

CONSTRUCTING COURAGE THROUGH WORDS: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF PERSUASIVE FORCE IN WINSTON CHURCHILL'S WAR SPEECHES

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Abstract

Winston Churchill's wartime speeches are recognised for their extraordinary rhetorical power and persuasive influence on the British public, combining pragmatic strategies and stylistic devices to rally morale and communicate resilience in times of national crisis. The primary objective of this study is to analyse Churchill's use of speech acts and rhetorical strategies across five key wartime speeches, while a secondary objective is to compare the linguistic and pragmatic patterns that contributed to the effectiveness of his oratory. This research employs a qualitative, comparative analysis of the selected speeches, examining the pragmatic functions of speech acts, directives, commissive, expressive, and declarative, alongside stylistic features such as repetition, metaphor, and moral appeals, with data analysed to identify patterns and variations in Churchill's rhetorical strategies across different contexts and audiences. The analysis shows that Churchill consistently employed repetition and parallelism to reinforce key messages and build emotional intensity, with moral and patriotic appeals central in motivating both Parliament and the public. His speeches varied in structure and tone depending on the audience, with parliamentary addresses emphasising factual explanation and public speeches emphasising encouragement and inspiration, while metaphors and imagery were strategically used to frame events as battles for civilisation, enhancing the persuasive impact of his rhetoric. Overall, Churchill's speeches demonstrate a sophisticated integration of pragmatics and stylistics to inspire, unify, and sustain a nation under threat, and his rhetorical mastery continues to serve as a benchmark for effective political communication.

Keywords: Winston Churchill, rhetorical analysis, pragmatics, speech acts, wartime speeches.

Introduction

In pragmatic theory, speech acts are not only about what is said but also about what is done with what is said: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions each shape not just the utterance but its real-world impact (Austin, 1962/1975; as explained by the Nottingham pragmatics guide). In political discourse, this means that leaders do more than convey information; they deliberately perform actions through language to change minds, mobilise listeners, and constitute collective identity (Arsith, 2015). Churchill's oratory, therefore, can be seen as a carefully calibrated pragmatic performance in which utterances are crafted not merely to state facts, but to generate commitment, foster solidarity, and provoke perlocutionary effects such as resolve and collective action. This pragmatic perspective helps explain why

Churchill's speeches were so effective: they work not just at the level of content, but at the level of social action, constructing not only a message but a community.

Winston Churchill's wartime speeches are recognised not merely as historically significant addresses but as linguistic acts that helped forge national resolve in a moment of existential crisis. From a pragmatic viewpoint, political oratory can be understood as more than the delivery of information: it operates through illocutionary and perlocutionary forces, where the speaker "in saying something we do something" (Austin, 1962/ 1975, p. 14) and thus intends to effect social responses. The theory of speech acts provides a foundational framework for this kind of analysis, specifying that language has the capacity to perform actions and shape outcomes (Searle, 1969, p. 24).

In the case of Churchill, recent studies highlight how his speeches were the product of strategic preparation, editorial collaboration and acute awareness of audience effect rather than spontaneous improvisation. For example, Glover (2011) observes that Churchill "set the oratorical standards or the benchmark against which the rhetoric of subsequent leaders in crises is measured" (p. 74). In other words, his language was crafted with the explicit aim of engendering courage, solidarity and commitment. This aligns with the notion that persuasive political speech combines rhetorical devices (ethos, pathos, logos) with pragmatic moves (directives, commissives) to mobilise a collective stance.

Moreover, Churchill's use of inclusive pronouns, contrastive binaries (us versus them), narrative sequencing of threat followed by resolve, and overt exhortations can all be mapped to speech-act functions such as directives and commissives. These devices contribute to what might be termed the "constructing" of courage: the speaker not only describes a situation, but invites audience members to see themselves as participants in collective action. As the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy notes, "the perlocutionary act refers to what we achieve 'by saying something', such as convincing, persuading, deterring..." (Austin, 1962/1975, p. 109). In sum, this study will apply a speech-act informed pragmatic approach to a selected corpus of Churchill's war speeches, combining close textual analysis with historical context and reception data. The objective is to trace how linguistic strategies generated a persuasive effect and helped build a sense of shared purpose and fortitude. Churchill himself once wrote: "Before the orator can inspire audiences with any emotion, he must be swayed by it himself. Before he can move their tears, his own must flow" (Churchill, as cited in International Churchill Society, 2010, p. 243). By reading his speeches as purposeful language acts aimed at constructing courage, the research offers a bridge between rhetoric, pragmatics, and historical speech-making in wartime leadership.

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the pragmatic strategies, including speech acts and rhetorical devices, employed by Winston Churchill in his wartime speeches.
2. To examine how Churchill's language functions to persuade and construct courage among his audience.
3. To investigate the relationship between linguistic features of Churchill's speeches and their intended social and psychological effects on the British public during wartime.

Research Questions

1. What pragmatic strategies and rhetorical devices are evident in Winston Churchill's wartime speeches?
2. How do Churchill's linguistic choices persuade and inspire courage in his audience?
3. What is the relationship between the linguistic features of Churchill's speeches and their intended social and psychological impact on listeners?

Significance of the study

The study is significant because it examines how Winston Churchill's speeches functioned not only as historical documents but as strategic linguistic acts that shaped public morale and collective action during wartime. By applying a pragmatic, speech-act approach, the research sheds light on the mechanisms of persuasive communication, illustrating how language can construct courage, influence behaviour, and foster social cohesion. The findings contribute to scholarship in pragmatics, political rhetoric, and historical linguistics, offering insights for both contemporary leaders and researchers interested in the interplay between language, power, and audience response.

Literature review

The study of political speech sits at the intersection of rhetoric and pragmatics: rhetoric offers tools for analysing persuasive form, such as ethos, pathos, logos, metaphor, and repetition, while pragmatics, especially speech-act theory, explains how utterances perform actions and aim to produce effects on audiences (Austin, 1962/1975; Searle, 1969). Classic theoretical treatments remain foundational for contemporary analyses of political oratory because they make explicit how speakers do things with words and seek concrete social responses (Austin, 1962/1975; Searle, 1969). Pragmatic approaches have been integrated with rhetorical and discourse analytic methods to study political persuasion more holistically, under labels such as pragma-rhetoric and pragma-stylistics (Ramanathan, 2020). Recent work applying pragmatics to colonial discourse illustrates how speech acts shape ideological framing, including analyses that combine implicature with rhetorical strategy (de Viales Martín et al., 2025).

