbs on the one side and ambiguous and non-violent verbs on the other. As has been mentioned, the present analysis focuses on verbs that denote a violent action

and contrasts them with those that do not lexicalize violence or harm. For this reason, only violent verbs were sub-classified into different types to account for more subtle differences. Verbs denoting actions that are not necessarily harmful were all classified as either ambiguous or as non-violent, depending on whether they have a lexicalized violent meaning component or their interpretation as violent or harmful requires contextual embedding.

The sub-classification of types of violent verbs is loosely based on Levin's verb classes (1993). However, Levin's classification is far too fine-grained for the present purpose and was simplified extensively. Levin's inventory of English verbs is governed by a "hypothesis of semantic determination", which relates the syntactic behavior of a verb to its meaning (Levin 1993: 13). Such an approach, although not uncontroversial, provides an appropriate tool since the present analysis is not only interested in the semantics but also in aspects of the participant structure of the verbs in question. Levin's classification incorporates the argument structure of verbs in two ways: she regards the "behavior of a verb, particularly with respect to the expression and interpretation of its arguments, [as] to a large extent determined by its meaning", and she argues further that "verb behavior can be used effectively to probe for linguistically relevant pertinent aspects of verb meaning" (Levin 1993: 1). The classification puts a strong emphasis on the syntactic properties of verbs that are regarded as indicative of any semantic differences. This way, even very subtle similarities and dissimilarities between verbs are highlighted.

In comparison, the present analysis puts the main emphasis on the semantic components of the different verbs, and only very few aspects of the argument structure are taken into account. Three criteria were used to differentiate between types of verbs:

- i. *Semantics*: Does the verb lexicalize a violent meaning component? Does it denote an action or a state? Is the denoted action bounded and has a clear resultative state?
- ii. *Agency*: Is the verb in question inherently agentive?
- iii. *Animacy*: Is the affected entity (target) animate or inanimate?

Following these criteria, an initial distinction can be made between verbs that lexicalize a violent meaning component, i.e. a notion of physical or psychological violence, and those that do not allow for such an interpretation without contextual embedding. The verbs that are classified as violent are further distinguished by means of whether or not the described action is bounded, i.e. whether it leads to a clear resultative state or not. This clear resultative state was defined as death.⁵⁹

59. This is of course a very broad distinction and it has to be stressed that it is not an assessment of the degree of violence expressed, but only of the semantically encoded situation. The meaning of the verb *kill* can be paraphrased as "to cause the death of" or "to end the life of (someone or

The second criterion helps to distinguish inherently agentive verbs, like *kill*, from verbs that do not involve a notion of a causer or doer of the actions, like *die*. Although the resultative state of death would be the same for both verbs, only one of them entails that this resultative state is caused by an agent, namely *kill*.

The third and last criterion differentiates between actions that have animate entities as a target or undergoer of the action, i.e. mostly human beings, and those that are directed towards inanimate objects, such as, for example, houses or other buildings. The combinations of these three components lead to a classification of three main types of verbs with four sub-types of violent verbs.

Figure 4.3 provides an overview of all verb types and an indication of the relevant criteria and their respective value and with examples from CoJO to illustrate each type.

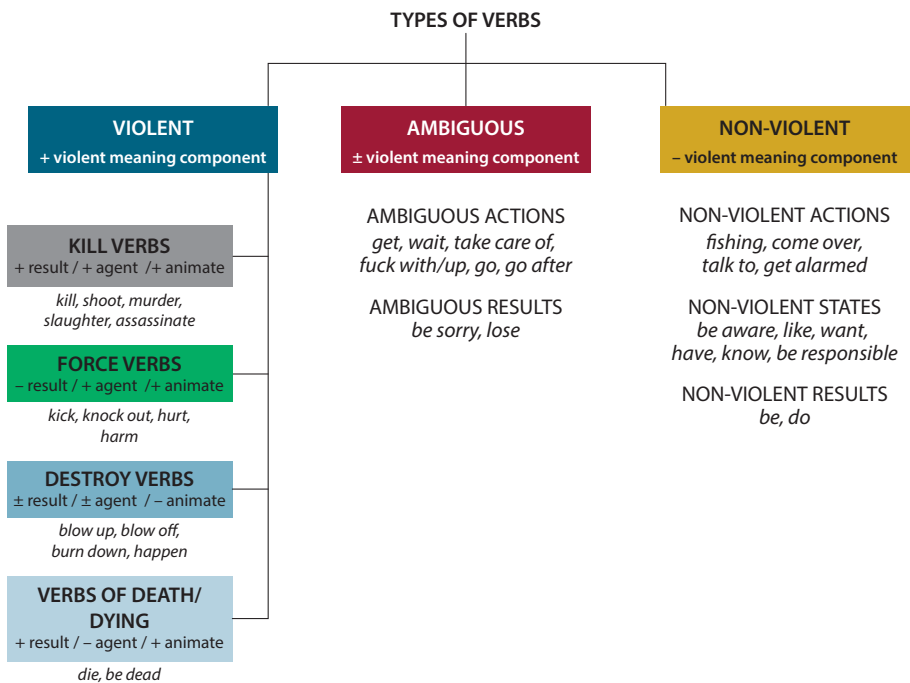


Figure 4.3 Classification scheme TYPE OF VERB

something)“. In comparison, other verbs do not inherently express such a clear resultative state. For example, *beat* can be paraphrased as “to hit (someone) repeatedly in order to cause pain or injury”. Although it is, of course, possible to cause someone’s death by beating them, death is not a semantically entailed resultative state of the action of beating. (cf. “Kill.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 16 June 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kill>> and “Beat.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 16 June 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/beat>>.

For all violent verbs in CoJO a violent meaning can be attested with the help of a standard dictionary, as with the verb *kill* in Example (53). For the ambiguous and non-violent verbs a ‘violent meaning’ has to be inferred from the co- and context of the utterance, as for example with the verb *get* in Example (54). The verb *get* is particularly frequent in the corpus and Merriam-Webster’s lists “to take vengeance on; *specifically*: kill”⁶⁰ as one possible meaning. However, this is not the primary meaning of the verb and it is thus classified as ambiguous. Similarly, in cases where the co-text of the utterance allows for both a violent and a non-violent interpretation, as with the phrasal verb *take care of* in Example (55) below, the verbs are coded as ambiguous. Verbs that can either only be interpreted as having a violent meaning if they receive specific contextual embedding or that do not denote an action at all are all coded as non-violent, as in Example (56) and (57) below.

- (53) If you call the police, I will **kill** you.
- (54) If they go for him again, I hope they **get** him.
- (55) I’ll **take care** of you.
- (56) This is Inglewood 13, homey, and I’m Pequeno Peligroso.
- (57) I also **know** where his kids go to school.

In the first three examples, the speakers denote a future action that is agentive, and both agent and patient are referenced. In Example (54) and (55) it is not clear what the resultative state of the respective actions is, while in Example (53) this resultative state is lexicalized by the verb. In the last two examples, the speakers do not denote violent actions, in this case not actions at all, but rather states, namely *be* and *know*. The interpretation of both utterances requires a high degree of contextual embedding to be understood as threats. Interestingly, both statements also lack an expression of FUTURITY and CONDITIONALITY. In terms of their pragmatic explicitness as threats, they can be described as relatively vague. Utterances of this kind do not contain variants of the three core components of any definition of threats we have looked at in Chapter 2. Consequently, they are probably the closest to what has been termed *indirect* or *veiled threats* in earlier studies (cf. Gales 2010; Storey 1995; Yamanaka 1995).

Figure 4.4 plots the overall distribution of violent, ambiguous, and non-violent verbs in CoJO.

60. “Get.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 16 June 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/get>>.

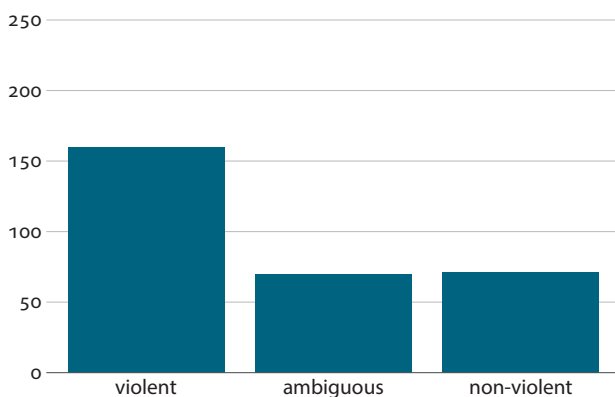


Figure 4.4 Distribution of violent, ambiguous, and non-violent verbs (N = 301)

As can be seen from the proportion of the individual bars, violent verbs occur more than twice as often as ambiguous and non-violent verbs. To be more precise, 53% (160) of the analyzed verbs were coded as violent, while of the remaining utterances roughly 23% each were coded as ambiguous (71) and non-violent (70) ($\chi^2 = 53.229$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.0001$).⁶¹

Our result meets the previously established expectation that threatening language is to some extent defined by the use of verbs that denote violent actions. As was discussed, this is primarily addressed by Gales (2010), who contrasts scholars' and practitioners' views on threatening language with her survey of students' ideologies of threatening communications. For the former group, according to Gales, "specific or vague action of harm" (2010: 36) is often discussed as a salient feature of threats, and a large majority of the latter group views "violent physical action verbs" as an important, if not the most important, defining factor of threats (Gales 2010: 96).⁶² Both views can be regarded as confirmed by the present findings.

Let us now take a closer look at the different types of violent verbs speakers use in their threatening communications. Based on the previously established criteria of semantics, agency and animacy, the corpus yielded four distinct types of violent verbs: kill verbs, force verbs, destroy verbs, and verbs of death and dying. Each type

⁶¹ Percentages were rounded and thus might not always add up to 100%. The raw frequencies are indicated in the brackets.

⁶² It has to be stressed again that Gales' respondents were specifically instructed to relate their expectations to what they know from television shows, and, according to Gales (2010: 94), "it is through this very framing of popular culture [...] that students' ideologies about threatening language are constructed."

is defined by a distinct configuration of the above-mentioned criteria, which will be briefly discussed in the following.

The class of kill verbs is based on Levin's (1993: 230) 'verbs of killing' and comprises all verbs that describe the act of causing someone to die. Levin distinguishes between 'murder verbs' and 'poison verbs', a sub-classification that is disregarded for the present purpose. The verb *kill*, according to Levin, "is the class member with the least specific meaning: it lexicalizes nothing about the specific means, manner, or purpose involved in bringing about death" (Levin 1993: 231). This seems to be a suitable classification for the present purpose, since this analysis is not interested in the specific means, manner, or purpose of the action. All class members lexicalize a clear resultative state of death, which is why they usually cannot be used with a resultative phrase such as *to death* (Levin 1993: 231). Following this, kill verbs are defined as agentive verbs that express a violent meaning component and lexicalize a clear resultative state of death of an animate target. With respect to the three above-mentioned features, this was formalized as {+ RESULT, + AGENT, + ANIMATE}. Examples can be seen below. The relevant verbs are highlighted in bold print.

- (58) I'm going to **kill** you, you'll see.
- (59) Do you think [the Morrisville Police] can protect you from a man who wants to die and want to kill you? Asshole, for sure you will be **killed** by such a man.
- (60) If he shows up to court, when I walk outta prison in fifteen years, I'm 'onna fuckin' **murder** his motherfuckin' ass.

In all three utterances the speakers explicitly denote the act of killing and refer to both an agent and a patient of the action. With the exception of Example (59), the agent can be readily identified as the speaker/threatener. Cases like in Example (59) are rather uncommon in the corpus. There are overall only nine instances in CoJO where the agent of a kill verb is not referred to by means of a first person pronoun. Members of the class of kill verbs are the most explicit violent verbs found in the corpus and, hence, display the greatest degree of pragmatic explicitness.

The class of force verbs blends several of Levin's classes into one. In Levin's classification, all members of this class denote "the exerting of force on an entity" (1993: 137), which was too imprecise a definition for the present purpose. Therefore, the class additionally contains what Levin termed 'verbs of contact by impact', specifically *hit*-verbs, *cut*-verbs, and other verbs that lexicalize an impact on an object's state (Levin 1993: 10). What essentially distinguishes force verbs from kill verbs is that the latter lexicalize a clear resultative state and the former do not. For the present study, all agentive verbs that lexicalize some exertion of force, with or without specified means, on an animate target or body parts of this target, but without a clear resultative state of death are coded as force verbs. The properties of

the class members can be formalized as {– RESULT, + AGENT, + ANIMATE}. Examples of class members can be found in Examples (61) to (63).

- (61) If I see that fool there to testify against my brother, I will **kick** his ass. I feel like going to jail anyways.
- (62) we are going to **choke** all you pachookos.⁶³
- (63) I'd like to **stick** a coat hanger in you.

In all three examples, the speakers describe or announce a violent action but, unlike in the examples we have looked at before, the verbs do not lexicalize a resultative state of death. Force verbs can be combined with the mention of an instrument, as in Example (63), and a resultative phrase like *to death*.

The class of destroy verbs is derived from force verbs. The difference is that force is exerted on an inanimate entity, such as a building or parts of furniture. The verb lexicalizes a notion of destruction as a resultative state. The class is based on Levin's class of 'destroy verbs', which "relate to the total destruction of entities" (1993: 239), but the class additionally contains Levin's class of *break* verbs, which "describe specifics of the resulting physical state of an entity (e.g. whether something is broken, splintered, cracked, and so on) rather than simply describing the fact that it is totally destroyed" (Levin 1993: 239). A way to formalize the general properties of the class members would be {+ RESULT, + AGENT, – ANIMATE}, which are agentive verbs that express a clear resultative state (of destruction) and are directed towards an inanimate target or entity. Examples from the corpus are found in (64) and (65).

- (64) I don't care about your company in there, if you don't pick up this phone I'm going to walk across the street and **blow** the doors off the son of a bitch.
- (65) Allstate had better stop messing with me or else I'm going to **blow up** their building.

In both utterances the speakers announce a violent action that has an inanimate target, namely the NP *the doors* in (64) and the NP *their building* in (65). It is likely that these expressions are used in a metonymical sense, i.e. as representative of a group of targets or indeterminate targets. And if a building explodes it is very likely that its inhabitants are put in danger. As a consequence, the speakers ultimately also threaten animate targets. Still, destroy verbs were coded separately because it seems that speakers mostly use these verbs if their threats are directed at a group of people or an underspecified target. Instead of announcing harm to every member of

63. The verb was classified as non-resultative because both a resultative and a non-resultative interpretation are available and the verb is often used with a resultative phrase like *to death*.

an indeterminate group of targets, speakers apparently rather underspecify whom they intend to hurt.

All verbs of death and dying are similar to kill verbs in that the action denoted entails a clear resultative state and the target of the action is animate, but the verbs of this class are distinct in that they are non-agentive. Verbs of death and dying denote the state of being or becoming dead without lexicalizing a cause or a causer. Accordingly, the properties of class members can be formalized as {+ RESULT, – AGENT, + ANIMATE}. The definition of the class is loosely based on Levin's 'verbs of disappearance', where disappear is understood in the sense of "going out of existence" (1993: 260). Examples from the corpus can be found in (66) and (67).

(66) Van Ripper: You made a mistake. You will **die** hard. Your demie.

(67) There are FBI Marshals that are on their way out to get me and if that happens, people are going to **die**.

In both utterances the speakers denote the action of becoming dead, without referencing a cause or a causer. Many of the threats coded as containing a verb of this class follow a similar structure to the examples in (66) and (67). In some cases, however, the action of becoming dead is expressed as a predicative complement, as in Example (68) and (69) below.

(68) If they go to prison you'll **be dead** in less than 7 months – so help me God!

(69) He is a mass murderer and he should **be dead**. Absolutely. (...) He deserves to be dead, absolutely.

Because of the close resemblance to the examples in (66) and (67), such predicative complements were also coded as verbs of death and dying.

Additionally, there are a small number of examples that occur with nominalized forms of the verb *die*, as in Examples (70) and (71) below.

(70) Kathleen, Despite the major disruptions that widowhood will bring about in your life I for whatever value I may be will be there for you. David's **death** from a cerebral vascular accident of an unknown idiopathy will stun all those who loved him. [...]

(71) I want you to suffer the hardest **death**, asshole!!!!

In both examples, the speakers denote the action in a nominalized form, which were also coded as verbs of death and dying. The nominalized form of *die* presumably expresses an even higher degree of non-agency or an objectivized form of the action (cf. Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1696).

Figure 4.5 plots the distribution of the different types of violent verbs in CoJO.

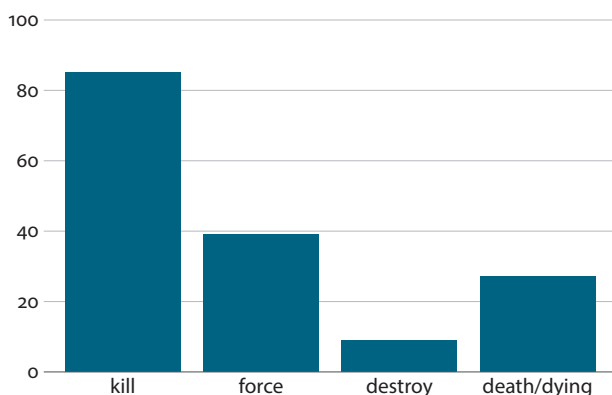


Figure 4.5 Distribution of types of violent verbs (n = 160)

Of the overall 160 violent verbs, more than 53% (85) are a member of the first, and most explicit class of verbs, kill verbs. The range of verbs in this class, however, is rather small. The most frequent class member is the verb *kill* itself, followed by *shoot*, and *blow out* in the sense of *to shoot*. With less than half as many instances, force verbs are the second most frequent type of violent verbs, with a share of 24% (39). The remaining types of violent verbs are considerably less frequent, with about 16% (27) of verbs of death and dying, and only 5% (9) destroy verbs ($\text{Chi}^2 = 78.9$, $\text{df} = 3$, $p < 0.0001$).

Overall, kill verbs are not only the most frequent type of violent verbs, but they are also the most frequent type of verb compared to both ambiguous and non-violent verbs. This comparison is illustrated in Figure 4.6.

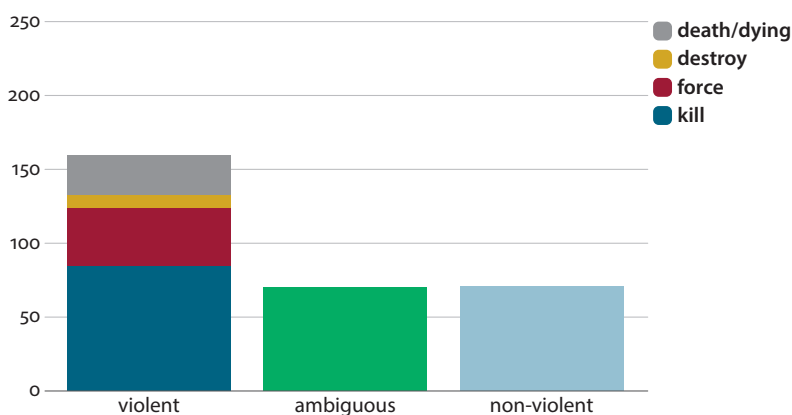


Figure 4.6 Overview frequency of TYPE OF VERBS (N = 301)

In the plot, the left-most bar, which represents violent verbs, is plotted as a stacked bar to illustrate the proportion of the individual types of violent verbs. It can be seen that the majority of verbs is almost evenly distributed among three different types: kill verbs, ambiguous and non-violent verbs, each with a proportion of roughly 25% of the overall data.

Taken together, these results seem to indicate two related tendencies in the data. Speakers predominantly announce their actions with violent verbs that clearly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of a scenario. And if they choose a violent verb, they also choose the most explicit variant, namely a kill verb.

At the same time, taken together with the findings on FUTURITY, the results appear to challenge the prevalent opinion that a majority of threats has to be characterized as *veiled* (Gales 2010: 95) or *indirect* (Yamanaka 1995: 38; Storey 1995: 75). According to our analysis of pragmatic explicitness (cf. Section 2.2), so far the majority of threat utterances in CoJO appear to be situated at the more explicit end of a scale: they predominantly contain an agentive verb that lexicalizes a violent action and often also a clear resultative state and they contain some reference to a future point in time. The only variable that does not correspond to the expectations is CONDITIONALITY. Only a minority of the threats in CoJO denotes a protasis and an apodosis with an explicit variant, i.e. a form of conditional clause. On the basis of the verbs used to threaten, however, it appears that threats are more pragmatically explicit than is commonly assumed.

4.4.2 AGENT-PATIENT RELATION

In part, the analysis of AGENT-PATIENT RELATION is already inherent in the typology of verbs presented in the previous section. As was explained, the classification distinguishes between agentive and non-agentive verbs. Additionally, it will now be analyzed whether speakers explicitly denote the participants of the actions in their threats, namely agent and patient. The analysis only concerns these two semantic roles, because they can be seen as the prototypical embodiments of the threatener and the target of a threat. The role of an agent is generally understood as the “performer of an action”, who is “animate and acts consciously, volitionally”, while the role of the patient is often paraphrased as “undergoer of an action” or “affected by an action” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 227). Accordingly, in the present analysis the agent is either the doer or the causer of the detrimental action specified by the violent, ambiguous, or non-violent verb. The agent is often identical with the threatener, even if s/he is not the person ultimately carrying out the violent action.⁶⁴

64. For example, in cases where the speaker expresses the intent to make someone else carry out the threatened action, s/he would still be assigned with the role of the agent of this action. The action

The patient is the undergoer of the action specified by the violent, ambiguous, or non-violent verb or is at least affected by it.

An analysis of the AGENT-PATIENT RELATION makes it possible to account for all configurations with violent, ambiguous, and non-violent verbs. This way, even subtle differences, like in (72) and (73) below, are registered.

(72) I'm going to kill you, you'll see.

(73) You and all the Jewish women and children will be burned.

Both utterances are coded as containing a violent verb, but the utterance in (73) is coded as denoting only the patient. Similar fine-grained differentiation can be made for both ambiguous and non-violent verbs.

For each utterance, the presence or absence of agent and patient was coded, leading to overall four different combinatory patterns: agent and patient both present, only agent present, only patient present, neither agent nor patient present. Figure 4.7 plots the frequency of occurrence of each combinatory pattern of the participant roles in the data as a contingency table.

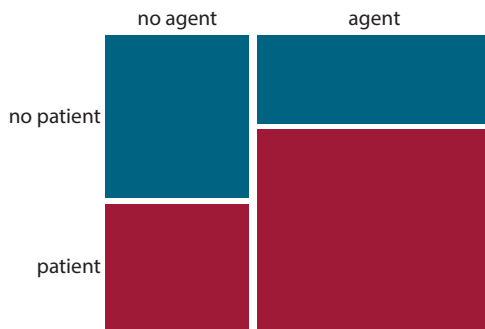


Figure 4.7 Proportion of AGENT-PATIENT RELATION (N = 301)

The two-by-two matrix depicts the proportion of each of the four different combinatory patterns, henceforth referred to as agent-patient, agent-no patient, no agent-patient, no agent-no patient. On the x-axis presence and absence of the agent is indicated, and on the y-axis the presence and absence of a patient ($\text{Chi}^2 = 18.344$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < 0.0001$).

As can be seen from the plot, a solid majority of the threats denote both agent and patient. Overall, 43.2% (130) of the threats in CoJO follow this structure, similar to the two examples below.

itself, however, would be most likely denoted by a non-violent verb. An example from CoJO would be *talk* in *You fucked up my brother's testimony, I'm going to talk to some guys from Happy Town.*

(74) I'm going to kill you, you'll see.

(75) I'm coming after you.

In the utterance in Example (74) the who-does-what-to-whom of the event could not be made more explicit. The verb is a kill verb, and both agent and patient role are assigned to personal pronouns, hence speaker and addressee respectively. In utterance (75) agent and patient are also denoted, but the action is denoted by an ambiguous verb. However, even though it is not specified what is meant by *coming after*, the utterance is still explicit with regard to who the participants of the action are.

Opposed to this extremely explicit description of the who-does-what-to-whom of the event are 21.3% (64) of the threats, in which neither agent nor patient of the denoted action are expressed, as in the Examples (76) and (77). As can be seen from Figure 4.7, no agent-no patient makes up the second largest group of participant relations in CoJO. However, the other two constellations, i.e. agent-no patient and no agent-patient, are almost as frequent.

(76) P.S. Sleep Died too!

(77) Your sister is a fucking rata.

In most of the utterances of this kind, the speakers also do not announce a future action and/or do not use a violent verb. In other words, the utterances are not only vague with regard to the participants of an action, but with regard to that action in general. A small number of these threats contain a verb of death and dying. These threats involve expressions that could have arguably also been classified as carrying the patient role, like in the utterances (78) and (79) below. Mostly, the arguments in question are pronominal address terms and hence refer to the addressees and/or target of the threats.

(78) You die.

(79) You will die this Christmas.

These cases were regarded as not carrying a patient role, based on the view that “a prototypical patient is affected by an action performed by some causer, especially an agent” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 231) and the fact that the verb *to die* is analyzed as non-agentive in the classification of verb types.

Utterances in which the speaker assigns only the agent role are the next largest group and make up about 19.6% (57) of the observations. Examples can be found in (80) and (81).

(80) I'll not miss this time.

(81) Maybe it's time for me to get a gun, Mr. Erlich.

In (80) and (81) the speakers are identical with the agents of the announced action. While the speaker in Example (81) addresses someone directly, using an address term, the utterance in (80) is a statement in the form of a declarative, with no indication of an addressee or the patient or target of the announced action.

The remaining 16.6% (50) of the threats in CoJO are utterances in which the speakers assign the patient role only. Naturally, most of these are short passives without by-phrase (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1428). Examples of this can be found below.

(82) You fucking CUNT!! You should **be burned** at the stake like any heretic.

(83) Ronnie, Listen Chump! Resign or You'll Get Your Brains **Blown Out**.

The two examples both denote the respective target of the threatened action as a patient of this action, but omit the agent. As was argued earlier, with constructions like this, the speaker de-emphasizes his own role and places the focus on the affected entity, specifically the target of threat.

To summarize the results, it seems to be the case that a solid majority of threats clearly refers to both participants of an announced action or event, even if the nature of the action or event itself is underspecified. This was the case for more than half of the utterances. The second most frequent structure is the complete opposite, with neither agent nor patient role assigned in the utterance. Both agent-no patient and no agent-patient are the least preferred participant combinations in CoJO, although it has to be noted that there are only minor differences between the latter three groups (cf. Figure 4.7).

There are again two main observations with regard to these results. For one, the rather large majority of agent-patient constellations in the corpus support the previous observation that, contrary to what has been claimed, speakers often explicitly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of an action. At the same time, no agent-no patient-threats are almost as frequent as those in which either one of the two roles is denoted. This could indicate that the main divide is between threats that explicitly refer to both agent and patient and those that reference either or neither of the two. In terms of their pragmatic explicitness, this suggests that there is no notable difference between no agent-no patient, no agent-patient, and patient-no agent.

The findings appear to be in line with the previous observation that often explicit or vague variants of features are combined with other explicit or vague variants of other features. More precisely, if a threat is vague with regard to the expressed AGENT-PATIENT RELATION, we often also do not find a variant of FUTURITY and either an ambiguous or non-violent verb. To further probe this observation, we need to examine more than one variable at once. Figure 4.8 illustrates a cross-comparison.

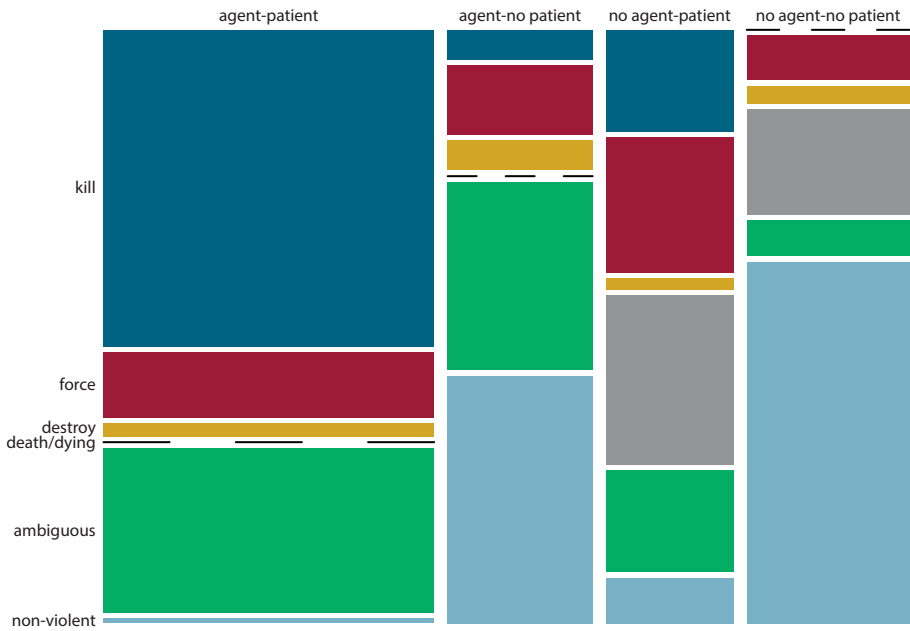


Figure 4.8 Proportion of AGENT-PATIENT RELATION and TYPE OF VERB (N = 301)

The plot illustrates another contingency table that indicates the frequency of each combination of AGENT-PATIENT RELATION (x-axis) and TYPE OF VERB (y-axis). Read horizontally, the width of the bars indicates the frequency of all participant combinations, and read vertically, the height of the different grey boxes corresponds to the proportion of the different types of verbs in combination with the respective participant pattern. The dashed lines indicate non-occurrence of a combination (Fisher's Exact Test, $p < 0.0005$).⁶⁵

And indeed, if we simultaneously look at the distribution of AGENT-PATIENT RELATION and TYPE OF VERB, we find two patterns that can be interpreted as in line with our previous observations: on the one hand, agent-patient and no agent-patient are more frequently combined with kill verbs or force verbs (cf. top of 1st and 3rd bar from the left), and on the other hand, no agent-no patient and agent-no patient are predominantly combined with ambiguous or non-violent verbs (cf. bottom of 2nd and 4th bar). As can be seen from the plot, by far the most frequent combination of features is agent-patient and kill verb. Threats of this kind clearly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of a violent action. Almost diametrically opposed, we can

65. All three missing combinations can be explained by the way the classes of verbs are operationalized in the previous section. For example, destroy verbs cannot co-occur with an explicitly denoted patient, since the target of the expressed action is by definition inanimate. Corresponding explanations can be found for the other two missing combinations as well.

find the combinations of agent-no patient and no agent-no patient with non-violent verbs. These threats do not denote a violent action and predominantly also do not refer to causer or doer and undergoer of an action. These patterns can probably be described as the two extreme ends of a scale of pragmatic explicitness (cf. Culpeper 2011: 184, Section 2.2). If a pragmatically explicit threat clearly denotes a violent future action and refers to the participants of this action, the first pattern represents one of the most explicit ways of expressing a threat. In comparison, the second pattern is a rather vague way of realizing a threat.

Are these patterns of vagueness and explicitness consistent, i.e. do we find a similar tendency for other variables? Let us simultaneously examine the distribution of FUTURITY and AGENT-PATIENT RELATION to further probe this question. Figure 4.9 plots their co-occurrence.

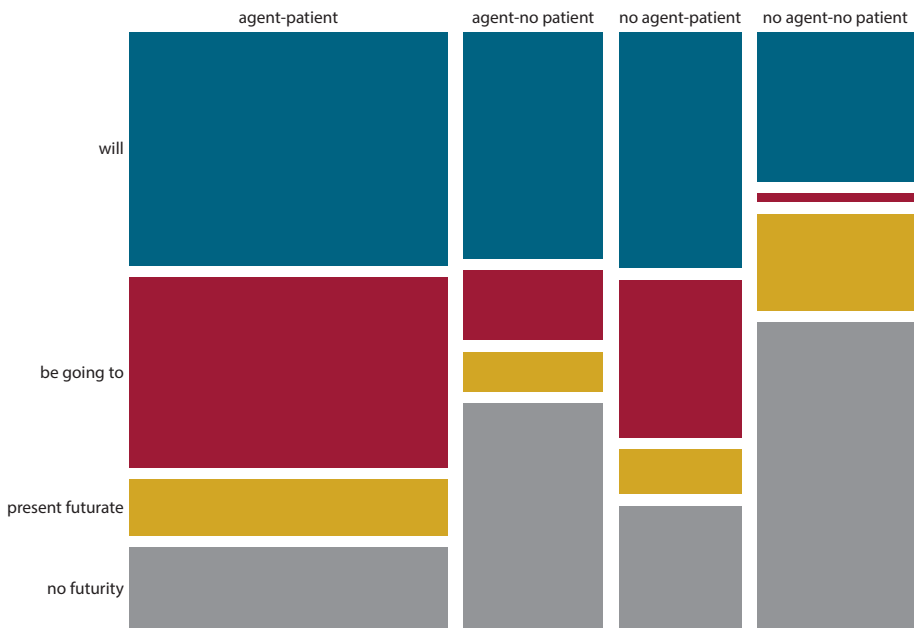


Figure 4.9 Proportion of AGENT-PATIENT RELATION and FUTURITY (N = 301)

The plot illustrates the co-occurrence of AGENT-PATIENT RELATION and FUTURITY. The proportion of the width of the bars is identical to Figure 4.8 and indicates the frequency of the different participant patterns. The grey boxes represent the proportion of variants of FUTURITY in combination with these participant patterns ($\text{Chi}^2 = 57.345$, $\text{df} = 9$, $p < 0.0001$).

As can be seen from the plot, we do not find the exact same tendencies that are visible for the combination of AGENT-PATIENT RELATION and TYPE OF VERB. The different variants of FUTURITY, especially will, are distributed almost evenly across

the different combinations of participants, with an exception of no agent-no patient threats. At the same time, the bottom of the second and fourth bar look similar to the ones in Figure 4.8, i.e. the occurrence of no futurity is clearly more frequent with agent-no patient and no agent-no patient threats. While the previously reported results seem to mirror two extreme ends of the scale, namely threats that explicitly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of an event and threats that remain vague with respect to all of these aspects, what we see here reflects just one of the scale's ends; if a threat is vague with respect to its participant structure, it more frequently also contains no unequivocal reference to a future point in time.

The results are in line with what was previously noted on the apparent importance of FUTURITY in general and the distribution of the different variants across all analyzed threats. The fact that the variant *will* occurs with all participant combinations supports our assumption that *will* is not primarily used as an expression of intent of an agentive speaker, because the modal occurs almost as frequently in agent-less threats. The finding also supports the view that *will* is the optimal candidate for speakers to highlight the temporal imminence of an action, while simultaneously expressing less commitment than with *be going to* or present futurate. The variant *be going to*, which was also said to involve an element of 'plans underway', is more frequent if the agent is omitted, and less frequent if only the patient is omitted from the utterance. Most of these instances are short passives, which de-emphasize the agent, presumably to minimize the effect of *be going to*. At the same time, this variant is extremely rare in no agent-no patient threats, most likely due to the fact that its semantics presuppose some agent to be present, at least implicitly.

In summary, the analysis of verb semantics and participant structure suggests that most threats in CoJO tend to be rather explicit in denoting a violent action and the participants of this action. As was mentioned already, the findings challenge the prevalent opinion that threats are more frequently made indirectly (cf. Gales 2010: 95; Storey 1995: 75; Yamanaka 1995: 38). Instead, the results suggest that speakers predominantly choose what Fraser (1998: 167) deemed "[t]he simplest way" to threaten, namely "to utter a declarative sentence with the speaker as the agent of the unfavourable act".

4.4.3 ORIENTATION OF THREAT

So far, the analysis has focused on the indication of agent and patient of violent and non-violent actions. We will now take a closer look at whether a threat is phrased from the perspective of the threatener or from the perspective the target. This offers a complementary perspective, since the analyses of TYPE OF VERB and AGENT-PATIENT RELATION focus on only distinctive parts of the entire threat sequence. The analysis of ORIENTATION OF THREAT is modeled after Blum-Kulka

and colleagues' concept of "request perspective", i.e. the viewpoint from which a requestive act is realized: "[a] request can be realized from the viewpoint of the Hearer, the Speaker, or both participants, or any explicit mentioning of the agents can be (deliberately) avoided" (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 278). Accordingly, ORIENTATION OF THREAT is understood as the general viewpoint from which an utterance is phrased.

The coding initially included attesting each type of orientation separately and the final variants are results of different combinatory patterns of the three options: speaker orientation, hearer orientation, and implicit hearer orientation, as in imperatives and interrogatives. As a result, threats were coded as speaker-oriented (84), hearer-oriented (85), mixed-oriented (86), directive⁶⁶ (87), or impersonal (88).

(84) I will kill you.

(85) You will die this Christmas.

(86) You fucked up my brother's testimony, I'm going to talk to some guys from Happy Town.

(87) Keep your human trash off my property.

(88) If Al keeps it up, he's going to get his ass kicked.

As can be seen from the utterance in Example (86) above, threats can be phrased from the perspective of the speaker and the hearer at the same time. Threats that are coded as impersonal are mostly phrased from the viewpoint of a third or indefinite person that is either the agent or the patient of the denoted action, as in the two examples below.

(89) Someone will set off a bomb here someday.

(90) There are FBI Marshals that are on their way out to get me and if that happens, people are going to die.

Of course, all of the utterances in the corpus have an addressee of some sort. To code an utterance as impersonal does not mean these utterances are not addressed at someone or do not denote a target of the announced action, but that the perspective from which they are phrased is neither the perspective of the speaker/threatener nor the perspective of the addressee. In this case, however, the addressee is to be strictly distinguished from an alleged target of the threat, because although these utterances are not phrased from the perspective of an addressee, it is likely that they are still phrased from the perspective of a potential target, as in Example (88) above.

66. The term is used here to describe utterances that implicitly address someone and express "something that can be 'complied' with," such as "commands (orders), requests, instructions [...] advice and permission" (Huddleston 1988: 133).

Overall, with 36.5% (110), a little more than a third of the threats are speaker-oriented, followed by 28.2% (85) that are mixed-oriented and 18.3% (55) that are hearer-oriented. With 39 observations, directive threats make up 12.9% of the data and impersonal threats are the least frequent variant, with only roughly 4% (12) of the data ($\text{Chi}^2 = 97.92$, $\text{df} = 4$, $p < 0.0001$). Figure 4.10 plots the distribution.

