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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Saying More by Saying Less: Conversational Implicature in the Davos 2026 Welcoming Address: A pragmatic study**

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**| ABSTRACT**

This study tackled a qualitative pragmatic analysis of the welcoming speech in the Swiss Confederation at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) by the president of the meeting, Davos, in 2026. This study followed Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature-encompassing the Cooperative Principle (CP) and its maxims in addition to subsequent refinements by Levinson (1983, 2000) and Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory. This research paper investigated the implied meaning encoded in the speech beyond the literal propositional content. The paper investigated how the speaker exploits, flouts, and observes Gricean maxims to convey political intentions, diplomatic signals, and ideological values that are not explicitly stated. It is revealed through the analysis that three main implicature functions in the speech: solidarity-building and national identity projection, implicit critique of global political trends (protectionism, AI governance deficits, geopolitical instability), and the strategic self-positioning of Switzerland as a responsible, neutral, and forward-thinking international actor.

**| KEYWORDS**

Implicature; Gricean maxims; Cooperative Principle; diplomatic discourse; World Economic Forum; Davos 2026; pragmatics

**| ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 15 March 2026

**PUBLISHED:** 09 April 2026

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2026.9.4.6

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**1. Introduction**

Language in diplomatic and political scenarios is not often exhausted by what it obviously states. Political speakers usually communicate meanings that exceed - and sometimes deliberately contradict - their literal utterances. This phenomenon, theorized influentially by H. Paul Grice (1975) as conversational implicature, refers to the layers of meaning that speakers express without directly encoding them in the propositional content of their speeches. Implicature arises from the interplay between what is said and what is communicated, mediated by the assumption that speakers are, in principle, cooperative communicators operating according to shared rational norms.

The annual meeting of the WEF at Davos, Switzerland, is one of the most consequential diplomatic and economic forums in the world, attracting heads of state, business leaders, and international organization representatives. The welcoming address in the Swiss Confederation that is delivered by its president at the opening of the meeting in 2026, offered a rich corpus for the study of political implicature. As a protocol speech with national / international audiences, it must navigate multiple competing communicative obligations: welcoming, mourning, reassuring, warning, committing, and signaling -frequently through implication rather than direct statement.

This study analyzed the Davos 2026 welcoming address of the Swiss President through the lens of Gricean implicature theory. The research questions in the study are:

(1) Which Gricean maxims does the speaker observe, flout, or exploit, and to what communicative ends?

- (2) What are the dominant implied meanings in the speech?
- (3) How does implicature function as a tool of diplomatic self-positioning?

## **2. Data Collection**

The chosen data for this paper involves a single speech ( the welcoming address delivered by the Swiss Confederation President at the Annual Meeting of the (WEF), Davos, January 2026). The speech was published on the official World Economic Forum website and it is accessible at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-welcoming-remarks/> .The reasons behind selecting this speech as the data source are several ones. First, it is a public, high-stakes diplomatic address with a clearly identifiable speaker, audience, and communicative context, making it an ideal site for pragmatic analysis. Second, the speech addresses multiple sensitive and politically charged topics-a national disaster, geopolitical conflicts, artificial intelligence, protectionism, and Swiss neutrality -requiring the speaker to manage implied meanings carefully. Third, its rhetorical and generic conventions (protocol welcome, national representation,..etc) create productive tensions between what must be said, what can be said, and what can only be implied.

Finally, the speech is delivered in the context of a formal international ceremony. it is segmented into fourteen units (Line1–Line14), each corresponding to a semantically coherent clause, sentence, or passage. The full text of the speech is reproduced in the Appendix.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework: Conversational Implicature**

This study adopted Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature. Grice proposed that human communication is governed by a master principle - the Cooperative Principle (CP) - which holds that speakers are expected to make their communicative contributions as required by the accepted purpose of the exchange. The CP is operationalized through four maxims:

- 1.Quantity Maxim: Making the contribution as informative as required.
- 2.Quality Maxim: not saying what you think is false , nor saying that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- 3.Relation Maxim: Being relevant.
- 4.Manner Maxim: Avoiding obscurity/ambiguity, and be brief/ orderly.

Grice observed that speakers do not always literally obey these maxims. They may:

- (i) observe them straightforwardly;
- (ii) violate them covertly (deception);
- (iii) opt out of them;
- (iv) face a clash between two maxims; or most importantly
- (v) flout them openly and overtly, generating conversational implicatures-implied meanings that the hearer is expected to recover through rational inference.