Applied work on speech acts in political contexts shows that leaders routinely deploy commissives, directives, assertives, and expressives to commit, instruct, inform, and move audiences, and that effective political persuasion depends on aligning these illocutionary moves with credible factual framing and audience expectations (Mukhroji, 2019; Ramanathan, 2020). Research in pragmatics and political discourse underscores the practical importance of perlocution: speakers not only say things but aim to change beliefs, emotions, and behaviours, which is crucial when studying wartime rhetoric where morale and action are explicit targets (Mukhroji, 2019). Churchill scholarship has treated his speeches as rhetorical masterpieces and as historically consequential acts. Biographers and historians situate Churchill's oratory within his political career and the exigencies of 1940–41, arguing that his addresses combined personal authority with strategic framing to sustain national resolve (Gilbert, 1991; Jenkins, 2001). Studies focused on Churchill's oratory map how his style adapted across contexts, including formal parliamentary addresses, radio broadcasts, and public speeches, and emphasise the strategic labour behind his texts, such as drafting, editing, and attention to delivery and audience (Theakston, 2015; Glover, 2011). This attention to rhetorical construction aligns with analyses of metaphor and heroic framing in Churchill's discourse, which show how metaphor builds political identity and moral positioning (Charteris-Black, 2005).

Rhetorical analyses of individual wartime speeches repeatedly point to recurring devices: anaphora and repetition, binary oppositions (we/them), inclusive pronouns, narrative sequencing that moves from danger to resolution, and metaphors that concretise abstract threats. Close readings of "*We Shall Fight on the Beaches*" and "*Their Finest Hour*" highlight the cumulative force of repetition and the moral and existential framing that turns military setbacks into narratives of honour and continued resistance (Puputti, 2019; Maguire, 2014). These devices operate simultaneously as illocutionary moves, such as promises and exhortations, and as perlocutionary triggers that increase confidence and reduce panic (Puputti, 2019). Comparative studies show that Churchill's speeches differ in texture according to

audience and medium. Parliamentary speeches tend to foreground factual narration and justificatory assertives, intended to justify government policy and reassure Members of Parliament, while public oratory often foregrounds emotive appeals and symbolic framing to mobilise mass morale (Maldonado-Orellana, 2014; Kingscott, 2013). Research comparing formats argues that Churchill consciously modulated tone, evidence, and rhetorical ornament to fit venue and constituency, and pragmatic-rhetorical studies of political leaders routinely find audience-sensitive modulation to be a staple of effective persuasion (Kingscott, 2013). Recent work on leadership communication places Churchill's style within broader traditions of crisis rhetoric, linking his techniques to leadership models and communicative practice (Lincoln, 2022).

Historians of the period bring reception studies into the conversation. Government morale reports and Ministry of Information summaries show the varied immediate effects of Churchill's speeches on public feeling and on print coverage, with some speeches producing uplift and others eliciting anxiety or mixed press responses depending on tone and perceived realism (Ministry of Information, 1940). These archival records allow researchers to link textual strategies to contemporaneous public responses and to track perlocutionary effects empirically (Ministry of Information, 1940). Additional rhetorical analyses argue that Churchill's dramatization of leadership was central to his wartime authority, highlighting how narrative stance and self-presentation were embedded in his rhetorical style (Jie, 2025).

Pragmatic-rhetorical frameworks have been fruitfully applied to other political figures, including comparative work on Mandela and Reagan, demonstrating the value of combining speech-act classification with rhetorical analyses such as metaphor identification and narrative sequencing (Ramanathan, 2020). These hybrid approaches, sometimes called pragma-stylistics or pragma-rhetoric, recommend explicit coding for speech-act types, close stylistic reading for rhetorical tropes, and triangulation with reception or archival data to validate perlocutionary claims (Mukhroji, 2019; Ramanathan, 2020). Scholars focusing on Churchill's rhetorical technique emphasise his strategic use of repetition and rhythm to create memorability, as well as his habit of moral reframing, which turns defeat into a test and evacuation into deliverance. Work on the memory and transmission of speeches argues that memorable phrasing, such as catchphrases and anthemic lines, aids diffusion and retention; this point is corroborated by analyses of how Churchill's lines were reported, reprinted, and broadcast (Theakston, 2015; Maguire, 2014). Studies of dysphemism in Churchill's wartime discourse further show how lexical aggression served as a persuasive tool that framed the enemy and intensified moral positioning (Crespo-Fernández, 2013). These features are central to the perlocutionary success of oratory because they increase recall and social circulation.

Several recent dissertations and theses provide systematic discourse analyses of Churchill's wartime rhetoric, often using mixed methods that combine qualitative coding and corpus counts to quantify features like repetition, pronoun distribution, and modality (Kingscott, 2013; Puputti, 2019). These projects demonstrate practical coding schemes that map speech acts onto rhetorical devices and show how consistent patterns emerge across a corpus of speeches. Student and postgraduate work is valuable because it often provides reproducible coding schemas and annotated transcripts that other researchers can adapt (Kingscott, 2013). Broader theoretical work on political persuasion and leadership communication enriches the Churchill literature by linking rhetorical form to psychological mechanisms such as social identity framing, moral elevation, and threat appraisal (Maguire, 2014). Cognitive and social psychology studies show that repeated, identity-anchoring messages reduce uncertainty and increase group cohesion, which helps explain why Churchill's inclusive pronouns and appeals to shared tradition were persuasive in wartime Britain (Maguire, 2014).