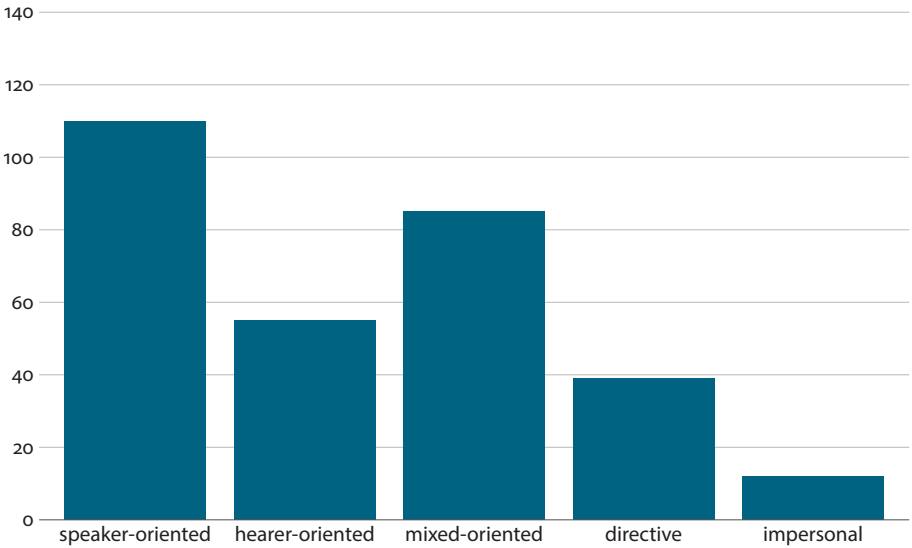


Figure 4.10 Distribution of ORIENTATION OF THREAT (N = 301)

Considering the fact that mixed-oriented threats by definition also contain at least one sequence that is phrased from the perspective of a speaker, it can be concluded that almost two-thirds of the threats in CoJo are at least partially phrased from the viewpoint of the speaker. This finding confirms the view that threats are primarily focused on the speaker’s perspective (cf. Gales 2010: 100)

Does the orientation also divide the data into more and less explicit threats? For further insight into the co-occurrence of individual variables in the data, ORIENTATION OF THREAT is reduced to three groups that each make up roughly a third of the data: speaker-oriented, mixed-oriented, and other. The latter group comprises the less frequent variants hearer-oriented, directive, and impersonal.

If we simultaneously look at the distribution of ORIENTATION OF THREAT and TYPE OF VERB we see that while speaker-oriented and mixed-oriented threats co-occur with different types of verbs in a relatively similar pattern, the third group of threats differs with regard to the types of verbs they co-occur with (Fisher’s Exact Test = $p < 0.0005$). These differences are illustrated in Figure 4.11.



Figure 4.11 Proportion of ORIENTATION OF THREAT and TYPE OF VERB (N = 301)

In part, the plot supports what we have previously observed about the patterning of explicit variants and vague variants. Threats that are at least partially phrased from the perspective of the speaker, i.e. speaker-oriented or mixed-oriented threats, seem to frequently contain the most explicit type of verbs, namely kill verbs (cf. top of left and middle bar). In comparison, speaker-oriented, directive and impersonal threats predominantly contain non-violent verbs (cf. bottom right bar). It is notable, however, that speaker-oriented threats also very frequently contain ambiguous verbs. In other words, the perspective from which a threat is phrased is not necessarily an indication of how explicit or vague a threat will be with regard to other formal features. There appears to be a tendency that threats that are phrased from the perspective of a speaker/threatener more frequently denote an agentive violent action with a kill verb, while threats that are phrased from the perspective of the addressee or neither addressee nor speaker more frequently denote no violent action or no action at all.

In summary, it can be noted that the threats in CoJO seem to be varying between two extremes with regard to their verb semantics, or more precisely TYPE OF VERB, AGENT-PATIENT RELATION, and ORIENTATION OF THREAT. On the one end, there are threats that are explicit, i.e. that overtly express the who-does-what-to-whom of an announced action and specify this action as violent. On the other end,

there are threats that are vague with regard to all of these aspects, i.e. do not denote a violent action and/or do not refer to the participants of this action. And, as we have seen, similar tendencies seem to emerge if we simultaneously look at other features. Of course there are nuances in between threats that we can now describe as pragmatically explicit and those that we can describe as pragmatically vague with regard to the features we have operationalized here. However, it seems that these semi-explicit or semi-vague combinations are much less frequent.

4.5 Other common features: Pronouns, taboo words, weapons

Lexical elements that are commonly mentioned in association with threatening language are personal pronouns and different forms of taboo language. As we have discussed in Section 2.2.4, an additional element that is often mentioned as a formal characteristic of threatening language in practitioner's literature is the mention of weapons. Unlike, for example, conditional language, these features are not direct equivalents of predefined function. Rather they are often mentioned as possible aggravators of threats (cf. Culpeper 2011: 141; Gales 2010: 100).

For the present analysis, the three features are examined without predetermined assumptions about their function as modification of threats. Instead, it will be discussed how their presence and absence relates to our previous findings. Because these elements do not directly correspond to any element of our working definition of an explicit threat, the meaning of their occurrence or absence is less clear (cf. Section 2.2.5).

4.5.1 1PP and 2PP

As was already pointed out, frequent use of personal pronouns is a pervasive feature in interpersonal communication (O'Keeffe et al. 2011: 44). Speakers use first and second person pronouns in all forms of discourse to refer to either themselves or their interlocutors (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 425). For this reason, the fact that the personal pronouns *I* and *you* are among the most frequent words in CoJO is not surprising. It is the proportion of their usage in comparison that is often seen as indicative of certain communicative functions or the focus of a communication (cf. Biber 1988; Brown & Gilman 1960). It has been argued that the use of first person pronouns can give information on, for example, the level of involvement of a speaker (cf. Sherblom 1990), or that the use of personal pronouns mirrors the frame of mind of a speaker (cf. Campbell & Pennebaker 2003).

In the context of threatening, it is mainly the use of second person pronouns that has been researched. Their increased frequency, for example, has been interpreted as “one of the primary methods of demonstrating personalization” from the speaker’s perspective (Gales 2010: 100). It is assumed that by using an increased number of second person pronouns the speaker places the focus on their addressee/target, which is seen as a method of instilling fear (Gales 2010: 96). Now, because it is often regarded as a main objective of threatening communications to instill fear in the target, it is not surprising that frequent use of second person pronouns is characterized as a prototypical formal element of threatening language. As was already mentioned, this view is reflected in Gales’ *Threatening Communications Survey* and her corpus analysis (Gales 2010: 96). Gales finds that, in comparison, second person pronouns are used even more frequently than expected (Gales 2010: 99). Unfortunately, the frequencies of second person pronouns in her corpus are not compared to the frequencies in any other text type or to the frequency of first person pronouns. Consequently, her results can only be interpreted to hint at the relevance of second person pronouns, but need further verification. According to Gales (2010: 100) this

raises an interesting question about the primary focus of threatening communications – i.e., is the focus of a threat typically on the recipient [...] or on the threatener, which [...] has been suggested by Turner and Gelles (2003) and Gales (2010), who claim that a focus on the self, as opposed to the victim, might *also* play a role in threatening language.

Although it is questionable whether an increased use of either first or second person pronouns directly corresponds to the perceived focus of an utterance, this simplified view will be adapted for now. The examination of pronoun use will reveal if speakers rather focus on their addressees/targets or on themselves in their utterances.

In order to compare both possible foci, the present analysis was expanded to include the use of first and second person pronouns. More precisely, all members of the two paradigms, namely *I*, *me*, *my*, *myself*, and *you*, *your*, *yours*, *yourself* were coded as instances of either 1PP or 2PP (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 425). The respective frequencies are regarded as an indicator of how frequently speakers refer to themselves and others and thereby as indicative of whether threats are more focused on the speakers or on their addressees. In part, the analysis of pronoun use and ORIENTATION OF THREAT overlap, but the analysis of personal pronouns accounts for all instances of 1PP and 2PP, regardless of their sentential position. An utterance like Example (91) is coded as speaker-oriented and additionally coded as containing both 1PP and 2PP.

(91) I will kill you.

As expected, the corpus yields relatively high frequencies for both types of personal pronouns. More than 73% (222) of the utterances in CoJO contain at least one 1PP. In comparison, 2PP are almost as frequent, with 68% (207). As is evident from these figures, the assumption that 2PP are more frequent in threats cannot be confirmed by the data. If anything, 1PP are slightly more frequent in comparison.

The focus of a threat is conceptualized as a categorical difference by Gales (2010). If the speaker either focuses on her-/himself or on the addressee, the distribution of 1PP and 2PP should reflect this, i.e. both pronouns should occur more or less complementary. Figure 4.12 illustrates the occurrence of both 1PP and 2PP and depicts the four possible combinatory patterns and their respective proportion: 1PP-2PP (92), 1PP-no 2PP (93), no 1PP- 2PP (94), and no 1PP-no 2PP (95).

(92) I'll kill you Mr. Haney, I'll kill you.

(93) I have a gun and nothing to lose.

(94) Your money or your life, quick.

(95) Silencers are quite often found in Europe than they are in this country. The reason there good is they don't wake up the children.

In Example (92), the speaker refers to both himself and the addressee and, in addition to the second person pronoun, also uses the addressee's name. In Example (93), the speaker only refers to himself and states something about his possessions and his state of mind, without any linguistic reference to the addressee. Compared to that, the utterance in (94) only contains a reference to the addressee and no reference at all to the speaker. Lastly, the utterance in Example (95) contains neither of the two pronouns and no other linguistic reference to speaker or addressee.

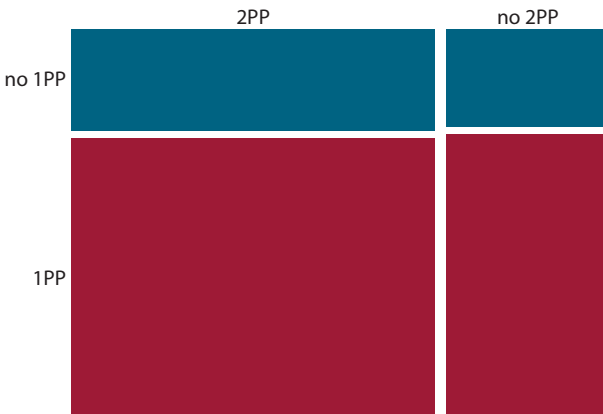


Figure 4.12 Proportion of 1PP and 2PP (N = 301)

It is apparent from the plot that the majority of threats contain both first and second person pronouns. In other words, around 50% (152) of the analyzed threats do not display a clear focus on either the speaker or the addressee, at least if *focus* is understood as a primary reference to either speaker or addressee by means of personal pronouns. An analysis of 1PP and 2PP alone does not give us enough insight that would allow for an assumption about their focus. This is additionally supported by the fact that the distribution does not reach statistical significance ($\text{Chi}^2 = 0.0023394$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p = 0.9614$). In other words, there is no clear, above-chance tendency towards either of these pronoun paradigms that could be interpreted as a clear focus on either speaker or addressee.

Two things have to be noted at this point that might constrain the generalizability of the results. First of all, repetition of a variant was not accounted for in the analysis. It could therefore still be the case that a focus on either addressee or speaker is reflected through multiple uses of either of the two pronouns. Secondly, all of the utterances are addressed at someone, i.e., they all have at least some implicit or intended addressee. For this reason, it could be argued that some of the utterances that do not contain any second person pronoun still focus on the addressee. And furthermore, the addressee can also be referred to by means of other address terms, such as first and last names or derogatory terms and the like. However, none of the cited literature discusses these possibilities. With regard to the prevalent assumptions on pronoun use, the present results do not seem to indicate that speakers clearly focus on either themselves or their addressees in their utterances.

Another factor that has been somewhat overlooked in previous analyses is the possibility to address someone other than the target/threaten someone other than the addressee, like in the Examples (96) and (97) below.

(96) If Reagan came to Sheridan, I would shoot him.

(97) If she doesn't understand who I am or she doesn't get on the phone right now, I will make sure I catch up with her later.

In both utterances, the speakers refer to a third person, who appears to be the target of their threat. In Example (96) this would be former US President Ronald Reagan and in Example (97) an unidentified female, referred to by means of third person pronouns. The addressee in both cases is someone other than the target.

In summary, it has to be stated that the use of first and second person pronouns in CoJO does not paint a clear picture with regard to what Gales (2010: 100) suggested about the focus of threat utterances. Rather, the results indicate that speakers regularly refer to both themselves and their addressees in their threats, and if anything, it seems that first person pronouns are used slightly more frequently. This finding is partially in line with the analysis of ORIENTATION OF THREAT: a large proportion of the threats in CoJO are mixed-oriented, i.e. the utterances contain

passages that are phrased from the perspective of the speaker, as well as passages that are mainly oriented towards the addressee. At the same time, speaker-oriented threats are even more frequent.

Taken together, the present findings suggest that threats are predominantly speaker-oriented, but regularly contain both 1PP and 2PP. As was argued earlier, this is a typical feature of interpersonal discourse, and no bias towards either of the participant roles appears to be reflected by an increased use of the respective pronoun.

To conclude, it has to be noted that not much is gained from analyzing the frequency of first and second person pronouns alone. The mere frequency of either pronoun type does not allow for any conclusions about the primary focus of threatening utterances. It could be argued that threatening is as much about the speaker as it is about the addressee. What could have brought additional insight is a more detailed analysis of the various syntactic roles in which the pronouns appear, for example as subject or object of a sentence or as a vocative expression. For practical reasons, however, this was not included in the coding.

4.5.2 TABOO LANGUAGE

The use of different forms of taboo language is often characterized as a typical feature of threatening language (cf. Gales 2010: 96). Taboo words, insults and swearing expressions have been described in various contexts as adding “affective meaning” (Leech 1981: 15), to “convey connotative or emotional meaning” (Jay & Janschewitz 2008: 268), “cause strong offence” (Culpeper 2011: 141) or “intensify descriptions” (Jay 1992: 63). In the case of threats this often means that speakers highlight, boost or intensify the offensive character of their threats (cf. Culpeper 2011: 141).

The examples in (98) to (100) illustrate the numerous instances of such expressions we find in CoJO.

(98) I’m going to get you for lying in court, you **fat bitch**.

(99) Take these handcuffs off and I’ll kick your **fucking ass**.

(100) I’m going to **fucking** kill you.

In all three utterances, it can be argued that the use of the highlighted words does not contribute to the propositional content of the utterances. They are not necessary elements to convey to the addressee that the speaker is going to somehow cause them harm in the future. Rather, adding them to the utterance “reflects the personal feelings of the speaker, including [their] attitude to the listener, or [their] attitude to something [they are] talking about” (Leech 1981: 15). Example (98) contains an insult concerned with the addressee’s weight, as well as the derogatory term *bitch*, which is a typical ‘dysphemism’ (cf. Allan & Burridge 1991: 26). The other

two examples contain the swear word *fuck*, which used here in its typical function as an emphatic intensifier or adverbial booster (cf. Jay 1992: 63; McEnery & Xiao 2004: 257).

It is already visible from these few examples that the category TABOO LANGUAGE spans very different phenomena. The term is used to refer to “the lexicon of offensive emotional language” (Jay 2009: 153). This includes “profanity (secular irreverent speech) and blasphemy (attacks on religion)”, as well as “speech [that is] considered obscene or indecent and speech that constitutes sexual harassment or discrimination” (Jay 2009: 254). Elsewhere, these phenomena have been described under labels such as swearing, cursing, profanity, blasphemy, obscenity, vulgarity, slang, religious slur, epithets, and insults, to name but a few (cf. Allan & BurrIDGE 1991; Dynel 2012; Jay 1992, 2008; McEnery et al. 2000, McEnery & Xiao 2004).

In the present study, all of the above-described forms of offensive language were treated as instances of TABOO LANGUAGE. Each utterance was coded for presence or absence of the feature and repetition was not accounted for in the analysis. Additionally, these utterances that contain an instance of TABOO LANGUAGE were examined more closely. As illustrated by the examples above, swear words, insults and the like can be used differently. In order to account for these differences, all instances of TABOO LANGUAGE were additionally coded for five different functions. For this purpose, an annotation scheme from McEnery and Xiao (2004: 257) was adopted and slightly modified. The resulting coding scheme is presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Functions of TABOO LANGUAGE in CoJO

Code	Description	Example from CoJO
P	Personal insult referring to a defined entity	You asshole motherfucker , you die. Ronnie, Listen Chump! Resign or You'll Get Your Brains Blown Out.
C	(Cursing) expletive	I want you to know to just fuck you and the horse you rode in on. You can't keep me from killing George Bush; One day I will have my chance, just watch and see. Your truly John Manning
E	Emphatic intensifier	I am a fucking suicide bomber communist terrorist! Pull me over! Please, I dare ya! Allah praise the Patriot Act ... Fucking JIHAD on the First Amendment! P.S. W.O.M.D. on Board!
O	Verbal form	I'll fuck you up!
I	Idiomatic 'set phrase'	I don't give a fuck about going back to the pen! I got connections, bro! My family is Mafia! Mafia!

The coding scheme was condensed to five different functions that focus on three general ways of using TABOO LANGUAGE. We distinguish between all nominal expressions, which are used to refer to persons or entities (P), affective or emotive expressions, which occur as either modifier or some form of exclamation (C and

E), and all verbal expression, where the words are used as either ambiguous action verbs or as idiomatic expressions (O and I).⁶⁷

A number of utterances contained more than one use of TABOO LANGUAGE, as in Example (101).

- (101) ... **shit!** I'll **fuck you up!** I don't **give a fuck** about going back to the pen! I got connections, bro! My family is Mafia! Mafia!

The speaker in (101) combines a cursing expletive (*shit*), a verbal form (*fuck you up*), and an idiomatic expression (*give a fuck*). Hence, the utterance is coded as containing C, O and I. As a rule, all first occurrences of each function were coded, but repetitions of the same function were disregarded. This roughly imitates a type/token distinction, where each function of TABOO LANGUAGE is considered a type and the different uses of the functions are individual tokens. Only types per utterance were analyzed, because we are only interested in an overview of how TABOO LANGUAGE is used in threats. Consequently, the results of this analysis depict the relative frequency of each function of TABOO LANGUAGE in CoJO.

Figure 4.13 contrasts the results of both analyses, namely the overall frequency of TABOO LANGUAGE in all threat utterances and the type frequency of the five different functions.

The left panel shows the frequency of TABOO LANGUAGE in CoJO. As can be seen from the proportion of the bars, roughly 39% (117) of the utterances in the corpus contain at least one instance of TABOO LANGUAGE ($\chi^2 = 14.914$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.0002$). As is visible from the figures, the use of TABOO LANGUAGE is relatively widespread in the corpus.

The right panel plots the type frequency of the different functions as explained above. As can be seen from the plot, type P (personal insult referring to a defined entity) is the most frequent function of TABOO LANGUAGE in CoJO, followed by type E (emphatic intensifier). The remaining types occur relatively infrequently ($\chi^2 = 137.32$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.0001$). The absolute frequencies of each type are listed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Type frequency function of TABOO LANGUAGE in CoJO

	P personal	C cursing	E emphatic	O verbal	I idiomatic
Frequency	80	8	38	13	5

67. McEnery and Xiao already use a condensed version of this category scheme, differentiating 8 functions, whereas the original scheme by McEnery et al. (2000) made a very fine-grained distinction of overall 16 types (McEnery and Xiao 2004: 257).

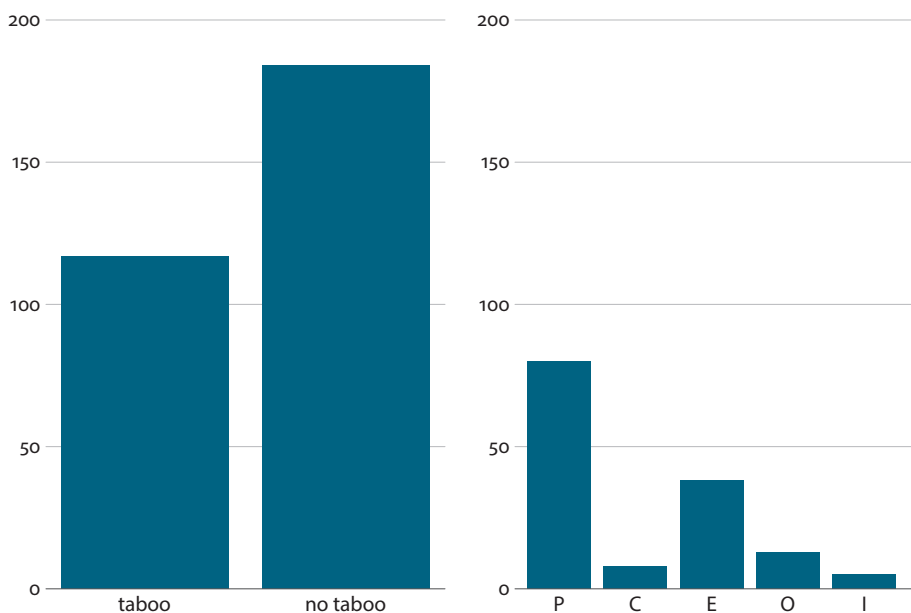


Figure 4.13 Distribution of TABOO LANGUAGE (N = 301) and type frequency of functions of TABOO LANGUAGE (n = 144)

The present findings confirm what Gales (2010: 99) describes as a prevalent assumption among her student respondents and also among scholars, namely that “profanity or other derogatory language” is frequently used in threats. With her own corpus analysis, however, Gales could not confirm the assumption to the same extent. Based on the frequency of insults and swear words in her data, she concludes that “profanity occur[s] less often than expected” (Gales 2010: 99). Only a little less than 25% of the threats in her corpus contain an instance of what she describes as ‘profanity’. Based on this, she concludes

that while one of the primary functions of threatening language is to intimidate and instill fear in the recipient (Olsson, 2004), these results demonstrate that threats are not always dependent on intimidating or instilling fear with profanity or insults.

(Gales 2010: 99)

Although the present analysis yields a higher frequency of TABOO LANGUAGE, I do not necessarily disagree with Gales. I would, however, draw a slightly different conclusion from the present findings.

In Section 2.3.2, we have discussed that at least two different functions of impoliteness might overlap in threats: *coercive impoliteness* on the one hand and *affective impoliteness* on the other (cf. Culpeper 2011: 220). Coercive impoliteness

can be used to “get power over actions (to get someone else to do something or avoid doing something)” (Culpeper 2011: 227), while affective impoliteness can be used to vent strong emotions, such as anger or frustration (cf. Culpeper 2011: 221). Unsurprisingly, a prime candidate of expressing or venting strong emotions is to swear, curse, or insult someone (cf. Jay 1992: 69, 2009: 155). As part of a threat, TABOO LANGUAGE was primarily discussed as an aggravating element, which intensifies the offensiveness of a message and damages the addressee’s positive face (cf. Culpeper et al. 2003: 1555; Culpeper 2011: 141, 154). To the best of my knowledge, however, it has not yet been systematically addressed that the use of TABOO LANGUAGE in threats – and maybe even threats in general – can also function as an emotional outlet or to vent negative feelings.

To come back to Gales (2010: 99) conclusion “that threats are not always dependent on intimidating or instilling fear with profanity and insults”, I would like to point out two things. The frequency of TABOO LANGUAGE in the present data confirms that speakers do not always rely on such expressions in their threats. More than 60% of the threats in CoJO do not contain a form of TABOO LANGUAGE. However, I consider it premature to conclude that TABOO LANGUAGE is primarily used to instill fear. Rather I would like to highlight the affective use of these expressions.

According to Jay (2009: 155), “the primary use of swearing is for emotional connotation, which occurs in the form of epithets or as insults directed towards others.” The analysis of functions of TABOO LANGUAGE in threats seems to support this view: personal insults (P) and emphatic intensifiers (E) that are the most common type of TABOO LANGUAGE in CoJO (cf. Figure 4.13, Table 4.6).⁶⁸ This might indicate that TABOO LANGUAGE in threats functions as a form of affective impoliteness. This means that, although instilling fear or intimidating the addressee can be an effect of swearing and cursing, speakers might also use these expressions to their own benefit.

To summarize, speakers regularly use TABOO LANGUAGE in their threats. It can be argued that the feature constitutes a salient component of threats, but not a pervasive one. The majority of instances in CoJO are insults and emphatic intensifiers, which are generally associated with strong emotions and affect. It was argued that this indicates that speakers tend to aggravate their threats with different forms of taboo language, not necessarily only to ‘intimidate’ the addressee, as Gales (2010: 99) suggested, but also to vent emotions such as anger or frustration.

68. Additionally, it was observed that the word *fuck* and its variants are by far the most common form of TABOO LANGUAGE in CoJO. This corresponds to the general role of this word as a swear word in American English (cf., e.g., Jay 1992; Jay & Janschewitz 2008).

4.5.3 MENTION OF WEAPONS

The remaining lexical element that was examined for the present study is the reference to any kind of weapons in a speaker's utterance. Such mention of weapons is predominantly discussed in psychological literature on threat assessment. Turner and Gelles (2003), for example, highlight 'weapon talk' as one potential indicator of a person's disposition towards violence. In simplified terms, the authors argue that the more often a person mentions weapons, the more likely this person is to engage in some kind of violence (cf. Turner and Gelles 2003: 43). Any mention of weapons is regarded as an epiphenomenon of threatening language, i.e. not a defining characteristic but one of the possible ways to modify a threat. In this regard, the feature is similar to TABOO LANGUAGE, but does it fulfill a similar aggravating function?

Not much is known about the function of mentioning weapons in threats. Gales (2010: 39) claims that mentioning weapons "most likely [does] play a role in function of threats", but "exactly what role [...] and to what extent [the feature exists] in threatening language remains to be empirically verified." With regard to the view on the feature, it has to be critically noted that the above-cited studies predominantly take a practitioner's perspective. Their main aim is to assess the seriousness of threatening messages, and their ultimate goal is to prevent violence from happening. The linguistic features discussed in these studies are therefore always interpreted as possible indicators of a speaker's propensity towards acting upon their announcements and their disposition towards violence in general. This applies to mention of weapons, but also, for example, to the use of swear words and pronouns. The studies typically compare actually realized with "empty" threats, i.e. threats that are not acted upon, and investigate whether this could have been predicted in any way by the wording of a threat. In comparison, the present study does not distinguish between threats that are actually carried out and those that remain hypothetical. Instead, it is assumed that if speakers regularly employ the same linguistic features, these features can be regarded as typical features of threatening language, regardless of the actual intent to carry out the threats. Consequently, and in line with the general objective of this study, the overall frequency of a feature has to be examined before any implications for potential functions can and will be discussed.

The term *weapon* is used here in the sense of "something (such as a gun, knife, club, or bomb) that is used for fighting or attacking someone".⁶⁹ The term is used as a cover-term that comprises all mentions of firearms, knives and explosives, as well as elements from the same lexical field (cf. Löbner 2013: 215). This would be, for example, ammunition, but also verbs that describe the use of weapons or verbs that

69. "Weapon." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 04 March 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weapon>>.

describe actions related to the use of weapons, such as aiming or hitting a target. The Examples (102) to (107) below illustrate these different contexts in which the feature occurs (highlighted in bold print).

- (102) Maybe it's time for me to get a **gun**, Mr. Erlich.
- (103) Give me all the 100s and 50s in your drawer. I have **dynamite**.
- (104) You need to worry about 245 on deputy sheriff ... With this motherfucker **knife** I have.
- (105) I would like to make a **bomb** big enough to **blow up** the Capitol and President and all the Senators and everybody in it.
- (106) Are your uniforms **bullet-proof**?
- (107) Hi Dick, Kevan Fulmer. Hope things are well, hope you had an enjoyable Easter and all the other holidays since I've spoken with you last. I want you to look something up. It's known as misprision. Just think of it in terms of misprision of a felony. Hope all is well. The silver **bullets** are coming. I'll talk to you. Enjoy the intriguing unraveling of what I said to you. Talk to you, Dick. It's been a pleasure. Take care.

In the first three utterances, the speakers refer to their possession of some kind of weapon, more precisely, a firearm, explosives, and a knife. The speaker in Example (105) refers to his intention or wish to build an explosive and additionally describes the purpose of this weapon, i.e. how he would put the weapon to use. This is comparable to what the speaker in (104) does, who also insinuates the purpose of his weapon. He uses the expression '245', which is police code for 'assault with a deadly weapon'.⁷⁰ In comparison, the speakers in (102) and (103) only mention their possession of a weapon and not the weapon's purpose or their intention to use it. In utterance (106), the speaker asks his alleged group of targets whether they possess or wear bulletproof apparel. Such a reference to equipment that is worn to protect oneself from being shot was also considered an instance of mention of weapons. Similarly, the mention of 'silver bullets' in Example (107) is considered to refer to weaponry in the widest sense. All references to weaponry of the kind illustrated above were coded as an instance of MENTION OF WEAPONS.

Overall, MENTION OF WEAPONS is comparably infrequent in the data. A subset of only roughly 17% (51) of the utterances contains an instance of the above-described kind. With that, the feature is the least frequent of all features that were examined in the present study. Based on this finding, MENTION OF WEAPONS cannot be regarded as particularly relevant to the speakers in the corpus for realizing threats.

70. See, for example, <http://www.radiolabs.com/police-codes.html> or https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_code.

The frequency is illustrated in Figure 4.14.

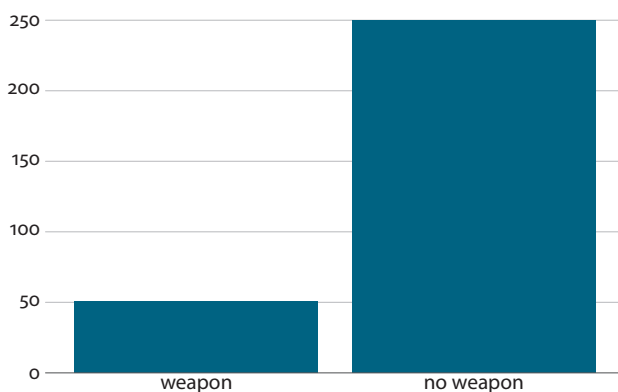


Figure 4.14 Distribution of MENTION OF WEAPONS (N = 301), $\text{Chi}^2 = 131.56$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < 0.0001$

Yet, there are a number of cases where speakers use MENTION OF WEAPONS in their threats. In order to probe whether the feature is used in any way as systematic as suggested in the literature or whether its frequency is just an artifact of the data, we need to take a more detailed look at the utterances in which the feature occurs.

As was mentioned earlier, in the majority of cases speakers refer to their possession of a weapon or their intent to acquire/build one. In some cases, they additionally refer to the use of said weapon, as in Example (110) below.

(108) I have a gun.

(109) I have a gun and nothing to lose.

(110) I have a gun and I'm not afraid to use it.

In neither of these cases does the speaker explicitly denote the intent to carry out a future action or specify that this action might be detrimental to a potential target or that the action is contingent upon anything the target does. Rather, the utterances are statements in the form of a declarative and can be characterized as rather vague, i.e. they do not contain any variant of CONDITIONALITY, FUTURITY, or a violent verb.⁷¹ Furthermore, the structure of the utterances in (108) to (110) appears to be very similar. In fact, closer inspection of all instances of MENTION OF WEAPON in the corpus reveals that the feature is largely used in a similar or comparable way. It

71. Of course it might be argued that “to use a weapon” is a paraphrase of a violent action, but the verb ‘to use’ was coded as non-violent. This was decided in principle. In a judicial context, phrases like ‘to use a weapon/firearm’ and their exact meaning and interpretation have attracted a large body of research. See, for example, Mouritsen (2010).

is used in statements about the weapons as such, i.e. their possession or acquisition, it is used in statements about the use of the weapons, and it is used in statements about the speakers themselves, i.e. their state of mind or their abilities and intentions. In some cases all of these contexts are combined, as in Example (110), where the speaker informs the addressee about the possession of a weapon, about his state of mind and additionally about his or her intention to put the weapon to use.

To put this observation to a test, and to be able to compare the use of MENTION OF WEAPONS to the use of other features, it is necessary to examine the features co-occurrence with other features. Figure 4.15 plots the co-occurrence of MENTION OF WEAPONS with CONDITIONALITY, FUTURITY, and TYPE OF VERB.

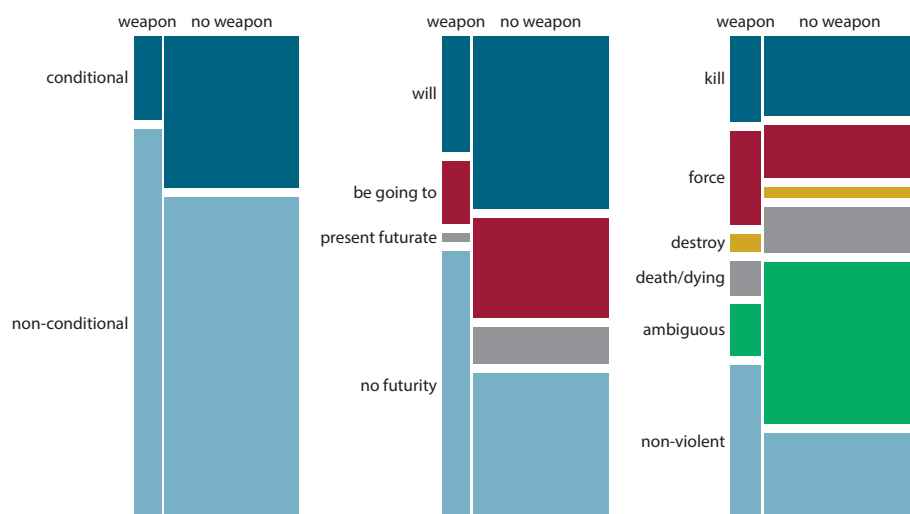


Figure 4.15 Proportion of MENTION OF WEAPONS and CONDITIONALITY, FUTURITY, and TYPE OF VERB (N = 301)

From left to right, the figure illustrates the co-occurrence of MENTION OF WEAPONS with CONDITIONALITY (Fisher's exact test: $p = 0.04389$), FUTURITY (Fisher's exact test: $p = 0.004587$), and TYPE OF VERB (Fisher's exact test: $p = 0.002087$). The two vertical bars in each panel represent the 51 threats that contain MENTION OF WEAPONS (left bar) and the 250 that do not (right bar).

The findings support the preliminary observation that threats containing an instance of MENTION OF WEAPONS often contain very few and sometimes even none of the other features; as indicated by the height of the bottom left bar in all three plots, the frequency of the feature is increased with non-conditional, no futurity and non-violent verbs. But does that mean the feature alone can be used by speakers to realize a vague threat?

One strong proponent of such a view can be found in Yamanaka's (1995) analysis of what he considers *indirect* threats. Yamanaka draws on previous accounts of conditions for successful threatening (cf. Fraser 1975) and on a previously formulated "rule for indirect threats" (cf. Gingiss 1986), both closely modeled after Searle's notion of felicity conditions. According to Yamanaka, mentioning the possession of a weapon is one variant of addressing the preconditions of a successful threat, which is a strategy that can also be found in other speech act realizations (cf., e.g., Weizman 1989: 137 on requests). For threats, Yamanaka suggests that highlighting the speaker's ability to carry out the threatened action is threatening by implication, and mentioning an instrument that can be used to hurt the target is one of the different strategies speakers resort to (Yamanaka 1995: 43).

Yamanaka's analysis is supported by scarce and rather anecdotal evidence, but it could be argued that, at first sight, the present findings seemingly support his viewpoint. Yet, there is one important objection to be raised here: closer inspection of the context of utterance reveals that almost all of the instances of MENTION OF WEAPONS occur in only two kinds of situations, namely during (bank) robberies or in association with school shootings. In my opinion, the fact that MENTION OF WEAPONS is mainly used in situations that are per definition associated with the use of firearms suggests that the feature's use is contextually very restricted. However, due to the relatively small data set, we cannot draw any final conclusions from the present finding.

4.6 Social context: Relationship of threatener and target

The last of the variables that were included in the present analysis was developed and operationalized based on the discussion of contextual influence in Section 2.3: *the relationship of threatener and target*. As was previously explained, the relationships of threateners and targets in the corpus were classified as a binary contrast by reference to the dimensions of P and D. We consequently distinguish *personal* and *non-personal* relationships, which conceptualize a contrast of socially more powerful speakers (+ P), such as judges, politicians, or teachers, and socially less or equally powerful speakers (– P), such as spouses, siblings, friends or acquaintances and a contrast of maximal distance (+ D), as between strangers, and minimal distance (– D), as between close acquaintances, friends, or family members (cf. Schneider 2010: 250). By classifying the relationships in this way, we are able to test the above-mentioned predictions and gain some first insight into how social context might influence the form and function of threats.

4.6.1 Operationalizing RELATIONSHIP OF THREATENER AND TARGET

For the operationalization of this variable, the classification of relationships was based solely on case history and information about the parties involved. A relationship was considered non-personal if the target is either not personally known to the threatener or addressed as a mere representative of a company, an office, or a group of people, or even a representative of a certain belief or position.⁷² Non-personal relationships include relationships with legal professionals, medical professionals, employees/employers of companies, and state or government officials. If, however, threatener and target know each other personally, share a personal history, or if their conflict concerns personal matters, their relationship can be described as personal. Personal relationships include relationships with spouses, friends, classmates, colleagues, relatives, or close family members.

Accordingly, all threats in CoJO were coded as either personal or non-personal. The two examples below should serve as an illustration of the distinction and the coding.

- (111) I want to leave a message for Mr. Pick – Pickering, or something like that? Uh, my name is Elias Zendejas, I received a letter. Mr. Pickering, you better stop sending me letters. You better stop talking to me. I sent you a letter to your attorney for the Santa Clara County Transit, or I'm gonna come down with a gun and blow your fuckin' brains out. Do you hear me, you son of a bitch?
- (112) Fuck you. I hate you. You STD bitch. I know where you grew up. I've got something for you.

The threat in Example (111) was coded as non-personal because, although the threatener addresses someone directly, this addressee is a representative of his former employer and he is addressed in that specific function. The addressee is not personally known to the threatener and the conflict concerns no personal shared history, but an employment relationship.⁷³ Compared to that, the threatener in Example (112) addresses a relative. The addressee is someone with whom he shares a personal history, and the conflict revolves around exactly this shared history.⁷⁴ Accordingly, the threat was coded as personal. As was already discussed, we tentatively assume that a personal relationship between threatener and target is characterized by a minimized distance and a rather equal power status, whereas a non-personal relationship often involves an increased social distance and a greater

72. This would be the case, for example, in political conflicts or in anti-abortion conflicts.

73. *People v. Zendejas*, 196 Cal.App.3d 367 (1987)

74. *People v. Allen*, Not Reported in Cal.Rptr.3d (2007)

imbalance of power between interactants. This leads to a classification where personal roughly corresponds to less distant and symmetrical power, and non-personal corresponds to more distant and asymmetrical.

4.6.2 Results and discussion

In total, roughly 53% of the data were classified as personal, and the remaining 47% were classified as non-personal (see Table 7).⁷⁵

Table 4.7 Overview relationship of threatener and target

RELATIONSHIP OF THREATENER AND TARGET	#
personal	159
non-personal	142

The relatively even distribution of both relationship types suggests that the type of relationship of threatener and target does not have an influence on the mere quantity of threats. In other words, less powerful speakers presumably produce as many threats in the data as are uttered between participants of equal power. This finding challenges views according to which threats by less powerful speakers *behind discourse* will be generally less common (cf. Culpeper 1996; Fraser 1998; Harris 1984; Limberg 2008, 2009). At the same time, the findings appear to support, for example, Limberg's (2009) expectation that in less formal constellations, participants can renegotiate power relations by means of threatening their interlocutor.

Now, does the relationship of threatener and target have an influence of the quality of threats, i.e. their form? With a distribution as even as this, any effect should be clearly visible. Figure 4.16 is a set of plots illustrating the occurrence of all features in personal and non-personal threats: FUTURITY, TYPE OF VERB, TABOO LANGUAGE, MENTION OF WEAPONS, and 2PP.⁷⁶ For an increased readability, the levels were reduced to binary (FUTURITY) or three-way contrasts (TYPE OF VERB: violent, ambiguous, and non-violent verbs).

75. Parallel to the remainder of the coding, this procedure was repeated twice in order to verify the decisions and resulted in 8 instances of divergence (i.e. < 3%)

76. The remaining variables CONDITIONALITY, AGENT-PATIENT RELATION, ORIENTATION OF THREAT, and 1PP were not included because the distribution of these features was not statistically significant (CONDITIONALITY: $\chi^2 = 2.7047$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.1001$; AGENT-PATIENT RELATION: $\chi^2 = 6.6328$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.08457$; ORIENTATION OF THREAT: $\chi^2 = 7.9641$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.0929$, 1PP: $\chi^2 = 0.71892$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.3965$).

