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FICTIONAL THREATENING: THE CASE OF DISJUNCTIVE CONDITIONALS

In the present paper, we extend previous work on the speech act of threatening by including in our analysis a corpus of crime fiction based on 700 English books, a characteristic trait of which are threats. By including data derived from written narratives in prose, imaginary rather than factual, this research aims to identify potential differences between fictional and authentic threats, thus contributing to the general panorama of this speech act. Here we concentrate on a single construction, known as disjunctive conditional or pseudo-imperative, which is analysed in terms of parameters employed in previous studies and modified to meet the purposes on the present research.

Keywords: *threatening, speech act, corpus, fiction, crime stories, pseudo--imperatives, disjunctive conditional*

1. Introduction

Po tym przykrym doświadczeniu nie przestała czerpać przyjemności z czytania, jednak zrozumiała, że rzeczywistość nie dorasta do książek. Taki las – ot, drzewa, liście, krzaki, zwierzęta. A w książce – poetyckie cuda, zachwyty. […] I Anna rozumie już, że to nie książki, kłamią, lecz życie. (Szczepan Twardoch, *Anna*)
After that unpleasant experience, she did not stop enjoying reading but understood that reality was no match for books. Take a forest – nothing but trees, leaves, bushes, animals. While in the book – poetic wonders, miracles. [...] And Anna knows now that it is not books that lie, but life (*Translation, AŁ*).

In the present paper we are far from claiming that life cannot compare to books; neither do we advocate the opposite view. We argue that an analysis of fictional texts is likely to provide the analysts with substantial evidence of linguistic constructions that are either hardly attested in the real world or are indicative of partial compatibility of verbal interaction taking place in the world of facts and in the world of fiction. According to Austin (1962), we speak to do things, which is a reason why we are interested in how the same things are done by real and fictional speakers. To this purpose, we extend previous works on the topic of the speech act of threatening by including in our analysis a corpus of crime fiction, a characteristic trait of which is the very act of threatening.

Most of the existing studies on threats and threatening language can be described as "armchair approaches", i.e. "approaches that do not analyse actual language data but work with reflections on language" (Jucker 2009: 1615). And in a sense, so is ours. Yet, while sitting in our armchairs, we are analysing *actual* data, i.e. not fictive but fictional ones, derived from a corpus of crime (and detective) stories. Furthermore, a substantial part of the analysed material can be placed at the interface of fiction and reality, being an artistic transposition of real events closed in a narrative form. Whatever the role of imagination, be it a reflection of personal beliefs, or fears and desires, we hope that a study into 700 books may offer a new insight into threatening and its linguistic forms.

The aim of the present study is twofold. First, we aim to expand on the results of previous corpus-based studies on threats. By concentrating on a specific syntactic construction associated with the act of threatening, i.e. pseudo--imperatives or Imperative-or-Declarative (henceforth *IoD*) structures, we intend to find out to what extent the constructions match the general multifactorial model proposed by Muschalik (2018). Second, by including data derived from written narratives in prose, imaginary rather than factual, this research aims to identify potential differences between fictional and authentic threats. Thus, by including the written fictional language, the study aspires to capture more of the heterogeneity of human communication, here restricted to the English language, and thereby, to shed light on the uses of *IoD* patterns in the performance of threatening and on the correlation of various constitutive factors of this speech act. Previous research, limited as it is, has in fact found that even if there is no one standard way of performing a threat, some aspects of the form of threat are more systematic than previously contended. Among these, an important discriminatory function is played by conditional language, which, although frequently characterized as a defining feature, has been found in Muschalik (2018: 173) to be relatively infrequent in the corpus of authentic threat utterances, yet salient enough in terms of its functional associations. The syntactic forms that "conditional language" can take are numerous and they

range from true conditionals of *if…then* type to (*don't*) *do it or.* And it is the last of these forms that we concentrate on to assess its place and contribution to the general panorama of conditional threats.

2. Threatening as a speech act: dilemmas

Unlike the flagship example of promising as a speech act, the speech act of threatening did not receive considerable attention in Austin's (1962) *How to do things with words*. However, the few mentions of threat(ening) that Austin offered clearly signalled potential problems that the general theory of speech acts could be confronted with.

First, Austin (1962: 130) suggests that the verb *threat* can be used as a direct speech act, i.e. following the canonical performative formula "I $\text{Verb}_{\text{present indicative}}$ (you)". In this way, Austin delegates it to the class of performative verbs, the site of such nonproblematic performative members as *warn* and *promise*. This membership has been questioned, however, in the subsequent literature. For authors such as Nicoloff (1989: 501) "there does not seem to be any **conventional** (*bold type ours*) expression that corresponds to or counts as the making of a threat", which does not invalidate Austin's claim on the acceptability of "I threaten you" but questions its canonical status. Salgueiro (2010) rules out the performative use of "threaten" in the first person singular of the present indicative active. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the possibility of using such semi-performative utterances as "Yes, I am threatening"[1] and, which is more commonplace, parenthetical remarks, "That's a threat"[2]. This claim finds a partial confirmation in our Corpus of Crime Fiction (henceforth: CCF), which provides two examples of the speakers' speech-act-classifying utterances but not a single instance of the semi-performative formula mentioned by Salgueiro:

(1) "That's an awfully strange question. One that might be misconstrued as a threat."
"A threat? That was not a threat," he said with a laugh. "But this is a threat." He moved one step closer. "We have you severely outnumbered. Lay down your weapons or you will have a new answer to my question about pain."

Secondly, Austin (1962: 121) observes that not only does the very act of threatening satisfy the performative formula, but it is acceptable in utterances

[1] The performative status of such utterances cannot be accepted. In his analysis of the performative verb "bet" Levinson (1983) interprets sentences in the progressive aspect such as *I am betting you five pounds it'll rain tomorrow* as reminders and not performative utterances capable of doing betting.

[2] "That's a threat" is not performative but functions as a description of the preceding utterance.

such as "*In* saying I would shoot him I was threatening him", which is found to be a sufficient condition to qualify it as an illocutionary act rather than a perlocutionary one. However, this has been challenged in numerous studies to follow. Nicoloff (1989: 501–502) argues that threats cannot be classified as illocutionary acts because even if they are "similar to orders or congratulations in that in their case, too, the saying is seen as constituting the doing, not as bringing it about as a consequence, as in the case of perlocutions, […] there does not seem to be any **conventional** (*bold type ours*) expression that corresponds to or counts as the making of a threat", thus providing the same argument as above. For Nicoloff, the absence of such a conventional expression is regarded as the major obstacle for "the conventionalistic interpretation of the class of illocutionary speech acts" (Walton 2000: 109). Accordingly, Nicoloff proposes that threats should be expelled from the class of illocutionary verbs and placed among perlocutions.

The third major problem that threats pose concerns their membership in Searle's (1976) typology of speech acts. Searle distinguished five classes of speech acts, namely, representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Threats appear together with promises in the general category of commissives, whose illocutionary force consists in committing the speaker to a future course of action, as in "I promise to be there tomorrow". This membership of threats in the class of commissives has been repeatedly questioned on the grounds that there are numerous differences between these two speech acts concerning not only their form, but also "commissiveness" of threats understood as an obligation assumed by the speaker. First, while the act of promising generates for the speaker an obligation to keep his/her promise, the act of threatening puts on the threatening party no such obligation, i.e. the threat 'Freeze, or I'll shoot' would still count as a threat even if the person threatened moves and the threatener decides not to shoot. Secondly, as Salgueiro (2010) emphasises, unlike threats but like betting, promises "are essentially inter-subjective speech acts, the performance of which involves the active joint participation of both speaker and receiver" while "threats are more unilateral", by which Salgueiro means that promises, but not threats, can be deactivated by the addressee:

(2) If you marry me, I will treat you like a queen.
Your Majesty, thank you, but there is no need. I wish to remain Cinderella.
(3) Marry me I said or I will break your nose.
? Thanks, but there is no need."