There is also an extensive literature on wartime communication infrastructure, including broadcasting, print, and the role of the Ministry of Information, which shapes how speeches are written, edited, and distributed. Researchers show that Churchill and his team were attentive to how speeches would be received over radio and print, and that revisions sometimes aimed at radio cadence and mass comprehensibility. Studies on the media ecology of wartime Britain, therefore, provide an important contextual layer for pragmatic analysis, because the medium affects perlocutionary reach (Theakston, 2015; Ministry of Information, 1940). While many scholars celebrate Churchill's rhetorical success, critical voices complicate the picture. Some historians and discourse analysts caution against over-attributing public morale shifts to oratory alone, pointing to structural factors such as military events, economic mobilisation, and propaganda, and arguing for multi-causal accounts. Reception studies that pair speech analysis with archival opinion data tend to support a contributory rather than determinative role for speeches: they mattered, but within a field of other stabilising forces (Gilbert, 1991; Ministry of Information, 1940).

Rhetorical history scholars examine the lineage of Churchill's style, tracing classical resources such as repetition, peroration, and moral exempla, and considering the modern mediational demands of radio and mass print (Glover, 2011; Theakston, 2015). Comparative rhetorical histories locate Churchill in a tradition of crisis oratory and show how his Victorian and classical education shaped his metaphors, historical allusions, and appeals to continuity. This literary-historical perspective complements pragmatic accounts by explaining why certain tropes, like appeals to civilisation and invocations of history, were available and resonant (Glover, 2011). Targeted studies that analyse individual speeches, such as Dunkirk, *We Shall Fight on the Beaches*, *Their Finest Hour*, *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat*, *Never Give In*, and *The Few*, employ close textual methods to isolate rhetorical devices and link them to speech acts. These studies repeatedly demonstrate the pattern noted above: factual grounding through assertives, followed by commissive promises and directive appeals, with expressives and moral reframing interwoven to produce resilience in listeners (Puputti, 2019; Maguire, 2014).

Recent theoretical developments in pragmatics have nuanced Austin and Searle's models by emphasising the situated, collaborative, and norm-laden nature of illocutionary acts. This literature encourages scholars to treat leadership speech as co-constructed with advisers, editors, and audiences, an approach already echoed in historical studies that document editorial collaboration in Churchill's speechwriting process (Ramanathan, 2020; Glover, 2011). Such an approach helps avoid myths of solitary oratorical genius and points to the institutional ecology of persuasive language.

Methodologically, the literature suggests several best practices for a pragmatic-stylistic study of Churchill: systematic corpus selection and transcription of authoritative texts, coding of speech acts and rhetorical devices with operational definitions, quantitative counts to identify recurrent patterns, close qualitative exemplars to illustrate function, and triangulation with reception and archival sources such as Ministry of Information records and contemporary newspapers (Kingscott, 2013; Puputti, 2019; Ministry of Information, 1940). An emerging body of comparative work situates Churchill's rhetoric in global frames by comparing wartime oratory across allied leaders and examining cross-cultural reception, especially via international broadcasting. This comparative strand highlights both the universality of certain persuasive devices, such as repetition and identity framing, and the importance of local cultural idioms in shaping perlocutionary uptake. Such comparative work suggests useful directions for extending Churchill studies beyond a British national frame (Ramanathan, 2020). Finally, practitioner-oriented analyses, including speech manuals and retrospective essays, distil lessons from Churchill's technique: clarity of purpose, memorable phrasing, moral framing,

and rhythmic delivery. These works map practice onto rhetorical theory and are useful for pedagogy and for linking scholarly insight to communicative practice (Theakston, 2015; Glover, 2011).

The literature converges on a few robust claims relevant to a pragmatic study of Churchill's wartime speeches. First, foundational theory and applied research together justify treating speeches as language acts with intended illocutionary and perlocutionary effects (Austin, 1962/1975; Searle, 1969; Ramanathan, 2020; Charteris-Black, 2005). Second, empirical analyses of Churchill's texts show recurring rhetorical-pragmatic patterns: factual grounding followed by commissive and directive moves, heavy use of repetition and binary framing, and moral reframing of loss into purpose (Puputti, 2019; Maguire, 2014). Third, archival reception studies and media-context work are essential for connecting textual strategies to observable effects on morale and mobilisation; speeches mattered, but within a broader media and political ecology (Ministry of Information, 1940; Theakston, 2015; Lincoln, 2022). Fourth, methodologically, mixed-methods designs that triangulate coding, close reading, and reception evidence are the current best practice (Kingscott, 2013; Puputti, 2019). These convergences shape the research design and analytic priorities of the present study.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a pragmatic-linguistic approach. It focuses on analysing Winston Churchill's wartime speeches as intentional language acts aimed at persuading and motivating his audience. The study will apply speech act theory (Austin, 1962/1975; Searle, 1969) and pragmatic frameworks to examine how Churchill's language constructs courage and inspires collective action. Qualitative analysis is particularly suitable because it allows for in-depth interpretation of linguistic strategies, context, and audience effect.

Corpus Selection

The research corpus will include a selection of Churchill's most influential wartime speeches, delivered between 1940 and 1945. Key speeches to be analysed are:

- *"We Shall Fight on the Beaches"* (June 4, 1940)
- *"Their Finest Hour"* (June 18, 1940)
- *"Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat"* (May 13, 1940)
- *"The Few"* (August 20, 1940)
- *"Never Give In"* speech at Harrow (October 29, 1941)

These speeches were selected based on their historical significance, rhetorical influence, and availability in archival or published transcripts.

Data Collection

Data will be collected from primary sources, including official transcripts, archival recordings, and published compilations of Churchill's speeches. Secondary sources, such as scholarly analyses of political rhetoric and pragmatics, will also be consulted to provide contextual and theoretical support.

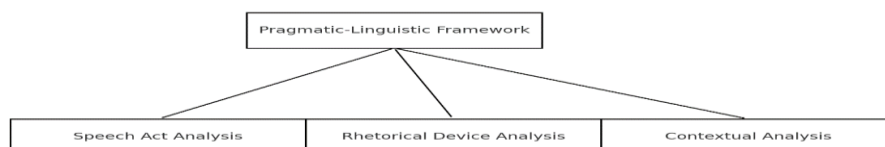
Analytical Framework

The study will employ a pragmatic-linguistic framework, combining:

1. **Speech Act Analysis** – Identifying illocutionary acts (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations) and perlocutionary effects to understand how Churchill intended to influence his audience (Austin, 1962/1975; Searle, 1969).
2. **Rhetorical Device Analysis** – Examining use of ethos, pathos, logos, pronoun choice, repetition, metaphor, binary oppositions, and narrative sequencing as tools for persuasion.