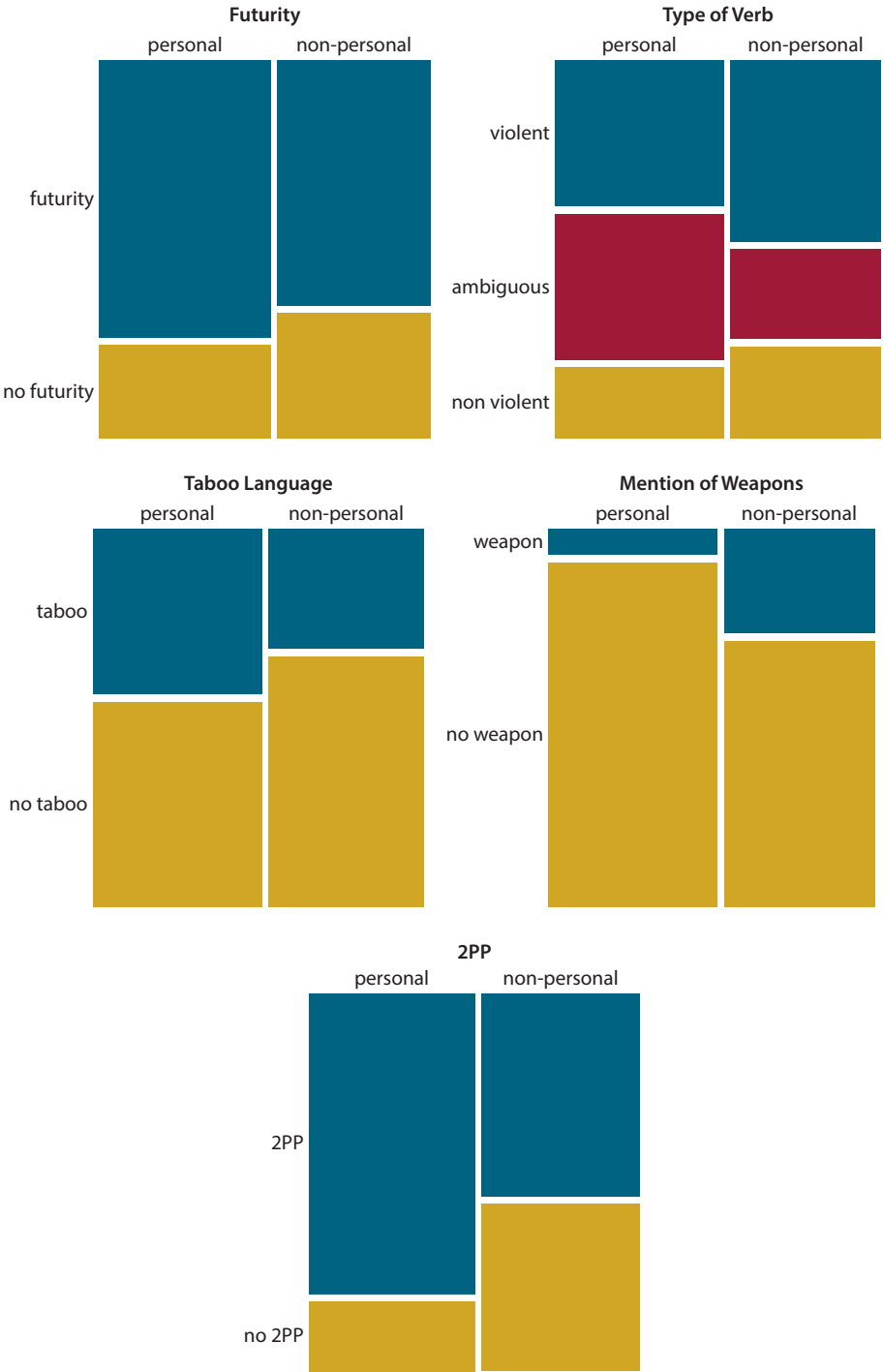


Figure 4.16 Distribution of features across personal and non-personal threats (N = 301)

The two vertical bars each represent the proportion of personal (left) and non-personal threats (right) in all panels. The variants of all features are indicated on the y-axis, i.e. occurrence of a feature is indicated on the top and absence is indicated on the bottom of the y-axis. The plots have been arranged in a way that the left panels all illustrate features that more frequently occur in non-personal threats, while the panels on the right depict features that are more frequent in personal threats.

As can be seen, the degree of variability is far from obvious and differs for all features, so that no single, clear tendency can be identified. This is also reflected by the different significance levels yielded by the tests applied to the contingency tables: FUTURITY ($\text{Chi}^2 = 11.263$, $\text{df} = 3$, $p = 0.0104$), TYPE OF VERB (Fisher's exact test: $p = 0.0451$), TABOO LANGUAGE ($\text{Chi}^2 = 4.2428$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p = 0.0394$), MENTION OF WEAPONS ($\text{Chi}^2 = 22.584$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < 0.0001$), and 2PP ($\text{Chi}^2 = 22.775$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p < 0.0001$).

The images suggest that, in direct comparison, personal threats seem to be less likely to contain a violent verb and an instance of MENTION OF WEAPONS and more likely to contain a variant of FUTURITY, TABOO LANGUAGE, and 2PP. Conversely, non-personal threats appear to more likely to contain a violent verb and an instance of MENTION OF WEAPONS and less likely to contain a variant of FUTURITY, TABOO LANGUAGE, and 2PP. How can these findings be interpreted? Does the relationship of threatener and target systematically influence the ways in which threats are realized? Let us look more closely at two of the results.

The plot illustrates that personal threats more often contain forms TABOO LANGUAGE and 2PP. From what is known about the use of these features in interpersonal communication, this is not surprising. As was already discussed, personal pronouns are generally very frequent in interpersonal discourse. The fact that they are used slightly more often in personal threats, mirrors that threateners who address a target personally more often do so by means of the second person pronoun 'you'. If speakers address someone as a representative of a company or if they address the government or an office, they tend to use third person pronouns or other referential expressions to refer to their target instead, as in Example (113). In cases like this, the actual addressee of their utterance remains implicit.

- (113) Allstate had better stop messing with me or else I'm going to blow up their building.

The speaker in Example (113) addresses an employee of Allstate on the phone, but directs his threat at the company, not the person on the phone. This is a typical pattern found in many of the non-personal threats.

Furthermore, the increased use of TABOO LANGUAGE that can be found in personal threats appears to be in line with Culpeper (2011), who claims that the use of verbal impoliteness in symmetric social structures necessitate a higher degree

of aggravation. The use of impoliteness in asymmetric structures, he argues, does not require additional aggravation because

commanding someone of relatively high power in a context where they clearly have no special right to do so is enough to lead to the evaluation of strong impoliteness, and at these higher levels of impoliteness the finer linguistic differences amongst [their] command items gets [sic!] lost in the ‘white noise’ of offence.

(Culpeper 2011: 194)

One way of interpreting the results would be that in order to exercise power *in discourse* speakers of equal power draw on more explicit means to highlight the offensive character of their utterance. At the same time, the assumption that less powerful speakers less often utter threats cannot be confirmed by the present data.

With the discussion of these last results, it has to be pointed out that up until now the interpretation of the findings is no more than informed speculation, which highlights the importance of further research on the influence of social factors on the use of impoliteness in general and threatening in particular (cf. Culpeper 2008, 2011). Even if the present findings suggest that there is a difference between personal and non-personal threats, the exact nature of this difference cannot be assessed on the basis of these findings alone. This is partly also because, so far, the analysis can give us some indication of how frequently individual features are used by speakers and an indication of some of the combinations of features we find, but we know little about the overall combinatory patterns. Up until now, the analysis is mono-factorial, i.e. even if some of the features are analyzed pair-wise the analysis never takes into account all variables at once. This creates an incomplete picture of the combinatory pattern(s) all features might form together, which only a multi-variate analysis will be able to complement.

4.7 Detecting feature patterns: Hierarchical cluster analysis

As discussed in the previous sections, the features were predominantly investigated individually, with only a few exceptions, where pairwise co-occurrence was examined. The findings on frequency and distribution of particular features amount to a detailed description of the data, which in turn allows for a number of generalizations about the role of the investigated features for threatening language in general. Based on the previously discussed findings, it is possible to claim that none of the investigated features can be classified as an IFID of threatening. More precisely, there is no form in the data that is so frequent as to reach the status of a conventionalized marker of threatening. Rather the results suggest that features are combined by speakers in intricate ways. In part, the results challenge some of the prevalent assumptions on typical features of threats, as for example with CONDITIONALITY. As

was repeatedly mentioned, the findings suggest that there are two opposed structures in the data: threats that can be considered pragmatically explicit and threats that can be considered pragmatically vague (cf. Section 2.2) – the use of conditional language, however, appears to be an exception. In order to further probe the question of how speakers threaten, we now have to change perspective and look at all features simultaneously.

In order to find out about potential combinatory patterns of features, the variables were analyzed a second time using hierarchical cluster analysis (Becker, Chambers & Wilks 1988). Cluster analysis is a multivariate statistical tool that helps detect meaningful structures and relationships between features while examining several variables simultaneously (Zumel & Mount 2014: 176). The method used in the present study is hierarchical clustering with a binary distance measure for categorical variables using Ward's method (Ward 1963). This type of clustering is often used as an exploratory method that organizes the data in a way that helps to detect nested patterns or relationships between individual data points. The method is 'unsupervised' because no preliminary prediction is tested.

A clustering algorithm conducts a pairwise comparison of all data points in order to calculate their distance, i.e. the similarity between the data points based on their properties. The algorithm then determines number and size of clusters or groups of data points based on their similarity (Zumel and Mount 2014: 176). Similarity and dissimilarity can be conceptualized as distance between cluster members. More similar data points will be closer together and/or members of the same cluster and dissimilar ones will be further apart. There are a number of different distance measures depending on the type of data. For the present analysis *Hamming distance* was used (Zumel and Mount 2014: 177).

With binary categorical variables, each data point can be described as the sum of values of each variable that is either 1 or 0. Through pairwise comparison, the difference between these sums is calculated and a *dissimilarity matrix* is created (Cantos Gómez 2013: 91). If both data points have the same value for a certain variable (0 or 1 respectively), their distance is 0 and if one of them has a diverging value, their distance is 1. From all these differences an overall distance measure is calculated, which is between 0 and 1 for binary categorical variables. The closer the value is to 0 the more similar two data points are and, conversely, the closer it is to 1 the more dissimilar two data points are. The resulting distance measures for all data points are combined in a square symmetrical matrix that lists all the distance measures for each data point in comparison to the other data points (Cantos Gómez 2013: 91). This matrix can be plotted as a dendrogram where 'similar' data points are grouped together and an embedded hierarchy of branches illustrates their overall relationships. If any meaningful relationship between data points can be detected, they should form visible clusters.

4.7.1 Data and methodology

For the present study, hierarchical clustering was used to examine the similarity between the variables themselves instead of similarity between all utterances in the data set. This was done because I was interested in a more generalizable insight into the combinatory patterns of features and not in an additional description of the individual utterances in CoJO.⁷⁷

The clustering algorithm used here can be applied to binary variables only, which is why all variables with more than two levels were transformed into binary contrasts of presence (1) versus absence (0) of a feature.⁷⁸ Explicit and implicit conditionals were grouped together, the different variants of FUTURITY were all condensed and for the variable TYPE OF VERB, violent and ambiguous verbs were grouped together as, because of their potential to receive a violent interpretation. The above-described transformation could be performed without repeating the coding because the initial coding decisions were not altered in any way. Table 4.8 is a schematic overview of the new coding matrix.

Table 4.8 Coding scheme hierarchical clustering

Variable	presence (= 1)	absence (= 0)
CONDITIONALITY	explicit conditional implicit conditional	non-conditional
FUTURITY	will be going to present futurate	no futurity
TYPE OF VERB	kill force destroy death/dying ambiguous	non-violent
AGENT	occurrence	non-occurrence
PATIENT	occurrence	non-occurrence
PP_I	occurrence	non-occurrence
PP_YOU ⁷⁹	occurrence	non-occurrence
TABOO LANGUAGE	occurrence	non-occurrence
MENTION OF WEAPONS	occurrence	non-occurrence
RELATIONSHIP OF THREATENER AND TARGET	non-personal	personal

77. A cluster analysis of all utterances in CoJO can only function as an additional description of the data, since it depicts similarities between individual observations.

78. The variable ORIENTATION OF THREAT was excluded from the analysis because the variable's levels could not be reduced to a coherent binary contrast.

79. The variables 1PP and 2PP were renamed PP_I and PP_YOU for technical reasons.

In order to examine the variables' relationships, a matrix was designed that contains an account of all variables as a feature vector. Each feature vector is comprised of a distinct combinatory pattern of 301 values for presence ($y = 1$) and absence ($n = 0$) of a feature in all 301 utterances (U1–U301). All of these vectors can be compared to each other in order to determine their (dis)similarity. Figure 4.17 is an excerpt from this matrix as an illustration.

Figure 4.17 Excerpt dissimilarity matrix

Variable	u1	u2	u3	u4	u5	u6	u7	u8	u9	u10	...	u301
CONDITIONALITY (cond)	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0		0
FUTURITY (futur)	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1		0
TYPE OF VERB (viol_verb)	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1		0
AGENT	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1		0
PATIENT	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1		0
1PP (PP_I)	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1		0
2PP (PP_you)	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1		0
TABOO LANGUAGE (taboo)	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1		0
MENTION OF WEAPONS (weapon)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
RELATIONSHIP OF THREATENER AND TARGET (non-personal)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0		1

Based on the complete matrix, the algorithm conducts a pairwise comparison of the feature vectors as described above. The more often variables occur together or are simultaneously absent in an utterance, the smaller the calculated difference is, i.e. the distance measure will be closer to 0. This means variables are considered more similar and they will cluster more tightly. Conversely, the more often variables are distributed complementary in the utterances, the closer their distance measure will be to 1. This means variables are dissimilar and they will be more distant in a cluster. In general, cluster members with a distance measure of ≤ 0.5 were considered more similar than dissimilar and cluster members with a distance measure of > 0.5 were considered more dissimilar than similar.

The results are depicted in a dendrogram. It is important to note that the resulting dendrogram depicts both similarity and dissimilarity, i.e. the members of the same cluster are always more similar to each other than they are to members of other clusters. Their degree of similarity is reflected in the nested hierarchical branch structure of the dendrogram. Individual distance measures can be read off the y-axis.

4.7.2 Results and discussion

The dendrogram in Figure 4.18 depicts which variables are used in combination and the degree (i.e. frequency) to which these are used in combination. As explained above, the height of the branches (indicated on the y-axis) is the distance measure. For the purpose of illustration and description, all branches in the plot have been numbered at the splits according to their distance measure from the bottom (1) to the top (9). The respective numbers will be stated in the running text when specific branches of the cluster are discussed.

As can be seen from the graph, the initial split (9) divides the variables into two structures, but only one is comprised of more than one member. The smallest cluster only contains one variable, namely *MENTION OF WEAPONS*. This indicates the dissimilarity of this variable to all other variables.⁸⁰ The peculiarity of this variable was already discussed in Section 4.5.3 and the present results support the impression that *MENTION OF WEAPON* cannot be regarded as a salient feature of threatening. The position of the variable in the dendrogram reflects that the feature behaves very different from the other features.

The second branch (8) splits again into two structures. The far right cluster (7) is also very small and contains only two features: *CONDITIONALITY* and non-personal relationship. This means that conditional language is used more frequently in non-personal threats. A possible interpretation of this finding might be that speakers who do not share a personal relationship with their targets have to explicitly denote the preconditions and negative consequences of their actions more often because the circumstances of a threatening scenario are not shared knowledge between participants. In turn, this implies that in personal threats, speakers do not need to explicitly introduce preconditions and consequences to the discourse and thus less often employ conditional clauses. However, a previous analysis revealed that the distribution of *CONDITIONALITY* across personal and non-personal threats does not show a statistically significant difference (cf. Section 4.6.2). This is reflected by the distance measure in this graph, which is fairly high (around 0.7). In terms of similarity, this means that *CONDITIONALITY* is more similar to non-personal relation than to the members of the other clusters, yet their overall similarity is not striking. In other words, there is a slight tendency for conditional language to occur in non-personal threats but the result is not conclusive.

80. Cluster analysis runs the risk of overfitting the data which can lead to clusters that represent nothing more than the dissimilarity of their members to the other data points. Such clusters are described as “trash can” clusters or “miscellaneous” because their members share no relation of similarity. Bootstrap evaluation can prove useful to avoid misinterpretation (Zumel and Mount 2014: 184). In the present analysis, however, bootstrap analysis is not necessary because the “miscellaneous” cluster only consists of one member.

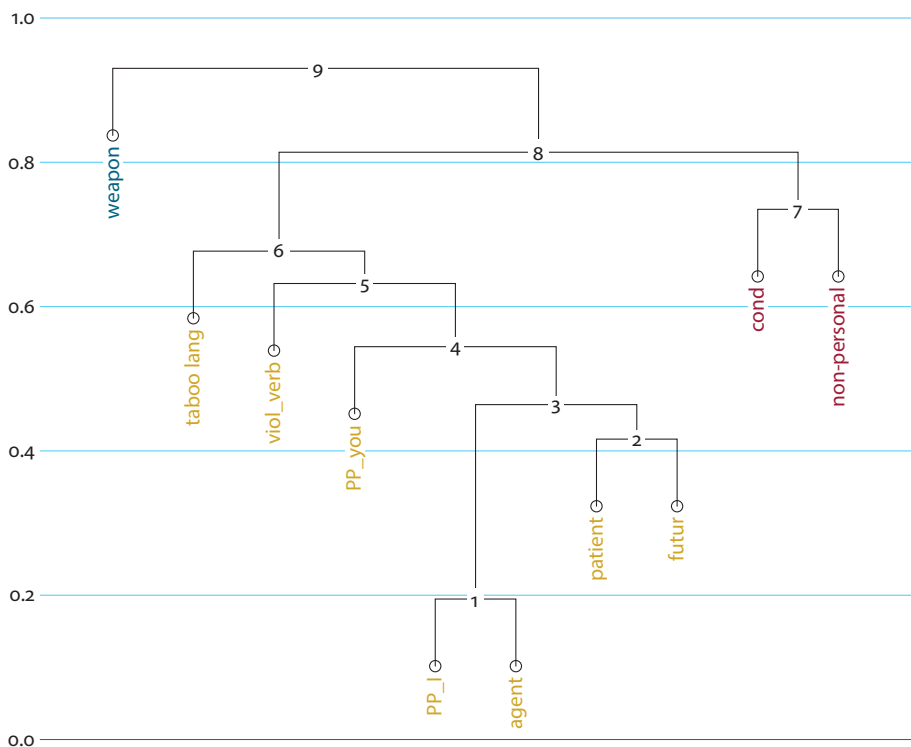


Figure 4.18 Dendrogram of formal features

The third cluster (6–1) is the tightest cluster and is made up of the remaining variables. It contains different nested branches, which reflect the different degrees of similarity between individual features. Within the cluster, the most similar variables, i.e. those with the greatest likelihood of co-occurrence, are 1PP and AGENT (1). This may be not surprising, since it means that the use of a first person pronoun often coincides with an expression of agency. In other words, if speakers refer to themselves by means of a first person pronoun, they are often also the agent of an announced action. The distance measure of the two variables at (1) is around 0.2, which means that in the majority of cases both features are simultaneously present or absent. The second most similar pair of variables in the cluster is PATIENT and FUTURITY (2). The two variables have a distance measure of around 0.4. This means that if speakers refer to the patient (or target) of an announced action, they often also mark the action as placed in the future. These two pairs (1PP + AGENT and 2PP + FUTURITY) in turn cluster together at (3) with an overall distance measure of still less than 0.5. This means the four cluster members are overall more similar to each other than dissimilar (i.e. distance measure closer to 0 than to 1). At branch (3), the cluster accounts for utterances that contain reference to an agent, most likely

in the form of a first person pronoun, reference to a patient and an expression of futurity, such as in the examples below.

- (114) Hello, baby. I hear the President is coming to the base. I am going to get him.
- (115) If I see that fool there to testify against my brother, I will kick his ass. I feel like going to jail anyways.
- (116) Give me one pack of 20s or I will shoot somebody in here now.

This includes cases in which the addressee of the utterance and the target of the threat, i.e. the patient of the announced action, are not identical, as in Example (114) and (115). In both of the utterances, the speakers address some third party. In Example (116) the addressee is addressed implicitly with a directive and the speaker uses no second person pronoun or other address term.

The next variable that is embedded in the cluster is 2PP (4). At branch (4), the cluster accounts for all utterances that contain reference to an agent, most likely in the form of a first person pronoun, reference to a patient, often in the form of a second person pronoun, and an expression of futurity, such as in the example below.

- (117) I am going to get you.

In the example the speaker refers to some future action s/he is the agent of and addresses a second person that is at the same time the target of the action, i.e. the patient. With a distance measure of around 0.5 the cluster at (4) can be still considered relatively tight, but the members at this split do not behave particularly similar anymore. At this point, the cluster describes what Fraser (1998: 167) describes as the “simplest way” of uttering a threat. With regard to our scale of pragmatic explicitness, the threat can be considered explicit with regard to the referents or participants of an action and part of the illocutionary point, i.e. something will happen in the future. The threat remains vague, however, with regard to the detrimental nature of this future action or event, i.e. *TYPE OF VERB*, and the question whether this action is contingent upon anything the target does, i.e. *CONDITIONALITY*.

The next feature embedded in the cluster is violent verb (5). At branch (5), utterances that the cluster accounts for include all of the previously mentioned features and speakers additionally specify the announced action as harmful or violent. Examples of this can be seen below.

- (118) I’m going to kill you, you’ll see.
- (119) I’m going to bring a gun to school tomorrow and shoot everyone and start with you. Maybe not you first.

These threats are pragmatically even more explicit: they denote an agent and a patient of a harmful action that is placed in the future. Threats of this kind could be presumably described as displaying the closest correspondence to the definitions of threatening that were reviewed in Section 4.1.1. The element that is missing from these utterances, however, is *CONDITIONALITY*. This appears to support the previous argument that, although the literature on threats often characterizes conditionals as typical elements of threats, speakers rarely employ conditional language to communicate the preconditions and consequences of their actions. With a distance measure of more than 0.6 at branch (5) the similarity between the feature and the other members of the cluster is not overwhelming, i.e. threats that do not specify the future action as violent are more common than threats that do.

The least similar and last member of the cluster is the variable *TABOO LANGUAGE* (6), with a distance measure of almost 0.7. Taken together, the cluster from (6) downwards accounts for utterances that express a clear participant structure (agent-patient), denote a violent action which is marked as placed in the future and contain insults, swear words or taboo words used as intensifiers, as in Examples (120) and (121).

(120) Mother fucker I'm going to blow you away.

(121) I'm going to fucking kill you.

As was argued earlier, in both examples the use of explicit language functions as an aggravator that boosts or intensifies the threatening nature of the utterance, but does not add to the propositional content of the utterance (see Section 4.5.2).

Overall, the results of the cluster analysis appear to support the previous observation that there is no one readily identifiable pattern speakers repeatedly use to realize threats and that consequently reaches the status of a conventional form of threatening. Nevertheless, there is one distinct cluster of features in our dendrogram which as a whole represents threats that are pragmatically explicit with respect to all but one of the features of threatening: *1PP* and *2PP*, *AGENT*, *PATIENT*, *FUTURITY*, *TYPE OF VERB* (i.e. violent), and *TABOO LANGUAGE*. As was already mentioned, the only feature that is missing for the structure to correspond fully to our initial definition by Milburn and Watman is *CONDITIONALITY* (cf. Section 2.2.5). At the same time, the embedded hierarchy of the dendrogram implies that structures that can be described by (6) are not the predominant structure in the data. Instead, the findings indicate that the most similar variables are those that relate to the participants and expressing futurity. This means that the most common structure in the data involves only *1PP*, *AGENT*, *PATIENT* and *FUTURITY*, but not necessarily a violent verb or *TABOO LANGUAGE* – which is a variation of the second part of Milburn and Watman's (1981: 8) definition: "If you do A, I will do B," namely "I will do B to you".

And if, however, a violent verb is used, the likelihood that speakers additionally use TABOO LANGUAGE increases.

To summarize, speakers presumably often rely on clearly denoting doer and undergoer of an underspecified action that is to take place in the future in order to communicate their threats. In comparison, the specification of an action as harmful and especially the expression of preconditions and consequences do not appear to play a major role for speakers. Yet, the majority of threats in CoJO can be described as more pragmatically explicit with respect to the expression of participants and action, as was to be expected from previous accounts of threatening. The fact that it is exactly these features that cluster in the dendrogram appears to support the previous observation that two overall tendencies are visible in the data: threats that explicitly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of a future (detrimental) action and threats that remain vague with respect to all of these aspects.

Furthermore, the findings do not appear to confirm previous taxonomies of threat types, as, for example, suggested by Gales (2012). Gales discusses three main threat types based on a mixture of functional and formal criteria. According to her, *direct threats* are explicit assertions of a harmful future action carried out by the speaker, *conditional threats* additionally attach a condition to this harmful future action, and *indirect threats* do not express anything about the speaker carrying out a harmful action that possibly affects an addressee in their surface structure and can often be understood as some other kind of speech act. As we have seen in the previous sections, such clear-cut distinctions cannot be applied to the majority of utterances in CoJO. And although in most of the previous studies, it is not sufficiently clarified what is meant by indirectness or veiled-ness, it seems that such a view is challenged by the present results: speakers will, for example, express a condition, but remain vague about the consequences, as in utterance (122) below. Or speakers announce some future action which they are responsible for, but remain vague about the harmfulness of this action or its effect on a possible target, as in Examples (123) and (124).

(122) I'm not going to be responsible for my behavior if you continue to aggravate me.

(123) Maybe it's time for me to get a gun, Mr. Erlich.

(124) I'll take care of you.

As is the case with many other classifications of threats (Fraser 1998, Storey 1995, Yamanaka 1995), it remains unclear whether Gales conceptualizes 'directness' in her taxonomy as the degree of direct correspondence between the form of a threat and its alleged function, and it is not specified whether there would be a clear cut-off point between what is classified as *direct* and what is classified as *indirect*, but her wording suggests that the categories are regarded as categorical differences.

Based on the present findings, I propose a scalar approach instead. Threateners might be explicit about some of the aforementioned features, for example how they refer to the participants or referents of an action, but remain vague with regard to others, for example the harmful nature of an announced action. Despite the fact that no one systematic structural pattern could be detected in the data, the findings on frequency and combinatory patterns of features discussed in this chapter suggest that the forms speakers use to realize their threats are more predictable than has been argued in the literature so far.

All in all, the present findings seem to emphasize that there is a noticeable difference in a form's frequency and its perceived saliency by both researchers and lay observers. This, too, makes an interesting case for further investigation: in how far do the actual realization patterns we find reflect speakers' perception of typicality of a threat? We need to systematically distinguish between insight into what speakers and targets perceive as typical in an abstract or metapragmatic sense and what we find as attested forms in the data. While there is clearly a close correspondence of the two – repeated use of the same forms should in a way always reflect what speakers perceive as an appropriate or effective realization strategy – the nature of meta judgements on saliency should not be confused with the actual frequencies found in the data. Therefore, another conceivable task for future research could be a design that separately⁸¹ probes collects data on emic and analytical insight into threats and their realization in order to more systematically differentiate between what speakers think a threat typically looks like and how they effectively threaten in an actual communicative setting.

In the following chapter, we will now move away from the forms of threats and instead take a closer look at their function. In this second main part of the analysis, it be further probed which different functions threats carry in discourse and, ultimately returning to our initial findings, how well these functions are reflected in the linguistic form.

81. As was previously argued, the present study combines emic and analytical judgement that is inherent in the data source (cf. Section 3.2)

The function of threats

One of the main advantages of the data that was analyzed for the present study is that it is authentic, i.e. the data was produced by speakers outside of the research project. As was discussed in Chapter 3, this has the advantage that every utterance in the corpus has a function, i.e. “was originally produced with a communicative end” (Jucker 2009: 1616). This chapter is dedicated to the systematic account and analysis of these communicative ends. Ultimately, the aim is to gain further insight into the complex relationship between the form and function of threats. Instead of the *how*, we now focus on the *why* of threatening: why do speakers threaten? Is there a uniform function of threats and can we identify this function based on contextual and formal similarities and dissimilarities?

As has also been outlined in Chapter 3, an additional advantage of the present data is that the overarching function in the sense of *illocutionary force* has already been assigned to the utterances by the language users themselves. And this judgement was then ratified by a legal entity, combining emic and analytical insight into the threats (cf. Haugh 2012: 123). This allows me to circumvent the initial questions of ‘What is the nature of a true threat?’ or ‘Which statements *count* as threats?’ (cf. Jucker 2009: 1619). After we have extensively described and analyzed the ways in which speakers *realize* their threats, we will now take a closer look at the specific contexts in which speakers actually *use* threats. The aim is to detect similarities and dissimilarities between the contexts of use that could serve as a basis for a classification of functions. Focusing on similarities and dissimilarities of contexts will help to avoid unnecessary speculation about the speakers’ intentions. Following Culpeper et al. (2003: 1552), the approach does not entail a claim “that one can reconstruct the actual intentions of speakers, but rather that ‘plausible’ intentions can be reconstructed, given adequate evidence.” And this evidence is taken from the situational descriptions found in the judicial opinions.

Compared to the form of threatening language, the function of threatening is addressed much more frequently (and systematically) in the literature. It was already discussed that in previous research threatening has often been examined as a corollary of other language uses, for example in police-citizen encounters, where threats are used by police officers to enforce citizens’ compliance or by citizens to reject orders of various kinds (Limberg 2008). It was argued that, as a consequence, the views on the functions of threatening expressed in the literature often mirror

these very specific communicative setups (cf. Section 2.3). Harris (1984: 250), for example, examines threats in courtroom discourse and argues that a threat will often have the function of “getting the defendant to *do* something”, and that, in this respect, threats often function as ‘intensified directives’. Milburn (1977) offers a very similar but more generalized view and argues that the perception of the function of threats will differ between speaker and hearer. According to him, the speaker always “focuses on his demands, i.e., upon what he hopes to accomplish by the use of the threat,” while the hearer focuses on the impending harm that is associated with the threat (Milburn 1977: 127). Put like this, Milburn implicitly identifies the fulfillment of a set of demands with the speaker’s aim and, consequently, the furthering of demands is depicted as a threat’s function. These accounts are only exemplary for the numerous studies that have discussed threats as a device for the deliberate manipulation of a target. However, it was already mentioned that this clear focus on manipulation is often an unavoidable consequence of the specific communicative contexts in which threats have been examined. The argument, as I have suggested, is, thus, often circular.

In this chapter, it will be further discussed why such a limited perspective is not able to fully capture the varied nature of the speech act of threatening. In what follows I present a speaker-based account of the function(s) of threats. The function of every threat will be determined based on either the speakers’ own indication of its function or based on additional information extracted from the judicial opinions.

The specific questions that are addressed in this part of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Can existing candidates for functions of threatening be attested in the present data?
- Can the contexts in which speakers threaten be categorized?
- Are contextual differences reflected in the form of the threats?
- Can the form of a threat serve as a predictor of its function?

In order to answer these questions, I will first argue that there is a basic contextual difference that can be used to distinguish between two macro-functions. I will outline the methodology and procedure of this analysis and provide evidence for the alternative classification (Section 5.1). I will further argue that the two functions found in CoJo systematically differ and that these differences are also reflected in the form of the respective threats (Section 5.2). In a last step, the form of the threats will be examined for its ability to serve as a predictor of function, i.e. type of threats (Section 5.4).

5.1 Assessing the point of utterance: Pre-event and post-event threats

A view of threats as a means of manipulation, as previously explained, seems to presuppose a kind of pre-event character of the threat utterance in question. In other words, the speaker uses a threat to either coerce the target into doing something or refrain from doing it in the future. All possible outcomes must be somehow under the influence of the threatener. Any form of a conditional threat overtly expresses this relation of contingency of demands and consequences, as in the Examples (125) to (127) below.

(125) If you call the police, I will kill you.

(126) If you don't pay me the \$2,500, me and the other witnesses will walk in there and say we don't know anything.

(127) Don't do anything funny or I'll be back.

In all three utterances the speakers clearly denote what they want the target to do or not to do, namely refrain from calling the police in Example (125), pay a considerable amount of money in Example (126) or continue to behave cooperatively in Example (127). The function of threats like these is deducible from the content of the threats alone, because all speakers spell out the behavior they desire from their targets. Additionally, the negative consequence that is contingent upon the targets' compliance is specified, namely killing them in Example (125), an unfavorable witness testimony in Example (126) and a re-appearance of the speaker in Example (127). Given that the speakers themselves denote their demands and consequences in their utterances, it seems unproblematic to designate the function of threats like these as 'manipulation'.

A similar analysis can be applied to threats that only specify a kind of desired behavior but omit the expression of a negative consequence as contingent upon the target's compliance, as in the Examples (128) and (129) below.

(128) Put all of the money into this bag. I want all of your money.

(129) Keep your human trash off my property.

Both examples are variants of directives that are clearly meant to incite (128) or deter (129) a particular action. Again, the content alone can serve as the basis for a reliable classification of the function as 'manipulation'.

However, if we look at examples like the ones in (130) to (132) below, it seems that their function cannot be designated as readily as in the examples above.

(130) You will burn in Hell for what you've done.

- (131) Judge Gibbon. I hope you are happy I have lost my family, my wife don't want me no more, I don't have no parole all because of these lies. I want to kill you as dead as am I now dead. Samuel
- (132) You snitched on me and my lawyer had it in black and white and I should have killed you.

In these three examples the speakers do not demand any kind of behavior or action. Instead they address past behavior or actions of the targets. In addition, some form of link is established between these past actions and the future actions of the speaker, sometimes explicitly through causation ('for', (130)) or implicitly through juxtaposition (131, 132). In Example (130) the speaker refers to 'what you've done' as causally related to the target's 'burning in hell'. The speaker in Example (131) lists several negative things that have befallen him for which he seemingly holds the addressee responsible. He then announces his intention to kill the target, which appears to be the consequence of the target's past actions. And the speaker in Example (132) states that the addressee "snitched on [him]" and that he should have killed him, which again insinuates a kind of 'trigger'-relation between the target's behavior and the announced harmful action by the speaker. Unlike the threats in the Examples (125) to (129), these threats appear to have a post-event character. This impression is additionally supported by the use of past tense expressions in all three statements. Referring to what the target has 'done' indicates that the targets' actions are already in the past. As a logical consequence, the uttering of these threats will not retroactively deter, for example, the target in (132) from denouncing the threatener, and likewise, whatever the target in Example (130) has done cannot be prevented anymore.

For this reason, the function these threats serve cannot be described as 'manipulation' in the same sense as in the Examples (125) to (129). Rather than pre-emptively influencing the targets' behavior it seems that speakers react to past events and refer to these events as justifications of their own actions or as having triggered or provoked a form of punishment. It can, of course, be argued that the threatener still attempts to manipulate or influence the target, only in a different way, or attempts to prevent or cause a particular emotional reaction. Arguably, this too can be described as manipulation. However, to the best of my knowledge, such a distinction between different kinds of manipulation, for example emotional and behavioral, is never discussed in the literature. No distinction is made between a threat that is uttered *before* an event and one that is uttered *after*, although, already upon first inspection, the point of occurrence appears to influence the form of the threats. This can be seen in the examples above. Instead of conditional language or mere declarations of their own intentions, the speakers of threats in Examples (130) to (132) address past behavior of the target. The examples are longer, contain more

second person pronouns and are oriented towards the target or both speaker and target rather than towards the speaker alone.

Given these apparent structural differences, it is without doubt that such examples present a challenge to the prevalent assumption that the primary function of threats is always the same kind of manipulation of future events. Instead, the findings suggest that a distinction should be made between such pre-event and post-event threats.

As was outlined above, in some cases the point of utterance in relation to the target's actions can be determined based on the wording of the utterances alone. If the speakers themselves identify the future action they want to manipulate or the past action they refer to as having triggered their own behavior, the point of utterance can be determined in relation to this action. This is illustrated in the two examples below.

(133) If I don't hear from you, I'll stop by some evening, so we can work toward justice.

(134) Van Ripper: You made a mistake. You will die hard. Your demie.

Example (133) is uttered preemptively by a speaker to get the target to contact the speaker *before* s/he has already done so. As was outlined in Chapter 2, one precondition of such attempted behavioral influence is that, most likely, the target would not act as desired under normal circumstances. The action the speaker wants to bring about is clearly denoted and expressed negatively as 'I don't hear from you'. The point of utterance is before that action, which renders this a pre-event threat. The fact that it is a pre-event threat also has consequences for the target, because the harmful action of the speaker and the desired action of the target are conceptualized as contingent upon each other. This means that both speaker and hearer manipulate the outcome of the situation with their actions: the speaker manipulates the target into an action ('hearing from them') and by compliance or non-compliance the target inherently manipulates the speaker's actions ('stopping by one evening') as well.

In comparison, the speaker in Example (134) acts *after* their target already 'made a mistake', which is an event that cannot be altered or prevented from happening anymore and, consequently, this threat is a post-event threat. As was already mentioned, it can of course be argued that the speaker is still trying to manipulate the target or the target's behavior by asserting their power. However, there is an important difference about the situation: the relation between the speaker's and the target's actions denoted in the utterance is no longer one of contingency. This means that the target's action ('having made a mistake') cannot be altered and the speaker does not offer any choice to the target that has an influence on the outcome anymore. Rather the past action appears to have brought about the impending harm

(‘dying’). For this reason, the relation between the speaker’s action and the target’s action can be described as ‘consequence’ rather than ‘contingency’.

The difference between the two types of scenarios is depicted schematically by way of the above-mentioned examples in Figure 5.1.

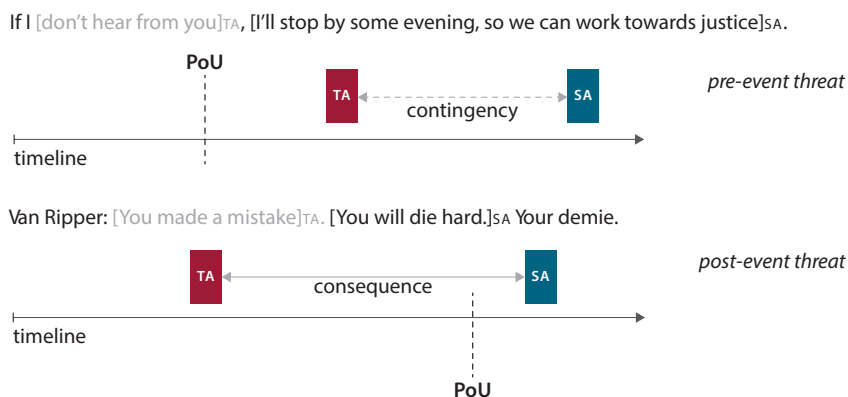


Figure 5.1 Schematic illustration of pre- vs. post-event threats; SA = speaker action, TA = target action, PoU = point of utterance

The above-outlined considerations lead me to the proposition of a general distinction between two basic macro-functions of threats based on the difference between pre-event and post-event utterances: *manipulation* and *retaliation*. These two functions are considered macro-functions because it is easily conceivable to develop a more fine-grained classification of functions. Such a classification could be based on additional external classification criteria or a more fine-grained classification of speaker goals. Similar classifications have been developed for speech acts such as apologies or compliments, where functions are often distinguished according to criteria such as (a) who compliments/apologizes (b) (to) whom (c) about what and (d) what is either the trigger or (e) the reaction to the compliment/apology (cf., e.g., Deutschmann 2003: 46; Holmes 1988: 455). As we have discussed earlier, a potential drawback of a more detailed type classification, however, is that it is often difficult to replicate.