Finally, the form of elementary threats such "I will kill you before you arrive home" opens up the possibility for classifying threats as assertives.

It is not our objective to address the problem of possible failings of the traditional versions of Searle's speech act theory and we embarked on this review of major reservations about "commissiveness" of threats mainly to demonstrate that the speech act of threatening can be accomplished by a variety of forms. Of these, at least for the purposes of the present study, two general forms are important: commissive conditional promises/threats and directive-commissive conditional ones, which are discussed in the section below.

3. Conditionality and conditionals

As signalled before, there is a well-recognised, or at least frequently alluded to, association between the speech act of threatening and its formal exponents. This has been constantly shown in numerous studies, of which the overwhelming majority are based primarily on introspection. Among the early studies following the publication of Austin's *How to do things with words*, Kent (1967: 31) observes that

> In situations which can be analyzed in terms of ("co operative") formal games, the statement may be that "I'll choose this alternative if you choose that alternative". In bargaining situations, a commonly encountered kind of threat is that in which the threatener says he will take a given action if a certain agreement (or one which would be even better for the threatener) is not obtained, thus suggesting that the conditional form is at least one of the most common ones.

In the same vein, yet far from the theory of bargaining, Milburn and Watman (1981: 8) state that "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."

The canonical character of conditionality in the speech act of threatening has also been pointed out by Fraser, who notes that a typical "threat takes the form of a declaration in which the speaker is presented as the agent, with a condition possibly present" (Fraser 1998: 165). It is also in the same work that he states explicitly 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). A similar observation is made in Salgueiro's discussion of formal parallelism between promises and threats (Salgueiro 2010), mentioned above. For these speech acts, Salgueiro identifies two common patterns: commissive conditional (CC) and directive conditional (DC):

(4) If one day I become capo di tutti capi I will make your life unbearable. (CC)
(5) If you don't make sure he doesn't step out of line again, I'll kill 'im. (DC)

Commenting on similar threat/promise patterns, Salgueiro (2010: 217) argues that in the CC threats the speaker's future action of the speaker depends on whether a condition is satisfied, yet "the main objective of the threat or promise or threat is not to get *R* to bring about the satisfaction, of that condition" as normally it is independent of the receivers' will and power. Consequently, (4) ≠ I want you to help me become capo di tutti capi. And then I will make your life unbearable.

In contrast, in the DC threats and promises, Salgueiro (2010: 218) continues, "the main illocutionary point is directive" and the commitment of the speaker to a future action does not depend on satisfying the specified condition, "but on the receiver's bringing about that", which is why (5) = I want fulfilment: you to make sure he doesn't step out of line again. Otherwise I'll kill 'im.

The fact that the implicative "if-then" form as the most common realisation of threats is often taken for granted or simply presumed to be the central one should not lead to underestimation of other threat patterns. The more that Tedeschi (1970: 159) considers "if-then" only an attempt "to constitute an objective criterion for identifying threats."

Even if Limberg (2009) states explicitly that there is no standardized format of threats, conditionality is still placed among the most common features of threats. The presence of this component is reflected both in various dictionary definitions of the concept and in scarce linguistic research outside the area of lexicography. As for the former, *Longman Dictionary* defines *threat* as "a statement in which you tell someone that you will cause them harm or trouble **if** they do not do what you want" *(bold type ours*) and OED explicates its meaning as a "denunciation to a person of ill to befall him; esp. a declaration of hostile determination or of loss, pain, punishment, or damage to be inflicted in retribution for or **conditionally upon** some course; a menace" (*bold type ours*).

Within the linguistic literature there has not been much research concentrating on the realisation of the concept of conditionality as an element of threatening, in spite of the fact that in numerous "armchair analyses", conditionally phrased threats are the epitome of threatening utterances. Among a few empirical studies accommodating the factor of conditionality as a recurrent component of threats, a note must be made of the threatening communication survey among over 100 university students undertaken by Gales (2011), who concludes that threats are accomplished in a variety of ways ranging from direct statements, as in "I will smash your fucking face" to more indirect ones, as in the conditional sentence "If you don't tell me where she is, I will bleed you like a pig". Interestingly, Gales has noticed a discrepancy between the informants' beliefs on frequency of conditionality in threats (54 per cent) and her actual findings in the corpus (26 per cent).

The largest truly empirical study of the association between the conditional and the speech act of threatening was conducted by Muschalik (2018), who

examined a corpus of authentic American English threat utterances obtained from naturally occurring speech and writing. Muschalik (2018: 172) shares Gales's view on the superior status of conditionality in threats only to a limited extent as she claims that in her analysis, conditionality "did not reach the status of a conventional component of threatening language in general" if measured in terms of its frequency, but "when the relevance of a feature is to be understood as the feature's discriminatory power, the prominent mentioning of the feature (i.e. conditionality) in the literature appears to be justified." In her study conditional language was found in about 29 per cent of all threats.

The significance of conditionality in threatening has also been confirmed by Nini (2017). In her corpus analysis of malicious forensic texts, including threats, she applied the multidimensional model introduced in Biber (1988; 1989) and found out that conditional threats accounted for as much as 37 per cent of the total corpus and that high scores on Biber's Dimension 4, the Dimension of Overt Expression of Persuasion, corresponded to a more frequent use of means of expressing modality that can be found in "if-then" conditional threats. Similar observations on the role of direct-conditional threats have been made in Glukhov and Martynova (2015) and Goshkheteliani and Churchelauri (2019).

All these empirical studies have demonstrated not only that conditionality is a prominent characteristic of threatening but also that threatening language can do without explicit conditionality. Indeed, apart from the "if-then" propositions, there are "conditionals in disguise" (Rescher 2007:14):

> "Should he come, I'm out of here" comes sufficiently close to count as a variantly formulated conditional. And "This button operates that light" is effectively equivalent with "If you push this button, that light will switch its on/off state." "Whenever it rains, it pours" comes to: "If it rains, it also pours" and "Wherever he goes, they follow him" comes to: "If he goes someplace, they follow him." "Membership in the club requires a fee" comes to "If someone is to join the club, then this individual must pay a membership fee." Again, "Doing X successfully requires a great effort" in effect comes to "If one is to succeed at doing X, one will have to exert a great effort." Even merely descriptive statements can carry an essentially conditional message. "Dogs are mammals" to all intents and purposes comes to "If a creature is a dog, then it is a mammal."

However, even this list does not exhaust all possibilities as conditionality is not restricted to assertions. Although the prototypical form of conditionals in English takes the format of assertive "if-then", i.e. two clauses, of which one is an antecedent (protasis) marked with *if* and the other one is 'a consequent' (apodosis) occasionally marked with *then* (von Fintel 2011: 1516), conditional meaning can be conveyed with other means such as other items governing content clause protasis, as in (6), inversion (7), constructions with phrases rather

than clauses (8), and finally coordinate and juxtaposed constructions with conditional interpretations (9) (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 758–59):

(6) Country people love to talk to the stranger, **provided** he shows a sincere interest in their anecdotes.
(7) **Were she to do so**, the studio threatened that she would never work in Hollywood again.
(8) **Without her**, I would be a different man, with a different life.
(9) **(Either you) Get your ass gone** or I'll assault you myself.