3. **Contextual Analysis** – Situating the speeches within historical and socio-political context to assess intended and realised audience impact.

Diagram 1



Data Analysis Procedure

1. Transcribe and organise speeches into a textual format.
2. Conduct a qualitative content analysis, coding examples of speech acts, persuasive devices, and audience-directed strategies.
3. Identify patterns of linguistic choices that consistently aim to inspire courage and solidarity.
4. Cross-reference findings with secondary sources documenting contemporary audience reactions and historical accounts of morale.
5. Interpret results in light of pragmatic theory and rhetorical scholarship.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study deals with publicly available historical texts, ethical concerns are minimal. Proper citation of primary and secondary sources will be ensured to maintain academic integrity.

Limitations

1. The study is limited to English-language speeches and may not account for subtleties of delivery (intonation, gesture) in performance.
2. Audience response will be inferred from historical accounts, which may not fully capture individual psychological reactions.

Justification of Methodology

This methodology allows for a comprehensive exploration of persuasive language, connecting linguistic strategies with historical impact. By combining speech act theory, rhetorical analysis, and historical contextualization, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how Churchill's speeches functioned as tools for constructing courage during wartime.

Data Analysis

Speech 1: Analysis of Winston Churchill's "*We Shall Fight on the Beaches*" (4 June 1940)

Pragmatic Strategies and Speech Acts in the Address

Churchill's "*We Shall Fight on the Beaches*" uses a coordinated system of assertives, commissives, directives and expressives to achieve specific pragmatic effects during a moment of national crisis. His assertiveness works to construct an authoritative factual foundation, as seen when he explains the situation in France: "From the moment that the French defences at Sedan... only a rapid retreat to Amiens could have saved the British and French Armies" (Churchill, 1940). These assertive acts perform more than description; they legitimise subsequent commitments and guide the audience toward accepting the realism of the threat. The commissives are the most striking feature of the speech, especially in the climactic vow, "*We Shall Fight on the Beaches*, we shall fight on the landing-grounds... we shall never

surrender” (Churchill, 1940). Through repeated “we shall” structures, Churchill binds the government and the nation to future action, creating a public commitment that functions pragmatically as both promise and rallying device. Directive elements also operate indirectly, encouraging vigilance and emotional discipline. This appears when he cautions, “We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory” (Churchill, 1940). Expressive moments, such as his tribute to those who died at Calais, help humanise leadership while simultaneously reframing sacrifice as purposeful. All of these speech acts reinforce one another: assertives frame the crisis, commissives establish resolve, directives orient behaviour, and expressives build emotional connection. Together, they reveal a carefully calibrated pragmatic strategy designed to steady and mobilise a threatened public.

Persuasive Language and the Construction of Courage

Churchill’s persuasive power in this speech stems from his strategic blend of rhetorical devices with pragmatic force. The famous sequence of anaphoric commissives, “we shall fight”, serves not only as a promise but also as a rhythmic declaration that listeners can internalise, transforming resistance into a collective identity. Metaphorical language makes danger vivid and tangible, as when Churchill describes the German advance as an “armoured scythe-stroke,” a choice that frames the enemy as a destructive force that must be opposed (Churchill, 1940). His use of binary oppositions reinforces a clear moral structure: “the British Empire” versus “the odious apparatus of Nazi rule.” These contrasts simplify political realities into moral imperatives. At the same time, Churchill’s narrative sequencing gives meaning to otherwise demoralising events. Rather than presenting Dunkirk as a retreat, he reframes it as a “deliverance,” telling Parliament that “the port of Dunkirk was kept open” through extraordinary effort (Churchill, 1940). This reframing transforms fear into pride and aligns emotional response with national duty. Ethos plays a significant role as well; Churchill’s acknowledgements of loss and praise of courage position him as a leader who not only commands but shares the struggle. Rhetoric and pragmatics interact throughout the address: the rhetorical devices amplify the force of the illocutionary acts, and the pragmatic structure ensures that these rhetorical choices produce predictable social effects hope, unity and determination.

Contextual Meaning and Intended Social Impact

The speech’s persuasive power becomes clearer when understood in its historical context. Delivered immediately after the evacuation at Dunkirk, it addressed a nation facing the possibility of invasion and widespread despair. Churchill’s insistence on full disclosure, describing losses, and explaining strategic decisions reduced public uncertainty, a major psychological threat during wartime. His narrative of events transforms what could have been perceived as chaos into a coherent story of endurance: “Thus it was that the port of Dunkirk was kept open” (Churchill, 1940). By giving meaning to setbacks, he prevents demoralisation and sustains public confidence. Institutional declarations such as “That is the resolve of His Majesty’s Government” reinforce the stability of governance at a time when collapse seemed possible. These declarations function as assurances that leadership remains strong and unified. The speech’s pragmatic design also anticipates audience expectations; parliamentary listeners received detailed justification, while the broader public, through subsequent media distribution, absorbed the emotionally resonant refrain of “we shall fight.” The result is a speech that not only reports a crisis but actively constructs the social and psychological conditions necessary for national survival. Through its mix of honesty, resolve and visionary framing, the address transforms collective fear into collective fortitude.

Table 1

Speech-act categories, pragmatic function, and examples from Churchill's speech

Speech-Act Type	Pragmatic Function (how it aims to affect the audience)	Representative wording / short excerpt (speech reference)
Assertives / Constatives	Present facts to orient, justify, and legitimate subsequent directives/commitments (builds credibility).	"From the moment that the French defences at Sedan ... only a rapid retreat to Amiens... could have saved the British and French Armies." (Churchill, 1940)
Commissives	Commit the government and nation to future action; bind speaker & polity to continued resistance (creates resolve).	" <i>We Shall Fight on the Beaches</i> ... we shall never surrender." (Churchill, 1940)
Directives	Urge particular behaviours or attitudes from the audience (mobilise effort, vigilance, unity).	"We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory." (Churchill, 1940)
Expressives	Express attitudes, sympathy, and gratitude; humanise the speaker and create an emotional connection.	"I take occasion to express the sympathy of the House to all who have suffered bereavement..." (Churchill, 1940)
Declarations (institutional tone)	Mark formal policy posture; invoke institutional authority (Parliament, government).	"That is the resolve of His Majesty's Government, every man of them." (Churchill, 1940)

(Note: Table shows categories used in the speech-act analysis. Excerpts are paraphrased or quoted directly and referenced to the speech.)