It is proposed that the function of pre-event threats of the kind described above is ‘manipulation’ in the sense of the views expressed in most of the literature on threats. By uttering a *manipulative threat* a speaker attempts to manipulate the target’s actions in the future and the target’s actions in turn influence the speaker’s action. The action and its occurrence in relation to the point of utterance is specified either by the speakers themselves or can be clearly determined from the context as it is described in the judicial opinion. It is further proposed that the function of post-event threats is ‘retaliation’ in the sense that the threat is a reaction to the

target's action(s) that precede(s) the point of utterance. By uttering a *retaliative threat* a speaker may or may not attempt to influence the target's actions but the target's actions no longer influence the speaker's own actions. The relation between the speaker's and the target's actions changes from 'contingency' to 'consequence'. The preceding action by the target and its occurrence in relation to the point of utterance is specified either by the speakers themselves or can be clearly determined from the context as it is described in the judicial opinion.

In the following, the method of classification is outlined in more detail and, subsequently, structural differences between the two functions are discussed and illustrated with further examples.

5.1.1 Methodology

The point of utterance in relation to a particular action by the target is determined as the sole criterion in order to create an objective and reproducible classification. There are two types of classification decisions: utterance-based and context-based. Utterance-based decisions were made in all cases where the speakers themselves mention the target's action as located after or before the point of utterance. In such cases the utterance in question is classified as a manipulative or retaliative threat. Because this information is retrievable from the utterances alone, it can be used as the basis for an objectifiable and replicable category assignment, as was illustrated in the previous section. Context-based decisions were made in all cases where the wording of an utterance could not be used to precisely determine the point of utterance in relation to any of the target's actions. In such cases the context of utterance is consulted. The relevant type of contextual information is provided in the judicial opinion in the form of a case summary. This case summary is used as a basis for the context-based classification decision. The utterances in (135) and (136) should serve to illustrate context-based classification decisions.

(135) Are your uniforms bullet-proof?

(136) I am going to get you.

In both threats the speakers do not make any reference to the target's actions or specify desired behavior. Therefore, the point of utterance in relation to the target's actions cannot be determined precisely. Whether the threats in question were uttered before or after the target did something can only be disambiguated in context. This information is provided in the case summary of both utterances.

The threat in Example (135) was uttered during a protest in front of an abortion clinic. The threatener, who is a known anti-abortion activist, was one of the protesters. The threat was addressed at medical staff leaving the clinic building. In

the opinion, an account of the events as provided by all parties is summarized as follows:

[...] [The threatener] himself admitted on the witness stand that he had made the remarks about bulletproof uniforms in conjunction with references to the victims of the recent shooting at an abortion clinic in Pensacola, [...]. He also added that [...] he was trying to remind the witnesses that they could be shot also.

(Dayton v. Dunnigan, 103 Ohio App.3d 67 (1995), own emphasis)

It is evident from the context that the threat is in relation to both past and present actions of the target(s): their ongoing occupation as doctors and nurses in an abortion clinic. While the threat can be understood as a reaction to this occupation, hence post-event, the utterance is certainly also intended to manipulate the target's future behavior, i.e. getting them to quit their job. The expression 'could be shot also' expresses the mere possibility of the event. The suggestion seems to be that if the addressees resign from their job they are no longer targeted by the activists. It can be deduced from the contextual information that the threatener has a clear agenda and is trying to coerce the targets to act accordingly.

Within the criminal justice system, threats that are uttered with a comparatively clear objective often constitute a specific criminal offense. These different offenses are listed and explained in the opinions, for example 'dissuading a witness', 'intimidating a witness', 'extortion', or 'obstruction of justice'.⁸² An attempted manipulation of future actions is inherent in the alleged facts of all of these criminal offenses. For the aforementioned reasons, all threats of this kind with a clear agenda or objective on the side of the speaker were coded as manipulative.

In comparison, the threat in Example (136) was uttered in the context of a rejected application for readmission to a PhD program. The threatener, who is a former PhD-student, was expelled from his study program and was advised to re-apply. After his second application was denied he threatened three professors that were all involved in the decision to reject him. One of the professors is the target of the above-quoted threat. In the opinion, the context is summarized as follows:

On June 25, 1982, the appellant went to see Dr. Dennis about [...] his second application for readmission to the graduate program. Dr. Dennis handed the appellant a letter informing him his application had been considered and denied. [...] Shortly after this the appellant met Dr. Horst Leipold, another professor in the Department [...]. Dr. Leipold testified the appellant told him several times in a very enraged and loud voice, "I am going to get you."

(State v. Abu-Isba, 235 Kan. 851 (1984), own emphasis)

82. For example West's F.S.A. § 836.05, West's Ann.Cal.Penal Code § 136.1, or USSG, § 3C1.1, 18 U.S.C.A..

It is evident from the context that in this case the point of utterance is after something the target has done and without a clear goal of manipulation of the actions of the target in the future. The threatener does not demand anything and the target is not in control of the outcome of the situation anymore. In the opinion the relation between the actions of the target and the announced action of the threatener is depicted as one of ‘consequence’. The causal relation between the denial of readmission of the threatener and the uttering of the threat is repeatedly stressed.⁸³

In contrast to the different forms of manipulation that constitute criminal offenses, there is only one specific offense that addresses the element of reaction in post-event threats, namely ‘retaliation against a witness’.⁸⁴ This, however, only applies to situations in which the target has previously stood witness against the threatener or has provided law enforcement with information about the threatener and the threat is seen in relation to the witness testimony. For the present analysis, the concept of retaliation was applied to all cases in which the threatener acts without any clear goal of manipulation in the future but where a clear relation between the target’s past actions and the threat are identifiable. All threats of this kind were coded as retaliative.⁸⁵

In summary, two functions of threats are distinguished. The distinction is based solely on the difference between the point of utterance that is either pre-event or post-event and is conceptualized as the difference between the macro-functions of manipulation and retaliation.

5.1.2 Results and discussion

Of the 301 threat utterances in CoJO a total of 139 were uttered before both speaker and target action and the speaker action is understood as contingent upon the target action. The remaining 162 of the threats were uttered after a specific target action and before the speaker action, changing the relation between the two actions from contingency to consequence. The proportion of each function is illustrated in Figure 5.2.

83. It is, of course, possible to argue that ‘readmission to the study program’ is the threatener’s agenda and that, for this reason, the threat is also *manipulative*. The wish for that outcome, however, is nowhere specified by the threatener or indicated as plausible by one of the targets. In addition to that, it seems to be common sense that the specific relationship between a PhD candidate and their advisor(s) should not be enforced.

84. For example 18 U.S. Code § 1513.

85. All cases where neither the utterance itself nor the judicial opinion contained any relevant information on speaker action, target action and point of utterance that could be used for a classification decision were excluded from the analysis of both form and function beforehand.

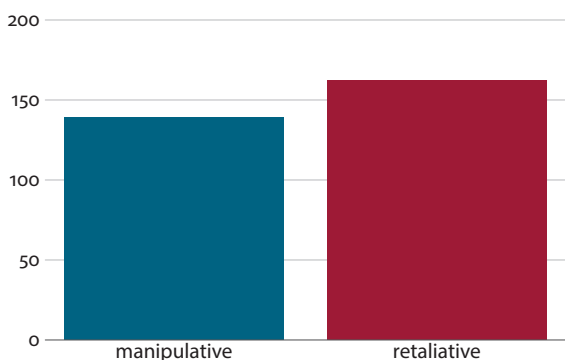


Figure 5.2 Distribution of manipulative and retaliative threats (N = 301)

As indicated by the figures and illustrated in the plot, both functions occur comparably frequently in the corpus: 46.2% of the threats were coded as manipulative and 53.8% were coded as retaliative. The relatively even distribution in a random sample of authentic threats suggests that neither of the two functions is markedly dominant, i.e. that both functions are used by speakers with a comparable probability. At the same time, the result presents another challenge to the prevalent assumption that threats are primarily uttered to manipulate the target into some specific future behavior or action. Apparently, speakers utter threats just as frequently in reaction to some past behavior to express their wish to retaliate or vent their anger or frustration. As we have outlined in Section 2.3, this possibility has rarely been addressed for threats in the respective literature.

In order to find further evidence in support of the two-fold distinction that was outlined above, in the following, systematic differences in the form of manipulative pre-event and retaliative post-event threats are examined. Based on these structural differences, it will be argued that manipulative and retaliative threats indeed constitute two fundamentally different threat types with distinct functions.

5.2 The form of manipulative and retaliative threats

The relation between a temporal sequence of specific events and the form and function of a speech act has been discussed for other speech acts as well. Apologies, for example, have been distinguished into ‘Anticipatory’ and ‘Retrospective’, with different sub-categories, depending on whether the apologies are uttered before or after any offense they remedy (cf. Aijmer 1996: 98). On the basis of this difference, Aijmer classifies apologies into “two major groups” (Aijmer 1996: 98) that are described as serving distinct functions which manifest in structural differences:

“[w]hile the function of the anticipatory apology is ‘disarming’ or ‘softening’, the retrospective apology is remedial, supportive (face-saving) and self-demeaning” (Aijmer 1996: 99). In other words, the point of utterance determines the function(s) of an apology and the specific function intricately influences the speakers’ linguistic choices (cf., e.g. Aijmer 1996; Deutschmann 2003).

Accordingly, it is expected for pre-event and post-event threats to display structural differences that can be systematically related to their different point of utterance and, hence, their function. In order to more closely examine systematic structural differences between manipulative and retaliative threats, in the following, we will look at the distribution of all previously analyzed linguistic features across the two functions. The underlying assumption is that if manipulation and retaliation are indeed two distinct functions of threats, these differences should be somehow reflected in the speakers’ choices of how to formulate their threats. It is expected that each of the two functions be characterized by a particular combination of features.

As a first step and to eliminate the possibility of conflated categories, the distribution of the two macro-functions across personal and non-personal threats was examined. As was discussed in Section 4.6, for personal threats, an existing relationship between threatener and target is presupposed while non-personal threats are characterized by a target that is not personally known to the threatener. From what we have discussed so far, it could be assumed that personal threats are generally more likely to serve a retaliative function and that the two categories are conflated because past events often presuppose a shared history of some kind. As can be seen from the contingency table illustrated in Figure 5.3, however, this is not the case.

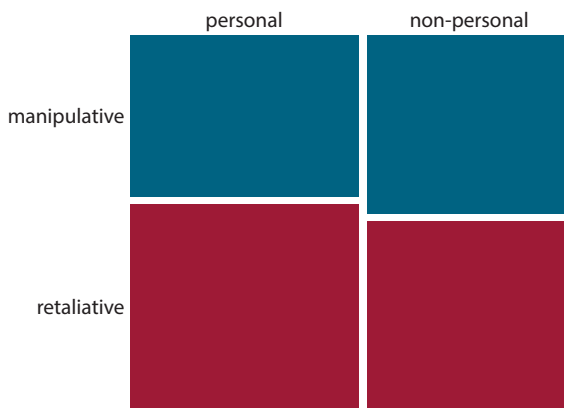


Figure 5.3 Distribution of manipulative and retaliative function across personal and non-personal threats (N = 301)

The plot clearly indicates that the two functions are distributed almost evenly across personal and non-personal threats, with only a minor difference for personal threats. However, the Chi-squared test does not provide evidence that this difference is statistically significant ($\text{Chi}^2 = 0.459$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p = 0.4981$). This means that the relationship between the threatener and the target does not appear to have an influence on the function of the threat.

The analysis in Section 4.6 indicated that the relationship between the threatener and the target appears to influence the form of threats and the finding is in line with expectations raised by previous analyses of other speech acts. The present finding suggests that the function of a threat is not overtly biased by whether the threatener and the target know each other personally or not. With regard to what has been claimed about the influence of power on (manipulative) threats, this finding challenges two views: (1) that “unconditional threats, i.e. those which contain no explicit or implicit condition, are fairly uncommon” (Harris 1984: 250) and (2) that power asymmetry is a prerequisite for manipulative threatening (cf. Culpeper 2008, 2011; Harris 1984; Limberg 2008, 2009). The latter view is challenged because manipulative threats occur just as often in power symmetric relationships (personal) as in asymmetric relationships (non-personal). And the former assumption is challenged because almost half of the threats in CoJO are retaliative, i.e. uttered without an explicit or implicit condition to be fulfilled.

5.2.1 Conditionality

As was outline above, manipulative is understood as ‘uttered with a clear objective or intent to manipulate future actions or behavior of the addressee’. This intent must be deducible either from the wording of the utterance alone or from the context. The relationship between the actions of the target and the actions of the threatener is thus one of contingency. For these reasons, it is expected that threats with a manipulative function often more explicitly denote the demands and consequences of the threatener, i.e. more frequently contain different forms of conditional language. The distribution of CONDITIONALITY across manipulative and retaliative threats is illustrated in Figure 5.4.

In line with our expectations, CONDITIONALITY is much more frequent in manipulative threats. A form of conditional language occurs in 44.6% of the threats with this function. As was repeatedly stressed, in the literature, threats that contain a form of conditional language have often been considered the prototypical form of threatening and, hence, conditional language is often considered a defining feature of threats. We have earlier questioned the validity of this assumption, but the present findings suggest that this might be a more adequate conception of threats with a manipulative function. Conditional language does not reach the status of a

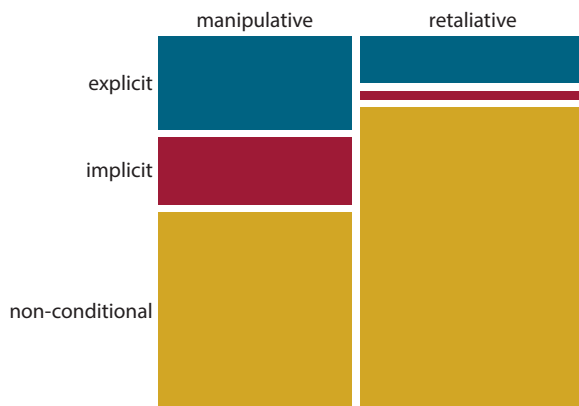


Figure 5.4 Distribution of *CONDITIONALITY* across manipulative and retaliative function ($\text{Chi}^2 = 35.352$, $\text{df} = 2$, $p < 0.0001$), ($N = 301$)

conventional component of threatening language in general, but *CONDITIONALITY* appears to be a salient feature of manipulative threats.⁸⁶

It has to be noted, however, that the use of the feature is not restricted to manipulative threats. There are a small number of threats with a retaliative function that also contain an instance of *CONDITIONALITY*. Examples of this can be found in utterance (137) to (139) below.

- (137) I may have to do all my ten (10) years, but if I ever get out of here and nothing happen to me while I am in here, you will never be able to be prejudice and racist against another Puerto Rican like me.
- (138) I may not kill you, but if I were you, I would keep my doors locked because once this gets started, I don't know what's going to happen.
- (139) If I don't kill you myself, I am not a man.

From the examples it is evident that conditional language is used differently in threats with a retaliative function. In all three examples a conditional clause is used not to denote demands and consequences, but to express temporal conditions, as in Example (137), to refer to counterfactual scenarios, as in Example (138), or to express 'rhetorical conditions', as in Example (139).

86. Of course, this argument runs the same risk of a logical fallacy that I have earlier criticized in previous accounts: threats are 'manipulative' if they denote demands and consequences; manipulative threats express demands and consequences with conditional language; thus conditional language is a prototypical feature of manipulative threats. The main advantage of the previous account is that the assumption is based on empirical results rather than on fabricated examples or anecdotal evidence. Nevertheless, the assumption should be verified by further research.

To summarize, there is an increased probability that threats with a manipulative function contain a form of **CONDITIONALITY**. Based on its frequency and distribution, however, the feature still cannot be considered pervasive in threatening language, neither for threats with a manipulative nor for threats with a retaliative function.

5.2.2 Futurity

As was previously discussed, the expression of **FUTURITY** is the most frequent feature in the corpus. Consequently, it is expected that the feature occur comparably frequently with both manipulative and retaliative threats. As for the distribution of the different variants, it was discussed in Section 4.3.2 that their occurrence is determined by syntactic as well as semantic factors. The different forms of **FUTURITY** express a scalar degree of predictive strength and, hence, speaker commitment: *will* displays the weakest predictive strength, *be going to* displays an increased predictive strength and *present futurate* constitutes the strongest form of prediction (cf., e.g., Bergs 2010: 218). For this reason, it is expected that the different forms be distributed unevenly across the two functions. Their distribution should allow for more insight into the functional differences between manipulative and retaliative threats. Figure 5.5 depicts the distribution of all forms of the feature across both functions.

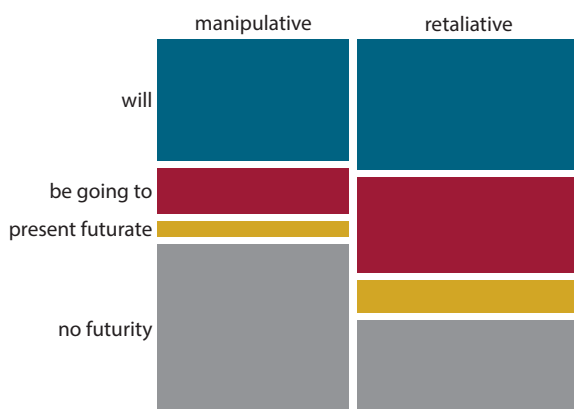


Figure 5.5 Distribution of **FUTURITY** across threats with a manipulative and retaliative function ($\text{Chi}^2 = 19.688$, $\text{df} = 3$, $p = 0.0001$), ($N = 301$)

The figure shows that, as expected, the feature is overall rather frequent in threats with both functions, but even more frequent in retaliative threats. Roughly 51% of all manipulative threats contain an instance of **FUTURITY** and more than 73% of all

retaliative threats do. The figure further shows that the variant *will* is used just as often with both functions: 34.5% of manipulative threats contain the form, compared to 37% of the retaliative threats. This result supports the previous arguments that *FUTURITY* as such is a pervasive feature of threatening language and that the variant *will* can be used in a wide range of contexts. The remaining two variants are distributed differently. There are almost twice as many instances of *be going to* and *present futurate* in retaliative threats compared to threats with a manipulative function. Just like *CONDITIONALITY* is a salient feature of manipulative threats, *FUTURITY* and especially the variants *be going to* and *present futurate* are salient features of retaliative threats. The question is whether these distributional properties can be linked to functional differences. In order to answer this question, we need to return to the semantic properties of the different futurate forms.

The variant *will* was described as displaying a weaker predictive strength, which means a general temporal imminence but with a minimized commitment by the speaker. It was argued that this could be one explanation why *will* is the most frequently used variant. We can see from the distribution across the two functions that *will* remains the optimal candidate regardless of whether speakers are trying to manipulate future behavior of the target or retaliate for past actions.

Compared to *will*, both *be going to* and *present futurate* express a heightened predictive strength. The fact that speakers use variants with an increased predictive strength in retaliative threats leads to the assumption that speakers characterize the announced actions as more imminent, already set in motion or inevitable, which is exactly what both *be going to* and *present futurate* express. In comparison, threats with a manipulative function appear to hedge the responsibility of the speaker more carefully. One explanation might be that speakers who aim at manipulating someone's future actions are more focused on maintaining plausible deniability (cf. Solan & Tiersma 2005: 204). In other words, the threatener is trying to get the target to do something without being overtly recognizable as forcing them. Weizman (1989: 71) summarizes the dilemma of such attempted manipulation as revolving around the question of how speakers "both try to enjoy its outcome and deny having made [a threat]". This view is additionally supported by the fact that utterances that contain no futurate expression at all (no futurity) are almost twice as often manipulative (48%) as they are retaliative (27%).

In addition, manipulative threats of the above-described kind often do not contain *CONDITIONALITY* or any of the other features, as is illustrated in Example (140) and (141) below.

(140) Give the kids my love.

(141) This is Inglewood 13, homey, and I'm Pequeno Peligroso.

The two examples are representative of what we have called the ‘vague end’ of a scale of pragmatic explicitness, utterances that do not clearly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of a threatening scenario. Their interpretation as threats highly depends on contextual embedding and the interpretation of the target. At the same time such vague threats facilitate a greater degree of plausible deniability. The combination of these two properties appears to be the optimal strategy for manipulative threats. Compared to that, retaliative threats appear to put less emphasis on achieving plausible deniability and instead focus on the expression of determination, which can be seen from the heightened predictive strength that is expressed in these utterances.

5.2.3 Type of verb, agent-patient relation and orientation of threat

As was outlined in Section 4.4, in the present study the verbs used to threaten were categorized as violent, ambiguous or non-violent. Additionally, four sub-types of violent verbs were distinguished: kill verbs, force verbs, destroy verbs, and verbs of death and dying. The categories were assigned according to whether or not the verb in question lexicalizes a resultative state of death, whether it is an agentive verb and whether it is directed at an animate or an inanimate target. It was found that, overall, violent verbs (53%) are distinctly more frequent in the corpus than ambiguous (23%) or non-violent verbs (23%). The majority are kill verbs (25% of all verbs), which occurs as often as both ambiguous and non-violent verbs (cf. Figure 4.6). The results taken together were interpreted to suggest that speakers predominantly announce their actions with verbs that clearly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of a threatening scenario. The pragmatically most explicit form, namely kill verbs are indeed a characteristic feature of threatening language, as has been suggested by previous literature (cf. Gales 2010; Salgueiro 2010).

It is therefore expected that violent verbs occur in both manipulative and retaliative threats. With regard to the distribution of the different variants, we expect a result parallel to the previous findings: if retaliative threats are focused less on maintaining plausible deniability, we expect more kill and force verbs, since the two types of verbs lexicalize an agentive structure, the exertion of force and/or a resultative state of death. Figure 5.6 below illustrates the distribution of all types of verbs across both functions.

The plot shows that threats of both functions contain violent, ambiguous and non-violent verbs; their individual frequency and distribution, however, seems to be almost inverted. We can see that kill verbs and force verbs appear to be more frequently used in retaliative threats and non-violent verbs are used almost three times as often in manipulative threats. At the same time, verbs that are ambiguous

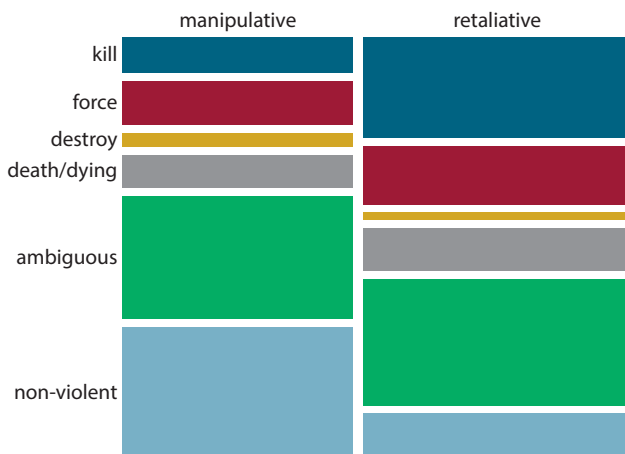


Figure 5.6 Distribution of TYPE OF VERB across threats with manipulative and retaliative function (Fisher's Exact Test, $p < 0.0005$), (N = 301)

verbs, destroy verbs and verbs of death and dying are used comparably frequently in threats of both functions.

The results appear to be in line with our previously established assumptions on the different aims of manipulative and retaliative threats. We have argued that threats that are primarily intended to manipulate future behavior of the target are often worded more vaguely and contain features that allow for the maintaining of plausible deniability. Accordingly, manipulative threats contain less kill verbs and force verbs and more non-violent verbs, as in the Examples (142) and (143) below.

(142) Be Aware Be Fair.

(143) Have you done any fishing lately?

Again, the interpretation of such utterances as threats depends to a great extent on contextual embedding, shared knowledge and the target's interpretation of the utterance. The risk of going unnoticed is clearly higher with such pragmatically vague threats. Simultaneously, as was argued, vagueness and context-dependency facilitates a greater degree of plausible deniability. In both utterances the speakers do not announce any harmful action that they will carry out and, thus, could not be held liable on the grounds of the utterance alone.

In comparison, retaliative threats almost twice as often contain violent verbs that clearly denote an agentive, forceful action that is directed at a target and in the majority of cases also lexicalizes a resultative state of death, as in Example (144).

- (144) Hey, Bitch, I'm on Redondo. I'm coming for you. You're going to die. You understand you're going to die. I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill fucking everybody. Your whole place is going to burn to hell. Die.

As is illustrated by this example, threats of this kind often additionally contain other features such as TABOO LANGUAGE, clearly denote both agent and patient of the announces action and are characterized by repetition and perspicuity of language. The speaker of a threat like the one in Example (144) has no grounds on which s/he could deny having threatened the person s/he is addressing.⁸⁷ At the same time, the choice of words increases the likelihood of being understood as having issued a threat, compared to Example (142) or (143).

The comparably frequent use of ambiguous verbs, destroy verbs and verbs of death and dying can be explained similarly. The ambiguous verbs found in the corpus, such as *get* or *take care of*, allow for both a violent and a non-violent interpretation. This means that while they do depend on contextual embedding, their interpretation does not necessarily require specific shared knowledge of target and threatener, as in the examples below.

- (145) Thanks a lot, dog. I'm going to get you, dog.

- (146) I will take care of him personally.

Embedded in context, both utterances can easily be understood as announcements of future harmful action, i.e. for the speaker, the chance of being understood by the target as making a threat increases. Yet, the violent meaning component of both *get* and *take care of* is not lexicalized, i.e. for the speaker, the chance of having to assume responsibility for making a threat is minimized. Apparently, ambiguous verbs are preferred by speakers to balance the chance of being understood by the target with the risk of being held responsible without evidently compromising one of these aims. This would explain their equally frequent use in threats with a retaliative and threats with a manipulative function. As for the distribution of destroy verbs and verbs of death and dying across threats with both functions, it can be assumed that the omission of either an animate target (destroy verbs) or an agent (verbs of death and dying) makes these verbs suitable for both functions. The overall comparably low frequency, however, indicates that they are not pervasive features of either of the two threat functions.

For the related features ORIENTATION OF THREAT and AGENT-PATIENT RELATION, it is expected that these tendencies will further manifest themselves.

87. In fact, the issue under discussion in such cases is often the degree of seriousness with which a threatener utters a threat and whether or not s/he intends to actually carry out the threatened action.

Figure 5.7 plots the distribution of both variables and, as expected, there is a corresponding effect visible in both plots (ORIENTATION OF THREAT: $\text{Chi}^2 = 16.173$, $\text{df} = 3$, $p = 0.0010$; AGENT-PATIENT RELATION: $\text{Chi}^2 = 14.913$, $\text{df} = 4$, $p = 0.0048$).

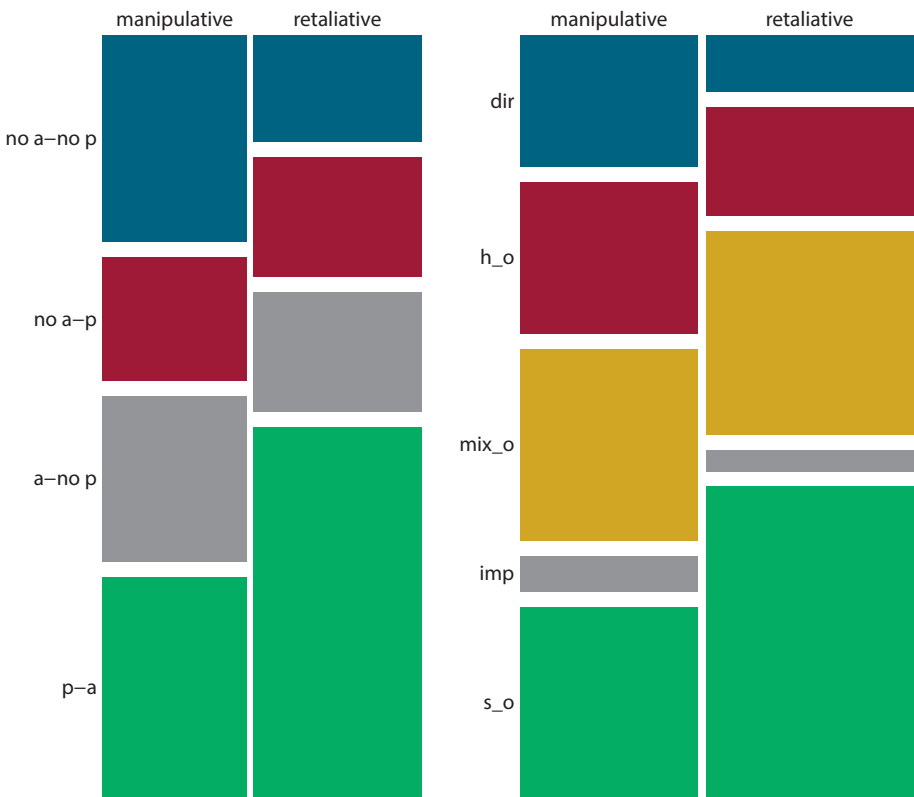


Figure 5.7 Distribution of ORIENTATION OF THREAT and AGENT-PATIENT RELATION across threats with a manipulative and retaliative function; a = agent, p = patient; right panel = directive, hearer-oriented, mixed-oriented, impersonal, speaker-oriented, ($N = 301$)

In Figure 5.7, the left panel illustrates the distribution of the four participant patterns that were distinguished in Section 4.4.2: no agent–no patient, no agent–patient, agent–no patient and agent–patient. We can see that the distribution is again inverted for the two extremes, namely both participants explicitly denoted and neither participant denoted in the threat. The reference to both participants at the same time is more frequent in retaliative threats, compared to the omission of both participants, which is more frequent in manipulative threats. Again, threats with a manipulative function reside at the vague end of the scale of pragmatic explicitness, whereas threats with a retaliative function reside at the explicit end of expressing

the who-does-what-to-whom of the action. Both middle courses, i.e. threats where one of the participants is omitted, are comparably frequent. This indicates that they are not characterized by any evident functional differences.

The right panel shows the distribution of the different types of orientation of the threat that were distinguished in Section 4.4.3: speaker-oriented, hearer-oriented, mixed-oriented, directive, and impersonal. If we compare the distribution of the different types across the two functions, we can see that threats with a manipulative function are more frequently hearer oriented and twice as often in the form of a directive. In comparison, retaliative threats are almost twice as often speaker-oriented and a little more frequently mixed-oriented. Taken together, these differences in perspective appear to indicate that threats with a manipulative function are more focused on the hearer/target whereas retaliative threats are presumably more focused on the speaker/threatener. Given what we have previously established about the relationships between speaker and target action in pre-event and post-event threats, the change in focus mirrors the difference between a relationship of 'contingency' and one of 'consequence'. Manipulative threats are primarily aimed at getting the target to (not) do something and the announcement of potential harm is contingent upon the target's actions. Directives and hearer-oriented threats presumably best express a clear focus on what the target has to do, as is illustrated in Example (147) and (148) below. Retaliative threats are primarily announcements of a harmful action by the speaker and the target's actions are often only referred to as a form of trigger for any negative consequences. Threats that are speaker-oriented or mixed-oriented presumably best express this focus on the speaker's own actions, as is illustrated in Example (149) and (150).

(147) Keep your human trash off my property.

(148) If you are afraid for Alexander and his life in this case you must do right for your son, you must pay.

(149) I will get that prosecutor, Seth Weber, for doing this to me and Neeson for fucking up our getaway trip for that weekend.

(150) You snitched on me and my lawyer had it in black and white and I should have killed you.

In both utterance (148) and (149) the focus is on the target actions and the target's compliance with what the speaker demands. Compared to that, utterances (149) and (150) both highlight the speakers' own actions and mention the targets' actions only as a trigger.

To summarize, the distribution of TYPE OF VERB, AGENT-PATIENT RELATION and ORIENTATION OF THREAT across the two functions of threats is in line with our previous observation that manipulative threats are more often situated at the vague end of a scale of pragmatic explicitness. These threats are characterized by

a considerably more frequent use of non-violent verbs, the omission of reference to both agent and patient, and are more frequently hearer-oriented or directive. Compared to this, retaliative threats more often contain violent verbs, more often clearly denote both agent and patient of that action and are more frequently speaker-oriented or mixed-oriented.

5.2.4 Common lexical elements: Pronouns, taboo language and mention of weapons

In this subsection, we look at the distribution of the remaining features: 1PP and 2PP, TABOO LANGUAGE and MENTION OF WEAPONS. As was outlined in Section 4.5, these features occur with varying frequency in the corpus and we discussed their functional differences. By looking at their distribution across the different threat functions, we will gain more insight into their role in threatening language in general.

First, we will look at the use of 1PP and 2PP. First and second person pronouns were analyzed for the present study because both are standardly used to refer to the participant roles of speaker/threatener and hearer/target, i.e. the potential participants of an announced future action. Additionally, they have been discussed as potentially indicating the primary focus of threats in previous research. However, this view was rejected by the present findings since the distribution of 1PP and 2PP showed no significant effect, i.e. no bias towards either speaker/threatener or hearer/target appears to be reflected by an increased use of the respective pronoun. For this reason, no significant effect in the distribution of pronouns across manipulative and retaliative threats is expected. Figure 5.8 plots the distribution of 1PP (left panel) and 2PP (right panel) across both functions.

We can see from the plot that the use of 2PP (right panel) is not significantly influenced by the threat's function. The distribution of 1PP (left panel), however, does show a small effect: retaliative threats contain more 1PP compared manipulative to threats. The finding is in line with what was discussed in the previous section, namely that retaliative threats are less focused on what the hearer/target does and more focused on the speaker/threatener. The fact that we do not find a corresponding effect for 2PP in manipulative threats can presumably be explained by referring back to the analysis of ORIENTATION OF THREAT. Manipulative and retaliative threats may differ in their orientation but they do not differ in how frequently they refer to the hearer/target by using 2PP. The difference is illustrated in Examples (151) and (152).

(151) Patty, you have not seen violence yet until you see what we do to you.

(152) I'll personally kill you when I get out of prison.

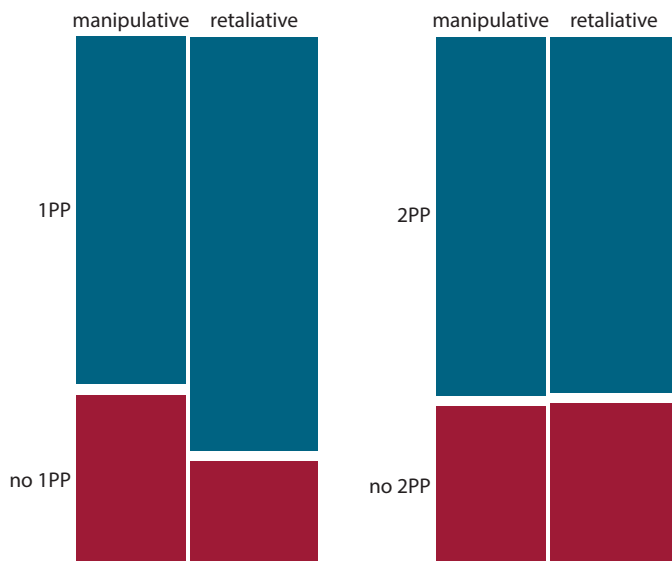


Figure 5.8 Distribution of 1PP and 2PP across threats with manipulative and retaliative function (1PP: $\chi^2 = 5.6161$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.0178$; 2PP: $\chi^2 = 9.8133e-31$, $df = 1$, $p = 1$), ($N = 301$)

Example (151) is a manipulative threat and Example (152) is a retaliative threat. Both examples contain instances of 1PP and 2PP and only differ in their orientation. Example (151) is hearer-oriented and Example (152) is speaker-oriented.

Overall, the present results confirm our previous conclusion that an analysis of pronoun frequency by itself is rather unrewarding. Although we see an effect for the distribution of 1PP, this effect is considerably small and can only be interpreted consistently with regard to the prior analysis of ORIENTATION OF THREAT.

Let us now turn to the use of TABOO LANGUAGE. It was discussed in Section 4.5.2 that various forms of taboo words are used by speakers to aggravate the offensive character of their threat (cf. Culpeper 2011: 154). For this reason, and because the use of TABOO LANGUAGE is often triggered by strong emotions like anger or frustration (cf. Jay 2009: 155), an increased frequency of the feature in retaliative threats is expected. The distribution is illustrated in Figure 5.9.

We can see that the feature is distributed as expected: retaliative threats contain roughly twice as many instances of TABOO LANGUAGE as manipulative threats. Given what we have already established about the two functions, this finding is not surprising. We have argued that retaliative threats are characterized by a heightened predictive strength, an increased use of violent verbs, and are more often speaker-oriented or mixed-oriented. They are pragmatically explicit with regard to

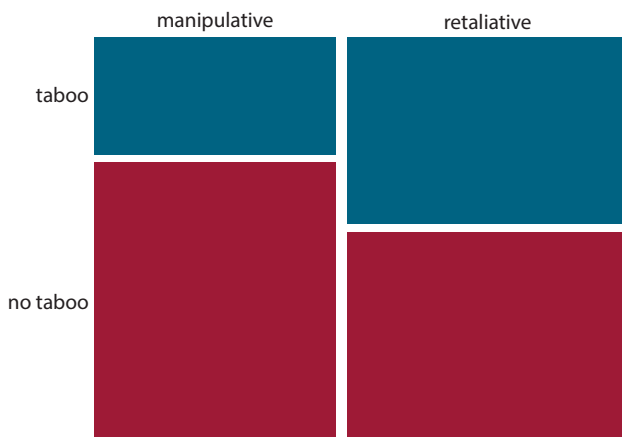


Figure 5.9 Distribution of TABOO LANGUAGE across threats with manipulative and retaliative function ($\text{Chi}^2 = 8.832$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p = 0.0029$), ($N = 301$)

almost all of features we have discussed. Only the use of CONDITIONALITY marks an exception here. Using swear words, insults and the like additionally highlights the explicitly offensive nature of the threat utterance. This would additionally support the previous argument that speakers who utter a retaliative threat are more focused on venting anger or frightening the target than on manipulating the target's future behavior. At the same time, the use of TABOO LANGUAGE in threats with a manipulative function can be interpreted as a power-intensifying device. By using TABOO LANGUAGE the speakers additionally highlight their powerful position, thereby increasing the chance of a successful threat, i.e. compliance by the target (cf. Culpeper 2011).

With regard to the different functions that can be assigned to TABOO LANGUAGE, it was previously established that the most frequent function found in the data are personal insults, followed by the emphatic use of taboo words as intensifying devices. The remaining three functions, cursing expressions, verbal expressions and idiomatic expressions, are found relatively infrequent in the corpus. The functions are illustrated in the examples below. One instance of TABOO LANGUAGE is highlighted in bold print and its respective function is indicated in square brackets.

- (153) You need to worry about 245 on deputy sheriff ... With this **motherfucker** knife I have.
[Emphatic intensifier]
- (154) It's a gun, **stupid**.
[Personal insult referring to a definite entity]

- (155) **Fuck you.** I hate you. You STD bitch. I know where you grew up. I've got something for you.
[Cursing expletive and personal insult referring to a definite entity]
- (156) ... shit! I'll **fuck you up!** I don't give a fuck about going back to the pen! I got connections, bro! My family is Mafia! Mafia!
[Verbal form and idiomatic 'set phrase']

Let us now look at the distribution of the functions across manipulative and retaliative threats, as illustrated in Figure 5.10.