In the present paper we shall focus on the last of these conditional structures, which is sometimes referred to as *pseudo-imperatives* (Clark 1993; van Rooij & Franke 2012) and *IoD*-and *IaD-constructions* (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 937; Kaufmann 2012: 221). Our focus is on *IoDs* (Imperative or Declarative), yet to demonstrate fully the syntactic and semantic potential of *IoD*, it is essential to adopt a comparative perspective and discuss *IoD* and *IaD* (Imperative and Declarative) together.

4. *IoD* and *IaD* conditionals

In a comprehensive survey of constructions with a conditional meaning, Quirk *et al*. (1986: 931–33) discuss the conditional interpretation of sequences of clauses combined by means of the coordinator *and*:

(10) Give me some money and (then) I'll help you escape.

which they interpret as:

(11) Give me some money. If you give me some money (then) I'll help you escape.

Unlike in the case of prototypical examples of if-then conditional sentences, where both clauses take a declarative form, in *IaD* constructions the first clause is a directive and "the second clause describes the consequence which will ensue if the directive is obeyed" (Quirk 1986: 931). Similarly, *IoD* constructions such as:

(12) Give me some money or (else) I'll shoot.

take the same directive form in the protasis followed by a declarative clause in the apodosis. However, unlike *IaD* constructions, they imply a negative condition and can be paraphrased as:

(13) Give me some money. If you don't give me some money I'll shoot.

This observation allows Quirk *et al*. (1986) to argue that "the conditional use of *or* is thus the negative analogue of the conditional use of *and*" and that "unlike *and*, *or* typically follows a negative imperative clause":

(14) Don't be too long, or you'll miss the bus.

In the context of the present paper, the most interesting observation that Quirk *et al*. (1986) offer is that the conditional use of both *or* and *and* "is associated with certain directive speech acts, such as promises and threats". This view is shared by Kaufmann (2012: 221), for whom *IoD*- and *IaD*-constructions are likely to receive a conditional-like interpretation when the protasis is imperative, and the apodosis is declarative."

While none of the above claims cannot be rejected, the relationship between the form and the order of *IoD* and *IoD* clauses does matter. Van der Auwera (1986) notices an intriguing pragmatic asymmetry in the following patterns:

(15) Close the window and I will kill you. (A and P^-)
(16) Close the window and I will kiss you. (A and P^+)
(17) Close the window or I will kill you. (A and P^-)
(18) ? Close the window or I will kiss you. (A and P^+).

What the four sentences have in common is their association with conditional assertive force. According to Franke (2005:1) "the declarative sentence in *IaD* makes an assertion only about those situations in which the content referred to by the imperative sentence holds", which contrasts sharply with IoDs, in which "the declarative sentence of an IoD makes an assertion only about those situations in which the content referred to by the imperative sentence does not hold." Apart from the assertive force, all the sentences exhibit a directive force. However not in all cases does the directive force agree with the force of the plain infinitive. In (16) and (17), the *IaD* and *IoD* have the same directive force as the plain imperative "Close the window" whereas (15) directs the opposite of the plain imperative form, i.e. "Close the window" should be interpreted as "Don't close the window" (if you don't want to be killed). It might be expected then that the symmetrical balance between positive (16) and (17) and negative (15) should be maintained by a negative interpretation of (18). However, quite unexpectedly it is not the case, as (18) is simply pragmatically infelicitous regardless of its positive or negative interpretation (for proposed solutions see, e.g. Franke, 2005 and 2008; van Rooij, R., and M. Franke 2012). Thus, the set of *IaDs* and *IoDs* becomes restricted to three cases of utterances, two of which contain conditional threats and only one conditional promise. In further sections, we will focus on conditional threats of *IoD* type and their instantiations in the CCF.

5. The Study

5.1. Analytic parameters

Our classification model makes use of a feature-assignment scheme, in which all tokens were marked up for the presence or absence of several features discussed below. To ensure the comparability of our results with the results achieved in Muschalik (2018), we included as many parameters employed in her analysis as possible and rejected those for which the presence/absence value predictably followed from the syntax and morphology of *IoDs*. In addition, new parameters were proposed. In what follows, we present these analytic parameters.

5.1.1. Conditionality

Muschalik (2018: 59) defines conditionality as a construction "consisting of a protasis p and an apodosis q, conjoined with either the conjunction *if*, or with the conjunction *and*, or the disjunction *or*", the former being referred to as explicit conditionals and the latter as implicit ones. Additionally, she identifies nonconditional threats. Clearly, all our *IoDs* representing syndetic *or*--coordination, meet the second condition and for this reason should be classified as implicit conditional threats. However, it should be noted that not only syndetic *IoDs* (19) but also asyndetic *ID* (20) may have a conditional interpretation:

(19) Don't move, or I'll shoot.
(20) Don't move. I'll shoot.

and consequently could be included in our study. Not rejecting the possibility of a conditional interpretation, we decided to exclude asyndetic constructions from our analysis.

5.1.2. Futurity

Futurity has often been indicated as a salient linguistic feature of threats (Yamanaka 1995; Fraser 1998; Gales 2010; Salgueiro 2010: Muschalik, 2018, Bojsen-Møller *et al.* 2020), often being indicative also of the speaker's intention. For Salgueiro (2010: 2–7), futurity is an indispensable element since being commissive speech acts "both elementary promises and elementary threats must describe a future action or omission, or a sequence of such actions or omissions, by the speaker." In the present paper, we understand FUTURITY as a reference to a future action (or its omission) performed by an agent or the affected.

Muschalik (2018) proposes a quadripartite system of classification of temporal orientation of the act of threatening, i.e. will-futurity, be going to-futurity, present futurate, and finally, no futurity, which in broad terms can be

reduced to the opposition futurity vs. no futurity. In our analysis, we follow this classification with certain amendments. We distinguish between will/shall--futurity (21), be-going futurity (22), the contracted form 'll (23), present futurate (24), and no futurity, as in:

(21) Cease your investigations or you **will** get her back in pieces.
(22) Do it, or I **am going to** fuck you up.
(23) Stop faffing about or I**'ll** be forced to get von Trotha on yer arse.
(24) Go to the corner or I **take** you into the bathroom and cuff you to the drain trap under the sink.

5.1.3. Violent verbs

Detrimentality of the action communicated in a threat to the target is a defining feature of this act. This property of threats has been referred to in the literature also as an *unfavourable action* (Fraser 1998), *undesirable action* (Limberg 2009), *harmful action* (Napier and Mardigian (2003) or simply *harm* (Wohlrapp 1991; Salgueiro 2010; Bojsen-Møller *et al.* 2020). Among other terminological labels there can be found also more neutral *undesirability of an action* (Franke 2008).

The range of detrimental actions is very wide and in most general terms, detrimental actions comprise physical or psychological/social injury, loss or damage as well as actions negatively affecting or deteriorating the situation of the patient as of the moment of threat.