Speech 2: Analysis of Winston Churchill's "*Their Finest Hour*" (June 18, 1940)

Speech Act Analysis

Churchill uses a sequence of assertives to explain the military crisis and ground the audience in shared facts. He opens with a clear statement of circumstances, noting the "*colossal military disaster*" and the loss of French divisions. These assertions help build a factual base that frames the seriousness of the threat. He follows this with directives that urge unity and focus, as seen when he tells Parliament and the public, "*We have to think of the future and not of the past.*" His commissives reinforce commitment to national defence, especially when he vows that Britain will fight on "*if necessary for years, if necessary alone.*" Expressives show his empathy and regard for soldiers, such as his praise for the French Army's "*heroic resistance.*" Declarations appear when he defines Britain's role in the world crisis, positioning the nation as the remaining defender of freedom and announcing that "*we have become the sole champions now in arms to defend the world cause.*" These acts show how Churchill blends fact, commitment, and encouragement to shape public resolve during a dangerous moment.

Rhetorical Device Analysis

Churchill strengthens the emotional force of the speech through repetition and strategic contrast. The phrase "*we shall fight*" does not appear here as it does in other speeches, but similar patterns appear in the repeated references to Britain's strength rising each week. Metaphorical framing amplifies urgency and determination. He describes the possible invasion as an "armada" that could be "blown to pieces" before landing, which dramatises both danger and British strength. Binary oppositions structure the stakes, as in the contrast between "*the survival of Christian civilisation*" and the "*abyss of a new Dark Age.*" Pronoun choice draws

the audience into a shared mission. The repeated use of “we” creates collective identity, while references to the enemy as “the whole fury and might of the enemy” create distance and reinforce solidarity. The closing image of “*broad, sunlit uplands*” works as a narrative sequencing that leads listeners from crisis toward hope. These devices helped the speech resonate as a call to courage at a moment of national uncertainty.

Contextual Analysis

This speech was delivered at a moment when France was collapsing and Britain faced the possibility of German invasion. Churchill uses history and current events to explain why the moment is critical. He refers to the losses at Dunkirk and describes the return of “350,000 out of 400,000 men” to assure the public that Britain has real defensive strength. He also places the burden of leadership on Britain by declaring that “*the survival of Christian civilisation*” depends on this battle. The socio-political context of fear and uncertainty shapes his emphasis on unity. He warns that opening “*a quarrel between the past and the present*” would make the nation lose the future, which responds to political divisions in Parliament. He also frames Britain's mission in global terms, stating that if Britain fails, “*the whole world... will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age.*” By rooting the speech in the immediate crisis and broader historical purpose, Churchill brings the audience to accept both sacrifice and perseverance as necessary for national survival.

Table 2

Speech-act categories, pragmatic function, and examples from “Their Finest Hour.”

Speech-Act Type	Pragmatic Function	Representative wording / short excerpt (speech reference)
Assertives	Present historical/military facts to justify subsequent commitments and actions	“Our Army and 120,000 French troops were indeed rescued by the British Navy but only with the loss of their cannon, vehicles and modern equipment.” (Churchill, 1940)
Commissives	Commit Britain and the Empire to sustained resistance; instil national resolve.	“We shall defend our Island home, and with the British Empire we shall fight unconquerable until the curse of Hitler is lifted from the brows of mankind.” (Churchill, 1940)
Directives	Urge action, preparation, and unity	“Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties...” (Churchill, 1940)
Expressives	Convey sympathy, confidence, and admiration; create emotional connection	“We have great faith in the French Army. We have great faith in the French people. We have great faith in the French Government.” (Churchill, 1940)
Declarations (institutional tone)	Signal official government policy and authority	“It is necessary at a time like this that every Minister ... shall be respected; and their subordinates must know that their chiefs are not threatened men.” (Churchill, 1940)

Speech 3: Analysis of “*Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat*” (May 13, 1940)

Speech Act Analysis

Churchill opens with assertions that explain the formation of his new government and the urgency of the political moment. He reports that it was the “*wish and will of Parliament and the nation*” that the administration include all parties, which helps establish legitimacy. He then uses commissives to signal commitment to decisive action, most famously when he declares, “*I have nothing to offer but Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat.*” This pledge sets the emotional tone of the speech and marks the seriousness of the task ahead. Directives appear when he calls for unity and shared effort, telling the House, “*Come, then, let us go forward together with our united strength.*” Expressives show his awareness of the hardship facing the nation, as when he acknowledges “*an ordeal of the most grievous kind.*” His declarations shape national purpose by defining policy and aim. He states plainly, “*It is to wage war... with all our might*” and then answers, “*It is victory... victory at all costs.*” These speech acts work together to secure Parliament’s confidence, clarify policy, and prepare the nation for sustained struggle.

Rhetorical Device Analysis

The speech uses repetition, contrast, and moral framing to drive its message. The most memorable line repeats four stark nouns: “*Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat.*” This sequence compresses the hardship of war into a simple and forceful rhythm. Churchill strengthens his message through parallel structures, as in “*victory, victory at all costs, victory despite all terror; victory, however long and hard the road may be.*” The repetition builds intensity and leaves no ambiguity about national purpose. He uses contrast to highlight the scale of the threat, calling Nazi Germany “*a monstrous tyranny*” and placing it against the endurance and values of the British Empire. Metaphors of journey and endurance, reflected in phrases such as “*long months of struggle and of suffering*” and “*the road may be long and hard,*” situate the war as a shared national test. Pronoun choice reinforces unity. The shift from “I” to “we” and ultimately to “let us go forward together” positions Parliament and the people as partners in a common cause. These devices help transform a short administrative statement into a powerful call for sacrifice and resolve.