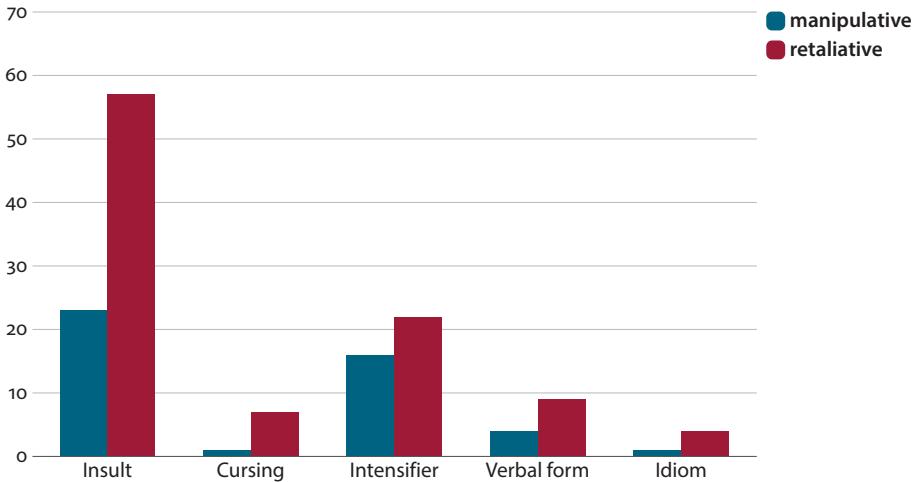


Figure 5.10 Distribution of functions of TABOO LANGUAGE across threats with manipulative and retaliative function (n = 144)

We can see from the plot that all functions of TABOO LANGUAGE more frequently occur in retaliative threats compared to manipulative threats: personal insults, cursing expletives, emphatic intensifiers, verbal uses of swear words and idiomatic 'set phrases'. However, although the image suggests that the different types of TABOO LANGUAGE are distributed differently across manipulative and retaliative threats, Fisher's exact test does not provide evidence that this difference is significant ($p = 0.4167$). We are looking at mere tendencies that would have to be verified by investigating larger data sets.

The fact that all functions of TABOO LANGUAGE are more frequently found in retaliative threats is in line with our previous observations that the primary aim of such threats is to ensure that the threat is acknowledged by the target, to highlight its offensiveness and not to conceal the intent from the addressee. Because threats of this type are uttered in reaction to past actions by the target, the context of utterance is often characterized by strong emotions on the side of the speaker,

like anger, frustration, or the wish for revenge. This is mirrored in the particularly frequent use of emphatic intensifiers, cursing expressions and verbal forms in retaliative threats. As was discussed in Section 4.5.2, it is predominantly such strong emotions like anger and frustration that trigger the use of swear words or TABOO LANGUAGE (cf. Jay 2009: 155).

In Section 2.3.2, we have already touched upon the difference between *coercive* and *affective* impoliteness (cf. Culpeper 2011). Culpeper (2011: 221) suggests that affective impoliteness is a form of hostile, verbal aggression that is connected to heightened emotions, such as anger or frustration and becomes a form of impoliteness if it is directed at someone. Additionally, affective impoliteness is often used by speakers in reaction to something. As Jay (1992: 106) argues, “retribution is what swearing, cursing, and insulting is all about.” With regard to the present findings, it appears that in retaliative threats speakers more often use affective impoliteness. This view is additionally supported by a distinction Beebe (1995) makes in her account of *instrumental rudeness*, a predecessor concept of impoliteness. Beebe (1995: 154) claims that instrumental rudeness essentially “serves two functions: to get power and to vent negative feelings.” The present findings suggest that this functional distinction is mirrored in retaliative and manipulative threats: while the former are more focused on ‘getting power’ the latter appear to be more about ‘venting negative feelings’.

In summary, there seem to be two overall motivations for speakers to use TABOO LANGUAGE in threats. It can function as a form of affective impoliteness and for the venting of negative emotions, such as anger or frustration, as described above. As such the use of TABOO LANGUAGE can fulfill a ‘cathartic’ function for the speaker (cf. Jay 1992, 2000) and at the same time increase the offensiveness of an utterance (cf. Culpeper 2011). Additionally, TABOO LANGUAGE can also function as a form of power-assertion (cf. Beebe 1995; Culpeper 2008, 2011; Locher 2004; Limberg 2008). While the latter function is rather reflected in manipulative threats, it appears that retaliative threats are more frequently focused on the affective use of swear words, insults, or other forms of TABOO LANGUAGE. Retaliative threats are uttered in reaction to past actions of the target often in emotionally charged contexts. Consequently, the use of TABOO LANGUAGE in retaliative threats can be interpreted as a form of ‘emotional discharge of the speakers’ (Limberg 2009: 1378) as opposed to a form of intensification or power-assertion in manipulative threats.

The last feature that was inspected for its role in threatening language is MENTION OF WEAPONS, i.e. the reference to weaponry and semantically related items in threat utterances (cf. Section 4.5.3). It was found that although in specific context types speakers employ MENTION OF WEAPONS as a form of vague hint at their abilities or preconditions of acting upon a threat, this use of the feature is overall rather infrequent. It was further discussed that MENTION OF WEAPONS is predominantly

used in utterances that are vague with regard to the other features as well, i.e. with regard to agent, patient, point in time, demands and consequences or negative actions that are contingent upon these demands.

For the current analysis, it is expected that MENTION OF WEAPONS is more frequent in manipulative threats, because the feature is used by speakers as a vague and contextually very restricted, thus opaque, form of threat. The distribution of the feature across both functions is plotted in Figure 5.11 below.

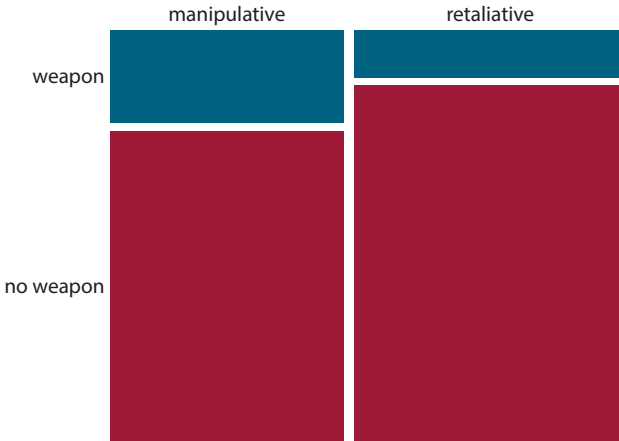


Figure 5.11 Distribution of MENTION OF WEAPONS across threats with retaliative and manipulative function ($\text{Chi}^2 = 6.0011$, $\text{df} = 1$, $p = 0.0143$), ($N = 301$)

We can see from the plot that the feature occurs as expected, i.e. almost twice as often in manipulative as in retaliative threats. It was discussed earlier that there are roughly three kinds of statements about weapons in the corpus that either occur on their own or are combined: statements about the possession, acquisition or use of weapons, statements about the abilities and intentions of the speakers in relation to weapons and, thirdly, statements about the general properties of weaponry and related entities. The different kinds of statements are illustrated in the Examples (157) to (159) below.

- (157) I have a gun and I'm not afraid to use it.
- (158) I was right there in Barnes Hospital when ... Sergeant Dodge brought in a [sic] Bob Stanze. With that cemetery blue look. I think Deebea would look about right that color. I can hit what I'm aiming at for 400 f- -ing yards.
- (159) Silencers are quite often found in Europe than they are in this country. The reason there good is they don't wake up the children.

All three examples are manipulative threats. In the first two examples, the speakers mention their possession of a gun, their state of mind, and their ability to use weaponry. In the third example, the speaker states something about the properties of firearm equipment, thereby highlighting his expertise or routine in dealing with these. By mentioning these abilities or this kind of knowledge, the speakers presumably pursue the same goal: to strengthen their position as more powerful in order to increase the likelihood of compliance by the target. At the same time, rather vague threats as in Example (159) ensure maintaining plausible deniability for the speaker. As was discussed earlier, the specificity of the contexts in which utterances like the ones in (157) to (159) are used as threats leads us to conclude that any potential demands and consequences are mutually known by both speaker/threatener and addressee/target. In a bank robbery scenario, for example, it is known what the robber demands and what negative consequences might be upon the target in the case of non-cooperativeness or non-compliance. By highlighting the possession of a firearm, the robber stresses their ability to act upon the implicit threat of physical harm and strengthens their more powerful position.⁸⁸

In comparison, speakers in retaliative threats often mention their possession of or expertise in dealing with weaponry in order to additionally highlight the offensiveness of their utterance or to stress their determination to act upon their threat. In line with this, mentioning of weapons has been discussed in the literature as a typical feature that indicates a greater disposition to physical violence and hints at an increased likelihood of execution of a threat (cf. Turner & Gelles 2003, Section 2.2.4). The utterances (160) and (161) below are examples of this.

(160) You're lucky I don't got my gun, bitch, or I'd kill you

(161) I'm going to bring a gun to school tomorrow and shoot everyone and start with you. Maybe not you first.

In both examples, the speakers utter their threat in an already conflictive situation and in reaction to past behavior of the target. In Example (160) the target denied the threatener shared custody of their child and in Example (161) the speaker threatens a classmate after being bullied. Both utterances additionally contain some of the other features: violent verbs, futurate expressions, taboo words and a clear reference to agent and patient of the announced harmful action. Mentioning a weapon only aggravates the already rather explicit threats, whereas in the Examples (157) to (159) the feature constitutes a threat on its own.

88. It is not surprising that it has been argued that threats of this kind are prototypical threats (cf. Yamanaka 1995), because the knowledge to understand a robbery scenario is not specific knowledge only the participants of the above described scenario have but can be considered a kind of 'world knowledge'.

Overall, the present findings are in line with the previous observation that the infrequent and context-specific use of MENTION OF WEAPONS suggests a rather marginal role of the feature for threatening language in general. It was argued that especially in scenarios where the demands and (negative) consequences are shared knowledge between threatener and target utterances that contain a reference to weaponry or semantically related actions or entities can strengthen the position of the threatener as more powerful. For this reason, the feature is more frequently found in manipulative threats.

To summarize, the distribution of 1PP and 2PP, TABOO LANGUAGE and MENTION OF WEAPONS appears to confirm our previous observations that manipulative threats are pragmatically more vague than retaliative threats with regard to the who-does-what-to-whom of a threatening scenario. Threats with a manipulative function contain less first person pronouns and more instances of MENTION OF WEAPONS, without any clear expression of demands and/or negative consequences, which were analyzed as a very specific type of opaque hint. Compared to this, retaliative threats contain significantly more forms of TABOO LANGUAGE, and especially more instances of personal insults and curse forms, which can be interpreted to indicate the highly emotional charge of threats of this kind.

5.2.5 Summary

Recapitulating the observations made so far, it has to be noted that the distribution of the different features across manipulative and retaliative threats mirrors the previous impression that the majority of threats in CoJO can be placed at the extreme ends of a scale ranging from very vague to very explicit threats. At one end, there are threats that contain few or none of the examined features and at the other are very explicit threats that clearly denote agent and patient of a violent action placed in the future and additionally contain explicit language.

The present findings further indicate that manipulative threats are predominantly rather vague while retaliative threats are rather explicit with regard to the features we have looked at so far. However, there is one exception: the use of conditional language is much more common in manipulative threats. Seeing, however, that the feature is overall relatively infrequent, the increased occurrence of conditionals in manipulative threats is not surprising. It was observed that, while all threats relatively frequently contain an expression of FUTURITY, in comparison, retaliative threats contain more variants with increased predictive strength, such as *be going to* and present futurate. At the same time, of all the threats that contain no futurity, an overwhelming majority has a manipulative function.

Furthermore, the distribution of the different verb types across the two functions indicates that the two most explicitly violent types, i.e. kill verbs and

force verbs, are most commonly found in retaliative threats. At the same time, non-violent verbs are twice as frequent in manipulative threats, again supporting the view that the two functions are characterized by a rather vague versus a rather explicit form. Accordingly, threats with a retaliative function more frequently denote both agent and patient of an action and threats with a manipulative function more frequently denote neither of the two participant roles. Retaliative threats are more often phrased from the perspective of the speaker and, in comparison, manipulative threats are more often phrased from the perspective of a hearer/target, implicitly in the form of a directive or explicitly.

With regard to the remaining features, it was observed that first and second person pronouns overall do not appear to be significantly differently distributed across the two macro-functions. There is a minor effect for first person pronouns, which suggests that manipulative threats contain less first person pronouns and, although this is only a slight tendency, it is also in line with the remaining observations. In addition, threats with a retaliative function contain significantly more instances of TABOO LANGUAGE such as swear words, curse words or intensifying expressions. It was argued that the use of such items presumably indicates that threats with a retaliative function are highly emotionally charged and are more focused on affective impoliteness, whereas manipulative threats are more focused on coercive impoliteness. Lastly, the increased occurrence of MENTION OF WEAPONS in threats with a manipulative function supports the view that the feature is often used in isolation as a contextually very restricted form of an opaque hint.

The present findings suggest that the formal differences between threat utterances found in the first part of the present study are, at least in part, traceable to the function of the respective threat. The majority of the detected distributional patterns can be explained as related to the difference between manipulative pre-event and retaliative post-event threats. As was previously noted, it is likely that a further sub-classification of the two examined macro-functions would reveal more fine-grained patterns of feature distribution. For manipulative threats, for example, sub-classes of 'manipulation' could be established depending on whether the threatener wants to encourage or prevent specific behavior or depending on the type of behavior or action that the threatener wants, for example, 'physical actions' or 'material goods'. Similarly, retaliative threats could be sub-divided according to the kind of 'punishment' or harmful action the speaker announces, for example, 'physical violence' or 'material sanctions', or according to the event that presumably triggered the retaliative action, for example, 'act of violence' or 'social conflict'. For now, however, the very broad classification into only two macro-functions allows for a first insight into functionally motivated differences in the form of threats.

It has to be stressed again that the proposition of two overall macro-functions, although theoretically informed by existing studies on other speech acts, is

data-driven, i.e. based on determinable contextual differences. The consecutively carried out analysis of the distribution of features supports the two-fold distinction: manipulative threats are realized differently by speakers than retaliative threats. At the same time, the often rather minor test statistics of some of the distributional patterns highlights the need for further research.

5.3 Form as a predictor of function: Classification tree models

We have seen so far that the two functions, which have been proposed based on contextual differences, are characterized by differently distributed linguistic feature combinations. Already in the first part of the present study, two broad tendencies of feature combinations were attested in the data: ‘pragmatically vague’ versus ‘pragmatically explicit’ with regard to the set of features we have previously examined. The difference is again illustrated in the two examples below.

(162) Motherfucker, asshole. I’m going to kill you.

(163) Have you done any fishing lately?

The utterance in Example (162) clearly denotes the agent and patient of a violent action set in the future and additionally contains insults or swearing expressions. We have argued that such a threat is explicit with regard to illocutionary point and referents of the threat and corresponds to the second part of Milburn and Watman’s ‘formula’: ‘If you do A, I will do B,’ where ‘A’ is detrimental to the threatener and ‘B’ is detrimental to the target” (Milburn & Watman 1981: 8). In comparison, the utterance in Example (163) denotes no violent future action and, consequently, does not refer to any agent or patient of such an action. Both utterances are realized by speakers with the same ultimate goal of threatening a target, but the utterance in Example (162) has a retaliative function and the utterance in (163) has a manipulative function.

Taken together, the results from both parts of the present analysis suggest that the structural differences we find are not as unsystematic as has been previously claimed in the literature. Instead, they can be at least partially explained as reflecting the difference between manipulative and retaliative threats, as reflecting a different focus on coercive or affective impoliteness, and, hence, as being *strategic* with reference to the specific goal(s) the speakers pursue. Now, if the variation we find in the data is indeed consistent and largely determined by the function of the threats, this should enable us to use the form of a threat as a predictor of its function. In other words, it should be possible to determine a threat’s function (or class) based on a list of the features (or variables) the threat contains.

In order to survey this assumption further we need a method that can be “used to classify an object or an instance [...] to a predefined set of classes [...] based on their attributes or values [...]” (Rokach & Maimon 2008: 5). For the present data, this means that we want to construct a predictive model that attempts to assign the threats in CoJO to a predefined set of functions, i.e. manipulative or retaliative, based on their linguistic features. In order to fit such a model, two complementary methods were used: classification trees (Breiman et al. 1984) and random forests (Breiman 2001).⁸⁹ The models were constructed using the `ctree()` (cf. Strasser & Weber 1999; Hothorn et al. 2006) and `cforest()` algorithm (Breiman 2001; Hothorn et al. 2006, Strobl et al. 2007; Strobl et al. 2009) implemented in the `party` and `partykit` packages in R (version 3.2.3).

There are a number of other methods that can be used to fit predictive models, but for the present analysis classification trees and random forests are particularly well suited, given two problems that we are facing: there is a rather large number of predictors ($p = 11$) and a comparatively small number of observations ($N = 301$)⁹⁰ and, more importantly, there is a lack of predefined assumptions about these predictors and their interactions, because none of the variables that are investigated are accounted for as predictors in previous research. Classification trees and random forests can handle both of these problems. Classification trees are useful in situations with many variables that potentially interact in complicated ways, and the resulting tree model will provide us with “a clear picture of the structure of the data” and offers “highly intuitive insight into to the kinds of interactions between variables” (Crawley 2013: 768). Different types of classification trees have been successfully applied to various types of linguistic data (cf., e.g., Dohmas et al. 2014; Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012). To complement a single classification tree model with a random forest has additional advantages: apart from handling the above-mentioned ‘data sparseness’ (Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 1), random forests are well suited for investigating complex interactions between variables and possible collinearity (Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 24).

Classification trees are the result of recursive partitioning, i.e. an algorithm splits the data repeatedly into subsets that maximally differ in their behavior with

89. Classification trees are a type of decision tree where the predicted outcome is categorical (or nominal) and not a continuous (or numerical) value (Rokach & Maimon 2008: 5; Breiman et al. 1984).

90. The number of observations in the present study is sufficient in most views. There are different rules of thumb for an appropriate ratio of predictors and observations in multivariate analyses (cf. Kunter 2011: 208). Baayen (2008: 195), for example, suggests that there should be “at least 15 times more observations than coefficients”, while Crawley (2005: 204) considers three observations per predictor sufficient. The current dataset meets these requirements.

regard to all predictor variables and the response variable in the model. At each split, the predictor with the strongest discriminatory power is selected and the splitting is repeated until a predefined stopping criterion is reached (cf. Strobl et al. 2009: 325). The resulting tree is similar to rule induction in that each path from root to final leaves can be transformed into a rule that states which characteristics a given subset has. In the present case, this could be something along the lines of ‘If a threat contains the features *X*, *Y* and *Z*, the function of the threat is *A*’ (cf. Rokach & Maimon 2008: 11).

Parallel to the analyses in the first part of the study, with this step, we move again from descriptive and explorative univariate analyses to multivariate analyses that enable us to look at multiple factors at the same time (cf., e.g., Gries 2013: 102). Unlike the hierarchical clustering method that was used in the first part, however, classification trees are a supervised method. Rather than to detect new and unknown patterns in the data like hierarchical clustering, a tree-based classification model predicts the predefined levels of a categorical variable *FUNCTION* (cf. Zume & Mount 2014: 175, Rokach & Maimon 2008: 5).

A more detailed explanation of both methods will be given in the next section.

5.3.1 Methodology

The specific type of classification tree used here is a conditional inference tree or ‘*ctree*’ (cf. Hothorn et al. 2006). Conditional inference trees use binary partitioning regardless of the number of levels of each predictor (cf. Levshina 2015: 291). At each split, it is considered whether subdividing the data into exactly two sets with different characteristics or feature constellations results in a subset where one predicted outcome is the majority and a subset where the other predicted outcome is the majority. The procedure is repeated with every predictor and every subset until no further splits can be made (cf. Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 22). The algorithm works on the basis of ‘impurity reduction’, i.e. the aim is always to create the most homogeneous subset possible. The degree of impurity reduction can be quantified by using measures such as the Gini Index or Shannon Entropy to indicate the discriminatory power of each predictor (cf. Strobl et al. 2009).

Conditional inference trees have two methodological advantages over classification trees based on traditional algorithms such as the CART algorithm (Breiman et al. 1984) or the CHAID algorithm (Kass 1980). The variable selection at each split is unbiased, i.e. variables with many levels are not favored (cf. Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 22). Additionally, the resulting tree model returns *p*-values at each split while algorithms such as CART have been described as having “no concept of statistical significance” (Mingers 1987, cited in Hothorn et al. 2006: 652).

Consequently, conditional inference trees do not run the same risk of overfitting the data by adapting too close to even unsystematic variation.

The p -values in the model are obtained by permuting or rearranging the assigned values of each data point, i.e. randomly changing the characteristics of each threat, for example from non-conditional to explicit conditional. The relevant test statistic is computed for each of these ‘permuted’ observations and is then compared to the test statistic for the original data. Based on the proportion of deviating test statistics for permuted observations, the significance level of each predictor is calculated (cf. Levshina 2015: 292). Permutation is a resampling method similar to bootstrapping, but while bootstrapping calculates test statistics for random sub-samples of the original data, permutation randomly rearranges the values of each observation. As a consequence of the above-described procedure, the final conditional inference tree does not have to be simplified or adjusted (‘pruned’). It has a “predictive performance equivalent to the performance of optimally pruned trees” (Hothorn et al. 2006: 653).⁹¹

However, all individual tree models, including conditional inference trees, have been shown to be overly sensitive to even minor changes in the data and, hence, are often considered rather instable. This instability is said to lead to undesired variability in the predictions of single trees (cf. Strobl et al. 2009: 330). As a solution to the problem of variability, a random forest was created in addition to the single tree model. Random forests are an *ensemble method*, i.e. not a single classification tree is fitted, but a predefined number of individual trees are aggregated on the basis of the same algorithm as single classification trees. As a consequence, predictions are no longer based on a single tree but on a whole set of trees (cf. Strobl et al. 2009: 331). Random forests differ from other ensemble methods such as ‘bagging’, in that the resulting random forest is grown from individual conditional inference trees that are each generated from a random sample of both observations and predictors. The algorithm randomizes observations as well as predictors, “to make the resulting set of trees even more diverse” (Strobl et al. 2009: 331).

By generating subsamples, the data are divided into so called ‘in-bag observations’ and ‘out-of-bag observations’. The in-bag observations are used as training sets by the algorithm, and the accuracy of each tree is evaluated by comparing the training set’s predictions to the remaining out-of-bag observations (Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 23). Permutation is used in order to “mimic the absence of the variable from the model” (Strobl et al. 2008: np). This means that the algorithm rearranges the levels of one predictor in the subset in order to break any given

91. This claim was confirmed by the fact that the final ctree used here is identical to an earlier pruned version of a traditional classification tree I fitted.

association between that predictor and the response variable. In the present case, this means that, for example, the values of all in-bag observations are changed from non-conditional to explicit conditional so that any potential association between non-conditional and retaliative or manipulative function is broken. By comparing the in-bag and out-of-bag observations it can be assessed whether or not the permuted predictor has an impact on the classificatory accuracy of the respective tree. In other words, if the out-of-bag observations are still accurately classified even with a permuted predictor, this predictor is not important, but if the predictive accuracy of the model measurably decreases, the predictor is important. The degree of difference between in-bag and out-of-bag predictions or before and after permuting the predictor is used as an importance measure (cf. Strobl et al. 2008). As a result, each tree generates a measure of relative importance for the permuted predictor (Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 23).

Because each tree in the forest can be used to determine the importance of one predictor, the entire forest can be used to determine the mean influence of each predictor in the model (cf. Levshina 2015: 292). For this purpose, the conditional permutation-based variable importance that is generated by each individual tree as described above is averaged over all trees in the forest. A mean is calculated for the individual differences in prediction accuracy before and after permuting one variable in all trees of the forest (cf. Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 23; Strobl et al. 2008).⁹² The measure is considered superior to traditional importance measures based on impurity reduction such as the Gini index (cf. Strobl et al. 2008).

Similar to an averaged variable importance measure, the predictions of a random forest are also averaged. Predictions generated by a random forest are achieved by means of a voting scheme. In our case this means that each tree contributes a vote as to what is the most likely function of a given observation, i.e. either retaliative or manipulative. The function that reaches a majority of votes is then selected as the predicted value (Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 23).

Using conditional inference tree modeling alongside the creation of a random forest will allow us to probe the question whether the variation we find in the structure of a threat is systematic and related to its function or a product of chance. Additionally, it will allow for some insight into the weight or importance of each predictor variable in the model.

All previously investigated features are included as predictors in both models: *CONDITIONALITY* (with levels explicit, implicit and non-conditional), *FUTURITY* (will, be going to, present futurate and no futurity), *TYPE OF VERB* (kill,

92. See Strobl et al. (2008) for a more detailed explanation of the algorithm and a formalized representation of the mean importance measure.

force, destroy, death/dying, ambiguous and non-violent), ORIENTATION OF THREAT (speaker-oriented, hearer-oriented, mixed-oriented, directive and impersonal), AGENT, PATIENT, 1PP, 2PP, TABOO LANGUAGE, MENTION OF WEAPONS (all with levels y and n) and RELATIONSHIP OF THREATENER AND TARGET (personal and non-personal). The predicted class is FUNCTION with values manipulative and retaliative.

5.3.2 Results I: Single conditional inference tree

A conditional inference was fitted with the variables from the previous section. The resulting tree is a structure with all possible splits that are significant at the level of $\alpha < 0.05$. The analysis was run several times with different parameters and the results proved to be stable.⁹³ The tree is plotted in Figure 5.12.

The tree is to be read as follows. The ovals contain the names of the respective predictor variable and the corresponding p -value. The levels of each predictor are indicated on the branches and all nodes, including terminal nodes, are numbered for easy reference. The terminal nodes give the distribution of manipulative and retaliative function in the respective constellation of features in terms of a stacked bar plot. The colors indicate manipulative (blue) and retaliative (red) function. The number of observations in this set is shown in parentheses at the top of each box.

As Figure 5.12 shows, only two features out of the initial eleven play a role as predictors in the final model, namely CONDITIONALITY and TYPE OF VERB. The most important effect concerns the question of whether the threat contains a type of conditional language or not. Accordingly, the first split (Node 1, the root node) divides conditional (both explicit and implicit) and non-conditional threats. The left branch with conditional threats is not split any further and contains 87 observations. Of these, more than 70% carry a manipulative function (Node 2), as for example the utterances in (164) to (166).

- (164) If you are afraid for Alexander and his life in this case you must do right for your son, you must pay.
- (165) Find out what happens if you step on my fucking property.

93. The different control parameters implemented in `ctree_control()` allow for an adjustment of, for example, significance level, minimum number of observation in each set or test type. Only the significance level had an influence on the final model, if set to marginal significance ($0.05 \leq p < 0.1$).

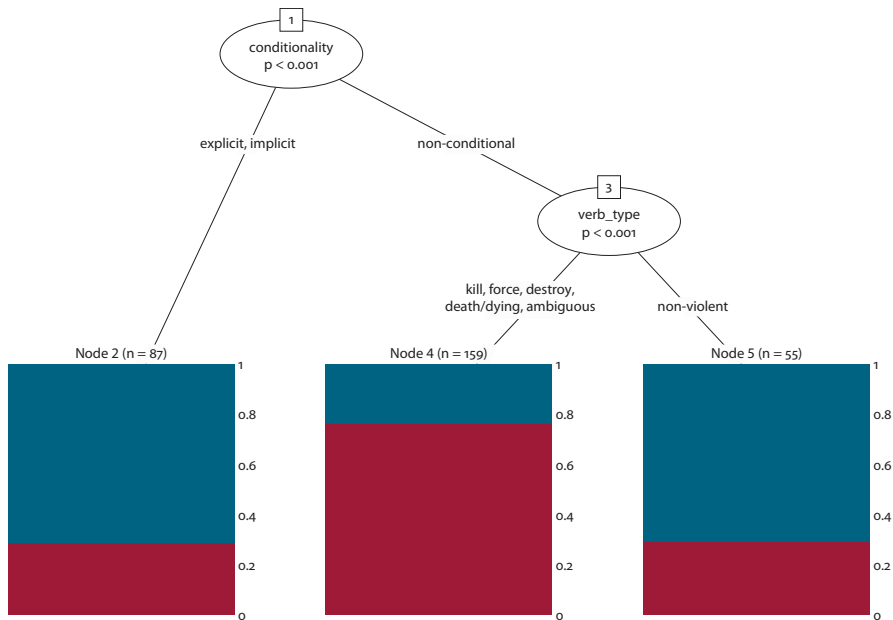


Figure 5.12 Single conditional inference tree model for the function of threats. Color is used to indicate function, blue = manipulative, red = retaliative

- (166) If I get indicted and you testify, I'm going to take care of you, I'm going to get you. You don't know what you're dealing with. But if you don't, everything will be fine, everything will be okay.

As is evident from the examples, the threats in this set are far from formally homogeneous. Their common denominator, however, is their conditional language, i.e. that they all formulate a protasis (prerequisite) and an apodosis (consequence) (cf. Section 4.2).

Let us now turn to the right branch. If the utterance does not contain any conditional language, the other decisive criterion is the type of verb the threat utterance contains (Node 3). The right branch splits into two branches, according to whether the verb present is violent or ambiguous (left branch) or non-violent (right branch). Utterances with a type of violent or an ambiguous verb are retaliative with an almost 80% chance. Utterances in this set that fit the criteria are threats like in Example (167) or (168).

- (167) I can't take this any more. The principal [is] just leaning on me.... I'm a man grasping at straws.... [Y]ou can't stop a man if he doesn't want to live any more.... [A] day doesn't pass that [I] don't feel like killing myself.... I think I'll bring a gun. I'll shoot the principal and shoot myself.
- (168) You fucking bitch. You're gonna die.

This branch structure accounts for more than half of the observations in the corpus (Node 4, $n = 159$), which means it has the highest predictive strength in the model. The examples illustrate, however, that this set is also not completely homogeneous. Some of the utterances contain other features such as TABOO LANGUAGE, as is illustrated in Example (168), others denote the agent and patient of the violent action they refer to, as is illustrated in Example (167).

All remaining utterances that are non-conditional and contain a non-violent verb are again manipulative with chance of more than 70% (Node 5, $n = 55$). Examples from the set would be the utterances in (169) and (170).

- (169) This is Inglewood 13, homey, and I'm Pequeno Peligroso.
- (170) I also know where his kids go to school.

The examples serve to illustrate the common denominator of utterances of this set, namely that they neither contain any reference to a violent action nor a form of conditional language.

From the above-described structure, the conditional inference tree is able to make predictions about the function of each threat in CoJO and classifies the threat as either manipulative or retaliative. Accordingly, threats with the above-described feature, i.e. conditional versus non-conditional and violent or ambiguous versus

non-violent verb are classified based on these features. The classification decision the algorithm arrives at can then be compared to the known classification that was manually coded. This comparison can be used as an evaluation of the tree's predictive performance, i.e. how accurately the algorithm predicts the actual known outcome. In our case this means how often threats are accurately classified as manipulative or retaliative.

A well-known indicator of classifier performance is a *confusion matrix*. A confusion matrix is a cross-tabulation of the predicted observations from the model with the actual or observed outcomes. The table gives an indication of how often the actual known outcome (truth) occurs with each of the two predictions. With regard to incorrect predictions, a confusion matrix evaluates both the amount of missed observations, i.e. observations that should have been part of the class but are not recognized by the algorithm, and the amount of wrongly classed observations, i.e. these observations that are not members of the respective class, but are placed in the class by the algorithm. The matrix can be used as a basis for different measures of performance of our tree model that will be explained below (cf. Zume1 & Mount 2014: 94).

A confusion matrix for the single conditional inference tree model illustrated in Figure 5.12 is depicted in Table 5.1 below. The rows correspond to the actual known outcomes (TRUTH), and the columns correspond to the predictions made by the model (PREDICTION). Because there are slightly more threats in the corpus that have a retaliative function, retaliative is now the class we want to identify. For the time being, this means that manipulative threats are defined as 'non-retaliative'.

The predicted outcomes can now be categorized as 'true' and 'false' members and non-members. Depending on the decision the classifier makes, the predictions are therefore considered (in the table clockwise, from top left): (i) true *negatives*, if the classifier accurately predicts that these observations are non-members, i.e. non-retaliative, (ii) *false positives*, if the classifier falsely identifies them as members, i.e. retaliative, but they are non-members, (iii) *false negatives*, if the classifier falsely predicts these observations are non-members, i.e. manipulative, but they actually are class members, and (iv) *true positives*, if the classifier accurately predicts that these observations are members of the class, i.e. retaliative.

Table 5.1 Confusion matrix single conditional inference tree

TRUTH	PREDICTION	
	FALSE	TRUE
non-retaliative	TN = 101	FP = 38
retaliative	FN = 41	TP = 121

The labels in the table are to be read as follows: TN = true negative, FP = false positive, FN = false negative and TP = true positive. As can be seen from Table 5.1, if we define retaliative as the class that is to be predicted, the classifier predicts 101 true negatives, 38 false positives, 41 false negatives and 121 true positives. These figures can be used to calculate different evaluation measures such as *accuracy*, *precision* and *recall*, *F1 score* and *sensitivity* and *specificity* (cf. Zumel & Mount 2014: 97).

To determine the accuracy of a classification model is the most common measure of classifier performance and “is defined as the number of items categorized correctly divided by the total number of items” (Zumel & Mount 2014: 95). In our case this means $(101 + 121)/301$, which amounts to roughly 0.74. In other words, the model predicts almost 74% of all observations correctly. At the same time, the algorithm predicts a wrong class for similar amounts of cases for both classes, i.e. 41 false negatives and 38 false positives. Since the frequency of both functions is not identical, however, the misclassification rate of manipulative is slightly higher and amounts to 28.8% compared to roughly 23% for retaliative. Precisely because the two classes are not completely balanced, the accuracy measure can at times be misleading (cf. Zumel & Mount 2014: 96). Therefore, we will look at some other related evaluation measures.

Precision and recall are determined by comparing the amount of accurately predicted class members with the amount of falsely predicted class members. Precision “is what fraction of the items the classifier flags as being in the class that actually *are* in the class” and recall “is what fraction of the things that are in the class are detected by the classifier” (Zumel & Mount 2014: 96). In the present case, we have 76% precision, which also means that 24% of the threats that were predicted as retaliative are in fact manipulative. At the same time, we have 75% recall, which means 25% of the threats that are retaliative are not detected by a classification tree with the above-described structure.

Based on precision and recall, we can also determine the F1 score of our model with the following formula: $2 * \text{precision} * \text{recall} / (\text{precision} + \text{recall})$ (Zumel & Mount 2014: 96). In our case this amounts to an F1 score of roughly 0.75. Because precision and recall are quite similar for our model, the F1 score does not add more information.

The measures of sensitivity and specificity are calculated similarly. Sensitivity or ‘true positive rate’ is identical to recall and gives an indication of how many of the actual class members are called out by the classifier, in our case 75%. Specificity or ‘true negative rate’ is a measure of how many of the actual non-members are called out by the algorithm, in our case 72% (cf. Zumel and Mount 2014: 97). Because sensitivity and specificity are calculated using just one row of a confusion matrix, their values would just switch if we set manipulative as the class that is to be predicted (cf. Zumel & Mount 2014: 96).

The different performance measures are summarized in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Summary of classifier performance measures for single conditional inference tree

Measure	Formula	ctree
Accuracy	$(TP + TN) / (TP + TN + FP + FN)$	0.74
Precision	$TP / (TP + FP)$	0.76
Recall	$TP / (TP + FN)$	0.75
F1 score	$2 * \text{precision} * \text{recall} / (\text{precision} + \text{recall})$	0.75
Sensitivity	$TP / (TP + FN)$	0.75
Specificity	$TN / (TN + FP)$	0.72

As all of the measures indicate, the individual tree model returns slightly better scores for retaliative threats and identifies more class members than non-members accurately. Overall, the performance of our single conditional inference tree is not overwhelming, but if we consider that a classifier that randomly assigns a class to all observations has a 53.8% chance of an accurate classification, the model offers a considerable improvement to any such random classification.

5.3.3 Results II: Random forest of conditional inference trees

To gain more insight into the importance of individual predictors included in the model and to further illuminate the underlying process of variable selection in the single tree, the previous analysis is complemented by generating a random forest, i.e. an ensemble of conditional inference trees (Breiman 2001). The random forest was created using the `cforest()` algorithm that is also implemented in the `party` package in R (Hothorn et al. 2006, Strobl et al. 2007, 2008). The forest is constructed of 1000 conditional inference trees. The number of input variables sampled as predictors at each split was set to 5 in the final model. The analysis was run several times with different parameters and the results proved to be stable.⁹⁴

As described in Section 5.4.1, a random forest is an aggregation of trees that are fitted to a randomized subset of both observations and predictors. In every tree, the levels of predictor are randomly rearranged in order to break any given association between this predictor and the response variable. The algorithm assesses the predictive accuracy of each tree with and without one permuted predictor and

94. The number of variables that are randomly sampled as candidates at each node varied between 2 and 11 (to perform the analysis without any random input variable sampling at all), but the best results were achieved with a measure of 5 input variables at each split. The number of trees grown was advanced from 500 to 1000, again in order to counterbalance the relatively sparse data.

uses the difference between these assessments as an indicator of the relative importance of said predictor. An overall mean importance over all trees is calculated from the permutation variable importance of each individual tree in the forest (cf. Strobl et al. 2009: 335). The resulting conditional permutation variable importance values rank between 0 and 1. The values of unimportant predictors will usually vary around zero. As a rule of thumb, the threshold is often defined as the value of the least important variable, i.e. the smallest score (cf. Levshina 2015: 298).

The variable importance scores for our random forest are illustrated in Figure 5.13. The predictors have been ranked according to their importance value. Since the values are overall rather small, the cut-off point at which a predictor becomes significant in the model was set to 0 (cf. Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012: 24). This is indicated with a vertical line in the plot. Predictors to the right of the vertical line are significant

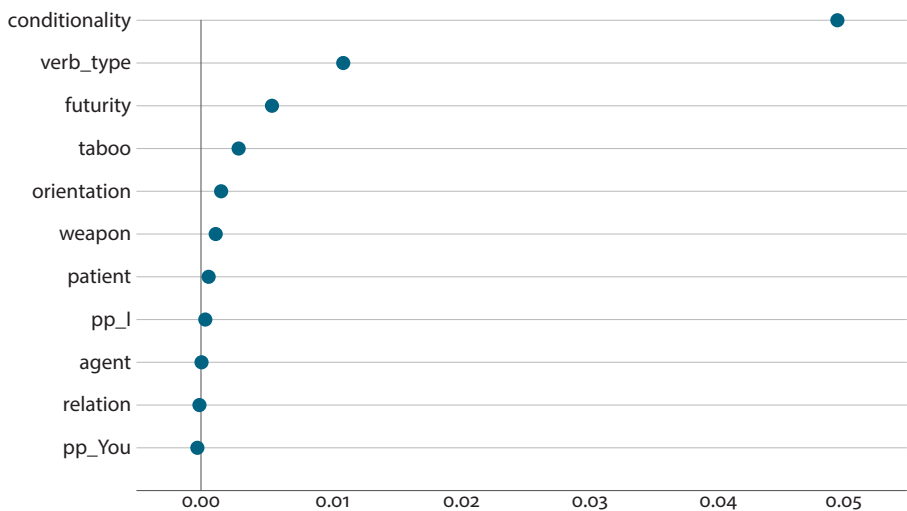


Figure 5.13 Conditional permutation variable importance for random forest with all predictors

As can be seen from the figure, the majority of predictors vary around zero and the three predictors at the bottom do not contribute any statistically significant effect in any of the trees in the model. The scores illustrated in Figure 5.13 demonstrate that CONDITIONALITY is by far the strongest predictor in the model (0.05), followed by TYPE OF VERB (0.011). Next are FUTURITY (0.006) and TABOO LANGUAGE (0.003). The remaining variables achieve scores just above or zero and, as has already been mentioned, they do not seem to have any discriminatory power in the model. The results appear to be partly in line with our single conditional inference tree, where

CONDITIONALITY and TYPE OF VERB are the variables that are responsible for the splits in the tree (Figure 5.12). It follows from this that the cut-off point for the single conditional inference tree would be at 0.01.