Rather than refer to the general category of detrimentality and its linguistic realisations irrespective of their form, Muschalik (2018), following Gales (2010), focuses on verbs denoting violent actions. Her tripartite classification system includes the categories of violent (25), ambiguous (26), and non-violent verbs (27), or more precisely, verbal phrases, such as *kill*, *be sorry* and *be responsible*, respectively. The first class is further divided into four subclasses on the basis of Levin's verb classes (Levin 1993). In this analysis, only the three general parameters of VIOLENT VERB will be used employed:

(24) Now calm down or I'm going to have to **slap** you, like in the movies, where the guy who
gets slapped goes, thanks, I needed that
(25) I want the IRS off Scott Coleman's back by tomorrow morning, or I am going to **make**
someone's life miserable.
(26) You cooperate or I **take you in for questioning**.

5.1.4. TABOO LANGUAGE

Another feature deemed typical of threatening is the use of offensive language. Gales's survey among over 100 respondents has shown that after conditionality, using profane language is the category most frequently associated with threats (Gales 2010). The link between vulgar language and threats has been corroborated in several other studies, including the corpus-based study by Muschalik (2018). Muschalik analyses instances of vulgar language under the heading "Taboo language" and her coding system assumes five distinct functional categories such as *personal insult* (mother fucker), *expletive* (fuck*)*, *empathic intensifiers* (fucking idiot*), verbal forms* (I'll fuck you*)*, and *idiomatic set phrases* (I don't give a fuck). For the purposes of our study, we use a binary feature scheme involving only the categories of presence (28) and absence (29) of TABOO LANGUAGE in all analysed tokens of threatening:

(28) Get out of the **fucking** car, or I will kill you, I'll shoot you here and now!
(29) Steer clear until I'm done, or I'll be using this brush on you.

5.1.5. USE OF WEAPON

Another feature that is closely associated with threatening language is the use of lexical items denoting weapons. In their risk assessment study Turner and Gelles (2003) claim that the mention of weaponry is indicative of the type and degree of violence to be inflicted by the threatener. Also Muschalik (2018) includes "mention of weapons" among other analytic parameters employed in her study.

In an attempt to define the term weapon, one can distinguish between two general directions: a broad and a narrow definition. Calhoun and Weston (2016) adopt a broad definition, which includes not only the use of firearm, edged weapon, bombs, incendiary devices, but also the use of weapon of opportunity (loose objects) and the use of fists, feet, or body. Here we shall use the narrow definition proposed in Muschalik (2018: 109), i.e. "something (such as a gun, knife, club, or bomb) that is used for fighting or attacking someone". On the linguistic level the category includes nominal categories such as names of weapons (30) as well as verbal categories referring to actions implying the use of weapons (31):

(30) Tell me what I did wrong, Harry, or I'll **kneecap** you with **the first bullet**."
(31) You come back here with twenty large, damn quick, or I **shoot** your ass multiple times.

Taking into account the fact the we analyse stories and the co-text is available for further analysis, we have decided to split the parameter into "explicit use of weapon" and "implicit use of weapon". The latter category

includes cases in which it is evident to the addressee of the threat that the threatener is in possession of a weapon and he/she manifests his/her intention to use it:

(32) Let her go. When Oserov maintained his grip, he added, even more quietly, Let her go, or I'll **knife** you right here. Oserov looked down at the point **of a switchblade that Arkadin had aimed at his liver**.

5.1.6. First and second person pronouns

As threatening represents interpersonal communication, it can be reasonably expected that its characteristic feature will be a noticeable use of personal pronouns, mainly pronouns referring to the roles of speaker and addressee. Within the very act of threatening, the roles of speaker and the addressee are likely to be identical with the roles of threatener and target, yet other correlations of the roles and pronouns are possible. This view on the high frequency of 1st and 2nd person pronouns in threats has found confirmation in the few empirical studies reported to date. In Gales's survey over 30 per cent of her respondents expected the 2nd person pronoun (Gales 2010). Also Muschalik (2018) observed a high frequency of personal pronouns in her CoJO corpus, with 73% of utterances containing 1st person pronoun and 68% – the second person pronoun.

In the present study, we follow Muschalik (2018), who analysed the frequency of 1st and 2nd person pronouns in terms of "four possible combinatory patterns and their respective proportion: 1PP-2PP , 1PP-no 2PP, no 1PP- 2PP, and no 1PP-no 2PP (95)" (Muschalik 2018: 102). The category of "**first and second person pronouns**" includes personal, reflexive and possessive pronouns, e.g. *you*, *your*, *yours*, *yourself/yourselves.*

A note should be taken of the structure of the imperative in the protasis, in which the omitted subject is always the 2nd person pronoun *you* (Quirk *et al*. 1985: 828). This leads us to the decision to analyse only the pronouns present or absent in the apodosis. The four options are shown below:

(33) Start having fun or I will not invite you next year. +1PP; +2PP
(34) Go away, or I will call the police. +1PP; -2PP
(35) Stop acting like a wild boar with a toothache, or you will need a lawyer. +1PP;+ 2PP
(36) Get away, or they will die. +1PP; -2PP

5.1.7. Agency

The distribution of personal pronouns as well as the verb type are to a certain extent related to the problem of semantic roles in threats. Here we define semantic roles as a relationship of a participant with the main verb in a clause and

focus on the roles of agent and patient. Accordingly, the agent is understood to be "either the [conscious] doer or the causer of the detrimental action specified by the violent, ambiguous, or non-violent verb" (Muschalik 2018:90) whereas the patient is the person or thing that undergoes a process, or "is affected by an action performed by some causer, especially and agent" (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 231).

With the two semantic roles, there are four combinatory patterns:

(37) Shut up or I'll burn you. +A; +P
(38) Don't be funny, Aaron, or I'll be forced to withhold sex. +A; -P
(39) Just know that you need to redirect your investigation, or you will be hurt. -A; +P
(40) Your money or your life. -A; -P

5.1.8. Direction of threat

Within this category, Muschalik (2018) codes threats as speaker-oriented, hearer-oriented, mixed-oriented, impersonal, or directive. The last of these refers to "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). The fact that the object of our analysis are *IoD* threats, whose structure includes a clause with a directive force, made us omit this parameter from our study due to its predictability. Instead, we propose to analyse the direction of the threat understood after Nini (2017) as the direction of harm addressed by a threatener.

In her analysis of authentic malicious forensic texts Nini proposes four categories of direction of harm coinciding with the roles of participants. The first category includes threats directed towards a third part, i.e. not the addressee (41). The second one refers to threats addressed to both the addressee of the threat and a third party (42). Thirdly, she codes threats as directed to the addressee (43). The fourth category includes threats to an unknown recipient (44). The four patterns are shown below:

(41) I'll fuck'em all.
(42) Come in here or I'll blow her brains all over this nice marble.
(43) Drop your weapons or you will all die like your comrades
(44) This better be important, he vowed, or I will burn whoever is at the goddamned door.

For the same reason as above, namely, that *IoD*s consist of an imperative clause, which provides reference to the addressee, it was essential to modify the analytic categories. Moreover, we had to reject Nini's second category as it assumes that the threat can be directed to the addressee in the protasis and the violent action towards a third party in the apodosis. Here we concentrate only on

apodoses and our final coding scheme involves three options of the DIRECTION OF THREAT: (1) the addressee, a third part, and unknown.