A conversational implicature is defined as a proposition that the speaker implies but does not encode by the hearer through the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative and rational.

This study also draws on Levinson's (1983) taxonomy of implicature types -particularized conversational implicatures (PCIs), which arise in specific contextual circumstances, and generalized conversational implicatures (GCIs), which arise by default from particular linguistic forms- as well as Sperber and Wilson's (1986) relevance-theoretic insight that hearers maximise relevance in their interpretive process, an insight that accounts for the context-dependence of implicature recovery.

### **3.2 Analytical Framework**

The analytical procedure follows four steps:

Step 1: The speech is segmented into fourteen analytical units (Line1–Line14).

Step 2: Each unit is quoted verbatim and its literal (semantic) meaning is identified.

Step 3: The implicature(s) generated by the unit are identified by asking: What is the speaker implying beyond what is literally said? Which maxim(s) are relevant- observed, flouted, or exploited?

Step 4: The implicature is classified by type (PCI or GCI), its function in the speech is described, and its role in the speaker's broader diplomatic/rhetorical strategy is analyzed.

The analysis is qualitative throughout. No quantitative measures are applied; the goal is interpretive depth rather than statistical generalizability.

#### 4. Analysis

The speech is segmented into lines, each of which is followed by its analysis as follows:

**Line1:** Greeting and institutional identity

*“as President of the Swiss Confederation, I'm particularly happy to welcome so many heads of state to this Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum.”*

This opening line announces the speaker's institutional role and expresses pleasure at the size of the attendance at the literal level. However, the implicature generated by the collocational choice “particularly happy” goes well beyond a performative welcome. The adverb “particularly” flouts the Maxim of Quantity (one is either happy or not; the degree modifier is informatively excessive) to imply that the speaker is more than ordinarily gratified by this gathering, signaling that the attendance is exceptional. The Maxim of Relation further activates an implicature: by foregrounding “as President of the Swiss Confederation” before “I'm happy to welcome”, the speaker implies that Switzerland's identity as host-nation is not incidental but purposeful—that Switzerland is a uniquely appropriate host for such a gathering. The implicature thus establishes Switzerland's claim to international diplomatic centrality from the speech's first line.

**Line2:** National tragedy and solidarity

*“This is particularly meaningful in a year which started with a tragedy for our nation, and Switzerland would like to thank all of the nations concerned for the support and solidarity they expressed during the disaster in Crans-Montana.”*

The speaker describes the Crans-Montana disaster as a “tragedy” and thanks nations for their solidarity. The Maxim of Relation activates a particularized conversational implicature: why mention a national disaster at the opening of an international economic forum? The relevance of the mention implies that the disaster is not merely background information but a rhetorical entry point—the speaker is implicitly drawing a parallel between the solidarity shown in a natural disaster and the solidarity needed at the global level to address economic and geopolitical crises. The phrase “all of the nations concerned” also implicates gratitude selectively: “concerned” implies that not all nations responded, and the thanks go specifically to those that did—an implicit notice to those that did not. The choice of “solidarity” is also important: the term carries strong political valence, implying that international support is a moral obligation, not merely a courtesy.

**Line3:** The lesson of disaster

*“It is impressive to see how energies can be mobilized by such a disaster, how it can strengthen international cohesiveness and unity. This must go beyond, of course, the particular dramatic events; it must pervade the relationships between our countries.”*

The phrase “it is impressive” shows the Maxim of Quantity by providing an evaluative comment that seems informationally redundant (of course, energies are mobilized). The implicature generated is that such mobilization is, in practice, rare or insufficient in normal circumstances—the disaster merely reveals a latent capacity for cooperation that is not routinely exercised. Using the directive modal “must” creates a strong deontic implicature: the speaker is not describing a fact but prescribing a norm. By saying the

cohesion shown in a disaster "must go beyond" that context, the speaker implies that current international relationships are insufficiently cohesive in normal times—a veiled critique delivered under the cover of normative prescription. This is a flouting of the Maxim of Manner (the message is oblique where it could be direct) in service of diplomatic tact.