Contextual Analysis

Delivered three days after Churchill became Prime Minister and during the collapse of Allied defences in Europe, the speech responds directly to a moment of fear and political uncertainty. Britain faced spreading German offensives in Norway, Holland, and France, and Churchill refers to being “*in the preliminary stage of one of the greatest battles in history.*” By describing the work of forming a government in a single day, he highlights the urgency of events and the need for swift leadership. The request for parliamentary confidence is set against the failure of earlier policies and the looming threat of invasion. Churchill acknowledges the crisis openly, stating “*we have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind,*” which reflects the sombre national mood. Yet he lifts the focus to a broader historical purpose by linking the war to the survival of the British Empire and the progress of humankind. This balance of realism and confidence helps stabilise public expectations as Britain transitions from political division to unified war leadership. The speech’s context explains its brevity and directness, as Churchill needed to secure trust and define clear goals at the start of his premiership.

Table 3

Speech-act categories, pragmatic function, and examples from “Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat.”

Speech-Act Type	Pragmatic Function	Representative wording / short excerpt (speech reference)
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Assertives	Present the situation and urgency of events; establish credibility	“We are in the preliminary stage of one of the greatest battles in history, that we are in action at many other points in Norway and in Holland...” (Churchill, 1940)
Commissives	Commit Britain to total war and ultimate victory.	“It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us.” (Churchill, 1940)
Directives	Appeal for unity and support from Parliament and the nation	“Come, then, let us go forward together with our united strength.” (Churchill, 1940)
Expressives	Convey determination, resolve, and emotional intensity	“I have nothing to offer but <i>Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat</i> .” (Churchill, 1940)
Declarations (institutional tone)	Establish the legitimacy of the new government and Cabinet appointments	“I now invite the House, by the Motion which stands in my name, to record its approval of the steps taken and to declare its confidence in the new Government.” (Churchill, 1940)

Speech 4: Analysis of Winston Churchill’s “*The Few*” (20 August 1940)

Speech Act Analysis

Churchill opens with assertions that ask the nation to pause and evaluate the situation after nearly a year of war. He describes the shift in Britain’s position, noting that while the country is still alone, it is “*alone in a higher sense*” because it fights not only for itself but for the wider cause of civilisation. His factual recounting of German threats, including Hitler’s order that “*the war will continue until the present British Government is disposed of*,” functions as an assertive design to frame the scale of danger without provoking panic. By stating these facts carefully, he builds the epistemic foundation for what follows.

Commissives appear as he outlines continued resistance and promises that Britain will defend not only its homeland but its Empire, saying Britain “*will be ready to defend the Suez Canal, to defend Egypt, to defend Palestine, to defend Syria*.” These pledges reassure Parliament that the government remains committed to global defence. His directives are indirect but clear. When he tells the House, “*we must take it as a warning that we are to be ready to withstand a direct assault*,” he signals the required vigilance without issuing a blunt command.

Expressives appear in his gratitude toward airmen who protect the nation each day. He praises the fighter pilots who face the Luftwaffe, stating, “*all hearts go out to the fighter pilots, whose brilliant actions we see with our own eyes*.” The emotional high point comes with the expressive-commissive blend, “*Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few*.” This line honours the pilots and appeals to the public spirit.

Declarations structure national policy, such as affirming that bombing military objectives is a strategic necessity, not revenge. When Churchill states that this campaign “*affords one of the most certain roads to victory*,” he frames military action as legitimate national policy. These speech acts collectively aim to inform, steady, inspire, and unify the nation during the Battle of Britain.

Rhetorical Device Analysis

Churchill reinforces his pragmatic goals through repetition, contrast, and emotional elevation. He employs repetition to build momentum, especially in his long catalogue of military commitments: “*to defend the Suez Canal, to defend Egypt, to defend Palestine, to defend*

Syria,” which creates a rhythm of resolve. He also uses cumulative structures when describing the full mobilisation of national resources: *“The whole of the man-power and womanpower... The whole of the brain-power... The whole of the agricultural and industrial production of the country.”* This listing strategy magnifies a sense of total commitment and unity.

Contrast plays a central role in framing the stakes of the conflict. He contrasts Britain’s moral mission with Hitler’s ambitions, noting the leaflet that claims the German people have *“no quarrel with the British people.”* Churchill exposes this propaganda and contrasts it with Germany’s proven record of invasion, calling the leaflet *“a piece of paper”* but still *“a warning.”* This contrast sharpens Britain’s sense of vigilance.

The speech is rich with metaphors and symbolic imagery. The phrase *“this strong City of Refuge which enshrines the title-deeds of human progress”* casts Britain as a sanctuary of civilisation. When he states that airmen *“are turning the tide of World War by their prowess,”* he frames their actions as the pivotal turning point of history. The famous line *“so much owed by so many to so few”* uses numerical contrast to elevate the fighter pilots to heroic status, positioning them as defenders of not only Britain but the world.

Narrative sequencing moves from the threat of invasion to the strength of British defences, culminating in praise for the Royal Air Force. This structure shifts the emotional tone from anxiety to courage, showing the House that Britain is under pressure but not helpless. The rhetoric supports his aim of fostering resilience during a brutal air campaign.

Contextual Analysis

This speech takes place at the height of the Battle of Britain, when German air attacks reached their most intense phase. Churchill acknowledges the gravity of events, saying the air battle has *“attained a high intensity”* and that its scale and duration cannot yet be predicted. His emphasis on the possibility of invasion is both realistic and strategic. By reading from Hitler’s leaflet, he places Germany’s threats in concrete terms, reminding the House that the danger is immediate and not theoretical.

At the same time, Churchill highlights improvements in British defences. He assures the House that the Army is *“so well equipped, so well trained, or so numerous”* as never before, and that the Air Force is at its highest strength. This balances the earlier discussion of danger with evidence of preparation. He also emphasises the importance of the Middle East and Mediterranean front, suggesting a global view of the conflict at a time when Britain stood largely alone.

The broader context is one of national exhaustion and fear. Cities were being bombed, and the fate of the war seemed tied to the endurance of the Royal Air Force. Churchill’s tribute to the pilots directly responds to this moment, offering the country a symbolic source of hope. The line *“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”* resonates so strongly because it captures the public sentiment of dependence on the RAF.