Finally, we decided to analyse the protasis to learn whether the DESIRED BEHAVIOUR of the addressee consists in undertaking an action (Do X) or omission (Don't do X). All analytic parameters are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Analytic categories in the CSF

Parameter		**Values**	
FUTURITY		will	+/-
		shall	+/-
		'll	+/-
		be going to	+/-
		present futurity	+/-
		no futurity	+/-
APODOSIS TYPE		or I	+/-
		or YOU	+/-
		or *other*	+/-
VIOLENT VERB		violent	+/-
		ambiguous	+/-
		non-violent	+/-
TABOO LANGUAGE		present/absent	+/-
USE OF WEAPON		explicit	+/-
		implicit	+/-
		no weapon	+/-
FIRST AND SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS (in apodosis)		1st	+/-
		2nd	+/-
AGENCY (in apodosis)		+Agent; - Patient	+/-
		+Agent; - Patient	+/+
		Agent - patient	-/+
		Agent - patient	-/-
DIRECTION OF THREAT		3rd party	+/-
		the addressee	+/-
		unknown	+/-
DESIRED BEHAVIOUR IN PROTASIS			
	ACTION	Do	+/-
	OMISSION	Don't	+/-

5.2. Materials and methods

5.2.1. Data selection

For our comparative analysis, we gathered a corpus CCF consisting of 700 English novels written by 243 authors representing crime fiction. "Crime fiction" is used here as an umbrella term for a wide variety texts including detective fiction, hardboiled fiction, police procedural, forensic crime fiction, legal thrillers, and crime thrillers, just to name a few. As presenting the full lists of the novels would probably exceed the word limit allowed by this publisher, we will only mention a few of them to illustrate the generic variety under investigation. The corpus includes among others Stephen King's *Desperation*, *Insomnia*, and *Firestarter;* Robert Ludlum's *Bourne Objectivity*, *Bourne Ultimatum,* and *Bourne Identity*; Tom Clancy's *Red Rabbit*, *Dead or Alive*, and *Red Storm Rising;* Alex Kava's *A Necessary Evil,* Frederick Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal*, Paula Marantz Cohen's *What Alice knew: a most curious tale of Henry James and Jack the Ripper*, Nigel Cawthorne's *The most barbaric murderers of our times*, and Lawrence Block's *The Burglar Who liked to Quote Kipling.*

The CCF consisted of around 76 million tokens (running words) representing 205, 061 types (distinct words). The shortest of the novels consisted 8, 060 tokens (2, 106 types) and the longest of 452, 813 tokens (15, 950 types).

5.2.2. Data analysis

The basic idea behind the analysis was to detect instances of *IoD* in the CCF and classify them in terms of analytic categories outlined above. As the only constant element of *IoD*s is the conjunction *or*, which is the 57th most frequent word in the CCF with 189, 395 hits, it was necessary to perform multiple concordance searches by means of WordSimith Tools 7.0. On the basis of examples of *IoD*-patterns provided in the literature, we narrowed them to several patterns such as "or * you* *", "or * I *", "or the *", "or * we *", "or * they", "or a*" within 5 words right of "or". This produced a list of almost 10, 000 concordance lines, which had to be analysed manually. Concordance lines with non-imperative left-hand context were generally deleted if the previous co-text did not imply an imperative reading of the element immediately preceding "or". Similarly, the right-hand NPs followed by a non-futurate verb form were also ignored. This left us with over 4, 000 concordance lines. As there does not exist any illocutionary force indicating device for threats, the remaining 4, 000 lines were examined in the process of coding, which involved 10 variables discussed for each of the threats.

The data were analyzed using MS Excel and statistical tools available at Social Science Statistics (https://www.socscistatistics.com/) and Wordsmith Tools 7.0.

6. Results

This section deals with corpus analysis output. The results obtained for each parameter will be presented and discussed.

6.1. Protasis/apodosis type and desired behaviour in protasis

The relatively simple structure of *IoD* or disjunctive conditionals, which consists an imperative clause followed by a declarative one, was not expected to produce a large number of patterns. These expectations found confirmation in the data gathered during the corpus search.

The imperative clause was mainly realised by means of subjectless imperatives (45), with only a few imperatives with the explicit subject (46):

(45) Throw down that pistol, or I'll kill her now! Kill her, and I'll kill you.
(46) You come back here with twenty large, damn quick, or I shoot your ass multiple times.

In a few cases, the imperative was expressed by means of verbless constructions of formulaic type or as a conventional call to surrender:

(47) Head down, Underhill said […]. Or I blow you a new hole.
(48) Hands up or I'll shoot.

Of the 790 threat utterances in the CCF, the protasis contained 78 negative imperative clauses introduced by *do not* or *don't* and 6 verbless phrases. The remaining 706 of the threats represented non-negated imperatives:

(49) Speak English at this table or I will fire you so fast you'll wind up standing at the airport wondering how the hell you got from here to there …

What follows from the distribution of plain and negated imperatives in the context of Salgueiro's (2010: 217) definition of the function of threats is that in the CCF the typical protasis refers to a future action rather than omission of an action.

Although the apodosis clause of *Iod*s was found to be syntactically more diverse, for the sake of brevity we reduce our further discussion to the three main patterns emerging from the data, namely, *or I*, *or YOU*, and *or OTHER*.

(50) Don't come another inch, fellow, **or I** will pump you," Floyd said.
(51) But this is a threat. He moved one step closer. We have you severely outnumbered.
Lay down your weapons **or you** will have a new answer to my question about pain.
(52) Pay up **or the same thing** will happen to her.

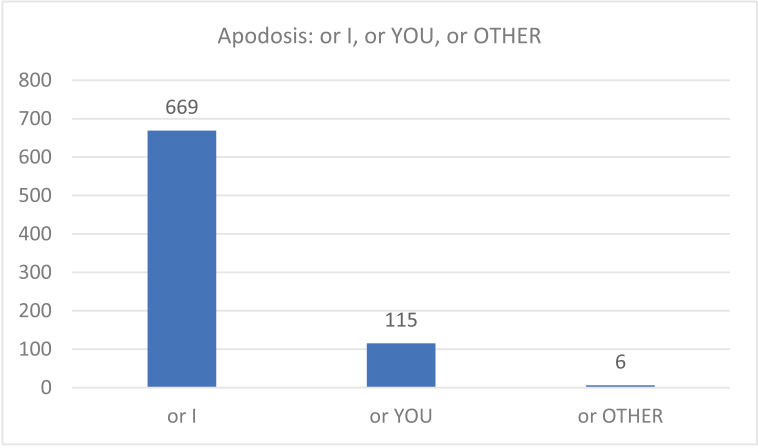

Figure 1. *or I, or YOU*, and *or OTHER* patterns in the apodosis

These patterns, the proportion of which is shown in Figure 1, were examined for the voice of verbs following the subject NPs. In 668 cases of *or I* patterns, *I* functions as the active subject in the clause and only in one as the passive subject (Quirk *et al*. 1986: 1596) of the clause:

(53) Leave now. **Or I will be compelled** to use force.

Similar results were obtained for *or OTHER* pattern, where 5 (83%) of 6 clauses had an active subject, whereas for *or YOU* the total number of active subjects was 109 (95%) in 115 clauses.

(54) No sooner **or you**'ll be sent away!

What follows from the data on the proportion of patterns and number of types of subject at this stage of analysis is that *I*, *you*, and OTHER function predominantly as active subjects of the clause. However, it remains to be investigated whether the high number of active subjects correlates with the semantic role of agent.