**Line4:** The year 2025 and the WEF

*“2025 offered up a number of challenges, geopolitical, economic and digital upheavals on a global scale. This edition, with its many distinguished guests, attests to the importance of resilience and dialogue in the bedrock of our institutions and their ability to cope.”*

The phrase "2025 offered up a number of challenges" flouts the Maxim of Quantity: describing geopolitical, economic, and digital upheavals as merely "a number of challenges" is clearly under-informative. The understatement implicates that the challenges were in fact severe and numerous—a classic scalar implicature where saying less "a number of" implies the reality is more (vast, unprecedented). The second sentence implicates, through the Maxim of Relation, that the WEF itself was under strain in 2025: "their ability to cope" is an unusual formulation for an institutional encomium, implying that survival required active effort. The complimentary framing ("attests to the importance of resilience") implies that resilience was indeed tested, not merely demonstrated abstractly.

**Line5:** Naming geopolitical flashpoints

*“2026 has barely started, yet there are indications of upheavals to come, and potential flashpoints: Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and now Venezuela and Iran, to name but a few.”*

Pragmatically, the used strategy here is rich. The speaker names five conflict zones but appends "to name but a few", invoking the Maxim of Quantity in reverse: by explicitly stating that the list is incomplete, the speaker implicates that the number of global flashpoints is too large to enumerate—a powerful implicature of global instability beyond what any single list can convey. The connective "and now Venezuela and Iran" adds a temporal implicature: these conflicts are recent or newly escalated, suggesting that instability is not a stable background condition but an accelerating trend. The phrase "2026 has barely started, yet" creates a concessive implicature (despite early timing, upheavals are already visible), implying that the year's trajectory is alarming. The speaker does not evaluate any of these conflicts, but the mere act of naming them together implies that they are analogous in their threat to global order—a geopolitical equivalence that is implied rather than argued.

**Line6:** Protectionism and AI governance

*“In terms of economic policy, protectionism is on the rise all over the world. In addition, there are many unresolved issues about the role and control of artificial intelligence that remain unanswered.”*

Both clauses flout the Maxim of Relation by appearing merely descriptive in a welcoming address. The implicature is that these two trends—protectionism and unregulated AI—are problems requiring attention, not just facts requiring acknowledgment. The phrase "on the rise all over the world" contains a Maxim of Quantity implicature: "all over the world" is informationally over-inclusive (not literally every nation is protectionist), implicitly generating the implicature that no region is exempt and that the trend is universal and therefore Switzerland's concern is both legitimate and generalized. The phrase "remain unanswered" implicates not only that questions exist but that the people in the audience—the very leaders, policymakers, and technologists present at Davos—have failed to answer them. This is a particularly tactful form of implied critique, directed at the assembled audience without naming any individual or state.

**Line7:** The Bergson quotation

*“For humans, standing still is not an option. Or to quote philosopher  
Henri Bergson: ‘to exist is to change.’”*

The quotation from Bergson is a textbook example of implicature through the Maxim of Relation: why quote a nineteenth-century philosopher in a geopolitical address? The relevance can only be recovered through implication. The implicature is that the changes described in the speech (AI, geopolitical flux, protectionism) are not aberrations but are constitutive of human existence itself -thus implying that resistance to change is philosophically untenable. The framing “for humans, standing still is not an option” precedes the quotation as a paraphrase, which means the speaker is using the philosophical authority of Bergson to validate a political argument: change cannot be resisted, only managed. The implicit message directed at protectionist tendencies is: attempts to “stand still” through protectionism are futile. This is a Maxim of Manner flouting (the argument is indirect, via philosophical citation) in service of a political implicature.

**Line8:** Technology, responsibility, and the “school of life”

*“Technology is never inherently good or bad; it is what we make it, and to make it a positive ally, its users must have a deep sense of responsibility. As economic affairs minister trained in the school of life, I am well-placed to explain that lasting success depends on early and forward planning.”*

The statement “technology is never inherently good or bad” is a general principle, but its contextual implicature in 2026 -the year of AI’s rapid rise- is specific: AI governance is currently inadequate, and the moral valence of AI is entirely dependent on human choices. The implicature generated through the Maxim of Relation is a warning rather than a description: the speaker is not merely philosophizing but implicitly warning that, without responsibility, technology becomes a danger. The self-referential phrase “trained in the school of life” is pragmatically performative: it implicates that the speaker possesses not just formal credentials but practical wisdom - a form of philosophy construction through implied experience. The implicature is: academic or technical expertise alone is insufficient; real-world experience is the deeper qualification. This functions as an implicit rebuttal to purely technocratic approaches to governance - a topic central to Davos discourse.