The section on Gandhi reflects political tensions within the empire and Churchill’s desire to maintain confidence in British democracy and leadership. His repetition of *“I am not aware that he has any authority...”* dismisses criticisms of Britain’s war conduct and seeks to reaffirm its democratic legitimacy before both Parliament and the world.

The speech ends on a note of steady resolve. By blending honest recognition of hardship with praise for national courage, Churchill shapes public morale at a moment when invasion felt dangerously close. His final assurance that the British people will *“show themselves capable of standing up to their duty”* ties the speech to its central purpose: to unify, strengthen, and embolden Britain during one of the most perilous phases of the war.

Table 4

Speech-act categories, pragmatic function, and examples from “The Few.”

Speech-Act Type	Pragmatic Function	Representative wording / short excerpt (speech reference)
Assertives	Present military and strategic situation; provide evidence of readiness	“The Home Guard has now reached a strength of 1,700,000 men...The Royal Air Force is at the highest strength it has ever reached.” (Churchill, 1940)
Commissives	Commit Britain to continued resistance; highlight the RAF's role in shaping victory.	“We can verify the results of bombing military targets in Germany...affords one at least of the most certain, if not the shortest, of all the roads to victory.” (Churchill, 1940)
Directives	Encourage collective resilience and morale.	“We must not forget that from the moment when we declared war on the 3rd September, it was always possible for Germany to turn all her Air Force upon this country...we will stand firm.” (Churchill, 1940)
Expressives	Convey gratitude, admiration, and moral framing.	“The gratitude of every home in our Island...goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the World War by their prowess and by their devotion.” (Churchill, 1940)
Declarations Institutional tone	Legitimise government assessments and strategic priorities	“I have finished. I have given the House a full and frank account of the present position.” (Churchill, 1940)

Speech 5: Analysis of Winston Churchill’s “*Never Give In*” (Harrow School, 29 October 1941)

Speech Act Analysis

Churchill begins with assertions that recap the previous year’s events, noting that the “*ten months that have passed have seen very terrible, catastrophic events in the world*” and that Britain is now in a “*very great improvement in the position of our country.*” These factual reflections frame the emotional and moral themes he plans to develop. His evaluation of Britain’s earlier isolation, describing how the nation was “*poorly armed*” and “*desperately alone,*” sets the stage for expressing national resilience.

As he shifts from recounting events to moral instruction, Churchill uses directives aimed at motivating the students. The core directive appears in his famous instruction: “*Never Give In, Never Give In, never; never; never; never.*” This repeated imperative works not only as advice but as a moral command rooted in national identity. Further directives appear when he encourages the audience to treat “*Triumph and Disaster*” the same, borrowing from Kipling to advise emotional steadiness.

Expressives surface through his praise for the British spirit during the conflict. He remarks that “*there was no flinching and no thought of giving in,*” expressing admiration for national perseverance. He also conveys appreciation toward Harrow School for the “*extra verse written*

in my honour;” revealing a more personal tone compared to his wartime parliamentary speeches.

Commissives appear implicitly in his assurance that Britain will continue its struggle until victory is achieved. He states confidently that the country now occupies a position where “*we have only to persevere to conquer;*” committing to eventual triumph. Finally, Churchill makes subtle declarations that frame Britain’s endurance as historically significant. When he says, “*these are not dark days; these are great days;*” he publicly redefines the national mood and reframes adversity as opportunity. This declarative re-labelling strengthens morale and aligns with his long-standing strategy of using rhetoric to influence public perception.

Rhetorical Device Analysis

Churchill relies heavily on repetition, metaphor, contrast, and appeals to collective identity to achieve persuasive force. The central rhetorical device is repetition, particularly the climactic line: “*Never Give In, Never Give In, never, never, never, never.*” This rhythmic insistence elevates the message from simple advice to a memorable creed. The repetition of “never yield” and “*Never Give In*” reinforces the resolve necessary in wartime.

Contrast is another major strategy. Churchill contrasts Britain’s earlier isolation with its improved situation, reminding listeners that “*we were quite alone, desperately alone,*” but now stand in a far stronger position. He also contrasts appearance and reality, echoing Kipling’s message that external conditions can be deceptive. The idea that “*appearances are often very deceptive*” becomes a metaphorical reminder that morale must not falter based on surface impressions.

Metaphorical imagery strengthens the emotional tone. Churchill likens imagination to a force that can magnify danger, noting that “*those people who are imaginative see many more dangers than perhaps exist,*” yet argues that imagination must be paired with courage. This frames emotional resilience as both intellectual and moral work. His rephrasing of the school song from “darker days” to “sterner days” illustrates rhetorical reframing. By replacing “darker” with “sterner,” he shifts the nation’s story from suffering to strength.

Churchill also employs narrative sequencing, beginning with recollection, moving through reflection, and ending in a rallying call. By recounting how Britain “*stood in the gap*” when many expected its defeat, he creates a narrative of national heroism that culminates in a triumphant reinterpretation of the present: “*These are not dark days; these are great days.*” This final line functions as both a rhetorical flourish and a motivational anchor for the speech.

Contextual Analysis

The Harrow School address takes place at a transitional moment in the Second World War. By October 1941, Britain had survived the Blitz, and a German invasion appeared less likely. Churchill alludes to this shift by noting the “*very great improvement in the position of our country,*” reinforcing that Britain was no longer “*poorly armed.*” His acknowledgement that students themselves had experienced air attacks highlights the shared trauma of the era and strengthens his appeal to their resilience.

The speech also reflects Churchill’s belief in moral education. Addressing boys at one of Britain’s historic schools, he frames the war not only as a military struggle but as a test of character. His insistence that they must “*be equally good at what is short and sharp and what is long and tough*” ties military endurance to moral endurance. By invoking Kipling and school tradition, Churchill roots contemporary struggle in a familiar lineage of British virtue.

A key contextual goal is to reinterpret national hardship. After the Blitz and months of uncertainty, Britain needed psychological renewal. Churchill’s re-labelling of the present as “*great days*” responds directly to fears of defeat and exhaustion. In the context of wartime

Britain, this rhetorical shift helps reposition civilians and soldiers as active participants in a historic moment, rather than passive sufferers.