The importance scores additionally highlight two aspects. First, the discriminatory dominance of CONDITIONALITY in the model: the variable’s importance measure is almost five times as high as the score of the next important variable. This highlights how much of the differences between retaliative and manipulative can be explained through this predictor. And, second, the discriminatory weakness of the remaining variables: it is apparent from the scores that a majority of the variables appears to have no or only very little impact on the predictive accuracy of a model. The results are discussed in more detail in the discussion section following the evaluation of our model.

In order to test whether the random forest performs better, i.e. represents the data more accurately than the individual conditional inference tree, we look at the predictions the random forest makes and compare them to the actual observed outcomes. For this purpose, another confusion matrix was created that can be used to assess the ensemble’s overall performance. We again define retaliative as the class that is to be predicted by the classifier and manipulative as non-retaliative. The confusion matrix for the random forest is illustrated in Table 5.3. As with the individual conditional inference tree, the rows of the cross-table correspond to the actual known outcomes (TRUTH) and the columns correspond to the predictions arrived at by the model through the voting scheme described earlier (PREDICTION).

Table 5.3 Confusion matrix random forest

TRUTH	PREDICTION	
	FALSE	TRUE
non-retaliative	TN = 108	FP = 39
retaliative	FN = 31	TP = 123

As can be seen from Table 5.3, if retaliative is the class that is to be predicted by the classifier, the model predicts 108 true negatives, 39 false positives, 31 false negatives and 123 true positives. In comparison to the individual tree model, the amount of both true negatives and false negatives, i.e. non-members, deviate the strongest and are increased to 108 and reduced to 31. In other words, the random forest is able to more accurately classify non-members or manipulative threats. This has an impact on the overall performance.

As expected, the accuracy of our ensemble model is slightly increased compared to the single conditional inference tree and rises to 0.77, i.e. 77% of the predictions

the forest arrives at are identical with our observed outcomes. The number of inaccurate predictions the forest arrives at for members and non-members is not as similar anymore and, consequently, the misclassification rate is slightly higher for retaliative with around 24% and noticeably minimized to 22% for manipulative threats. Again, we can clearly see that the forest performs better at accurately classifying non-members.

Accordingly, we can calculate the different additional performance measures that were described in Section 5.4.2. The results are summarized in Table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4 Summary of classifier performance measures for random forest

Measure	Formula	cforest
Accuracy	$(TP + TN) / (TP + TN + FP + FN)$	0.77
Precision	$TP / (TP + FP)$	0.76
Recall	$TP / (TP + FN)$	0.79
F1 score	$2 * \text{precision} * \text{recall} / (\text{precision} + \text{recall})$	0.77
Sensitivity	$TP / (TP + FN)$	0.79
Specificity	$TN / (TN + FP)$	0.73

The different evaluation measures summarized in Table 5.4 all indicate that the predictive strength of the random forest is slightly increased compared to the single conditional inference tree. As we can see from the individual measures, for example the increased recall or sensitivity measure, the random forest performs better with regard to the classification of manipulative or non-retaliative threats: more manipulative threats are accurately recognized as non-retaliative ('true negatives') and less retaliative threats are classified as non-retaliative ('false negatives'). In other words, the random forest appears to be able to better recognize manipulative threats compared to the single conditional inference tree.

Like the other performance measures, the precision of any given classifier can never be evaluated in isolation but only for a given data set. In the present case, the random forest achieves an overall accuracy of 77%, which is a slight improvement over the single tree model. Again, given that a classifier that randomly assigns a class to all observations has a 53.8% chance of an accurate classification, we can consider both the single tree as well as the random forest model a noticeable improvement over any classification by chance.

In the following section, it will be discussed what we make of the results, how the results relate to our previous findings and what can be gained from predictive modeling in general in such cases.

5.3.4 Discussion: Predictable strategies?

Both the single conditional inference tree and the aggregated random forest provide strong evidence that the use of conditional language, although an overall relatively infrequent feature in the corpus, has the strongest association with the threats' function. The next most important predictor in both models is the semantics of the verb present. The remaining predictors do not contribute any or only minor effects to both models. Now, what do we make of these results and how do we relate them to the previous findings?

At first sight, it might seem contradictory that a relatively infrequent feature has the strongest discriminatory power in both models. As was repeatedly stressed, based on the feature's frequency, *CONDITIONALITY* did not reach the status of a conventional component of threatening language in general. It was discussed that, in this regard, the assumptions put forward in the literature about the relevance of the feature could not be confirmed based on its frequency. If, however, the relevance of a feature is to be understood as the feature's discriminatory power, the prominent mentioning of the feature in the literature appears to be justified: even if conditional language is used sparingly by speakers, it serves a distinct function that can be used to unequivocally determine the speaker goal as manipulating the target into particular behavior. This strongly supports the proposed distinction of a feature's saliency and its frequency (cf. Section 4.7.2) and further highlights the demand for research that systematically probes the distinction of emic and analytical judgements of a threat's typicality.

If we take all of our previous findings together, the picture becomes even clearer: it was repeatedly stressed that manipulative and retaliative threats appear to call for different strategies on the side of the speaker (cf. Section 5.3.5). The present findings appear to reflect these different strategies. It was discussed that threateners who attempt to successfully manipulate their targets into particular behavior often try to avoid being overtly explicit about these aims. It was further argued that one possible explanation for such a strategy would be the wish to maintain plausible deniability in order to not be unequivocally identifiable as the causer of the coerced behavior. Now, if there is such a strong association between different types of conditional language and a manipulative function, but the feature is overall relatively infrequently used, this arguably supports the idea that speakers of manipulative threats often use rather vague threats. In other words, speakers presumably often deter from using conditional language in their threats because it makes their intentions much more transparent to their addressees and other parties involved.⁹⁵ At the same time,

95. This, as was argued, is probably especially heightened in the present data because we are dealing with criminal threats. Since threatening can be a criminal offense, the threateners potentially face not only social but legal consequences if they are held responsible for uttering a threat.

the results indicate that if a speaker uses conditional language, their goal is very likely ‘getting power’ (cf. Beebe 1995: 154) or, more precisely, “getting the [target] to *do* something”, as Harris (1984: 250) phrased it. Overall, we can conclude that CONDITIONALITY is not a pervasive feature of threatening language in terms of its frequency, but a salient feature in terms of its functional association.

We have further seen that the individual conditional inference tree performed worse than the random forest when it comes to predicting a manipulative function, although it has the strongest association with the most influential variable CONDITIONALITY. This additionally reflects the rather scarce attestation of the feature in the data. Compared to that, the random forest displays an improved predictive accuracy because the trees in the forest are each fitted to subsets of the data and predictions are arrived at by means of a voting scheme.

The individual conditional inference tree has the largest explanatory power for a subset of observations that contain two features: non-conditional and a violent or ambiguous (i.e. ambiguously violent) verb. Threats of this kind constitute a large subset in the data and of these almost 80% have a retaliative function. The respective subset is considerably more homogeneous than the remaining two subsets into which the individual tree model divides the data. Consequently, both the individual tree model and the random forest more accurately predict retaliative threats than their counterpart – but why is that?

If we look back at our previous findings, a possible explanation appears to be again to assume different speaker strategies. It was previously argued that retaliative threats are often characterized by more affective impoliteness and by an increased offensiveness, i.e. speakers who react to a past action by the target more often clearly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of an event and tend to more frequently use insults, swear words or taboo words as intensifiers in their threats. We have concluded from this that one strategy behind retaliative threats is no longer to primarily maintain plausible deniability, but that a threatener who is retaliating against their target is more set on satisfying their desire to vent anger and/or ensuring the target’s understanding and ratification. The fact that following CONDITIONALITY, the three variables TYPE OF VERB TYPE, FUTURITY and TABOO LANGUAGE have the highest conditional variable importance in the random forest appears to be in line with this view, because these features are typically part of what is considered a pragmatically explicit threat in this study or a *direct threat* in the literature (cf., e.g., Gales 2012). Unlike CONDITIONALITY, however, the other features also regularly occur in manipulative threats, which is why their discriminatory power or association with the threat’s function is not as strong as with conditional language.

Another argument in favor of such a view is the comparison of precision and recall for both the individual conditional inference tree and the random forest. While the precision of the random forest does not improve compared to the individual tree model, recall considerably improves. This means that, compared to the single tree,

the random forest does not more accurately classify retaliative threats, but instead more accurately identifies those that are non-retaliative, i.e. manipulative threats. In other words, even in subsets of the data, the usage of TYPE OF VERB, FUTURITY, and TABOO LANGUAGE is much more dispersed than the usage of CONDITIONALITY.

We conclude from the findings that, overall, retaliative threats are more explicit and more homogeneous and, thus, easier to classify than manipulative threats. Yet, the features that can be frequently found in retaliative threats are not restricted in their use to threat utterances with that function. It was argued that the homogeneity of retaliative threats might be a consequence of a stronger focus on affective impoliteness and a more unified speaker strategy. Another possibility, which we have not discussed yet, is that more homogeneity in retaliative threats could hint at overall more similar aims, i.e. that retaliation as opposed to manipulation is a more homogeneous function.

It was already mentioned that the two functions manipulation and retaliation could presumably be subdivided much further into more fine-grained or local speaker goals (cf. Section 5.3.5). Additional classification criteria for different types of manipulation could be, for example, the specific type of behavior that a target is coerced into, i.e. the type of ‘target action’, and the type of action the target is threatened with, i.e. the type of ‘threatened action’. Let us look at some examples to illustrate the distinction. The threats in Examples (171) to (173) all have a manipulative function.

- (171) If you are afraid for Alexander and his life in this case you must do right for your son, you must pay.
- (172) You better not snitch or tell.
- (173) Sarvjit. If ur a government witness signal me by not responding to this message. But if ur a friend call me.

The example in (171) was already discussed in the previous section as a typical example of a threat that contains an explicit conditional, but no violent verb. In this case, the threatener is a representative of an adoption agency, who tries to coerce potential adoptees into paying a considerable amount of money. It is insinuated that paying the money will ensure that the adoptees do not have to be ‘afraid for [their adopted son] and his life’ anymore.⁹⁶ The threatened action could be classified as ‘physical violence’, since it the threatener explicitly mentions a fear for ‘his life’. The target action can be classified as ‘material goods’, since the desired action of the target is that they pay the threatener with money.

⁹⁶ U.S. v. Nishnianidze, 342 F.3d 6 (2003)

In comparison, the threatener in Example (172) is trying to hinder their target from standing witness against them.⁹⁷ The threatened action is not specified and it is only insinuated that the target action will avert a negative outcome (cf. the discussion of *(had) better* in Section 4.2.1). Consequently, the threatened action has to be classified as ‘underspecified negative consequence’. Furthermore, the target action cannot be classified as ‘material goods’ but rather falls under the category of ‘immaterial’ or ‘physical action’. At the same time, the target is not meant to do something specific but is meant to refrain from doing it.

The threatener in Example (173) is also trying to hinder their target from standing witness against him.⁹⁸ In this threat, the threatener does not even specifically refer to any threatened action or negative consequence. Thus, the threatened action has to be classified as ‘unknown’. The target action in this case is specified as ‘call’, i.e. a ‘physical action’. The three examples already serve to point out some of the possibilities to develop a more fine-grained classification of manipulative threats. At the same time, the examples highlight the diversity of the goals speakers are trying to further by threatening their target.

Compared to that, retaliation seems more limited in its configurations. Let us again look at some examples. The threats in Examples (174) to (176) all have a retaliative function.

- (174) Marilyn McClure, the crimes that you have committed on [M.] carries a death sentence. So thats what you have coming is death. You are not going to get away.
- (175) I’m going to get you for lying in court, you fat bitch.
- (176) I’ll be the one to get you, no matter how long it takes me. If I don’t get you, I will get Iris or Christie or whoever close to you

Just as we have differentiated between threatened action and target action in manipulative threats, we can distinguish between these two actions in the examples at hand. Example (174) was uttered by the threatener after he and his wife, the target, separated. At the time the threat was uttered, the two parties were involved in a custody battle over their son.⁹⁹ The threatened action could again be labeled as ‘physical violence’, because the threatener explicitly refers to the target’s death. The target action is an offense of some kind, which is described by the threatener as “the crimes you have committed on [M.]”, their son. Since the target action is not specified any further, it could be labeled as ‘offense against third party’.

97. In re Jerry B., Not Reported in Cal.Rptr.2d (2003)

98. U.S. v. Archer, 671 F.3d 149 (2011)

99. People v. Goodlow, Not Reported in Cal.Rptr.3d (2010)

Compared to that, the threat in (175) was uttered after the target stood witness against the threatener and he was subsequently convicted.¹⁰⁰ The testimony is the target action and, from the perspective of the threatener, it constitutes an action to the threatener's disadvantage. For this reason, one possible way of categorizing the target action in this case would be to label it as 'offense against threatener'. The threatened action is ambiguous between a violent and a non-violent meaning, and could be described as 'underspecified negative consequence', similar to the threatened action in Example (172).

Lastly, the threatened action and the target action of the threat in Example (176) can be described similarly. The threatener addressed a federal Magistrate with his utterance, who was responsible for the threatener's previous conviction.¹⁰¹ Similarly to Example (175), the threatened action can be described as 'underspecified negative consequence', because the action the threatener announces with the verb *get* can receive both a violent and a non-violent interpretation. The target action, although not explicitly mentioned by the threatener, can be described as 'offense against threatener', because the action consisted in convicting the threatener, which, from the threatener's perspective, is also to his disadvantage.

The examples that were given serve to illustrate that retaliative threats follow a more restricted pattern: some target action, which is perceived as offensive by the threatener, triggers or causes the threatener to announce some negative consequence. While the quality of the negative consequences may range from different kinds of severe or less severe physical violence to less drastic consequences, the target action is always either some offense against the threatener or a third party. The pattern appears to be much more rigid than with manipulative threats, which would at least partially explain why retaliative threats appear to be more homogeneous. However, the explanations presented are based on qualitative observation and cannot be verified on the basis of the present findings alone. In order to verify the assumptions generated from the initial observations, it would be necessary to further investigate both manipulative and retaliative threats.

5.4 Summary: The function of threats

This second part of the present study, building on the first, has examined potential functions speakers assign to their threats. For this purpose, the different contexts in which threats are used by speakers were compared. As a result of this comparison,

100. State v. Spainhower, 988 P.2d 452 (1999)

101. U.S. v. Maxton, 940 F.2d 103 (1991)

one systematic contextual difference found in the data was used to develop a classification of two macro-functions of threatening: manipulation and retaliation. It was argued that manipulation by means of threatening is defined by the speaker's desire to manipulate the target's future behavior or actions, which presupposes a pre-event character of the threat. It was further proposed that, due to this pre-event character, threatened action and target action are contingent upon each other; the reaction of the target to the threat, i.e. essentially compliance or defiance, influences the threatened action. Retaliation, on the other hand, is characterized by a post-event structure; a target action that is already in the past can be identified as the trigger of the threat. As a consequence, the threatened action is no longer seen as contingent upon the target action, but is a consequence of the target action.

A classification based on differences in the temporal sequence of events was taken as a starting point to propose a distinction of two different threat types, namely manipulative and retaliative threats. To relate a temporal aspect to systematic differences in the form and function of a speech act is not an unprecedented approach. Similar observations have been made for apologies, which are usually classified into 'Anticipatory' and 'Retrospective', with different sub-categories, depending on whether the apologies are uttered before or after any offense they remedy (cf. Aijmer 1996: 98). A similar approach was taken to further investigate structural differences between the two threat types.

All the features of threatening language that were examined in the first part of this study were re-examined in terms of their distribution across manipulative and retaliative threats. The results confirm our assumption that features are distributed differently across the two functions. Not all of the effects that were found proved to be statistically significant, but tendencies were nonetheless visible. It was found that there is a slight disposition for manipulative threats to contain conditional language, futurate expressions with reduced predictive strength, such as *will*, and even more often no futurity. Furthermore, manipulative threats more frequently contain non-violent verbs and both agent and patient of a potential future action are not explicitly referenced. Threats with this function appear to be more frequently hearer-oriented or directive and, in line with this, 1PP occur less frequently.

Compared to this, retaliative threats were found to only rarely contain conditional language and more frequently contain futurate expressions with an increased predictive strength, such as *be going to* and present futurate. More violent verbs were found in retaliative threats, especially kill verbs, i.e. verbs that lexicalize a clear resultative state of death. These verbs were also more frequently used in agentive expressions and, consequently, retaliative threats were more often speaker-oriented or mixed-oriented. Additionally, the patient of a future action was more often clearly referenced in these threats. Lastly, more insults, swearing expressions and other forms of TABOO LANGUAGE were found in retaliative threats.

Taken together with the findings from the first part of the study, it was concluded that the distribution of the different features across manipulative and retaliative threats mirrors the previous impression that the majority of threats in CoJO can be placed at the extreme ends of a scale ranging from pragmatically very vague to very explicit with regard to the who-does-what-to-whom of a threatening scenario. Although none of the features that were examined for this study could be unequivocally associated with only one of the two functions, a number of features predominantly occurred with only either manipulative or retaliative threats.

In order to further probe these observations, the descriptive findings were put to the test and used as a basis for a predictive model. Using two complementary methods of predictive modeling allowed us to investigate whether the features we examined can be used effectively as predictors of the function of a threat. For this purpose, we fitted a conditional inference tree model and a complementary random forest. The analysis revealed that one of the less frequent features proves to be the most salient in this case: *CONDITIONALITY*. The next important predictor is *TYPE OF VERB*. The resulting conditional inference tree predicts the function of the threats with an overall accuracy of roughly 74%, which is a considerable improvement over any random classification. The complementary random forest analysis revealed that apart from *CONDITIONALITY* and *TYPE OF VERB*, *FUTURITY* and *TABOO LANGUAGE* also appear to contribute minor effects in the model. The accuracy of the random forest's predictions improved to roughly 77%. It was further noted that, as a consequence of the uneven distribution of *CONDITIONALITY* in the corpus, the individual tree model performed better at accurately predicting retaliative threats, while the random forest arrived at more accurate predictions for manipulative threats.

We have concluded from these results that, although *CONDITIONALITY* could not be found to be a pervasive feature of threatening language in terms of its frequency, it has to be considered a salient feature with a clear functional association. The infrequent use of the feature was interpreted with regard to possible strategies speakers pursue. It was proposed that speakers would deter from using conditional language in manipulative threats because it makes their intentions too transparent to maintain plausible deniability. In comparison, retaliative threats appear to be primarily aimed at venting anger and frustration, and getting the target's acknowledgement. Maintaining plausible deniability is not prioritized by speakers of retaliative threats.

It was further deduced that retaliative threats appear to be overall more homogeneous and, thus, easier to classify and to predict. Yet, most of the features used in retaliative threats are used in manipulative threats as well, which is why their association with the threat's function is not as clear as with *CONDITIONALITY*. As a possible explanation for this difference, it was proposed that manipulation is an

overall more heterogeneous goal that can occur in a great variety of configurations: by means of threatening their target, speakers aim at influencing specific actions or try to evoke particular behavior or feelings in their targets or even extort material or immaterial goods. It is likely that these different configurations additionally influence the speaker's linguistic choices. In comparison, retaliation is presumably a more homogeneous because the contextual set-up is more comparable, at least from the perspective of the speaker: the target did something that is to the disadvantage of the threatener or offended the threatener in some way and, as a consequence, the threatener announces some future negative action.

We have further argued that many of the differences between retaliative and manipulative threats mirror a distinction that was introduced by Culpeper (2011) and that is modeled after similar contrasts that have been mapped out by Kasper (1990) and Beebe (1995). Culpeper (2011: 221) suggests that two of the main functions of impoliteness are to assert power (coercive impoliteness) and to vent negative feelings (affective impoliteness). There is, however, no clear-cut divide between these functions, "[i]n particular, affective impoliteness leaks into the other categories" (Culpeper 2011: 221). It seems that this view is an accurate summary of the present findings.

On the whole, the second part of the analysis reveals that some of the generalizations found in the literature, which were rejected in the first part of the analysis, can be tentatively confirmed in light of the present findings. Most importantly, however, it was shown that the majority of these generalizations apply primarily to manipulative threats, which are indeed characterized by conditional language and are often phrased in a way that helps the speaker conceal their intentions. These characteristics, however, are often over-emphasized in the literature and clearly do not apply to all types of threats. Unfortunately, a more fine-grained distinction of threat types or a systematic discussion of retaliative threats as a form of affective impoliteness is completely disregarded in the literature, even if some definitions of threatening, such as Limberg's (2009), mention retaliation or emotional discharge as one possible function of a threat. The present findings indicate that different functions of threats are reflected in their form. Retaliative and manipulative threats systematically differ in their linguistic form, to the point that some of the features can be used as predictors of a threat's function. The findings further suggest that any comprehensive theory on threatening language should account for both, threats that are uttered with a clear agenda to manipulate a target into future behavior and threats that are uttered as a reaction to the target's past behavior and serve as a form of retaliation and an expression of anger or frustration. This distinction might also help to more clearly conceptualize the general differences between various functions of impoliteness. Interestingly, based on the frequency of these two

macro-functions, manipulative threats cannot even be considered more common or prototypical, which is another reason why the discourse should be expanded to include retaliative threats as well.

However, as was repeatedly mentioned, it is sometimes difficult to arrive at firm conclusions, largely because of the rather small data set that was investigated. Nevertheless, the findings presented in the previous sections and also in the first part of the analysis provide some insights into the nature of threatening language, some confirmations or disconfirmations of previous research and, most importantly, some pointers for future research.

After we have now gained detailed insight into the ways in which speakers realize threats, into the functions these realizations carry, and into the relation that appears to hold between form and function, in the following chapter, we will abstract away from individual results and instead focus on an overall perspective. I will discuss some of the potential overarching motivations for speakers to realize threats in exactly the way we have just discovered, and relate these motivations to a more general conceptualization of (in)directness as an optimal choice for conflictive communication.

Conclusion

6.1 Summary: The form and function of threatening

The study presented here has investigated the form and function of threatening in English. The analysis of a corpus of authentic threat utterances provides empirical support for a number of existing claims about how exactly speakers threaten, but it has also challenges some of the existing views on threatening. In order to answer the superordinate question of how speakers threaten, two interrelated analyses were carried out. This section recapitulates the main findings and draws some final conclusions.

The first part of the study was concerned with an analysis of the linguistic features of the 301 threat utterances in the corpus. Starting from existing definitions of threatening in the literature, a list of formal features which are typically associated with threats was created: conditional language, expressions of futurity, verbs that lexicalize violent actions, the reference to participants of these actions, the use of pronominal forms, the use of swear words and other forms of taboo language, and the mention of weapons. These features were examined for their frequency and distribution in order to assess whether threats really “do not come in a standardized linguistic format” (Limberg 2009: 1378). Instead of using a notion of (in)directness, the analysis assessed a threat’s pragmatic explicitness on the basis of these formal realizations, with present features as an indicator of explicitness and absent features as an indicator of vagueness.

Although the analysis revealed that there is no one standard way of realizing a threat, the findings suggest that some aspects of the form of threats are much more systematic than previously contended. Conditional language, although frequently characterized as a defining feature, was found to be relatively infrequent in the corpus. Instead of linking the announcement of a future detrimental action explicitly to the expression of demands, most speakers opt for either an announcement of a future detrimental action without an expression of any demands, or they opt for expressing their demands without linking them to the announcement of negative consequences. I concluded two things from these findings: (1) speakers remain much more vague with regard to what they want to achieve with a threat than the picture created in most of the literature suggests, and (2) another possibility might be that speakers do not always intend “to make someone do what [they]

want” (Merriam-Webster “threaten”, *v.*),¹⁰² an observation that was later taken up for further examination.

During the subsequent analyses of the remaining features, two main tendencies became increasingly visible in the data: threats that are explicit with regard to all of the features except for conditionality on the one side, and threats that are vague with regard to all of them on the other. And contrary to prevalent views in the literature, the most explicit form of threats appeared to be just as common. It was concluded that speakers presumably resort to one extreme or the other, semi-explicit or semi-vague combinations were much less frequent in the data. This observation was supported by large parts of the findings. Threats either explicitly denote the ‘who-does-what-to-whom’ of a threatening scenario with futurate expressions, violent verbs, reference to agent and patient, a clear focus on the speaker, and taboo words, or they do not mention future events or harmful actions and participants of these actions at all.

In order to incorporate an aspect of social context into the analysis, it was further examined whether the relationship of threatener and target influences the form of threats. The findings suggest that the relationship has some influence on the form of threats, but the nature of the effect was not always conclusive, with one exception; the common assumption that less powerful speakers less often utter threats, as put forward for example by Gales (2010), Limberg (2008, 2009) and Culpeper (2008, 2011), could not be confirmed by the present data. It was argued that the relationship of threatener and target presumably influences the quality of threats but not their quantity.

The last step of the formal analysis was concerned with a closer look at how exactly features are combined in threats. In order to analyze the features’ co-occurrence, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted. The results of the cluster analysis supported the prevailing opinion that there is no single readily identifiable pattern speakers repeatedly use to realize threats. Nevertheless, one distinct cluster became visible in the dendrogram, which represents threats that are pragmatically explicit with respect to all but one of the features, namely conditional language. I concluded that the majority of threats in CoJO can be described as more pragmatically explicit with respect to the expression of participants and action, as was to be expected from previous accounts of threatening.

To summarize, the analysis of the form of threats revealed that a large proportion of threats in CoJO can be described as residing on one of the ends of a scale of pragmatic explicitness: either threats are completely vague with regard to the ‘who-does-what-to-whom’ of a threatening scenario or they are considerably more

102. “threaten.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 27 March 2015. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threaten>>.

explicit than most of the literature describes. Furthermore, the findings do not appear to confirm previous taxonomies of threat types, as, for example, suggested by Gales (2010, 2012). Instead of a clear-cut distinction between direct and indirect threats, I proposed a scalar approach. Despite the fact that no one systematic structural pattern could be detected in the data, the findings on frequency and combinatory patterns of features discussed in this chapter suggest that the forms speakers use to realize their threats are more predictable than it has been argued in the previous studies.

The second part of the study was concerned with the communicative function of threats. The prevailing opinion in the literature seems to be that threats are primarily used to coerce another person into doing something s/he would not have done voluntarily. This view was challenged by a discussion of some examples that clearly serve a different function. Based on these differences, a distinction was proposed between threats that are uttered in *prospect* of an action that threateners either try to prevent or incite, and threats that are uttered in *retrospect* of events that have somehow negatively affected the target. The distinction forms the basis of a binary typology of *manipulative* and *retaliative* threats.

In a next step, the features from the first part of the analysis were reexamined for their frequency and distribution across the two threat types. It was found that the distribution of the different features across manipulative and retaliative threats mirrors the previous impression that the majority of threats in CoJO can be placed at the extreme ends of a scale ranging from very vague to very explicit threats. Manipulative threats are predominantly rather vague, while retaliative threats are rather explicit with regard to the features we have looked at in the analysis. The findings were interpreted to suggest that the formal differences between threat utterances found in the first part of the study are, at least in part, traceable to the function of a threat.

This interpretation was put to the test by reversing the premise: if the form is somehow determined by the function, it should be possible to predict the function based on the form. Two statistical models were fitted that try to predict the threats' function on the basis of their form: a single conditional inference tree model and a random forest. The analysis revealed that only two of the features I investigated have discriminatory power in both models: conditional language and the verbs used in the threat. In other words, based on the question of whether or not a threat contains a conditional clause and/or a violent verb, the conditional inference tree predicts the function of the threats with an overall accuracy of roughly 74%, and the random forest model predicts the outcome with an overall accuracy of 77%. Both results, although not overwhelming, are a considerable improvement over any random classification. While the first part of the analysis rejected the status of conditional language as a pervasive feature of threatening language, the results

of the predictive model suggest that it has to be considered a salient feature with a clear functional association.

It was concluded that, overall, retaliative threats are easier to predict because they appear to be more homogeneous than their manipulative counterpart. Of course, an additional factor might be that retaliative threats can be predicted on the basis of *what is there*, whereas manipulative threats are more often characterized by *what is not*. With regard to our initial question of *how* speakers threaten, it seems to be adequate to answer that it depends on *when* they threaten – and why. The present findings suggest that the situations in which speakers threaten, i.e. whether it is in prospect of something or in retrospect, considerably influence the linguistic choices they make, to the point where parts of the function can be predicted based on the form.

On the whole, the analyses reveal that some of the generalizations found in the literature can be confirmed by looking at actual language data while others have to be rejected. Most importantly, however, it was shown that the majority of the generalizations we find apply primarily to manipulative threats. This points to an unfortunate contradiction in the literature, where we find mostly views that describe the form of threats as extremely heterogeneous, if not entirely unpredictable, and at the same time assume their function to be extremely homogeneous.

The current study has shown that retaliative and manipulative threats differ systematically in their linguistic form, and that large parts of these differences can be explained by their distinct function. This prompts the view that any comprehensive theory of threatening language should account for both threats that are uttered with a clear agenda to manipulate a target into future behavior and threats that are uttered as a reaction to the target's past behavior and serve as a form of retaliation and an expression of anger or frustration. To carefully distinguish between these two types of threats might also help to more clearly conceptualize the general differences between various functions of impoliteness.

Taking into account all of the present results, it was then briefly discussed whether the realization patterns found in the data can be explained as ideal choices, motivated by one overarching rationale. In order to investigate such a claim, which has been put forward by recent research on (in)directness, the potential speaker goals and choices were conceptualized in a tangible cost-benefit-equation. The results of such a game-theory-inspired analysis suggest that, instead of utilizing one unified and optimal strategy for one set of speaker goals, speakers seem to adapt their realizations to two adversary goals and, correspondingly, develop two optimal strategies, one for each of their superordinate goals of retaliation or manipulation. Consequently, the present results do not support assumptions of non-conventional indirectness as the ideal candidate for conflictive communications in general.

Lastly, the study also set out to present a methodological contribution to pragmatic research. One of the main aims was to test the usefulness of a number of quantitative methods for pragmatic inquiries in general and speech act research in particular. The summary of the rich findings that is presented here already indicates that innovative methods can indeed prove fruitful, especially when researching a fuzzy object of study. Instead of generating a detailed theory based on individual examples, which often only works if it incorporates as many exceptions as it formulates rules, the present approach highlights the advantages of a data-driven approach in pragmatics. The categories that were analyzed are based on observation and the conclusions are based on inductive reasoning. The findings consist of a list of claims that can be further tested, with different data or different methods, but their validity is not as easily questionable as the claims on threatening we find in the literature. To make use of a tried and tested quote:

[w]hen you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it, your knowledge is of a meager and unsatisfactory kind. It may be the beginning of knowledge, but you have scarcely, in your thoughts, advanced to the stage of science. (William Thomson, quoted in Gries 2013: 1)

However, it goes without saying that innovative research often comes with its very own flaws. Some of them were already discussed, others merely mentioned in the previous chapters. In the two final sections of this book, I will briefly address two of these flaws in more detail: (1) the question of how all of the present results might fit into a bigger picture of communication models and (2) some of the potential (methodological) criticisms that could be addressed by future studies.

6.2 The risks and benefits of threatening: The rationale of a strategic speaker

In the previous chapters, it was argued that two general tendencies are visible in the data: threats that explicitly denote the who-does-what-to-whom of a future harmful action and threats that remain vague with respect to the majority of the features we have analyzed. We have related these differences at least in part to the function of the respective threats. Whether speakers attempt to manipulate someone or to retaliate against them is presumably reflected in the linguistic choices speakers make. Some of the possible motivations for individual linguistic choices have been discussed already alongside the results. It was not yet addressed, however, what could be an overarching rationale behind these linguistic choices. This chapter is

dedicated to a first attempt at uncovering exactly such an overarching rationale. The precise issue that is taken up for discussion at this point is the speakers' possible motivation to alternate between including almost all of the previously discussed features or none of them. It is, of course, unavoidable to address this issue without touching upon existing notions of *indirectness*, even though the present study has focused on *pragmatic explicitness*, in terms of frequently used forms to express the same function.

As a discussion basis, I will draw upon a rather recent approach: the conceptualization of indirectness in a model of communicative efficacy as proposed by Pinker, Nowak and Lee (2008) and Lee and Pinker (2010).¹⁰³ The idea of a *strategic speaker* is, of course, not unique to Pinker and colleagues' approach. Already Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualize speakers as rational agents, who motivate their choice based on the weighing up of different constraints:

The social valence of linguistic form has two especially important sources: the intrinsic potential impact that a specific communicative intention may have on a social relationship, and the ways in which by modifying the expression of that intention participants seek to modify that impact – such modification measuring for participants the nature of the social relationship. On this view, a very considerable intentional and strategic mediation connects linguistic form with social relationships. In short, language usages are tied to strategies rather than directly to relationships, although relationships will be characterized by the continued use of certain strategies.
(Brown & Levinson 1987: 281)

Similarly, Leech (1983: 36), whose model of pragmatic principles also views a speaker's tasks "in terms of means-ends analysis", argues that linguistic choices are strategic solutions to communicative dilemmas. Nevertheless, we will restrict our discussion to the *strategic speaker* model proposed by Pinker and colleagues for two reasons. First of all, although their model has been criticized extensively (cf., e.g., Terkourafi 2011a, 2011b), it raises some interesting points with regard to the use of indirectness in models of communicative conflict, which might help to shed some light on what exactly is going on here. Although threats are not the main focus, the *strategic speaker* model Pinker and colleagues develop lends itself to comparison because threats, alongside solicitation, sexual advances and other speech acts with tangible payoffs, are repeatedly described by the authors as "among the prime scenarios in which off-record indirect speech is called for" (Lee & Pinker 2010: 786).

¹⁰³. A comparable model of *Strategic conversation* was developed by Asher and Lascarides (2013). However, the authors focus more strongly on the interactional component of conversation and factor in both speaker and hearer. For the present study the focus was more on a speaker-based analysis of the rationale behind less overt threats.

What Lee and Pinker refer to as “off-record indirect speech” corresponds to what we have considered one extreme end of the scale of pragmatic explicitness, i.e. pragmatically vague threats. Secondly, this is only meant as an additional scenario that could also be developed further in subsequent research. But more on that a little later.

Pinker and colleagues (2008, 2010) argue that a speaker’s choices cannot always be explained in terms of cooperation. The authors see it as one of the main shortcomings of existing research that it is rarely acknowledged that communication presumably entails both cooperation and conflict (cf. Pinker et al. 2008: 833). The gist of their argument is that indirect speech is a rational choice made by a *strategic speaker* because it allows for optimal balancing of altruistic and egoistic motives and general insecurities of communication. The authors argue that by being non-conventionally indirect, speakers minimize risks and maximize benefits of their communication. In order to support this argument, they draw on a dilemma from the realms of *game theory* (cf., e.g., von Neumann & Morgenstern 1944) known as the *identification problem* (cf. Schelling 1960). A game-theoretical angle allows the authors to illustrate speaker and hearer goals as tangible cost-benefit equations that speakers assess in order to come to a decision of whether to be direct or indirect. These payoffs can be depicted in a matrix similar to the one in Figure 6.1 below.

Three different scenarios that call for off-record indirect speech are discussed by the authors. Off-record indirectness is conceptualized as an optimal solution for (i) attaining plausible deniability, (ii) for negotiating relationships and ultimately also in (iii) situations where no uncertainty about the speaker’s intended meaning exists (cf. Pinker et al. 2008: 834–836). The issue of plausible deniability is illustrated with a bribing scenario. A speaker is “pulled over for running a red light and is pondering whether to bribe the officer” in order to avoid the cost of a ticket (Pinker et al. 2008: 834). Apart from the decision to bribe or not to bribe the officer, the possibility of merely implicating a bribe adds a third option to the speaker’s payoff matrix.

	Dishonest officer	Honest officer
Don't bribe	Traffic ticket	Traffic ticket
Bribe	Go free	Arrest for bribery
Implicate bribe	Go free	Traffic ticket

Figure 6.1 Bribery payoff matrix. Modeled after Pinker et al. (2008: 834), the colors signify preferred (light grey), dispreferred (grey) and least preferred (dark grey) outcomes

The matrix in Figure 6.1 illustrates the speaker's risks (traffic ticket, arrest for bribery), benefits (go free, avoid arrest for bribery) and strategies to cope with the dilemma. Faced with a traffic ticket, a speaker can choose between bribe, no bribe, or an implicated bribe (strategies). The specific costs and benefits of these options depend on whether the speaker faces a cooperative interlocutor, i.e. a dishonest police officer that will accept the bribe, or an antagonistic one, i.e. an honest police officer that will not accept the bribe and arrest the speaker for attempted bribery. Next to the traffic ticket, being arrested for bribery constitutes the highest cost in this scenario. Pinker and colleagues argue that a speaker's assessment of the likelihood of encountering an honest vs. a dishonest police officer is what essentially influences the speaker's choice of linguistic strategy (Pinker et al. 2008: 834). They further argue that a cooperative police officer, i.e. a dishonest one, will take a bribe even if it is only insinuated because of their general willingness to cooperate. Compared to that, an antagonistic police officer will have a much higher threshold to assume an utterance was intended as a bribe because it will be harder to prove if it is only insinuated.

From this the authors conclude that an implicated bribe is the optimal solution because it balances the risk of being arrested for bribery by an honest police officer with the chance of going free if a dishonest police officer takes the bribe (Pinker et al. 2008: 835).¹⁰⁴ The authors then go on to extend the model to scenarios with less clear payoffs and ultimately argue that by being more or less direct, speakers balance multiple risks of communication at once. Indirectness is characterized as the optimal strategy to hedge against these risks (Pinker et al. 2008: 837). They conclude that the resulting model of a *strategic speaker*

makes numerous empirical predictions about how people interpret the intent and perceive the relationship between a speaker and a hearer depending on the level of indirectness in the speaker's words. (Pinker et al. 2008: 837)

In a follow-up paper (Lee & Pinker 2010), a selection of these 'empirical predictions' is tested in three experiments. Lee and Pinker argue that the results of their experiments corroborate the hypotheses generated by the *strategic speaker* model on various levels:

104. One of the main points of criticism Terkourafi (2011a: 2863) raises in her response to the *strategic speaker* model is that all forms of communication involve cooperation at a higher level. She refers to other models of locutionary cooperation, illocutionary and perlocutionary cooperation as, for example, by Tomasello (2009).