**Line9:** Long-term thinking in times of upheaval

*“Long-term thinking is necessary in any situation. It is particularly necessary in times of upheaval. It can help us to drive progress while remaining true to our fundamental values without forgetting their meaning or their role.”*

The repetition of the word (necessary) across two sentences creates a scalar reinforcement-a Maxim of Quantity implicature. Through saying long-term thinking is “necessary in any situation” then adding “particularly necessary in times of upheaval”, the presenter implies that the present moment is indeed such a time of confusion. The implicature thus positions the present as a moment of crisis requiring exceptional foresight. The phrase “without forgetting their meaning or their role” implies that some actors have, in fact, been forgetting the meaning of fundamental values -a veiled critique of the international community’s drift toward short-termism and value relativism. This is a highly insightful implicature: the criticism is embedded in a positive normative claim (“we should not forget”), making it both deniable and communicatively powerful.

**Line10:** Switzerland’s national identity and the Federal Council’s commitment

*“Switzerland draws its strength from the consistency that helps to ensure political stability. Consistency is not a source of stagnation; on the contrary, it is the foundation of progress.”*

The assertion that "consistency is not a source of stagnation" is pragmatically significant because it responds to a charge that has not been explicitly made. According to Gricean terms, a speaker does not ordinarily contradict an accusation that has not been levelled-doing so could violate the Maxim of Quantity (saying more than what is required). The implicature is that Switzerland has been accused or perceived as stagnant or overly conservative - perhaps due to its long-standing neutrality policy or its deliberate pace of reform. The speaker's pre-emptive rebuttal implies that this perception exists and that it is incorrect. This is a particularly sophisticated diplomatic manoeuvre: by denying the charge, the speaker acknowledges its existence while rejecting its validity, all through implicature rather than direct statement.

**Line11:** Free trade and equal-footing negotiations

*"Even in the current climate, which is prone to protectionism, we believe in the success of free trade and wish to continue expanding our networks of agreement. To achieve this, we must be able to conduct negotiations on an equal footing, yielding good results for the benefit of all parties."*

The adverb "even" at the opening of this passage is a key implicature trigger. "Even in the current climate" implicates that the current climate is hostile to the position being articulated -that free trade advocacy is a minority or contested stance at present. The implicature through the Maxim of Relation is that those listening (heads of state, many from countries pursuing protectionist policies) are implicitly identified as part of that problematic climate. "We must be able to conduct negotiations on an equal footing" has a strong implicature through the Maxim of Quantity: the use of (must) and "equal footing" implicates that current negotiations are not conducted on equal terms - a pointed diplomatic signal without direct accusation. The phrase "for the benefit of all parties" invokes the Maxim of Quality (any reasonable trade deal should benefit all parties) to implicate that some existing arrangements are not mutually beneficial.

**Line12:** The WEF and Switzerland's diplomatic role

*"Switzerland is in tune with this; as a neutral nation, it is able and willing to assume its responsibilities in favour of a rules-based international order, international law, human rights and free trade."*

The line starts with the phrase in tune with (this) that refers to the WEF's dialogue-oriented mission and generates an implicature through the Maxim of Relation: Switzerland's neutrality is not passive but actively aligned with the international forum's values. The catalogue of values -"rules-based international order, international law, human rights and free trade" - creates a Maxim of Quantity implicature by its inclusiveness: listing all four pillars implies that all four are currently under threat and need championing. In the context of 2026 geopolitics, this list is a quiet but unmistakable critique of states that violate these norms. Switzerland, by positioning itself as its defender, implicitly contrasts itself with states that have abandoned or undermined these commitments -without naming them.

**Line13:** The OSCE chairmanship

*"This year, Switzerland is taking on a particularly demanding task in chairing the OSCE, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. However, our country's diplomatic strength also lies in its recognized practice of good offices, for which international Geneva provides a stage commensurate with the challenge at hand."*

The line begins with the description of the OSCE chairmanship as "particularly demanding" flouts the Maxim of Manner (one could simply announce the role without evaluating its difficulty) to generate the implicature that the year ahead contains exceptional diplomatic challenges - which, combined with Line 5's list of flashpoints, implies that the OSCE will be dealing with multiple active crises. The adversative connector "however" before "our country's diplomatic strength" is a Maxim of Relation trigger: it reveals a contrast between the demands of the task and Switzerland's confidence in meeting them -an implicature of

institutional readiness. The phrase "a stage commensurate with the challenge at hand" generates a spatial implicature: Geneva is not merely a venue but a symbolic match for the magnitude of global diplomacy, implying that Switzerland's geographic and institutional identity uniquely qualifies it for this role.