6.2. Futurity *in* IoDs *in protasis*

The most frequent expression of futurity (61%) in the CCF data was the contracted form *'ll*. The proportion of *will* was considerably lower (29%). The two expressions together make up 90 per cent of all expressions of future in our corpus. Present futurate was found in 56 threats (7%). The frequency of *shall* and *no futurate* is negligible as the two forms add up to 2 per cent. Finally, *be going/ gonna* represents 1.5% (12/790).

The distribution of futurity is radically different from the results obtained in Muschalik (2018: 72). Muschalik found that 71% (213) 53 of the threat utterances in CoJO contained a variant of futurity. The remaining 29% (88) of the threats had no marker of futurity. If we confine our comparison to variants realising only futurity, then the proportions, according to Muschalik (2018: 72), were as follows: "54% will (115), 30.9% be going to (66), and 15.1% present futurate (32)."

One obvious source of the striking differences is that Muschalik does not analyse *IoD* as a separate category and her results are derived from the analysis of a much broader category of conditionality, a part of which are *IoD*s.

Another reason for the discrepancies could be the corpora themselves. While Muschalik's corpus consisted of threats involving life-threatening scenarios, the CCF contains also less serious threats, uttered in a family setting with different parameters of power and distance between the participants.

Thirdly, the dissimilarities in the distribution of futurity in the two corpora may follow from the differences in the text type and medium. If we use the categories of informative and imaginative text categories proposed by Berglund (2005), Muschalik's threats fall into the broad category of informative texts, whereas the CCF represents mainly imaginative texts. In her analysis of expressions of future, Berglund (2005:34) observes marked differences between the two types:

> To sum up, the Informative hyper-categories in both corpora are characterised by a high proportion of *will*, and a very low proportion of *going to* and *'ll,* while the distribution of *will* and *'ll* is more even in the Imaginative category.

With respect to the distribution of the most frequent marker of futurity in the CCF, i.e. *'ll*, it is immediately evident that *'ll* strongly favours *or I* patterns. *'ll* is present in 456 of 681 of *or I* (68.1%) and in only 26 of 115 of *o YOU* (22.6%). The Chi-square test with Yates correction provides evidence that this difference is statistically significant ($Chi^2 = 79.9632$, df = 1, $p = .00001$

The frequency of *be going to* is very low, which is surprising given the fact that the frequency of the futurate form has been observed to increase in English. In the CCF, *be going to* collocates almost exclusively with the first person pronoun referring to the threatener, as in:

(55) Drop the gun, or **I**'m going to shoot you.
(56) Now do it, or **I**'m going to fuck you up.

The semantics of *be going to* has been extensively described in the literature. Klinge (1993) claims that *going to* refers to a verified state of affairs. For Brisard (2001), Leech (1971), and Palmer (1965) it reflects the speaker's certainty that some event will occur. Comrie views *going to* (1976:64–65) as a "prospective aspect", in which a present state is related to a future situation. In this sense, *going to* is said to be oriented to the present moment (Palmer 1990; Quirk *et al*. 1985) in a manner analogous to the Present Perfect.

The term "orientation towards the present moment" requires a comment. Haegeman (1989: 309) argues that *going to* and *will*, have the same truth-conditions, but differ in pragmatic import, by which she means differences in giving processing instructions:

(38) (a) Now we'll have no bread left for tomorrow's breakfast.
(b) Now we're going to have no bread left for tomorrow's breakfast.
(38a) directs the hearer towards the future implications of the proposition (i.e. tomorrow's breakfast) and (38 b) directs him to the present implications (i.e. what to do about the situation now)."

Such a view is most clearly illustrated in (57), in which the present implications of *be going* threat (augmented by the suggestion of the immediacy of the action in *leave you here*) are contrasted with future implications of another (*'ll call*), temporarily more distant one:

(57) "You tell me who hired you **or I'm going to cut your balls off and leave you here** to bleed to death. Better yet," she said, letting go of him, "**I'll call some people we know with the Kosovo Liberation Army**. I'm sure they wouldn't let you bleed to death; at least not right away."

A similar line of argumentation is taken by Muschalik (2018: 142), as she explains differences in the distribution of futurity forms in her corpus in terms of

a scalar degree of predicative strength, where "will displays the weakest predictive strength, be going to displays an increased predictive strength and present futurate constitutes the strongest form of prediction."

6.3. Violent language

The results obtained in the data analysis show that violent physical action verbs are strongly associated with threatening in crime stories. Violent verbs occur in 55.3% of all threats under analysis, which is exactly the same figure as in Muschalik (2018). Within the group, the most frequent verb phrases include such lexical items as *shoot* (119), *kill* (94), *die/death* (22), *break* (17), *cut* (17), and *fuck* (17), as in:

(62) I was so fucking scared I couldn't have pulled the trigger no matter what. Stop, or I'll **shoot**!
(63) Back off or I'll **kill** her.

The repertoire of violent language in the CCF is very rich and ranges from the classic *I will kill you* to rarer expressions like *I shoot his brains out* to extremely bizarre one as in:

(64) Now, help Caspar make his shot or I swear to God I'll pull the top of Naz's skull off with my bare hands and eat her brains for dinner.

Ambiguous verbs represent 16.4% (as compared to 23% in the CoJO corpus). The remaining 28.3% of threats contain nonviolent verbs (23% in the CoJO).

The most frequent expressions in the group of ambiguous verbs, i.e. verbs that do not lexicalize a violent meaning, are represented by *you'll be sorry, you'll regret*, and phrases in which the speaker commits himself/herself to a discontinuation of a previous action:

(65) Do it now or **you'll be sorry**.
(66) Don't you lie to me, Leigh West. Or **you'll both regret** it.

6.4. Taboo language

Taboo expressions are not as frequent as violent language and are found in only 23.8 per cent (152 instances) of all threats:

(67) Now you tell them **godless bastards** to clear us a path – a wide one – or I swear before God
Almighty, I'll kill you, Pete.

(68) Don't make me ask you again or you'll be leaking out through a hole in your **fucking** head.

By contrast, Muschalik (2018) reports that as many as 144 (47.8%) of the 301 threats in her corpus met the criteria set for taboo language.

To explain this discrepancy, it would be useful to refer to what Muschalik (2018: 134–35) identifies as two major functions of threat: manipulative and retaliative. The former refers to the case in which "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 latter differs from the former in the fact that irrespective of the speaker's attempt to influence the target's action, "the target's actions no longer influence the speaker's own actions", from which she concludes that although not an exclusive feature of manipulative threats, conditionality is likely to occur more often in manipulative threats than retaliative ones.

Since all instances of threats in the CCF have been found to be of manipulative type, it is advisable to compare results obtained only in this section of threats. In the CoJO "retaliative threats contain roughly twice as many instances of TABOO LANGUAGE as manipulative threats" (Muschalik 2018: 150), with 117 instances of TABOO LANGUAGE (38.8%), which, nevertheless, is a figure still higher than in the CCF.