- participants' estimation of the probability of sanctions increases relative to the perceived degree of directness of a bribe or a threat (Lee & Pinker 2010: 799)¹⁰⁵
- participants' estimation of likelihood of a successful¹⁰⁶ bribe increases relative to the perceived degree of directness of the bribe (Lee & Pinker 2010: 793)
- participants' estimation of certainty of addressee about the nature of the speech act decreases relative to its perceived degree of directness (Lee & Pinker 2010: 800)

The authors further contend that the results in their entirety support the hypothesis that “indirect speech is a strategic response to the payoff structure defined by a mixture of cooperative and antagonistic hearers” (Lee & Pinker 2010: 801). The strategies speakers choose to realize a speech act in a potentially conflictive setting (here: bribing, requesting a favor, threatening and making a sexual advance) factor in an estimation of the potential cost of the act and the likelihood of its success (Lee & Pinker 2010: 801).

Based on these findings, the *strategic speaker* model should allow for clear predictions for the case of threats. For any strategically operating speaker who is balancing the risk of potential sanctions and the desire for success of their threats, an indirect, i.e. vague threat should be the optimal solution. The general outline of any threatening scenario should be the same and should be educible in a payoff matrix almost identical to the one proposed by Pinker and colleagues (Figure 6.1).

However, the payoff matrix of bribing is not easily transferable because, although Pinker and colleagues argue otherwise, the risks and benefits of threatening are not the same as with bribing or requesting. There are at least two fundamental differences. Firstly, the outcome of a threat is always in some way detrimental to the target, either because s/he is coerced into (not) doing something or s/he is affected by potentially harmful consequences. Secondly and related to this, a threatener does not face insecurity about whether s/he encounters a cooperative or an antagonistic target but rather whether the target will be amenable to the influence of the threat or not. This means that, unlike bribes, favors or sexual advances, threats are truly *conflictive* because threatener and target do not share any goal irrespective of whether the target cooperates or not.

105. In a pilot study, the authors asked participants to rate the degree of directness of a given wording on a scale from 0 to 100. Based on these ratings, four wordings with significantly distinct ratings were chosen and designated as *very vague* (1), *indirect* (2), *nearly overt* (3) and *overt* (4) (Lee & Pinker 2010: 792). This scale of directness is used in some of the conducted experiments and depicted either as a scale from 1 to 4 or expressed in words with the above-mentioned values.

106. ‘Successful bribe’ is operationalized as “officer will interpret the speech acts as bribes and take the money” whereas ‘unsuccessful bribe’ is operationalized as “officer will interpret speech acts as attempted bribes and arrest the driver” (Lee & Pinker 2010: 793, plot caption).

This becomes even more clear if we compare two of the scenarios Lee and Pinker construct for their experiment: “a driver attempting to bribe a police officer in order to avoid a ticket” and “a professor threatening a talented student with the loss of a scholarship if she does not work in his lab” (Lee & Pinker 2010: 787). The former scenario has been discussed already. The police officer can choose between taking a bribe, which poses a financial incentive, or declining the bribe, which can presumably be described as posing a ‘moral incentive’. In both cases the officer does not face imminent negative consequences.¹⁰⁷ In comparison, the student in the threatening scenario faces two detrimental consequences: losing a scholarship or losing the prospect of “the opportunity to broaden her experience and learn a new set of research skills” (Lee & Pinker 2010: 804). In other words, if the student is cooperative she attains to the professor’s goal, and if she is antagonistic she attains to her own goal but she risks losing another of her goals in both cases. In such a ‘no-win situation’ for the student, her only incentive would be avoiding the ‘greater evil’ (cf. Limberg 2009: 1379). This is analyzed similarly by Beller (2002) who compares the motivational schemas of threats and promises and summarizes the differences as follows:

If the addressee cooperates [...], then in the first case [a promise] he gets something he cannot expect without the promise (the reward A +), whereas in the second case [a threat] he only avoids the punishment (A –) without getting anything positive in return.
(Beller 2002: 114)

Described like this, a bribe can also be conceptualized as a kind of (illegal) promise. Similarly to bribing, both favors and sexual advances can be analyzed as involving at least one positive incentive for the addressee. In comparison, a threatening scenario does not involve such a positive incentive. This is why bribing, asking a favor or a sexual advance can be described as potentially involving complementary costs and benefits for speaker and addressee that can overlap or be aligned if both participants cooperate. For threats, however, the payoffs are always to the disadvantage of the addressee regardless of antagonism or cooperation.

It follows from this imbalance that the cost-benefit equation of a threatener does not factor in the cooperation or antagonism of a target, but is rather oriented exclusively towards the speaker’s own goals, which might be achieving success and avoiding potential sanction. If success is conceptualized as ‘compliance’ by the target and potential sanctions are related to responsibility for vs. deniability of the threat, a payoff matrix should look like the one in Figure 6.2.

107. Of course it could be argued that the officer may face consequences if it is detected that he is corrupt. Seeing that this is not discussed in the initial model, however, such a potential ‘secondary consequence’ will be disregarded in the discussion.

	Success	Sanction
No threat	–	–
Threat	Compliance	Responsibility
Implicate threat	Noncompliance	Deniability

Figure 6.2 Threatening payoff matrix. The colors signify preferred (light grey) versus dispreferred (grey) outcomes

The matrix depicts three possible strategies the speaker can opt for: no threat at all, a pragmatically explicit threat that is straightforward about the who-does-what-to-whom of a future detrimental action, and a vague threat that only insinuates these features. In order to decide on the optimal strategy, speakers have to take into account two aims that call for opposite behavior: their wish for success of their threat on the one side and their wish to avoid sanctioning of any kind on the other. While the latter according to traditional models of politeness might motivate mitigation and off-record indirect speech, i.e. vague threats, the former might rather call for explicitness and aggravation (cf. Lee & Pinker 2010: 793, 799, 801). Consequently, the matrix cannot predict one clearly favorable outcome.

Potential outcomes are sketched out as follows. Not uttering a threat at all does not lead to a change of the existing state. In the realms of Lee and Pinker's (2010) threatening scenario the professor would remain silent about potentially taking away the scholarship from the student and the student would maybe leave the lab and receive the scholarship, but this outcome is not controlled by the professor. Alternatively, the professor could utter a threat that explicitly denotes his aims and his demands, as for example "I am on the board of the scholarship committee. If you decide to work for another lab, I will ensure that you don't get any funding in the future." This or a similar wording increases the chances that the student is sure about the nature of the utterance and refrains from moving on to another lab (compliance). At the same time, the wording increases the chance that the professor could be held liable for threatening the student (responsibility). This could turn into a positive outcome for the student, e.g., if the professor has to resign and the student gets both the scholarship and the new job. However, that does not follow directly from the student's noncompliance and is thus not factored in. The last option would be an implicated threat along the lines of, for example, "I'm on the scholarship committee and saw that you applied for next year. You would be a great addition to my team." With such an utterance, the professor minimizes the risk of being held liable for threatening his student (deniability). However, the chance of success also decreases because the threat might not be perceived as such or the student might not feel as inclined to act accordingly (noncompliance).

As was argued already, there is no clearly beneficial or disadvantageous strategy for the speaker because what is preferred as an outcome appears to depend on the prioritization of the speaker's aims. Off-record indirect speech, so it seems, is only the optimal strategy if the aim of avoiding possible sanctions is ranked higher than the aim of guaranteeing the threat's success. This is what the *strategic speaker* model would predict. It is, however, not what was found in the present study. As was illustrated in the previous sections, instead of a clear tendency for vague utterances two tendencies were identified that appeared to be the extreme ends of a scale.

Taken together, the findings can be interpreted to indicate that a threatener's risks and benefits do not align into a clear pattern and, consequently, there is not one optimal strategy. It is doubtful that the main reason for the variation found in the present analysis is that speakers encounter "cooperators" or "antagonists", as Lee and Pinker suggest. All of the previously reported findings rather indicate that *strategic threateners* appear to attend to at least two different goals, which is reflected in the two types of strategies that were detected. Pragmatically explicit and pragmatically vague threats are optimal strategies not for different kinds of speakers, but for different kinds of speaker goals, namely manipulation and retaliation. From what has been analyzed in the previous chapters it can be concluded that threats with a manipulative function are less explicit because the threateners are trying to maintain plausible deniability while manipulating the target into some future behavior without having to assume responsibility for the manipulation. Compared to this, threats with a retaliative function are often more explicit because threateners are primarily trying to achieve recognition of their threat by the target and, as was further argued, vent anger, frustration or other strong emotions. Sanctioning and potential consequences appear to be of secondary importance to these speakers. A model of a *strategic threatener* of course does not hold all the answers to why speakers opt for off-record indirect speech in conflictive scenarios. However, it was shown that an analysis in terms of a cost-benefit equation has certain advantages over analyses that presuppose 'purely cooperative' approaches.

Of course, the points I have touched upon on the last pages all relate to a much more fundamental issue: little is still known about the role of pragmatic explicitness or indirectness in models of impoliteness and communicative conflict. While recent years have seen a growing interest in research on impoliteness phenomena, the state of research still cannot "hope to compete with the embarrassment of research riches which the concept of politeness enjoys" (Locher & Bousfield 2008: 2). Conflictive illocutions were once neglected as 'marginal' to communication (cf. Leech 1983: 105), but in the last decade it has been repeatedly claimed that "any adequate account of the dynamics of interpersonal communication [...]"

should consider hostile as well as cooperative communication” (Locher & Bousfield 2008: 2). And judging from the results of the present study, the case of threatening appears to be a prime candidate for further research. Which brings us to the final section of this book, an outlook on potential future research, addressing some of the shortcoming of this present study.

6.3 Outlook: A to-do list for future research

This study has given a panoramic view on both the form and function of threats: setting out with an inventory of forms, it has investigated realization patterns and mapped these patterns onto potential functions, it has discussed threats as a form of impoliteness and has, just now, briefly entertained some thought on potential speaker motives. If the present mixed method approach can yield something like a moral lesson, it is certainly this: qualitative research can yield extremely interesting and insightful results, but it is only in combination with quantitative measures that these will lead to conclusive results. And even then, many questions remain to be answered.

Most importantly, I cannot claim that I have presented convincing evidence for the generalizability of the present results across all types of threats. Although, I have argued in favor of the results’ generalizability, ultimately, and in line with my own research ethics, it remains to be empirically tested whether other, less drastic forms of threatening abide by the same principles that were proposed here. The present findings should be complemented by analyses using not only different data, but also different elicitation methods. This way, it could be ensured that, although judicial opinions are a somewhat specific type of data source, they offer a helpful starting point for obtaining especially conflictive speech acts. Similar analyses are conceivable for other (potentially criminal) speech acts: insults or hate speech, conspiring, or even lying, which, if done under oath, also constitutes a criminal offense.

Where possible, elicitation procedures should control for a more balanced data set with regard to the mode of communication and information on micro- as well as macro-social variables should be included. Are written threats, for example, less pragmatically explicit, because the written record increases the chance of social sanction? In addition to that, experimental research design might be the most suitable to manipulate P and D and this way probe some of the claims we have put forward, e.g. whether more powerful speakers have to be *less pragmatically explicit* because more power *behind discourse* necessitates less power *in discourse*.

Another rather fundamental issue that was not addressed is the perception of threats. We have discussed the difference of saliency and frequency, a distinction

that has previously been recognized in the existing literature, but that was not systematically applied in the majority of case studies we have discussed. Does the *typicality* of a threat hinge on whether it contains features that speakers (or threateners and targets) perceive as salient or does it hinge on whether or not these forms are frequently found? And if these two measures reveal fundamentally different linguistic forms, how do we explain a feature's saliency, given that frequency has been found to influence so many psycholinguistic measures?

Furthermore, the present study has almost exclusively focused on a speaker-oriented perspective on the object of study, but what about the hearer or target of the threat? Are threats perceived differently, depending on their form and their function? Do targets distinguish between different kinds of threatening in the same way as speakers seem to? And if so, does the *effect* of a threat rest in any way on the speaker's choice of words, or are para-verbal signals more decisive?

In addition, future studies should also focus on other national and sub-national varieties other than American English, furthering recent developments in the field of variational pragmatics. As I have argued, a solid baseline is a necessary prerequisite for investigating any type of variation and this could, and should, be done based on the present findings. Do we find different patterns of pragmatic explicitness in other varieties? And, ultimately, what about cross-cultural differences? If macro-social variables have an influence on the form and function of threats, is the situation different with languages and cultures that are known to incorporate social hierarchies differently?

And finally, as was already mentioned, comparable research should be carried out on other conflictive speech acts. The present findings are considered necessary and useful complements to existing research on threatening, but, more importantly, they should serve as a starting point for a more thorough analysis of a broad variety of impoliteness phenomena.

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Statutes

West's F.S.A. § 836.05
West's Ann.Cal.Penal Code § 136.1
USSG, § 3C1, 118 U.S.C.A.
18 U.S. Code § 1513

Appendix

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
1_1	Abbott v. State, 190 Md.App. 595 (2010)	O'Malley, getting ready to lose my wife after 24 years of marriage. 3rd construction co. & 2nd house I am going to lose because of no good fucking government like you and pieces of shit like you. If i ever get close enough to yoy, I will rap my hands around your throat and strangle the life from you. This will solve many problems for true AMERICAN'S. Maybe you can send your MEXICAN army after me, you no good AMERICAN SELL OUT PIECE OF SHIT. I HOPE YOU DROP DEAD BEFORE I GET TO YOU, I WOULD HATE TO TO LOSE MY LIFE BECAUSE OF A PIECE OF SHIT LIKE YOU. FUCK YOU TRULY WALTER C. ABBOTT JR.	written
2_2	Williams v. Com., 721 S.W2d 710 (1986)	Do you want your life?	oral
3_3	Duan v. State, 970 So.2d 903 (2007)	If you don't pay me the \$2,500, me and the other witnesses will walk in there and say we don't know anything.	oral
4_4	Jackson v. Thurmer, 748 F.Supp.2d 990 (2010)	It felt like I was being chased down as if someone was trying to kill me and because I felt trapped in that cell, with no place to retreat to for safety that I felt like I was going to freak out and strike out against whomever was around me as a means of protecting myself.	oral
5_5	State v. Cardell, 318 N.J.Super. 175 (1999)	If she doesn't understand who I am or she doesn't get on the phone right now, I will make sure I catch up with her later.	oral
6_6	U.S. v. Wooten, 689 F.3d 570 (2012)	I am going to rob you. I have a gun. Give me your money.	oral
7_7	City of San Jose v. Garbett, 190 Cal. App.4th 526 (2010)	What does somebody have to do to change policy around here? Do you have to be – take matters into your own hands like the Black man in Missouri?	oral
8_8	USS-Posco Industries v. Edwards, 111 Cal. App.4th 436 (2003)	You know what time I get off. You know where the parking lot is at, and you know what time I'll be out there. We'll just go out there and take care of this.	oral
8_9	USS-Posco Industries v. Edwards, 111 Cal. App.4th 436 (2003)	One of these days some motherfucker is going to piss me off and they're going to have to change the company's name from USS-POSCO to USS-Columbine.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
9_10	U.S. v. Jennings, 439 F.3d 604 (2006)	Put all your money on top of the counter. I have a gun. Just do it now.	oral
10_11	Martin v. U.S., 691 F.2d 1235 (1982)	I'm trying to do the Aubuchon's a favor. They best realize that. I'm 42 years old, and I'll not be locked in prison the rest of my natural life. They best think about it. Their sister didn't!!	written
10_12	Martin v. U.S., 691 F.2d 1235 (1982)	You best think about the seriousness of this matter before its to late. I'm telling you this because I mean every word of it. If you care anything atall about the child and others involved you best do something. They can't keep me in Texas forever, and Mister You and Dean or the two I hold personally responsible. I don't care what happens to me so long as I know you didn't enjoy your immunity. And you want!	written
11_13	People v. Brooks, 26 Cal.App.4th 142 (1994)	Don't go to court and testify against our home boys. Or else we'll hurt you or we'll take you out. If you go to court and testify, I'll kill you. There's no where you can go that I won't be able to find you.	oral
11_14	People v. Brooks, 26 Cal.App.4th 142 (1994)	I heard that you had went downtown to testify or something. Someone ... told me that they seen you down there. That's a stupid thing to do. Get your hands off of it.	oral
12_15	People v. Stanfield, 32 Cal.App.4th 1152 (1995)	Not reading this will cost you your life.	written
12_16	People v. Stanfield, 32 Cal.App.4th 1152 (1995)	I am not bluffing. If you don't want anything further to do with this case, I intend to arrange happy motivated paid gang bangers, carjacking with fatality.	written
13_17	Com. v. Meier, 56 Mass.App.Ct. 278 (2002)	Maybe it's time for me to get a gun, Mr. Erlich.	oral
14_18	Dayton v. Dunnigan, 103 Ohio App.3d 67 (1995)	Are your uniforms bullet-proof?	oral
14_19	Dayton v. Dunnigan, 103 Ohio App.3d 67 (1995)	Judgment has come to the people down at Pensacola and it will be coming here.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
15_20	U.S. v. Capps, 952 F.2d 1026 (1991)	Harry is snitching on me. I am bringing in some bikers to kick his ass and deal with the snitch.	oral
16_21	U.S. v. Bush, 94 Fed. Appx. 101 (2004)	I will get that prosecutor, Seth Weber, for doing this to me and Neeson for fucking up our getaway trip for that weekend.	written
17_22	In re M.S., 10 Cal.4th 698 (1995)	We are going to kill you, you are all going to die of AIDS.	oral
17_23	In re M.S., 10 Cal.4th 698 (1995)	We are going to get you faggots.	oral
18_24	Shackelford v. Shirley, 948 F.2d 935 (1991)	The next time you come by, I'll be toting an ass whipping.	oral
19_25	People v. Bolin, 18 Cal.4th 297 (1998)	Well I finally heard from Paula and what I heard from her I'm not too pleased with. I heard her side of things which are real different from what you had to say. I'm only going to say this one time so you better make sure you understand. If you ever touch my daughter again, I'll have you permanently removed from the face of this Earth. You better thank your lucky stars you're Ashley's father or you'd already have your fucking legs broke. I found out what happened to most of the money from the van, and I also found out you got 1500 for the truck not 1300 like you said. I'm still going to find out how much you got for the Buick and if it's 1¢ over 1000 you can kiss your ass good bye. I also found out it was running like a top and the burnt valves was a bunch of bull shit, just like I thought in the first place. You sounded a little shaky over the phone and gave yourself away. I told you a long time ago don't play fucking games with me. You're playing with the wrong person asshole. I've made a couple of phone calls to San Pedro to some friends of mine and they're not too happy with your fucking game playing with other people's money and especially you hitting Paula. What I want done and it better be done. Everything that's mine or hers tools, clothes, books, gun, TV, VCR, I don't fucking care if it's a bobby pin, you better give it to Paula. I want all my shit given to her and I mean every fucking thing. You have a week to do it or I make another phone call. I hope you get the fucking message. Your game playing is eventually going to get you in more than a poo butt game player can handle. 1 week asshole. And keep playing your game with my granddaughter and see what happens.	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
20_26	U.S. v. Archer, 671 F.3d 149 (2011)	Sarvjit. If ur a government witness signal me by not responding to this message. But if ur a friend call me.	written
21_27	U.S. v. Hoffman, 806 F.2d 703 (1986)	Ronnie, Listen Chump! Resign or You'll Get Your Brains Blown Out.	written
22_28	U.S. v. Fulmer, 108 F.3d 1486 (1997)	Hi Dick, Kevan Fulmer. Hope things are well, hope you had an enjoyable Easter and all the other holidays since I've spoken with you last. I want you to look something up. It's known as misprision. Just think of it in terms of misprision of a felony. Hope all is well. The silver bullets are coming. I'll talk to you. Enjoy the intriguing unraveling of what I said to you. Talk to you, Dick. It's been a pleasure. Take care.	oral
23_29	King v. U.S., ___ A.3d ___ (2012)	There's that snitch, Mr. Clark. We know where he lives at, and there's ways to keep snitches quiet.	oral
24_30	U.S. v. Dillard, 835 F.Supp.2d 1120 (2011)	Maybe you don't realize the consequences of killing the innocent. If Tiller could speak from hell, he would tell you what a soulless existence you are purposefully considering, all in the name of greed. Thousands of people are already looking into your background, not just in Wichita, but from all over the U.S. They will know your habits and routines. They know where you shop, who your friends are, what you drive, where you live. You will be checking under your car everyday – because maybe today is the day someone places an explosive under it. People will be picketing your home, your office. You will come under greater scrutiny than you've ever known, legally and professionally. Much worse than the disciplinary actions and ethical concerns that you've been facing. You will become a pariah – no physician will want to A1:C302 with you. You will be seen like all the other hacks that have stooped to doing abortions when they weren't good enough to maintain a real practice. You will lose your legitimate clientele, as no one bringing a baby into this world wants to be in the same facility where you are also killing them. You will have trouble keeping staff who are willing to participate in innocent blood-shedding and won't be able to keep the sanitary conditions necessary to maintain a healthy medical facility. You will end up having the same kind of rat-infested, dirty facility that they have in north-eastern Kansas. Anyone who partners with you will experience the same headaches. Not to mention the fact that you will be haunted by bloody, squirming, dismembered babies in your sleep. You can't do what is morally reprehensible and enjoy peace of mind. The Bible says, "There are six things the Lord hates ... hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises evil schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil ..." Proverbs 6:16–18. Abortion kills human life-it matters	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
		not if you kill it at 6 weeks or at 26 weeks, it's still the unnatural, violent death of a human baby for the sake of convenience. You are doing what the Humane Society wouldn't allow to happen to a pregnant dog or cat. I urge you to think very carefully about the choices you are making. There are 3 churches within 1 block of your practice, and many others who must take a stand. We will not let this abomination continue without doing everything we can to stop it. We pray you will either make the right choice and use your medical practice to heal instead of kill, or that God will bring judgment on you, the likes of which you cannot imagine. We don't want you killing our children in our community. Good people are tired of this rampant evil, and will stand against you every step of the way. Do the world a favor and ABORT this stupid plan of yours. It's not too late to change your mind. Angel Dillard	
25_31	U.S. v. Dinwiddie, 76 F.3d 913 (1996)	Robert, remember Dr. Gunn? This could happen to you.... He is not in the world anymore.... Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed...	oral
25_32	U.S. v. Dinwiddie, 76 F.3d 913 (1996)	Patty, you have not seen violence yet until you see what we do to you.	oral
26_33	U.S. v. Hanna, 293 F.3d 1080 (2002)	William Jefferson Blythe 3rd, Mr. buzzard's feast, WANTED For MURDER, DEAD OR ALIVE. If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.	written
27_34	U.S. v. Lincoln, 403 F.3d 703 (2005)	President Goerge [sic] W Bush, you think cause [sic] you go over There and Blow Them up that The killing will Stop in you [sic] Dream They got over 275,800 or more since, Never mind that this is only the Beging [sic] of the Badass war To come Just think Their army is over here already hiding They have more Posion gas Then [sic] you know. ha ha. Too bad you don't think Like Them. You will see a good Job Done agin [sic] may [sic] 2 week's, [sic] maybe 2 months, 3, who know's [sic]. You Will Die too George W Bush real Soon They Promissed [sic] That you would Long Live BIN LADEN.	written
28_35	U.S. v. McDonald, 444 Fed.Appx. 710 (2011)	She is right now on my death list.... The first thing I'm doing when I get out of here is going after her.	oral
29_36	U.S. v. McMillan, 53 F.Supp.2d 895 (1999)	Where's a pipebomber when you need him?	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
29_37	U.S. v. McMillan, 53 F.Supp.2d 895 (1999)	ya'll look like a bunch of birds on a telephone wire waiting to be shot off by a man with a shotgun.	oral
30_38	U.S. v. Viefhaus, 168 F.3d 392 (1999)	As an added ultimatum to those of you who are still unwilling to pick up a sword, a letter from a high ranking revolutionary commander has been written and received demanding that action be taken against the government by all white warriors by December 15th and if this action is not taken, bombs will be activated in 15 pre-selected major U.S. cities. That means December 15, 1996, one week from today. In [other] words, this war is going to start with or without you.	oral
31_39	U.S. v. Bagdasarian, 652 F.3d 1113 (2011)	Re: Obama fk the niggar, he will have a 50 cal in the head soon	written
31_40	U.S. v. Bagdasarian, 652 F.3d 1113 (2011)	shoot the nig country fkd for another 4 years +, what nig has done ANYTHING right? ? ? ? long term? ? ? ?	written
32_41	U.S. v. Bellrichard, 994 F.2d 1318 (1993)	Never in history, except sambos. If they go to prison you'll be dead in less than 7 months – so help me God!	written
32_42	U.S. v. Bellrichard, 994 F.2d 1318 (1993)	You'd best begin opposing an incinerator in ol' Winona or else you may get your ignorant ass burned. And you'd better get the rest of those stupid fucking commissioners to oppose and stop that damn incinerator – just to save your worthless God-damned life, you bitch!	written
32_43	U.S. v. Bellrichard, 994 F.2d 1318 (1993)	Don't ever fuck with me again and God will let you live! Being jailed is what you deserve but, if you persist, being shot is what you'll all get.	written
33_44	U.S. v. Whitfield, 31 F.3d 747 (1994)	You are my most desired goal, and I will Stop at nothing to reach you.	written
34_45	Roy v. U.S., 416 F.2d 874 (1969)	Hello, baby. I hear the President is coming to the base. I am going to get him.	oral
35_46	Lucero v. Trosch, 928 F.Supp. 1124 (1996)	He is a mass murderer and he should be dead. Absolutely. (...) He deserves to be dead, absolutely.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
36_47	U.S. v. Callahan, 702 F.2d 964 (1983)	Dear Mr. Knight: It is essential that Reagan and Bush are assassinated on Inauguration Day in front of the television cameras. If you can arrange for me to get into the act, I will be willing to accept the responsibility. I don't want anymore Protestant Scum in the White House. The separation of Church and State is a sacrosanct privilege to me and all Christians. The fate of the Christian West hangs in the balance. The forces of the Reformation must be destroyed before there is any possibility of dissolving the threat posed by Jewish Fascism and Communism. You know where I live. Just call, I will be in Washington in a few hours.	written
37_48	U.S. v. Darby, 37 F.3d 1059 (1994)	How would you like to have a pipe bomb delivered to your place of employment? This is not a bomb threat.	oral
38_49	U.S. v. Daughenbaugh, 49 F.3d 171 (1995)	Now comes the Aryan shadow of death to let you know that your death is at hand. I, the Aryan shadow of death, shall execute you in the very most painful way. As the Lord said, every hair on your head is numbered. You will never again prosecute an Aryan.	written
39_50	U.S. v. Dutsch, 357 F.2d 331 (1966)	I'll not miss this time.	oral
40_51	U.S. v. Gordon, 974 F.2d 1110 (1992)	Ronald Reagan is the anti-Christ, he must be killed and I must kill him.	oral
41_52	U.S. v. Leaverton, 835 F.2d 254 (1987)	This could have blown your [expletive deleted] head off! Think about it. D.E.N.	written
42_53	U.S. v. Manning, 923 F.2d 83 (1991)	Honorable David Hittner, I am writing you this letter to tell you that you will die within the next six months. I hope you fall dead one day giving someone some time. I want you to know to just fuck you and the horse you rode in on. You can't keep me from killing George Bush; One day I will have my chance, just watch and see. Your truly John Manning	written
43_54	U.S. v. Maxton, 940 F.2d 103 (1991)	I'll be the one to get you, no matter how long it takes me. If I don't get you, I will get Iris or Christie or whoever close to you.	written
43_55	U.S. v. Maxton, 940 F.2d 103 (1991)	I'll personally kill you when I get out of prison.	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
43_56	U.S. v. Maxton, 940 F.2d 103 (1991)	And all the stitches I got under my eye and knots in my head, going to cost you and that bastard because I don't give a dam if I go to the chair. I will kill you and Carroll Campbell no good ass if I live to get out of here. Your son was lucky being shot, but you and Gov. Campbell won't be. You bastards will wish you had listen to me, that I'll promise, both you sons-of-bitches. I'll get both of you somehow one day and I is to. You got your sorry ass on the stand today and Lied. And I dont give a damn what you said, I still have every intentions on killing you one day and thats a promise. You can call all the SCDC officials you wonna or run to the marshall or FBI all you wonna and nothing going to stop me from killing you but my death or your. I'm going to kill President Nixon, and I'm going to Washington to do it.	written
43_57	U.S. v. Maxton, 940 F.2d 103 (1991)		written
44_58	U.S. v. Patillo, 431 F.2d 293 (1970)	I will take care of him personally.	oral
44_59	U.S. v. Patillo, 431 F.2d 293 (1970)		oral
45_60	U.S. v. Siegler, 272 F.3d 975 (2001)	Kenny, Business!!! I couldn't say over a phone. This girl testified against me. Do what you have to do! [Name, address, and school of the witness]. Your Brother Always! Romeo Simon City Royals	written
46_61	U.S. v. Spruill, 118 F.3d 221 (1997)	Burnt them up in Waco! Hey! Did you-did you see what happened in Oklahoma City! I'm telling you it's coming. It's coming. It's coming and tell Larry whatever he thinks is totally f___ing irrelevant, and he-is he-we have some of his agentson-we have their names and addresses.	oral
47_62	U.S. v. Bardeley, 452 F.2d 930 (1971)	In point of fact, as soon as I can get this case situated around in the position I want you are the first S.O.B. that will go, Sam Sechser will next.	written
48_63	U.S. v. Crews, 781 F.2d 826 (1986)	If Reagan came to Sheridan, I would shoot him.	oral
49_64	U.S. v. Dysart, 705 F.2d 1247 (1983)	Dear Mr. Reagan: I am going to fly to Washington and am going to assassinate you on May 5, 1981. Sincerely, Douglas Dysart	written
50_65	U.S. v. Kirk, 528 F.2d 1057 (1976)	I'll tell you how I'm going to fix things. I'm going to blow the (obscenty's) brains out.	oral
51_66	U.S. v. Prochaska, 222 F.2d 1 (1955)	Okay, Maurie, this is it, get it and get it straight because you have only one chance. We want \$10,000.00 cash in 10's and 20's to be placed by you in a place designated by us in our next letter. You have 5 to 7 days. If you should wish to contact us please do so by advertising under personals in the Tribune. Please Maurie, make it easy on yourself by cooperating fully.	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
52_67	Com. v. Matsos, 421 Mass. 391 (1995)	There is [going to come] a day when you are [going to] want to come and see me.... But you will never see me, your eyes will always be closed.	written
52_68	Com. v. Matsos, 421 Mass. 391 (1995)	Silencers are quite often found in Europe than they are in this country. The reason there good is they don't wake up the children.	written
53_69	In re Ernesto H., 125 Cal.App.4th 298 (2004)	Yell at me again and see what happens.	oral
54_70	In re Jason D., Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2011)	Im going to kill you. I dont care if I do it in front of a teacher.	oral
55_71	In re Ricky T., 87 Cal. App.4th 1132 (2001)	I'm going to get you. I am going to kick your ass.	oral
56_72	People v. Allen, 33 Cal.App.4th 1149 (1995)	I'm gonna kill you. I'm gonna kill you and your daughter.	oral
57_73	People v. Garrett, 30 Cal.App.4th 962 (1994)	You better sit here on this god damned phone and listen to me, because when I get off this phone, I'm coming there to put a bullet in your head.	oral
58_74	People v. Gaut, 95 Cal.App.4th 1425 (2002)	Yeah, you going to die.	oral
59_75	People v. Jackson, 178 Cal.App.4th 590 (2009)	I'm going to get an AK-47 and blow all your heads off.	oral
60_76	People v. Martinez, 53 Cal.App.4th 1212 (1997)	I'm going to get you. I'll get back to you, I'll get you.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
61_77	People v. McCray, 58 Cal.App.4th 159 (1997)	I don't care about your company in there, if you don't pick up this phone I'm going to walk across the street and blow the doors off the son of a bitch.	oral
62_78	People v. Solis, 90 Cal. App.4th 1002 (2001)	Hey, it's me. I'm out here at Cherry and Pacific. I'm on my way to your house so you better be afraid because when I get there I'm going to kill you. You hear me. I'm going to fucking kill you, all of you. I don't give a fuck who it is in the house. I'm on my way, so you better stop me. You better call fucking the cops, better call 911, because I'm on my way. I'm right here on fucking PCH and Spring/Cherry, so you better fucking stop me, Adrian. You are going to meet your fucking worse nightmare. Bye, Bitch.	oral
62_79	People v. Solis, 90 Cal. App.4th 1002 (2001)	Hey, Bitch, I'm on Redondo. I'm coming for you. You're going to die. You understand you're going to die. I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill fucking everybody. Your whole place is going to burn to hell. Die.	oral
63_80	People v. Toledo, 26 Cal.4th 221 (2001)	You know, death is going to become you tonight. I am going to kill you.	oral
64_81	In re David L., 234 Cal.App.3d 1655 (1991)	It's a gun, stupid.	oral
65_82	People v. Brown, 20 Cal.App.4th 1251 (1993)	If you call the police, I will kill you.	oral
66_83	People v. Dias, 52 Cal. App.4th 46 (1997)	If you're lying to me, I'm going to kill you.	oral
67_84	People v. Franz, 88 Cal.App.4th 1426 (2001)	... shit! I'll fuck you up! I don't give a fuck about going back to the pen! I got connections, bro! My family is Mafia! Mafia!	oral
68_85	People v. Gudger, 29 Cal.App.4th 310 (1994)	If that [bitch] causes me to be put out of her apartment, I don't own a gun, but I will buy a gun and I will personally come into that courtroom and shoot the judge, kill Judge Bruguera and I will turn and kill myself. Did you hear about the post office case?	oral
69_86	People v. Mendoza, 59 Cal.App.4th 1333 (1997)	You fucked up my brother's testimony, I'm going to talk to some guys from Happy Town.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
70_87	U.S. v. Schneider, 910 F.2d 1569 (1990)	Dear Public Serpents, high and mighty yo-yo's, I remind you again, that this 'Idiotia Persona Non Grata' is of your problem and if is allowed to continue to be mine, he will be executed as the pending to others as enemies of the Constitution and Nation by his act of War.... You had better nullify and countermand any of his demented orders or he will be nullified for his criminal activities.	written
71_88	U.S. v. Velasquez, 772 F.2d 1348 (1985)	You will burn in Hell for what you've done.	oral
72_89	In re Jerry B., Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2003)	You better not snitch or tell.	oral
73_90	People v. Zendejas, 196 Cal.App.3d 367 (1987)	Uh, my name is Elias Zendejas, I received a letter. Mr. Pickering, you better stop sending me letters. You better stop talking to me. I sent you a letter to your attorney for the Santa Clara County Transit, or I'm gonna come down with a gun and blow your fuckin' brains out. Do you hear me, you son of a bitch?	oral
73_91	People v. Zendejas, 196 Cal.App.3d 367 (1987)	If he keeps bothering me and I, you know where I live - 1703 Cooley Drive - you keep bothering me and I'm going to take a gun and blow out his fuckin' brain. My name is Elias Zendejas, I means this seriously, I don't want to be bothered by the County Transit District for anything. I don't want no more registered letters, I'm sick and tired.	oral
74_92	U.S. v. Cox, 957 F.2d 264 (1992)	I tell you what, you all better have my personal items to me by five o'clock today or its going to be a lot of hurt people there.	oral
75_93	U.S. v. Shoulberg, 895 F.2d 882 (1990)	Sonny-listen, I might be getting out on bail. I didn't even know you on the street so I can't hurt you. The other guys I don't trust at all. Billy's nothing. They'll work on Penna - tell me where does he live. If he is fucking I got a trick for his ass. Write me back today.	written
76_94	Hyde v. State, 525 N.E.2d 627 (1988)	I'm going to blow you away.	oral
77_95	Pavey v. Com., Not Reported in S.W.3d (2012)	You don't think I think about her? You don't think I lose sleep over her? You don't think she matters to me? You think I'm just going to give up? You think it's just going to go away? You think I need to quit? You think I need to stop? You think I'm crazy? Fuck you. You are a piece of garbage, Deana O'Hara. You are a piece of trash. You don't deserve what you have, and I have no intentions of allowing you to keep it. You	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
78_96	State v. Frustino, 142 Ariz. 288 (1984)	piece of shit. You know I'm not intoxicated. Not one little bit. Not one little bit, you three-abortion abortion having slut. I hope you lose sleep for the rest of your fucking short pathetic life, you fucking piece of trash. I hate you now more than I've ever hated anyone in my life, and that's really not a good thing. Trash. The people who provided the loan money, don't fool around. They will take anything of value for the \$770.00, such as your little Bronco or anything of value in your house, or could either hurt you or the kids, or even get mad enough if you don't pay it, they could blow your house up or something like that. Fuck you. I hate you. You STD bitch. I know where you grew up. I've got something for you.	oral
79_97	People v. Allen, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2007)	Yeah, I don't have anything better to do but drive around and take care of you; ... me and my brothers are going to take care of you.	oral
79_98	People v. Allen, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2007)	I am a fucking suicide bomber communist terrorist! Pull me over! Please, I dare ya! Allah praise the Patriot Act ... Fucking JIHAD on the First Amendment! P.S. W.O.M.D. on Board!	written
80_99	Fogel v. Collins, 531 F.3d 824 (2008)	If you don't give me this schedule change, I'm going to shoot you!	oral
81_100	Lovell By and Through Lovell v. Poway Unified School Dist., 90 F.3d 367 (1996)	You better not go home alone. We've got our eyes on you.	oral
82_101	New York ex rel. Spitzer v. Cain, 418 F.Supp.2d 457 (2006)	Stay out of my way. This is your last warning.	oral
82_102	New York ex rel. Spitzer v. Cain, 418 F.Supp.2d 457 (2006)	I'd like to stick a coat hanger in you.	oral
82_103	New York ex rel. Spitzer v. Cain, 418 F.Supp.2d 457 (2006)		