**Line14:** AI's limits and the primacy of humanity

*"We shall see what AI has to offer. We will certainly still be amazed, perhaps dazzled. But what it will never be able to do is to bring hearts together, or attract helping hands, as we saw at the start of this year in the canton of Valais. Solidarity and humanity are not part of the digital vocabulary. I see this as a good omen for the future."*

Finally, this closing passage is the most rhetorically and pragmatically elaborated section of the speech. The sequence "amazed, perhaps dazzled" employs scalar implicature (Levinson, 2000): "dazzled" is stronger than 'amazed', and the hedge 'perhaps' implicates that dazzlement - a state of uncritical awe - is a risk rather than a promise. The contrast introduced by "but" is the pivot of the whole speech: the speaker implies that AI, for all its transformative power, is constitutively incapable of human connection and solidarity. The reference to Valais circles back to Line2, creating a discourse coherence implicature: the tragedy that opened the speech and the solidarity it generated serve as the ultimate counter-example to AI's limitations -human catastrophe generates human response, not algorithmic response. The final declaration "I see this as a good omen" is a Maxim of Relation flouting: why is AI's incapacity for solidarity a "good omen"? The implicature is that AI's limitation is a guarantee of human irreplaceability - a reassurance, via implicature, that the human dimension of politics, diplomacy, and social life will endure.

## 5. Results

### A. Scalar Implicature as a Tool of Understatement and Critique

One of the most recurrent implicature types across the speech is scalar implicature -meaning generated by the speaker's choice to use a weaker or stronger expression from a scale, thereby implicating the exclusion of stronger or weaker alternatives. In Line4, the description of the upheavals of 2025 as "a number of challenges" conspicuously under-encodes their severity, generating the implicature that the challenges were in fact formidable. In Line5, "to name but a few" explicitly signals that the list of flashpoints is incomplete, implicating a global crisis landscape too extensive to enumerate. In L14, the progression from 'amazed' to 'perhaps dazzled' creates a scalar warning about AI's potential to overwhelm critical judgment.

These scalar implicatures serve a consistent diplomatic function: they allow the speaker to register the severity of a situation without the bluntness of direct description. In a high-stakes international forum, understatement projects composure and authority; the audience's inferential recovery of the implied severity is more rhetorically effective than explicit alarm.

### B. Maxim Flouting for Indirect Critique

Several examples of Maxim of Relation flouting serve as vehicles for implied criticism of international actors and trends. In Line6, describing protectionism and AI governance gaps as matters to "nam'e" in a welcoming address implicates that these are serious failures requiring the attention of the very audience before the speaker. In Line7, the Bergson quotation implicates a philosophical rebuttal of protectionist logic without naming any country or policy. In Line9, the warning against "forgetting the meaning and role of fundamental values" implicates that such forgetting is already occurring in the international community.

Critically, these implicatures are all deniable: the speaker can always retreat to the literal meaning ("I was merely quoting a philosopher", "I was simply making a general observation"). This deniability is itself a diplomatic resource, allowing the speaker to register critiques at the level of implicature while maintaining formal neutrality at the level of explicit assertion - a strategy wholly consistent with Switzerland's self-positioning as a neutral interlocutor.

### C. Presuppositional and Pre-emptive Implicatures

Several lines generate implicatures through what is implicitly presupposed rather than stated. Most strikingly, in Line10, the claim that "consistency is not a source of stagnation" presupposes that this characterization of Switzerland as stagnant has been made- a presupposition that triggers an audience that holds, or might hold, this view. The pre-emptive rebuttal implicates the existence of a negative perception and constitutes an attempt to neutralize it.

Similarly, in Line11 that is “we must be able to conduct negotiations on an equal footing” presupposes that current negotiations may not be conducted on equal terms, generating a diplomatic implicature about asymmetric power relations in Switzerland's existing or prospective trade relationships. This pre-emptive framing- asserting a condition in the guise of a normative claim-is a hallmark of political speech pragmatics (Chilton, 2004).