Furthermore, the global context of late 1941 is important. The Soviet Union had entered the war after Germany's invasion in June, and the United States was inching closer to involvement. Britain's isolation was coming to an end. Churchill's assurance that "*we have only to persevere to conquer*" reflects this geopolitical change and reassures listeners that victory is becoming more plausible.

The speech closes with gratitude for being able to "play a part" in such a defining moment in history. This sentiment resonates strongly in a time when collective effort was essential. Churchill's address transforms adversity into purpose, shaping morale through a blend of honesty, tradition, and hope.

Table 5

Summary of pragmatic features in "*Never Give In*"

Feature coded	Operational definition	Representative instances
Assertive narrative	Historical account and contextual framing	"We were poorly armed. We are not so poorly armed today, but then we were very poorly armed."
Commissive statements	Encouragement to persevere and adhere to honour	" <i>Never Give In</i> ...never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."
Expressive intensifiers	Moral framing and emotional uplift	"These are not dark days; these are great days—the greatest days our country has ever lived."
Directives/exhortation	Instruction in mindset and action	"We must learn to be equally good at what is short and sharp and what is long and tough."
Metaphoric/symbolic reference	Link personal conduct to national legacy	"We have been allowed, each of us according to our stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race."

Findings

Across the five speeches, Churchill uses a consistent core of pragmatic and rhetorical strategies, but the balance of these strategies shifts depending on the audience, the moment of the war, and the emotional needs of the nation. All speeches rely on assertives to report the military situation, commissives to promise steadfast action, directives to guide public behaviour, and expressives to build emotional connection. Still, each speech deploys these acts with different intensity. In "*Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat*," the commissive force is strongest, anchored in the pledge "I have nothing to offer but *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat*," which sets the tone for his new government. In "*We Shall Fight on the Beaches*," repetition turns commissives into a unifying national vow through "*We Shall Fight on the Beaches*... we shall never surrender." In "*Their Finest Hour*," assertiveness dominates early on as Churchill explains the defeat of France, while the closing passage lifts morale by promising that history will judge Britain's stand as "*Their Finest Hour*." The speeches "*The Few*" and "*Never Give In*" integrate more expressiveness than the parliamentary addresses. In "*The Few*," the tribute "so much owed by so many to so few" elevates the RAF pilots to moral heroes. In "*Never Give In*," Churchill uses

a personal tone to directly instruct resilience through “*Never Give In, Never Give In*, never, never, never, never,” creating an instructional directive rather than a political one.

Churchill’s rhetorical devices also follow a clear comparative pattern. Repetition appears in every speech but serves different purposes. In “*We Shall Fight on the Beaches*,” it creates the rhythm of a national vow. In “*Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat*,” it intensifies the national aim through “victory, victory at all costs, victory despite all terror.” In “*Never Give In*,” repetition becomes a moral command. Metaphor and imagery likewise change in focus. In “*Their Finest Hour*,” the threat of invasion is framed as the approach of a “new Dark Age,” suggesting civilizational risk. In “*The Few*,” the RAF pilots are framed as the decisive force that “turns the tide of World War.” In the Harrow speech, Churchill reframes hardship by changing the school verse from “darker days” to “sterner days,” turning difficulty into strength. Narrative sequencing also differs across speeches. Parliamentary speeches move from crisis to resolution, while the Harrow and RAF speeches move from reflection to emotional uplift.

A comparative reading also shows how Churchill adjusts tone, emotional weight, and strategic focus as the war evolves. The early speeches, such as “*Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat*” and “*Beaches*,” are defensive and sober, aimed at preparing Britain for suffering and endurance. “*Their Finest Hour*” balances realism with a forward-looking hope, helping the nation understand its historical role. “*The Few*” marks a transition into praise and gratitude as Britain survives the worst of the Battle of Britain. “*Never Give In*” arrives at a time when morale needed renewal, not survival, and its main goal is to strengthen personal character as well as national resolve. Across all five speeches, Churchill’s language constructs a shared identity rooted in perseverance, sacrifice, and national unity. His blend of factual framing, moral instruction, emotional elevation, and collective commitment creates a steady, persuasive force that evolves with the war but remains grounded in the same pragmatic foundation.

Table 6

Comparative Summary of Pragmatic Features in Churchill’s Five Wartime Speeches

Speech	Dominant Speech Acts	Key Quotations	Primary Pragmatic Effect	Rhetorical Devices
<i>We Shall Fight on the Beaches</i> (June 4, 1940)	Commissives, Assertives	“ <i>We Shall Fight on the Beaches... we shall never surrender.</i> ”	Creates a national vow of resistance and binds the public to continued struggle.	Heavy repetition, parallel structure, binaries (“British Empire” vs “Nazi tyranny”).
<i>Their Finest Hour</i> (June 18, 1940)	Assertives, Directives	“Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties.”	Establishes sober realism and prepares listeners for long-term defence.	Historical framing, metaphor (“new Dark Age”), narrative sequencing from loss to hope.
<i>Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat</i> (May 13, 1940)	Commissives, Declarations	“I have nothing to offer but <i>Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat.</i> ”	Sets the moral tone for the new government and commits the nation to sacrifice.	Compact repetition, moral appeals, contrast (“monstrous tyranny”).

The Few (August 20, 1940)	Expressives, Assertives	“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”	Elevates RAF pilots as moral heroes and strengthens national gratitude.	Emotional elevation, metaphor (“City of Refuge”), cumulative listing.
Never Give In (Harrow, Oct 29, 1941)	Directives, Expressives	“Never Give In, Never Give In, never, never, never, never.”	Gives moral instruction tied to national identity and personal resilience.	Direct repetition, contrast (early isolation vs recovery), reframing (“sterner days”).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of Churchill’s five speeches demonstrates his consistent use of pragmatic and rhetorical strategies to unify, motivate, and guide his audiences through periods of national crisis. By blending assertive statements, commissives, directives, and expressive language, Churchill adapts his style to both parliamentary and public settings, balancing factual exposition with emotional and moral appeals. His deliberate use of repetition, metaphor, and moral framing not only reinforces key messages but also fosters resilience, courage, and a sense of shared purpose. Across all contexts, these speeches reveal a masterful orchestration of language to sustain national morale, legitimise leadership, and inspire collective action, cementing Churchill’s legacy as a preeminent wartime orator.

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