Examples (67) and (68) induced us to ask a question on a possible relation between the parameters of VIOLENT LANGUAGE and TABOO LANGUAGE. The overall distribution of the two parameters is shown in Figure 2:

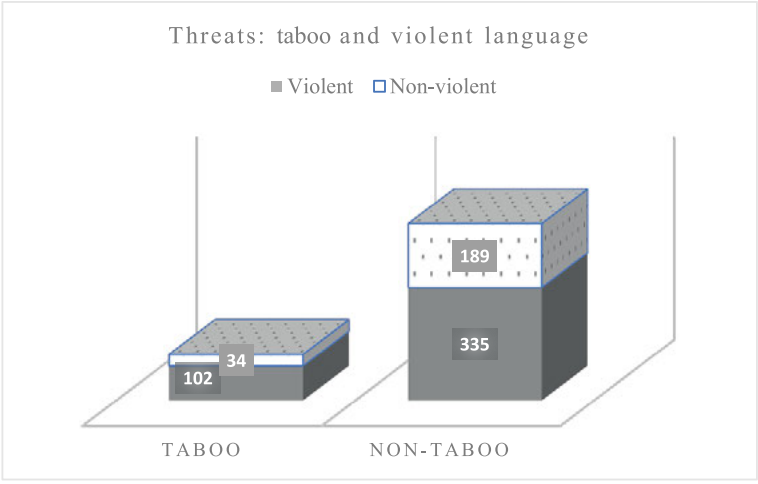

Figure 2. The distribution of VIOLENT LANGUAGE and TABOO LANGUAGE

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between taboo language and violent language. The relation between these variables was significant, X^2 (1, N = 660) = 5.9132, p = .015028. This means that VIOLENT LANGUAGE use and the use of TABOO LANGUAGE in the CCF are related.

6.5. USE OF WEAPON

Results indicate that the use of weapon is relatively frequent in *IoD threats.* Overall, the combined results for the explicit and implicit USE OF WEAPON amount to 24.17 per cent, i.e. the mention of a weapon can be found in almost every fourth act of threatening by means of *IoD*s in the CCF.

Compared with the results obtained in Muschalik's CoJO (17%), the use of weapon in crime stories cannot be said to play a marginal role in the construction of threats.

The mentioning of weapon is accomplished in an overwhelming majority of cases by means of *shoot* (69), agentive verbs lexicalising the concept of weapon (70), or verb phrases with nominal forms denoting weapons (71):

(69) Put both your hands on the top rail of that bottle-container crate, and you do just what I tell you or you'll **get shot** again.
(70) Don't make a sound, Rapp whispered, his mouth only inches from the man's left ear, or I'll **slit your throat**.
(71) Release me or I'll **put this flare through her head**.

On the lexical level the most frequent patterns are represented by *I'll shoot* (*you*) (*dead*) (*right here*) stressing the imminence of the execution of a threat.

6.6. FIRST AND SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS

In view of the syntactic structure of *IoDs,* it is not surprising that a high frequency of 1st and 2nd person pronouns was observed in the CSF. The numbers shown in Figure 3 refer not to the total number of pronouns in apodosis but to the total number of apodoses with threats. In threats with multiple occurrences of the same pronoun, as in (72), an account was taken only of one form:

(72) Stay outta this, scumbag, I said. Or **I**'ll kill you **myself**.

It follows that the 1st person pronoun appeared in 85.1% of threats and the 2nd person pronoun in 72%. This is in agreement with Muschalik's observation of a high frequency of personal pronouns in her corpus, with 73% of utterances

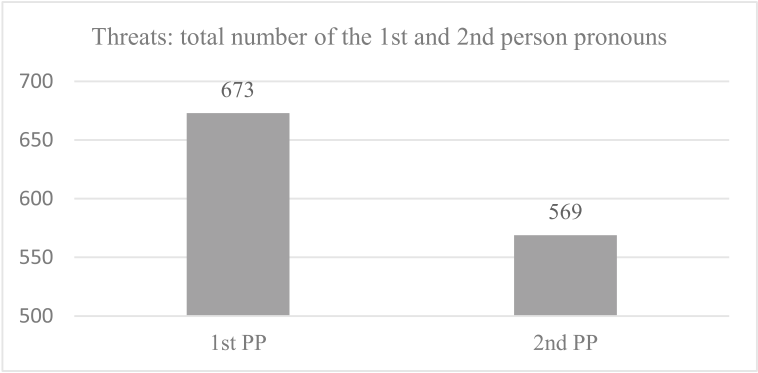

Figure 3. FIRST AND SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS in the CCF

containing 1st person pronoun and 68% – the second person pronoun (Muschalik 2018: 102).

Even though the total numbers of the 1st and of the 2nd person pronouns are broadly similar, their distribution shown in Figure 4 is not regular:

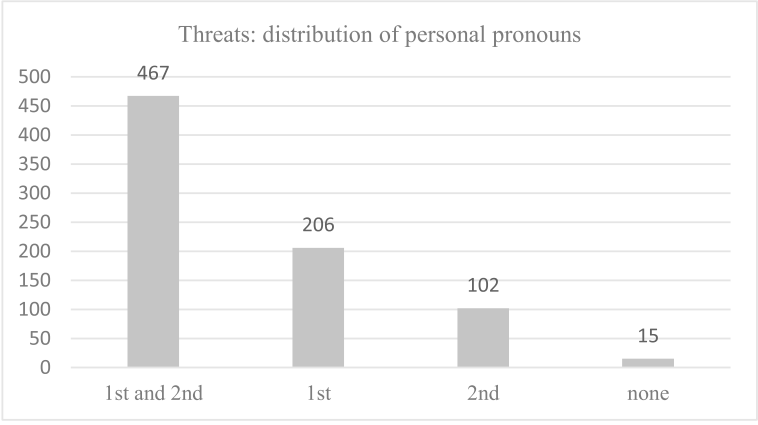

Figure 4. The distribution of FIRST AND SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS in the CCF

To examine the relation between the 1st and 2nd person pronouns, a chi-square test of independence was performed. The relation between these variables was significant, X^2 (1, N = 790) = 156535, p = .000076.

However, what should be remembered at this point is that Muschalik's analysis of the CoJO was not limited to the apodosis but covered the total threatening utterance, whether conditional or not. Consequently, the results are not fully comparable. If this analysis is extended to the protasis, then the total

number of the 2nd person pronouns must include almost 800 omitted *you*-subject of the protasis. This would clearly indicate that the focus of threat *IoD* utterances is on the hearer. In that case what follows from the analysis of the parameter of FIRST AND SECOND PERSON PRONOUNS is that the analysis of *Iod*s supports Gales's (2010: 99) (slightly underspecified) claim that "second person pronouns, modals, and a time frame occur more often than expected".

6.7. AGENT / PATIENT

The high value of the 1st-2nd person pattern in the threats presented above is likely to be indicative of the distribution of patient- and agent roles in the apodoses. Figure 5 shows the distribution of four patterns in terms of the presence and absence of markers of these two roles.

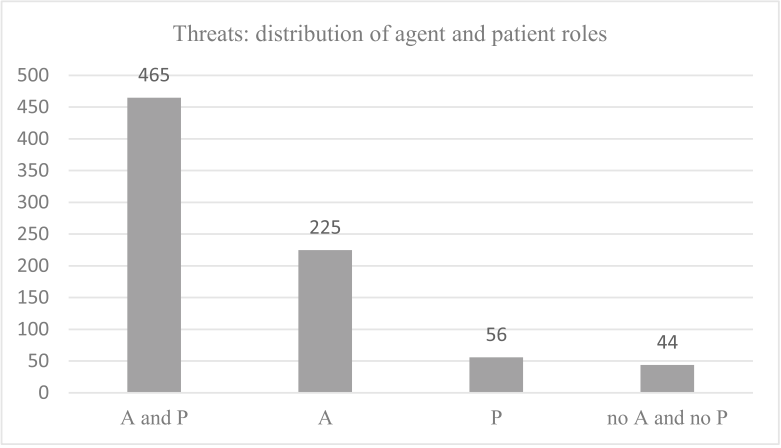

Figure 5. The distribution of AGENT and PATIENT roles in apodoses

The values in Figure 5 differ from the personal values for at least two reasons. First, the orientation of the detrimental action is not necessarily towards *you*, i.e. the addressee:

(72) I said, come here, Tara. Or I'll kill her.
(73) But leave Iola alone or I'll make things happen you won't like.