#### **D. Solidarity and National Identity Projection Through Implicature**

The speech opens and closes with references to the Crans-Montana/Valais disaster (Line2 and Line14), creating a structural implicature through discourse cohesion: the tragedy and the solidarity it generated are not incidental details but the speech's central argumentative axis. At the level of implicature, the repetition frames the entire address: international cooperation, multilateralism, and human solidarity are not abstract ideals but have been concretely demonstrated. The implication for the assembled world leaders is clear -if such solidarity is possible in a natural disaster, it should be achievable in geopolitical and economic challenges too.

The final implicature- “solidarity and humanity are not part of the digital vocabulary. I see this as a good omen for the future” -is the speech's most powerful. By implicating that AI's incapacity for human solidarity is a reason for optimism, the speaker inverts the typical techno-pessimist framing: the limitation of AI is not a regret but a reassurance. Humanity's irreplaceable dimension is the “good omen”, and AI's boundaries define rather than diminish human purpose.

#### **E. Generalized vs. Particularized Implicatures**

The analysis highlights a consistent pattern in the distribution of implicature types across the speech. Generalized conversational implicatures (GCIs)- implicatures that arise by default from particular linguistic forms regardless of context -predominate in the speech's normative and prescriptive in (Line3, Line9, Line11). These include the scalar GCIs generated by phrases such as “particularly necessary” and “all over the world”, as well as the deontic GCIs generated by the modal “must”.

Particularized conversational implicatures (PCIs)- those requiring specific contextual inference - are concentrated in the speech's more politically charged passages (Line5, Line7, Line12, Line14). The Bergson quotation, the list of flashpoints, and the final AI-Vs-humanity contrast all require the hearer to bring substantial contextual knowledge (the 2026 geopolitical situation, the AI governance debate, the Valais disaster) to bear in order to recover the implied meaning. The prevalence of PCIs in these passages reflects the speaker's reliance on the shared knowledge of a highly informed, elite audience - precisely the audience assembled at Davos.

#### **6. Conclusion**

This research paper demonstrated that the Davos 2026 welcoming address of the President of the Swiss Confederation is a pragmatically sophisticated diplomatic speech in which conversational implicature operates as the primary vehicle for the speech's most substantive political content. The explicit, literal content of the speech is largely positive, inclusive, and ceremonial. Its real argumentative work -critique of protectionism, warnings about AI governance, calls for genuine international solidarity, and Switzerland's self-positioning as a uniquely qualified neutral mediator - is conducted almost entirely through implication.

The analysis identified five dominant implicature functions:

- (A) scalar understatement as a tool of indirect critique.
- (B) Maxim of Relation flouting for implied criticism of international actors.
- (C) presuppositional and pre-emptive implicatures for diplomatic self-defence.
- (D) solidarity and national identity projection through discourse-structural implicature.
- (E) the strategic deployment of both generalized and particularized implicatures calibrated to the elite, politically literate Davos audience.

These findings have two broader implications. First, they confirm that implicature is not a marginal pragmatic phenomenon but a central feature of diplomatic speech, where deniability, tact, and indirection are communicative virtues rather than evasions. Second, they demonstrate the analytical yield of Gricean implicature theory when applied systematically to political discourse: the framework reveals layers of meaning that surface-level rhetorical analysis would miss.

Future research might productively compare this welcoming address with those from other years or other national speakers at Davos, in order to examine whether the implicature strategies identified here are genre-specific (typical of WEF welcoming

addresses) or speaker-specific (characteristic of Swiss diplomatic discourse). Multimodal extensions -examining gesture, prosody, and audience response- would also enrich the analysis.