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
82_104	New York ex rel. Spitzer v. Cain, 418 F.Supp.2d 457 (2006)	Someone will set off a bomb here someday.	oral
82_105	New York ex rel. Spitzer v. Cain, 418 F.Supp.2d 457 (2006)	You're lucky they're not hitting you in the head. You better watch out for next time.	oral
83_106	People v. Janousek, 871 P.2d 1189 (1994)	Next time you abuse someone, if there is a next time, consider that not everyone has the same tolerance for abuse.	written
83_107	People v. Janousek, 871 P.2d 1189 (1994)	You must pay up now or face a much pricier levy, as I'll tolerate your crap no longer. One way or another, I'll GUARANTEE that you pay. You could make it VERY expensive for yourself, if you insist. In fact you might give up everything, just as you would have me do, all for the perversion you cooked up in your mind....	written
84_108	People v. McIntier, 134 P.3d 467 (2005)	I want her to live paralyzed, blind and deaf thinking about what I done to her family all because she made a living selling dope setting people up once in a while.... Eventually you are going to run for District Attorney, well unless I act out my fantasy and the press finds out you disclosed who the CI was and left her living in the same place. So enjoy the holidays. I'll be enjoying XMAS this year as you ... have no choice but to let me go December 18 and give me a ride to Adams County.	written
85_109	U.S. v. Aman, 31 F.3d 550 (1994)	But I will have the last laugh by exposing the corrupt Wisconsin legal system to the world and I will devote the rest of my life to destroy those two slimebags, Becker and Phillips. Speaking of destruction of foul legal scum, one reads more and more news stories about judges and lawyers being killed (in courtrooms) by decent people driven to extremes by such corrupt legal slimebags. Every time I read news about yet another nasty judge or disgusting shyster killed, I rejoice: "Great! One less piece of shit to terrorize us decent people!" After having been fucked over mercilessly by Wisconsin legal slime, I can now fully understand and sympathize with such "killers," who really should receive an award for cleansing our world of legal vermin. Shooting Old Bitch Becker and Filthy Phillips would be too fast and too painless. Those two bastards must die a very slow and painful death, so that they can appreciate all the suffering they have inflicted on others. If there is a God or Just Fate, those two pigs - now protected by their immoral legal buddies - won't be able to get protection from all the Waukeshit storm trooper cops but will rot away like diseased sewer rats and burn forever in deepest hell, punished by a Power higher than those hypocritical, corrupt, self-important little gods at the Appeals Court and Supreme Court of Wisconsin.	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
86_110	U.S. v. Kosma, 951 F.2d 549 (1991)	Mr. Reagan: You are hereby invited to PHILADELPHIA. We are going to give you a 21 Gun-Salute. 21 guns are going to put bullets thru your heart & brains.	written
87_111	U.S. v. Sovie, 122 F.3d 122 (1997)	Either get on the bus in the mornin' or you're gonna find somebody dead up there in New York.... You're gonna be dead and in a fuckin' casket.... Sherry you're a dead motherfucker. You're just a walkin' dead woman.... No, Sherry. You ain't on that bus, I'm gonna kill you. Got it? One way or another. You're dead. I want to string the motherfucker up and cut her throat, his throat, and make it like a copycat so that people will do the same thing.	oral
88_112	U.S. v. Stewart, 420 F.3d 1007 (2005)	I hope they get him.	oral
89_113	Rankin v. McPherson, 483 U.S. 378 (1987)	One day soon one will come and liberate America and this planet from the grip of Jews, like yourself, Marlowe ... but the rest should be heads put in a vice and ... these should be knocked out with a sledge hammer.	oral
90_114	U.S. v. Alaboud, 347 F.3d 1293 (2003)	Look at Montserrat, take an aerial photograph of Montserrat and you will then be looking at your company ... in the next few ... weeks.	oral
90_115	U.S. v. Alaboud, 347 F.3d 1293 (2003)	If justice is not given to me the population of the area from Key West to Tallahassee will be driven from their homes, what happened to Montserrat will happen to them, they will lose their homes.	oral
90_116	U.S. v. Alaboud, 347 F.3d 1293 (2003)	Ax and sledgehammers would be utilized to make justice.	oral
90_117	U.S. v. Alaboud, 347 F.3d 1293 (2003)	You and all the Jewish women and children will be burned.	oral
90_118	U.S. v. Alaboud, 347 F.3d 1293 (2003)	It's too bad that Hinckley wasn't successful in killing that son of a bitch ... the only thing I will do is blow the head off of the President of the United States.	oral
91_119	U.S. v. Carrier, 672 F.2d 300 (1982)	There are FBI Marshals that are on their way out to get me and if that happens, people are going to die.	oral
92_120	U.S. v. Chase, 340 F.3d 978 (2003)	I may not kill you, but if I were you, I would keep my doors locked because once this gets started, I don't know what's going to happen.	oral
93_121	U.S. v. Fenton, 30 F.Supp.2d 520 (1998)	Sue him? I probably wouldn't get any money anyway. I will have to kill him.	oral
94_122	U.S. v. Frederickson, 601 F.2d 1358 (1979)		oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
94_123	U.S. v. Frederickson, 601 F.2d 1358 (1979)	Well, as soon as my toys get here I will eliminate all the pigs from the president on down.	oral
94_124	U.S. v. Frederickson, 601 F.2d 1358 (1979)	I am going to blow them all up. I start with the President and go down.	oral
95_125	U.S. v. Fuller, 387 F.3d 643 (2004)	I will be released soon! Me and my friends are going after all of Americas rulers! They will pay! Bush is first! He will die first! I will not have a president that is criminal in office! I will kill him myself!	written
96_126	U.S. v. Koski, 424 F.3d 812 (2005)	Does someone honestly want me to crack up and kill the SOB's who have been fucking with me? (...)	written
96_127	U.S. v. Koski, 424 F.3d 812 (2005)	When all of this is over, the Government will lose and God and I will win. The IRS, FBI and others have been harassing me. I've written hundreds of letters trying to find out what in the hell is going on.... I honestly believe that the Government is trying to drive me to commit suicide. I'm a born again Christian and I believe that only God can decide when it is my time to die. When all this is over, the Government will lose and God and I will win.	written
97_128	U.S. v. Nishnianidze, 342 F.3d 6 (2003)	If you are afraid for Alexander and his life in this case you must do right for your son, you must pay.	oral
98_129	U.S. v. Roberts, 915 F.2d 889 (1990)	To O'Connor: Since the court insists upon violating my kids' rights to life (survive), you are all now notified that either Brennan, Stevens or Kennedy is to die.	written
99_130	U.S. v. Schiefen, 139 F.3d 638 (1998)	TREASON by law, is punishable by the DEATH PENALTY.	written
100_131	U.S. v. Poe, 96 F.3d 333 (1996)	Can you please send me your daughter's address?	written
101_132	People v. Goodlow, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2010)	Merilyn McClure, the crimes that you have committed on [M.] carries a death sentence. So thats what you have coming is death. You are not going to get away.	written
102_133	People v. Clark, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2006)	You fucking bitch. You're gonna die.	oral
103_134	Birdsong v. Com., 347 S.W.3d 47 (2011)	Get up. Give me the money. Open the drawers.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
104_135	<i>In re Troy S.</i> , Not Reported in Cal. Rptr. 2d (2003)	If Al keeps it up, he's going to get his ass kicked.	oral
105_136	<i>People v. Baer</i> , 973 P.2d 1225 (1999)	You want to play games and be a con artist and keep me from my son. You have a major fucking war on your hands. I've been fair to you. No more fucking niceguy. All I care about living for is to fuck you over, you fat fucking ugly cunt and Allen too. You both want to play games with me? All fucking things cease as of today. I care nothing else about in life, but to get both of you mother fuckers. And believe me the shit is going to happen. Have a nice fucking life.	oral
106_137	<i>Jones v. State</i> , 347 Ark. 409 (2002)	I hope you remember this day, cuz you'll forever be the cause of my violence and rage, You steadily rejected me, now I'm angry and full of fucking misery, You try to be judgmental telling me to act right. Before you take the speck from my eye, take the fucking board from your eye, I didn't do nothing to deserve this, and now I'm stressed, and when I'm stressed, I'm at my best, I'm a motherfuckin murderer, I slit my mom's throat and killed my sister. You gonna keep being a bitch, and I'm gonna cliché [click], My hatred and aggression will go towards you, you better run bitch, cuz I can't control what I do. I'll murder you before you can think twice, cut you up and use you for decoration to look nice, I've had it up to here bitch, there's gonna be a 187 on your whole family trik [trick], Then you'll be just like me, with no home, no friends, no money. You'll be deprived of life itself, you won't be able to live with yourself, Then you'll be six feet under, beside your sister, father, and mother, You'll be in hell, and I'll be in Jail, but I won't give a fuck cuz we all know I've been there before, Goodbye forever my good friend. I'll see you on judgement day when I'm punished for my sin.	written
107_138	<i>People v. Teal</i> , 61 Cal. App.4th 277 (1998)	I'm going to kill you, you son of a bitch. When's the court date?	oral
108_139	<i>State v. Chung</i> , 75 Haw. 398 (1993)	I can't take this any more. The principal [is] just leaning on me.... [Y]ou can't stop a man if he doesn't want to live any more.... [A] day doesn't pass that [I] don't feel like killing myself.... I think I'll bring a gun. I'll shoot the principal and shoot myself.	oral
109_140	<i>People v. Rivers</i> , Not Reported in Cal. Rptr. 3d (2008)	Motherfucker, asshole. I'm going to kill you.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
110_141	Eberle v. State, 942 N.E.2d 848 (2011)	You better watch your back. You don't know who you're messing with.	oral
111_142	In re Vincent V., Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2006)	We'll wait for you outside. We'll get you out there.	oral
112_143	People v. Zichko, 118 Cal.App.4th 1055 (2004)	I want to withdraw enough money to go buy a gun and a clip with enough bullets to shoot everyone.	oral
112_144	People v. Zichko, 118 Cal.App.4th 1055 (2004)	Do you want to make me angry so I can come back here and shoot you all in the head?	oral
113_145	U.S. v. Maisonet, 484 F.2d 1356 (1973)	I may have to do all my ten (10) years, but if I ever get out of here and nothing happen to me while I am in here, you will never be able to be prejudice and racist against another Puerto Rican like me.	written
114_146	In re George T., 33 Cal.4th 620 (2004)	Who are these faces around me? Where did they come from? They would probably become the next doctors or loirs or something. All really intelligent and ahead in their game. I wish I had a choice on what I want to be like they do. All so happy and vagrant. Each original in their own way. They make me want to puke. For I am Dark, Destructive, & Dangerous. I slap on my face of happiness but inside I am evil!! For I can be the next kid to bring guns to kill students at school. So parents watch your children cuz I'm BACK!!	written
115_147	Pendergast v. State, 99 Md.App. 141 (1994)	Judge Sheare & Leasure. If you don't think I will seek "Revenge" to the highest degree. All you have to do is keep this Injustice on ME. I will NEVER change my mind unless I get justice, we'll see who hurts in the END. Thank you. Steve Pendergast	written
116_148	People v. Anchondo, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2002)	This is Inglewood 13, homey, and I'm Pequeno Peligroso.	oral
116_149	People v. Anchondo, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2002)	I know where you live.... I'm Little Peligroso. I know where you live. I'm going to get you.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
117_150	People v. Butler, 85 Cal.App.4th 745 (2000)	Mind your own business or you're going to get hurt. We're Nortenos These are our apartments. You're outta here. You fucking bitch.	oral
118_151	Ragansky v. U.S., 253 F. 643 (1918)	I can make bombs and I will make bombs and blow up the President.	oral
118_152	Ragansky v. U.S., 253 F. 643 (1918)	We ought to make the biggest bomb in the world and take it down to the White House and put it on the dome and blow up President Wilson and all the rest of the crooks, and get President Wilson and all of the rest of the crooks and blow it up.	oral
118_153	Ragansky v. U.S., 253 F. 643 (1918)	I would like to make a bomb big enough to blow up the Capitol and President and all the Senators and everybody in it.	oral
119_154	State v. Ware, 196 N.C.App. 518 (2009)	You got a very dangerous job and people today ain't got no fucking sense, and your behavior is very questionable by allowing this to happen to me when I sincerely believed you loved me and yalled [sic] care about me and had no reason to believe your emotions had changed toward me. People don't need much of a reason.	written
119_155	State v. Ware, 196 N.C.App. 518 (2009)	I get alarmed real easy.	written
120_156	People v. Ford, 145 Cal.App.3d 985 (1983)	You punk mother fucker, we'll get you, you've got kids.	oral
121_157	U.S. v. Gilbert, 884 F.2d 454 (1989)	Keep your human trash off my property.	written
122_158	U.S. v. Rivera, 971 F.2d 876 (1992)	Don't come around [Courtlandt Avenue] because I'm going to kick your ass, and you're a snitch.	oral
123_159	U.S. v. Tropiano, 418 F.2d 1069 (1969)	We know how to take care of guys like you.	oral
123_160	U.S. v. Tropiano, 418 F.2d 1069 (1969)	Tell him to lay off before he gets hurt.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
123_161	U.S. v. Tropiano, 418 F.2d 1069 (1969)	You can stretch a rubber band just so far and it's going to break and somebody is going to get hurt.	oral
124_162	U.S. v. Matthews, 431 F.3d 1296 (2005)	I know you heard about sleep got killed. he got shot up in the car one night. he died in the hospital a month later. thats why I say get your self right with the lord because we don't know when were leaving here but we won't be right with Jesus.	written
124_163	U.S. v. Matthews, 431 F.3d 1296 (2005)	P.S. Sleep Died too!	written
124_164	U.S. v. Matthews, 431 F.3d 1296 (2005)	you know that's way sleep got shot up because a nigger step to him and said he was telling the folks on him and they had a fight and that same night he got shot up on the house ...	written
125_165	People v. Hickman, 988 P.2d 628 (1999)	The next one's gonna blow your head off. Hope you sleep well after that.	oral
126_166	U.S. v. Walker, 665 F.3d 212 (2011)	If a man or woman would have done what my wife and brother did to me, I would have killed them.	written
127_167	State v. Milner, 571 N.W.2d 7 (1997)	Just remember what happened in Oklahoma City.	oral
127_168	State v. Milner, 571 N.W.2d 7 (1997)	I'll drive in my truck and come blow you away.	oral
127_169	State v. Milner, 571 N.W.2d 7 (1997)	I'll use the last of my gas money to come down and blow the place up.	oral
127_170	State v. Milner, 571 N.W.2d 7 (1997)	I'm not going to be responsible for my behavior if you continue to aggravate me.	oral
127_171	State v. Milner, 571 N.W.2d 7 (1997)	Someone might get hurt.	oral
127_172	State v. Milner, 571 N.W.2d 7 (1997)	It is not going to be pretty if I have to come down there.	oral
128_173	Watts v. U.S., 394 U.S. 705 (1969)	If they ever make me carry a rifle the first person I want (or would want or would like to have) in my sights is LBJ.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
129_174	U.S. v. Orozco-Santillan, 903 F.2d 1262 (1990)	Take these handcuffs off and I'll kick your fucking ass.	oral
129_175	U.S. v. Orozco-Santillan, 903 F.2d 1262 (1990)	You motherfucker, lo vas a pagar.	oral
129_176	U.S. v. Orozco-Santillan, 903 F.2d 1262 (1990)	Danny, this is Orozco. Somebody is going to die. You ain't shit, Vela. You're just a punk. You better let Vidal go. You had no right arresting him. You can't fuck with me Vela, cause I'm out on bail! You're going to get your ass kicked, punk.	oral
130_177	State v. Jimerson, Not Reported in P.2d (1996)	Yeah, we're about to fight.	oral
131_178	State v. Grant, Not Reported in P.3d (2004)	To you all. This letter is going to be short and to the point. You all tried to send me to prison for 23 years. You tried to take me away from my family and the people who care about me, but you did not succeed in doing so, but did you really think you would? Now, just as if I would have been guilty of the crime I was accused of, I would have had to suffer consequences, you all must suffer consequences for what you have done in a way you never imagined. I am not going to tell you how or what these consequences are going to be, but since you all have such good imagination, I'll let you use it. I will be free in a matter of months. This letter is to nobody in particular but to whomever the shoe fits. Have a nice day. Sincerely, yours truly.	written
132_179	People v. Reynolds, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2008)	He says he thinks he was cut now. Wait until I get out, I'm going to kill that nigga.	oral
133_180	People v. Muro, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2006)	You're lucky I don't got my gun, bitch, or I'd kill you.	oral
134_181	People v. Hubbard, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2012)	I also know where his kids go to school.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
134_182	People v. Hubbard, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2012)	You don't know what a vindictive prick I can be, and you'll find out.	oral
134_183	People v. Hubbard, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2012)	Find out what happens if you step on my fucking property.	oral
135_184	People v. Figueroa, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2003)	I'm going to kill you, you'll see.	oral
136_185	State v. Abu-Isba, 235 Kan. 851 (1984)	I am going to get you.	oral
136_186	State v. Abu-Isba, 235 Kan. 851 (1984)	I will destroy you before leaving the university. I will destroy Dr. Leopold, and I will destroy Dr. Kruckenberg.	oral
137_187	People v. Peterson, 306 Ill.App.3d 1091 (1999)	P.S. I will take everything you have if need be—wife, kids, all possessions, and any further contact you have with your father, who is not happy with you. You decide. It's up to you, for I am God Almighty, Mighty Lord of Lords. Precious are My servants in My eyes.	written
138_188	People v. Stutzman, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2003)	Do you love your nephew? Then shut up and don't make a sound.	oral
139_189	People v. Pina, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2003)	You guys are stupid for going. Just don't go next time, because they're going to be waiting for you.	oral
139_190	People v. Pina, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2003)	If I see that fool there to testify against my brother, I will kick his ass. I feel like going to jail anyways.	oral
140_191	State v. Howe, 247 N.W.2d 647 (1976)	Mrs. Rohde, this is Henry Howe. Did you sign a complaint on Diane Stringer? Well, I'm not making a threat, I'm making a statement – if you want to play these silly little legal games, I'll sue for your back teeth. You know I'm a good lawyer – I'll sue you for everything you've got and charge you with neglect.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
141_192	State v. Gould, Not Reported in P.3d (2005)	I'm coming after you.	oral
142_193	People v. Jones, 67 Cal.App.4th 724 (1998)	I'll do whatever I have to. Just don't testify, man. I'm telling you, Darrell, I'll do whatever I have to, man.	oral
143_194	U.S. v. Malik, 16 F.3d 45 (1994)	Pharoah and his clique Were intoxicated with pride of race and pride of material civilization and grievously oppressed the israelities What Pharoah Wished Was To Crush Them Is That What You Folks Trying to Do Me As And My Cases Beware Of All Actions South Africanner Europeans	written
144_195	People v. Andrews, 75 Cal.App.4th 1173 (1999)	but the fucking prostitute fucking bitch [Judge] Nelson, oh yeah. I have plenty of shit against the mother-fucking prostitute. I wouldn't do any harm to you. Don't worry about it. I love your face, this is enough to spare you, but this fucking prostitute, [Judge] Nelson, I don't know, you know. I will go through the process but if I fail, if I don't find any understanding, I will eliminate and we'll probably meet in fucking heaven. Thanks a lot, dog. I'm going to get you, dog.	oral
145_196	People v. Canela, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2007)	88 motherfucker. I'll slit your throat.	oral
146_197	People v. Hattam, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2010)	Your sister is a fucking rata.	oral
147_198	People v. Padilla, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2002)	We're going to get you, bitch.	oral
147_199	People v. Padilla, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2002)	I have a gun and I'm not afraid to use it.	written
148_200	U.S. v. Aragon, 947 F.Supp. 426 (1996)		

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
149_201	U.S. v. Carbaugh, 141 F.3d 791 (1998)	I have a gun.	oral
150_202	U.S. v. Gibson, 155 F.3d 844 (1998)	This is a robbery. Give me all your money. No funny stuff. I have a gun.	oral
150_203	U.S. v. Gibson, 155 F.3d 844 (1998)	This is a robbery, give me the money, give me 50s and 100s, count it.	oral
151_204	U.S. v. Summers, 176 F.3d 1328 (1999)	I've got a gun, give me \$500.	written
152_205	U.S. v. Bell, 207 F.Supp.2d 940 (2002)	I hate most of the human race. (...) My regular personality is friendly and wouldn't hurt anyone and controls the monster alter ego that constantly wants to destroy everything and every scumbag in sight. (...) When I snap I feel like I'm going to explode and hurt some who deserves it. (...) I'm panicky and feel like I'm going to lose control. (...) I built myself up with weights and throwing punches. I am 2-3 times as strong as the average fool and am a world class puncher. (...) if someone done me wrong or confronted me I could quickly beat them into a coma. I was extremely distraught and prepared to die. (...) wrote a letter to them (DHS) about not being able to pay my water bill and having no money for gas or anything else. I said I was about to have a showdown among other things with the SSA. (...) Dr Mikilimi and he diagnosed me with an 'Impulse disorder and borderline personality'. He testified in court that I was a danger and should be put in a mental hospital (...). This evil process is making my condition unbearable. (...) I hope the judge or whoever is in charge now does the right thing before it's to late. If not, I won't be going down quietly. I've got a plan that will have the press, politicians, and the public all over the SSA disability bureau so they can overhaul this sinister process (...).	written
152_206	U.S. v. Bell, 207 F.Supp.2d 940 (2002)	This area of Region 7 will have to suffer the catastrophic consequences of the inept way you've handled this case. (...) If my vehicle brakes down or is confiscated I will be forced to take someone elses even a donut eater if necessary. I have no fear of those inferior saps.	written
153_207	U.S. v. Davis, 943 F.2d 53 (1991)	Dear Judge McRae. Well I wish that you could be in my shoe, I have lose [sic] my family- I have lost all hopes of parole, I have lost everything there is for a man to have. I want to kill you as dead as I am now you don't need to live enough [sic] day- All these lies in my P.S.I. All those times you could have let me correct them and you did nothing. Samuel	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
153_208	U.S. v. Davis, 943 F.2d 53 (1991)	Judge Gibbon. I hope you are happy I have lost my family, my wife don't want me no more, I don't have no parole all because of these lies. I want to kill you as dead as am I now dead. Samuel	written
153_209	U.S. v. Davis, 943 F.2d 53 (1991)	Mrs. Summerville. If you take my wife away from her kids I will make you as dead as I am now I sworn I will. Samuel JM Davis	written
154_210	U.S. v. Floyd, 458 F.3d 844 (2006)	Be Aware Be Fair.	written
155_211	U.S. v. Some, 968 F.2d 1222 (1992)	we are going to choke all you pachookos.	written
155_212	U.S. v. Some, 968 F.2d 1222 (1992)	White Power is going to get you.	written
156_213	U.S. v. Taylor, 972 F.2d 1247 (1992)	Kathleen, Your Husband, David Goldstein will have his health take a turn for the worse this Christmas Season and you will be widowed in 1990. I am truly sorry that this is the "Kay Ser Ra Ser Ra" [sic] scenario that has to take place. However you will always be the foci [sic] of my desires as I remember you to be the most exsuisite [sic] creature that has ever taken me in. I'm always grateful that we have had the moments given to us and I will be there should you ever desire me again. I can say with all sincerity, I Love You. David S Taylor	written
156_214	U.S. v. Taylor, 972 F.2d 1247 (1992)	Kathleen, Despite the major disruptions that widowhood will bring about in your life I for whatever value I may be will be there for you. David's death from a cerebral vascular accident of an unknown idiopathy will stun all those who loved him. However despair not as I am of the belief his soul will rest comfortably at the side of the heavenly being he alleges to be of. I Love You /s/David For when winter cometh before the spring Sing ye the songs of astonishment and bewilder not with bereavement. For as I write the forgiver receive no punishment and David your Husband of thee we sing he was the man who dared to be King	written
157_215	In re C.C., 178 Cal. App.4th 915 (2009)	no [S.] im gonna come to school with one of [P's] gun and kill half the school ill load everyone with bullets and then shoot myself in the head right in front of u. just to show u how much u pushed me fuck u stupid fuckin girl! fuck u!! god u stupid little fuckin cunt!	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
157_216	In re C.C., 178 Cal App.4th 915 (2009)	god i waited to kiss u for a fuckin month its been two weeks ur kissing ppl [Sh.'s] friends try to cuddle with me and i push them off ur all i think about i do drugs now because of u because u r constantly hurting me i told u i cheating on u cause i didnt want to hide things from u i could have and i could have been happy but no.... u pushed me to cheat on u u would constantly tease me and fuck with me and put me thru things those were all bitch moves and i took them i cheated on u because of that u find a fuckin guy that will stay with u when u tease but dont put out and i waited all that time u will probably fuck [B.] right after he wins the [football game] i fuckin hate u i wanna kill myself cause u put me thru all this but only ppl c my bad side not ur shitty side cause ur a cheerleader and ill i did was b nice and i get picked on so fuck u[S.] god ur a lyer and a jerk. fuck.	
158_217	Long v. State, 492 N.E.2d 700 (1986)	There will be trouble. You will be sorry.	oral
158_218	Long v. State, 492 N.E.2d 700 (1986)	You'll end up with plugs in you just like Thelma.	oral
159_219	People v. Felix, 92 Cal.App.4th 905 (2001)	Both of you are dead mother fuckers.	oral
159_220	People v. Felix, 92 Cal.App.4th 905 (2001)	I'm going to fucking kill you.	oral
159_221	People v. Felix, 92 Cal.App.4th 905 (2001)	If I see her with somebody else I will shoot her and then the kids and then myself.	oral
160_222	State v. Collins, 580 N.W.2d 36 (1998)	Give the kids my love.	written
161_223	People v. Byrd, 285 Ill.App.3d 641 (1996)	You know I'm a general. Look, you don't think I could have you killed? If I order this man here to kill you he'll do it. [Byrd turned to Adams] If I order you [referring to Adams] to shoot this man in the head or shoot these guys in the head, you have to do it, isn't that correct?	oral
162_224	People v. Maldonado, 247 Ill.App.3d 149 (1993)	We already threatened your daughter once. Put a bullet in her head.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
163_225	People v. Mosley, 155 Cal.App.4th 313 (2007)	You need to worry about 245 on deputy sheriff ... With this motherfucken knife I have.	oral
163_226	People v. Mosley, 155 Cal.App.4th 313 (2007)	This motherfucker is for Deputy Wargo.	oral
163_227	People v. Mosley, 155 Cal.App.4th 313 (2007)	I am going to have them killed, I am going to kill them.	oral
164_228	People v. Powers, 193 Cal.App.4th 158 (2011)	I'll seriously just wage war on everybody with my fists. And they will not win. They've never won. They can't win. Like I said, I did all kinds of things in my life. One was – I was the world heavyweight champion in boxing for so many years that yeah, it didn't matter what name I used, I – I rarely used my real name[...].	oral
165_229	People v. Verkrusye, 261 Ill.App.3d 972 (1994)	Let's get it on.	oral
166_230	People v. Young, 34 Cal.4th 1149 (2005)	You snitched on me and my lawyer had it in black and white and I should have killed you.	oral
167_231	State v. Anderson, 111 Wash.App. 317 (2002)	Nelda is fucked and she better watch out.	oral
167_232	State v. Anderson, 111 Wash.App. 317 (2002)	I'm afraid for a few people when I get out and find my boys in foster home. I will and I promise, I will go to written prison for life for multiple MURDERS.... Ida [Ina Carpenter] is my first stop and Dea will be my last stop, with a few people in between. (ie foster parents) My boys will not live in the system like I did.... When I get out I'll try by the book once and only once to get my boys, then shit will hit the fan. I will not fuck around when it comes to them anymore.	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
168_233	State v. Gill, 103 Wash.App. 435 (2000)	P.S.... Option # 1 is no longer available. I've had a change of heart. I never want to see you again. Transfer of property can occur through attorneys. You may visit or write me, but I never want to see you face to face again. The disgust would overwhelm me and I'm afraid I may do something that would disappoint my creator. There are times I'm compelled to seek revenge and it's so hard to give these feelings up to God, but I know I must. Please, for your safety, keep your distance unless we see each other through the protection of a visit booth.	written
169_234	State v. Hotham, 307 A.2d 185 (1973)	When I get out of this jail, I'm going to go home, get my 30--40 Craig out of the closet, and I'm going to kill me some f _ _ police officers. Isn't that right, Captain Cook?	oral
170_235	State v. Lizotte, 256 A.2d 439 (1969)	Michaud, pizza maker-this is a promise. I am going to get you in an alley and you won't be coming out of it. When I am done with you, you won't be moving. You have had it, cop. I will get you.'	oral
171_236	State v. Scherck, 9 Wash.App. 792 (1973)	If you will refuse to appear as a witness in a trial against (Scherck's friend), the State will have no course but to drop the case. (...) You have a nice house in a nice neighborhood. It would be a shame if anything happened to it. (...) If the case comes to trial it will be very embarrassing for you.	oral
172_237	U.S. v. Canzater, 994 F.2d 773 (1993)	In the bag a gun 100s and 50s.	written
173_238	U.S. v. Tuck, 964 F.2d 1079 (1992)	Don't do anything funny or I'll be back.	oral
174_239	U.S. v. Robinson, 86 F.3d 1197 (1996)	Give me one pack of 20s or I will shoot somebody in here now.	written
175_240	U.S. v. Jones, 83 F.3d 927 (1996)	Do not pull any alarms, because if you do, I have a gun and I'll use it.	oral
176_241	U.S. v. France, 57 F.3d 865 (1995)	Give me all the 100s and 50s in your drawer. I have dynamite.	written
177_242	U.S. v. Moore, 6 F.3d 715 (1993)	I have a gun and nothing to lose.	written
178_243	U.S. v. Bachiero, 969 F.2d 733 (1992)	Your money or your life, quick.	written

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
179_244	U.S. v. Whiffen, 121 F.3d 18 (1997)	Your building will go boom.	oral
179_245	U.S. v. Whiffen, 121 F.3d 18 (1997)	Allstate had better stop messing with me or else I'm going to blow up their building.	oral
180_246	U.S. v. Freeman, 176 F.3d 575 (1999)	I could kill her and leave where she is now.	oral
181_247	In re Jasmine H., Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.2d (2003)	Everyone is concerned about my past ..., now is the time to be concerned because I will do whatever it takes to get my daughter back.	oral
182_248	State v. Fixel, 945 P.2d 149 (1997)	When I get out the judge is dead.	oral
183_249	U.S. v. Johnson, 968 F.2d 208 (1992)	If I get indicted and you testify, I'm going to take care of you, I'm going to get you. You don't know what you're dealing with. But if you don't, everything will be fine, everything will be okay.	oral
183_250	U.S. v. Johnson, 968 F.2d 208 (1992)	Sister, the 2 or \$300 that you're making here is not worth it. Because whatever goes down, and whoever is here is going down with it.	oral
184_251	State v. Wise, Not Reported in P.3d (2010)	I'm going to take care of this.	oral
184_252	State v. Wise, Not Reported in P.3d (2010)	[I have] been working [my] ass off ... to get [myself] out of debt so that [my] wife [will] have no worries[. I will] take care of [your] husband.	oral
184_253	State v. Wise, Not Reported in P.3d (2010)	I'm holding you responsible and I'm willing to take it to the most extent I can take it.... [M]y son is graduating in a week and I'm dealing with you, you little worm.	oral
184_254	State v. Wise, Not Reported in P.3d (2010)	I'm holding you responsible ... I'm taking care of this myself ... If you want to report this call, I have a plan to go below you.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
185_255	U.S. v. Bowdach, 501 F.2d 220 (1974)	You got those two kids to think about, if you do this, a lot of harm can come to you and those kids.	oral
186_256	People v. Kirk, Not Reported in Cal. Rptr.3d (2009)	You guys aren't going to make it 'til morning. I'm going to call my boys. They're going to come over here. You guys will not make it out tomorrow. I will burn this mother fucker down.	oral
187_257	State v. Hall, 327 Or. 568 (1998)	Put all of the money into this bag. I want all of your money.	oral
188_258	State v. Kilburn, 151 Wash.2d 36 (2004)	I'm going to bring a gun to school tomorrow and shoot everyone and start with you. Maybe not you first.	oral
189_259	State v. Williams, 144 Wash.2d 197 (2001)	Don't make me strap your ass.	oral
190_260	State v. McGirk, 999 S.W.2d 298 (1999)	I'll take care of you.	oral
191_261	U.S. v. Kelner, 534 F.2d 1020 (1976)	We have people who have been trained and who are out now and who intend to make sure that Arafat and his lieutenants do not leave this country alive. ... We are planning to assassinate Mr. Arafat. ... Everything is planned in detail.	oral
192_262	U.S. v. Patzlaff, 44 Fed.Appx. 58 (2002)	Maybe there will be a necktie party with you as the special guest.	written
193_263	State v. Spainhower, 988 P.2d 452 (1999)	I'm going to get you for lying in court, you fat bitch.	oral
194_264	State v. Wilcox, 160 Vt. 271 (1993)	How would you like to be shot?	oral
195_265	U.S. v. England, 507 F.3d 581 (2007)	If he shows up to court, when I walk outta prison in fifteen years, I'm 'onna fuckin' murder his motherfuckin' ass.	oral
196_266	U.S. v. De Stefano, 476 F.2d 324 (1973)	My eyes are dimming, but I think I know you. My memory is fading, too. It must be old age. I understand your eyes are failing—are dimming, and your memory fading permanently this week.	oral
196_267	U.S. v. De Stefano, 476 F.2d 324 (1973)	Have you done any fishing lately?	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
197_268	U.S. v. Patrick, 117 F.3d 375 (1997)	When I get out, your life will change.	written
198_269	U.S. v. White, 670 F.3d 498 (2012)	I understand you think you're very tough and you think that by dragging this process out you have created me a lot of misery; that is an incorrect assessment, but I must admit I have run out of patience with you and your smug attitude. I hope the fact that I've obviously paid someone to find you conveys the seriousness with which I take your current attitude. If you resolve this issue quickly and efficiently I can guarantee you will not hear from me again; if you don't, well, you will be well known to the Citibank customers you are currently in litigation with in [a] very short amount of time. Again, make my life easy; fax over the letter, and you will not be hearing from me again. PS: I took the liberty of buying the [Citicard] corporate phone directory and locating information on your outstanding disputed credit accounts from an internet dealer today, and can probably make you better known to your customers than the security measures you enact at your company indicate you would like. Consider this, as I'm sure, being in the collections business and having the attitude about it that you do, that you often make people upset. Lord knows that drawing too much publicity and making people upset is what did in Joan Lefkowitz.	written
199_270	U.S. v. Elonis, 730 F.3d 321 (2013)	You know your shit's ridiculous when you have the FBI knockin' at yo' door. Little Agent Lady stood so close. Took all the strength I had not to turn the bitch ghost. Pull my knife, flick my wrist, and slit her throat. Leave her bleedin' from her jugular in the arms of her partner [laughter]. So the next time you knock, you best be serving a warrant. And bring yo' SWAT and an explosives expert while you're at it. Cause little did y'all know, I was strapped wit' a bomb. Why do you think it took me so long to get dressed with no shoes on? I was jus' waitin' for y'all to handcuff me and pat me down. Touch the detonator in my pocket and we're all goin' [BOOM!]	written
200_271	U.S. v. Mabie, 663 F.3d 322 (2011)	(...) the only way he could get away with it is if no one knows who did it, and the ACTUAL owner is not ready to put several bullets in his head and his kids and grandkids heads. This is a problem, as it would take hours to clean up the blood.	written
200_272	U.S. v. Mabie, 663 F.3d 322 (2011)	I was right there in Barnes Hospital when ... Sergeant Dodge brought in a [sic] Bob Stanze. With that cemetery blue look. I think Deebea would look about right that color. I can hit what I'm aiming at for 400 f- -- -ing yards.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
200_273	U.S. v. Mabie, 663 F.3d 322 (2011)	If I don't hear from you, I'll stop by some evening, so we can work toward justice.	written
200_274	U.S. v. Mabie, 663 F.3d 322 (2011)	A cornerstone of this society (for which countless have died) is a fair Justice system, honesty is essential, correct your mistakes / without delay or suffer the consequences.	written
201_275	U.S. v. Armel, 585 F.3d 182 (2009)	[I]f you don't pay me within three days, none of you, male or female, are gonna be able to have sex again.... [Y]ou're gonna lose you're [sic] genitalia. God promised me that he would curse you. You come and try to pull on me ... [y]ou will die. Not by my hand, by the hand of God. Or maybe by my hand, but it will be self-defense.... Pay Me My Wages ... Or Else! [g]et it straight or fucking die!	oral
202_276	U.S. v. Hankins, 195 Fed.Appx. 295 (2006)	Let me tell you something, between me and you. I could go up yonder and kill Wallace Whittaker tomorrow. Kill him. Right in his fucking office.	oral
203_277	U.S. v. Jeffries, 692 F.3d 473 (2012)	When I come to court this better be the last time (...) Take my child and I'll take your life (...) I killed a man downrange in war. I have nothing against you, but I'm tellin' you this better be the last court date (...) So I promise you, judge, I will kill a man (...) And I guarantee you, if you don't stop, I'll kill you (...) So I'm gonna f*** somebody up, and I'm going back to war in my head. So July the 14th is the last time I'm goin' to court. Believe that. Believe that, or I'll come after you after court (...) Cause you don't deserve to be a judge and you don't deserve to live. You don't deserve to live in my book (...) And I hope I encourage other dads to go out there and put bombs in their goddamn cars. Blow 'em up (...) There went your f***in' car. I can shoot you. I can kill you.	oral
204_278	U.S. v. Stock, 728 F.3d 287 (2013)	i went home loaded in my truck and spend the past 3 hours looking for this douche with the expressed intent of crushing him in that little piece of shit under cover gray impala hooking up my tow chains and dragging his stupid ass down to creek hills and just drowning him in the falls. but alas i can't fine that bastard anywhere ... i really wish he would die, just like the rest of these stupid fucking asshole cops. so J.K.P. if you read this i hope you burn in hell. i only wish i could have been the one to send you there.	written
205_279	U.S. v. Havelock, 664 F.3d 1284 (2012)	I will slay your children. I will shed the blood of the innocent.	written
206_280	U.S. v. Landham, 251 F.3d 1072 (2001)	Do you want to push my buttons like O.J. did Nicole? Do you want to play Nicole, do you want me to play O.J?.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
206_281	U.S. v. Landham, 251 F.3d 1072 (2001)	I'm going to tell you something you.... You will not have Priscilla by her second birthday, because I'm going to have all your children.... You will not have Priscilla to raise ... I'm going to get her.	oral
206_282	U.S. v. Landham, 251 F.3d 1072 (2001)	It's over kid. Are you an idiot? I've done more to you with a Parker 51 than what happened to your father with a goddamn Taurus five-shot.	oral
207_283	U.S. v. Wolff, 370 Fed. Appx. 888 (2010)	I am demanding the Sheriff of Campbell county to come to my aid and arrest these criminals, but he may also be one of them. In which case, this will be a standoff at the property in question, and which I will give my life if need be, but which I will take any that will try to come against me, which again is justified and has been proven many times in the courts.	written
208_284	Nielander v. Board of County Com'r's of County of Republic, Kan., 582 F.3d 1155 (2009)	Then they'll have another Ruby Ridge.	oral
209_285	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	Either you lose or Die, there is no way you will win and LIVE.	written
209_286	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	Van Ripper: You made a mistake. You will die hard. Your demie.	written
209_287	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	How long is your penis? You will lose it and then you will die.	written
209_288	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	You will die soon, mother fucker. But you will watch your son die first.	written
209_289	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	You are on the death list!	written
209_290	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	You will die this Christmas.	written
209_291	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	You die.	oral

ID	Citation	Quote	Mode
209_292	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	You asshole motherfucker, you die.	oral
209_293	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	I want you to suffer the hardest death, asshole!!!!	written
209_294	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	I will kill you.	oral
209_295	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	If I don't kill you myself, I am not a man.	written
209_296	U.S. v. Li, 537 F.Supp.2d 431 (2008)	Do you think [the Morrisville Police] can protect you from a man who wants to die and want to kill you? Asshole, for sure you will be killed by such a man.	written
210_297	State v. Locke, 175 Wash.App. 779 (2013)	I hope you have the opportunity to see one of your family members raped and murdered by a sexual predator. Thank you for putting this state in the toilet. Do us a favor and pull the lever to send us down before you leave Olympia.	written
210_298	State v. Locke, 175 Wash.App. 779 (2013)	You fucking CUNT!! You should be burned at the stake like any heretic.	written
210_299	State v. Locke, 175 Wash.App. 779 (2013)	Invitation to "Gregoire's public execution."	written
211_300	State v. C.G., 150 Wash.2d 604 (2003)	I'll kill you Mr. Haney, I'll kill you.	oral
212_301	State v. Krijger, 130 Conn.App. 470 (2011)	More of what happened to your son is going to happen to you. (...) I'm going to be there to watch it happen.	oral

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Threatening is among the less pleasant “things we do with words”, but, together with other conflictive speech acts, it seems to play a central role in communication. Yet, little is still known about how and when exactly speakers threaten. The present volume addresses this void by giving an in-depth analysis of the form and function of this speech act. A set of authentic threat utterances is used to probe questions on the linguistic repertoire employed and the different objectives speakers pursue with their threats. Based on the central findings, a classification of two types of threats is proposed, each with distinctive formal and functional properties. The analysis employs a mixed method approach with a two-fold aim; by combining a qualitative discussion of examples with the application of innovative statistical methodology, the findings allow new insights into research on threats and, simultaneously, offer new perspectives on general research methodology.

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