Second, the person to which the 2nd person pronoun refers may function as an experiencer rather than a patient (74), an experiencer rather than an agent (75), and finally, there are a number of cases in which none of the roles are expressed (76):

(74) Just don't let her meet Duggie, I said, or you'll have no chance.
(75) Keep your bloody mouth shut, do you hear, or you'll regret it.
(76) Cancel the wedding, or the whole parish will know what he has done.

In her analysis of agent/patient, Muschalik (2018) argues that "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." The results obtained in the CCF seem to imply a different conclusion about *IoD*s as predominantly manipulative threats. Unlike in the distribution of the two semantic roles in the CoJO the distribution is not inverted for two extremes observed by Muschalik (2018: 147), i.e. both participants explicitly denoted and neither participant denoted in the threat.

To examine the relation between the roles of agent and patient, we used a chi-square test. The relation between these variables was significant. The chi-square statistic is 5.047. The *p*-value is .024669. Significant at $p < .05$.

6.8. Direction of threat

Figure 6 provides an overview of the distribution of threats in terms of the parameter of direction of threat.

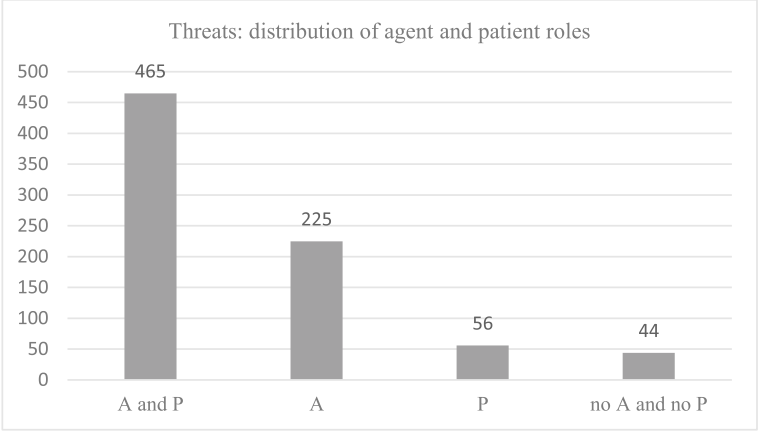

Figure 6. direction of threat

The results leave no doubt that the most common direction of threats in the CCF is the addressee. Of 790 threats analysed here the addressee is clearly marked as the target in as many as 707 threats (89.4%):

(77) Put it down or I'll beat **you** to a pulp, I really will!

Threats directed at a third party come second, yet their contribution amounts to only 9.5%:

(78) Do it or I'll blow **her head** off.

Finally, the target is unspecified in 1% of cases, which follows from the fact that in a few cases the apodosis is not complete (79) or the target is hard to identify (80):

(79) Don't you DARE, or **I'll-**
(80) A sea streak, Henry!" said the devoted brother, reaching into his belt and slowly pulling out an automatic. Or I'll be forced to do something I don't even want to think about.

The coding parameters applied in this analysis of DIRECTION OF THREAT differ from those employed in Muschalik (2018). As the orientation towards the addressee is predictable on account of the presence of the imperative clause in protasis, our analysis centred on apodoses.

If protases were included in the analysis, then the total number of mixed-oriented threats (i.e. including the speaker and the hearer) would rise by almost 800, which would strongly support Muschalik's (2018: 148) claim that threats with a manipulative function are more focused on the hearer/target than retaliative threats. But even without the undeniably addressee-oriented protases, it is readily apparent from Figure 6 that the DIRECTION OF THREAT, as expressed solely by apodoses, is also addressee-oriented.

7. Conclusions

In the present paper, we have chosen to take a corpus linguistics perspective on one of the most problematic speech acts, i.e. the speech act of threatening. The starting point for our research was the claim about the centrality of conditionality in the performance of the speech act of threatening, a claim repeatedly emphasised in the literature but hardly ever validated in empirical studies. Without making a claim about its centrality, we concentrated on one particular form of conditional threats known as pseudo--imperatives or *Iod* (Imperative *or* Declarative) constructions in a very large corpus of crime fiction. Our primary goal was to provide a more complete descriptive picture of conditional threats by assessing the place and role of *IoD*s in threatening utterances. Our second goal was to observe whether threats in imaginary written communication aspiring to be a representation of real communication differ from the authentic threatening language in terms of nine

analytic parameters. Following a corpus-based search and a quantitative analysis of the CCF, we went through each analytic parameter to interpret the frequency values and what the numbers actually indicated in comparison with previous findings reported in the literature.

It was found that the dominant pattern of apodosis was *or I* followed by an active voice verb phrase which, when combined with the data on the distribution of AGENT-PATIENT parameter, strongly indicates that the CCF threats are performed from the perspective of the speaker. This finding differs from the results obtained in Muschalik (2018) and Gales (2010). In our view such a distribution of patterns in the apodosis can be related to the factor of commitment or responsibility of the speaker. In real life situations the performance of the speech act of threatening may be subject to criminal liability, which, as observed by Muschalik (2018), may lead the threateners to use forms that hedge their responsibility such as passive voice, impersonal constructions and the like. Criminal story writers seem not to agonize over the consequences of their characters' threats.

Second, we observed a marked difference in the distribution of FUTURITY. While the leading position of futurate forms remained unchallenged, we observed a high frequency of 'll. forms, which is likely to be attributable to the stylistic requirements of criminal fiction involving colloquialization of language.

Third, while the frequency of VIOLENT VERBS reached the same level as in Muschalik (2008), TABOO LANGUAGE is less frequent, even if we restrict our comparison to manipulative threats. The reasons behind it can be varied. First, the lower frequency may result from a difference in the situations in which the threats in Muschalik's CoJO and our CCF were performed. Unlike the threats in the CoJO, all threats in the CCF were produced in spontaneous face-to-face interaction, in which the emotional attitude of the threatener does not have to be manifested through an increased offensiveness of the threats, the more that the parameter of USE OF WEAPON attained higher values than in the CoJO. Second, it cannot be excluded that the frequency of offensive language is regulated by some mechanisms of the genre of crime fiction itself, which we leave here only as a pure conjecture.

We analysed nine different parameters of threats in terms of their presence or absence in threat utterances to find that threats employing all dominant values of the parameters such as "Stop or I'll shoot you with this gun, loathsome smelly dog" are not common. In most cases, the act of threatening relies upon a selection of only a few parameters

We are aware of the limitations which this analysis suffers. First, we concentrated only on one conditional form of threat, namely, pseudo-imperatives, leaving aside the question of the status of "true conditionals" in the CCF. Second, by focusing on pseudo-imperatives, we automatically limited our analysis to manipulative threats. Consequently, the picture of the act of threatening in crime

fiction that we have drawn must be regarded as fragmentary. Nevertheless, we hope that this analysis has led to new insights and demonstrated that further larger-scaled research is desirable.

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