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## Appendix: Source Data — Full Text of the Speech

### Welcoming Remarks — Davos Annual Meeting 2026

Source: World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-welcoming-remarks/>

*Mr Hoffman, Mr Fink, Mr Brende, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, as President of the Swiss Confederation, I'm particularly happy to welcome so many heads of state to this Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum.*

*This is particularly meaningful in a year which started with a tragedy for our nation, and Switzerland would like to thank all of the nations concerned for the support and solidarity they expressed during the disaster in Crans-Montana. It is impressive to see how energies can be mobilized by such a disaster, how it can strengthen international cohesiveness and unity. This must go beyond, of course, the particular dramatic events; it must pervade the relationships between our countries, because it is only together that we can find solid and lasting solutions to the major challenges of our time.*

*2025 offered up a number of challenges, geopolitical, economic and digital upheavals on a global scale. They can be seen everywhere, they permeate our daily lives, and even extend to the World Economic Forum, for which the past year was not a walk in the park. This edition, with its many distinguished guests, attests to the importance of resilience and dialogue in the bedrock of our institutions and their ability to cope.*

*2026 has barely started, yet there are indications of upheavals to come, and potential flashpoints: Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and now Venezuela and Iran, to name but a few. In terms of economic policy, protectionism is on the rise all over the world. In addition, there are many unresolved issues about the role and control of artificial intelligence that remain unanswered. This should come as no surprise. For humans, standing still is not an option. Or to quote philosopher Henri Bergson: "to exist is to change".*

*This year will be marked by technological advances as well as economic and security concerns. The rapid rise of AI is set to deeply transform the fabric of our societies. The changes it brings will be visible at every turn and in every area of human life: the economy, the government, in our day-to-day lives. They're changing the way we work, communicate, and make decisions. As such, they present both risks and opportunities. Digital transformation will bring the dangers of cybercrime, disinformation, but also exciting prospects, particularly in the field of healthcare.*

*Technology is never inherently good or bad; it is what we make it, and to make it a positive ally, its users must have a deep sense of responsibility. Change is not just a matter of speed. As economic affairs minister trained in the school of life, I am well-placed to explain that lasting success depends on early and forward planning. This is a rule that applies to many other sectors, where investments do not generate immediate returns. I'm thinking of research, which also falls under my remit as minister.*

*Long-term thinking is necessary in any situation. It is particularly necessary in times of upheaval. It can help us to drive progress while remaining true to our fundamental values without forgetting their meaning or their role.*

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Switzerland draws its strength from the consistency that helps to ensure political stability. Consistency is not a source of stagnation; on the contrary, it is the foundation of progress. Our country is fortunate enough to have an excellent education and research system with a capacity for innovation recognized far beyond its borders. With its open, export-oriented economy, Switzerland is an integral part of the global economy.*

*The Federal Council is deeply committed to ensuring that our country can continue to participate successfully in the vitality of that economy. One of our current priorities is to stabilize and expand relationships with our most loyal and significant partners. Switzerland also wishes to continue to diversify its international relations, particularly in the areas of trade and science. Even in the current climate, which is prone to protectionism, we believe in the success of free trade and wish to continue expanding our networks of agreement.*

*To achieve this, we must be able to conduct negotiations on an equal footing, yielding good results for the benefit of all parties. Agreements of this kind, which are mutually beneficial, don't happen by chance. We have the ability to build them patiently, one step at a time. Personal contacts and a willingness to engage in dialogue are essential – and we have both.*

*The World Economic Forum has always contributed to this dialogue, and I would like to thank it for offering us, in Switzerland, once again this year, an extraordinary international platform for exchange. Switzerland is in tune with this; as a neutral nation, it is able and willing to assume its responsibilities in favour of a rules-based international order, international law, human rights and free trade. These values have always defined us.*

*This year, Switzerland is taking on a particularly demanding task in chairing the OSCE, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. However, our country's diplomatic strength also lies in its recognized practice of good offices, for which international Geneva provides a stage commensurate with the challenge at hand. Switzerland is always available to play a part.*

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, our different positions offer us unparalleled prospects on the evolution of our world and the dangers that threaten it. They also provide us with the necessary overview and connections to address these changes with the appropriate means and in a concerted manner.*

*Society, science, economics and politics must interact in a spirit of partnership. Otherwise, problems can only be addressed in a partial and imperfect manner. Let me add that it also takes courage to take on a task of this magnitude with the ambition of seeing it through to completion, the courage to innovate, to remain true to one's values, to ask for assistance or advice when necessary, the courage to make a long-term commitment, as wine growers do when faced with a slow and relentless pace of nature.*

*We shall see what AI has to offer. We will certainly still be amazed, perhaps dazzled. But what it will never be able to do is to bring hearts together, or attract helping hands, as we saw at the start of this year in the canton of Valais. Solidarity and humanity are not part of the digital vocabulary. I see this as a good omen for the future. Many thanks for your attention*