

Diplomatic Language and Repression in Post-Napoleonic Germany

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INTRODUCTION

- After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, European powers worked to preserve political stability through alliance cooperation and diplomatic coordination.
- This period has been studied extensively, including examinations of state repression, alliance politics, and major episodes of political violence.
- Diplomatic correspondence is among the most frequently used primary sources for understanding political decision-making during this era.
- However, these letters are often read mainly for the information they provide about events. The way instability is described and managed, including tone, phrasing, and emphasis, is not always the focus.
- Using positioning theory, this project examines how language situates political actors and shapes how political tension is understood.

METHODS

This study analyzes diplomatic correspondence written by European envoys between 1808 and 1819. The letters were untranscribed and drawn from an archival collection assigned as part of an ongoing research project. The documents were transcribed by hand and reviewed for accuracy with a faculty mentor, while still preserving original spelling and formatting. Letters were examined for reference to political instability, repression, and alliance tensions.

Using rhetorical analysis and positioning theory, the project examines patterns in tone, phrasing, and indirect language, and considers how diplomatic language describes repression and places political actors within roles during moments of instability.

Figure 1. Positioning triangle adapted from Van Langenhove & Harré (1999a p.18)

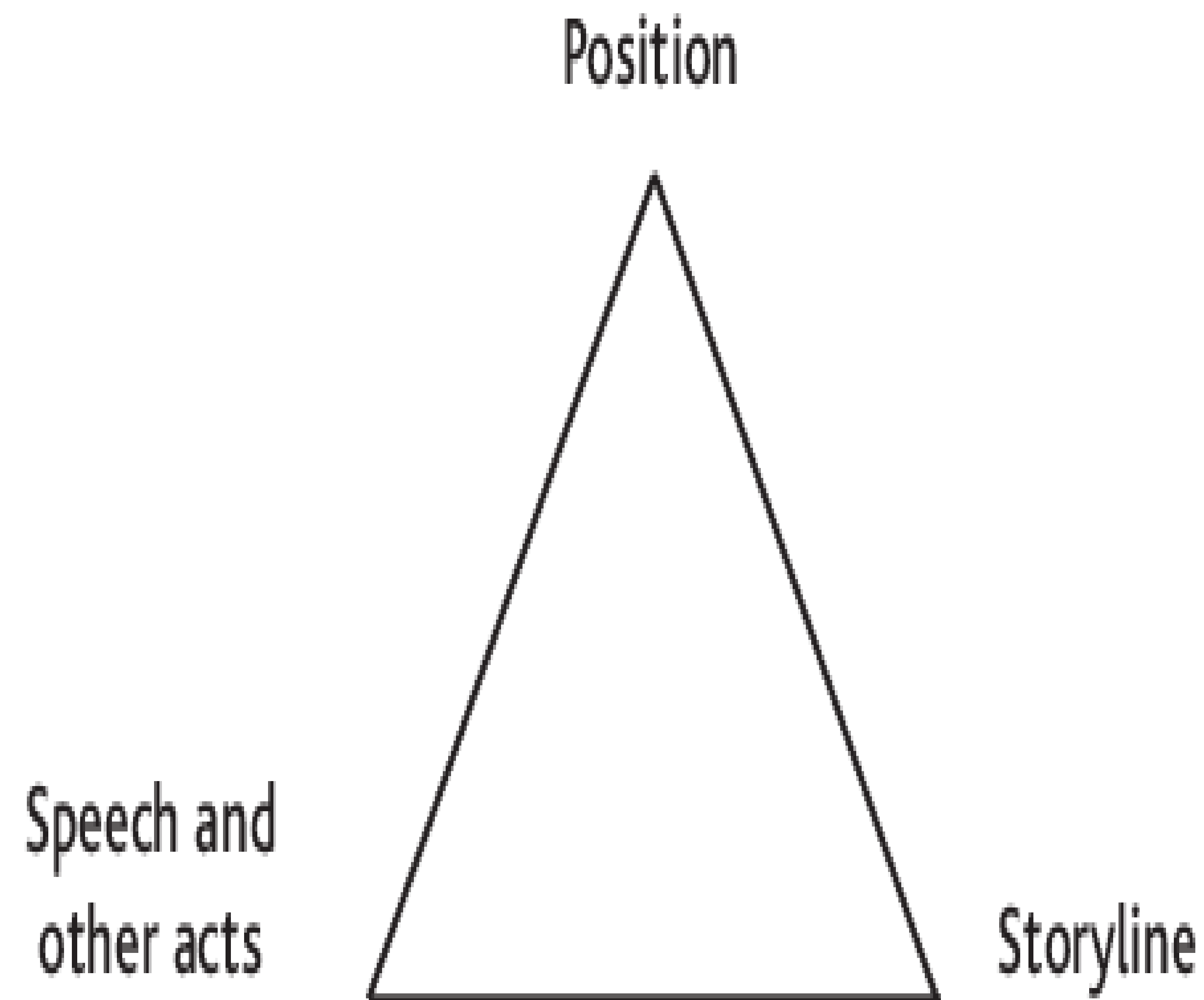
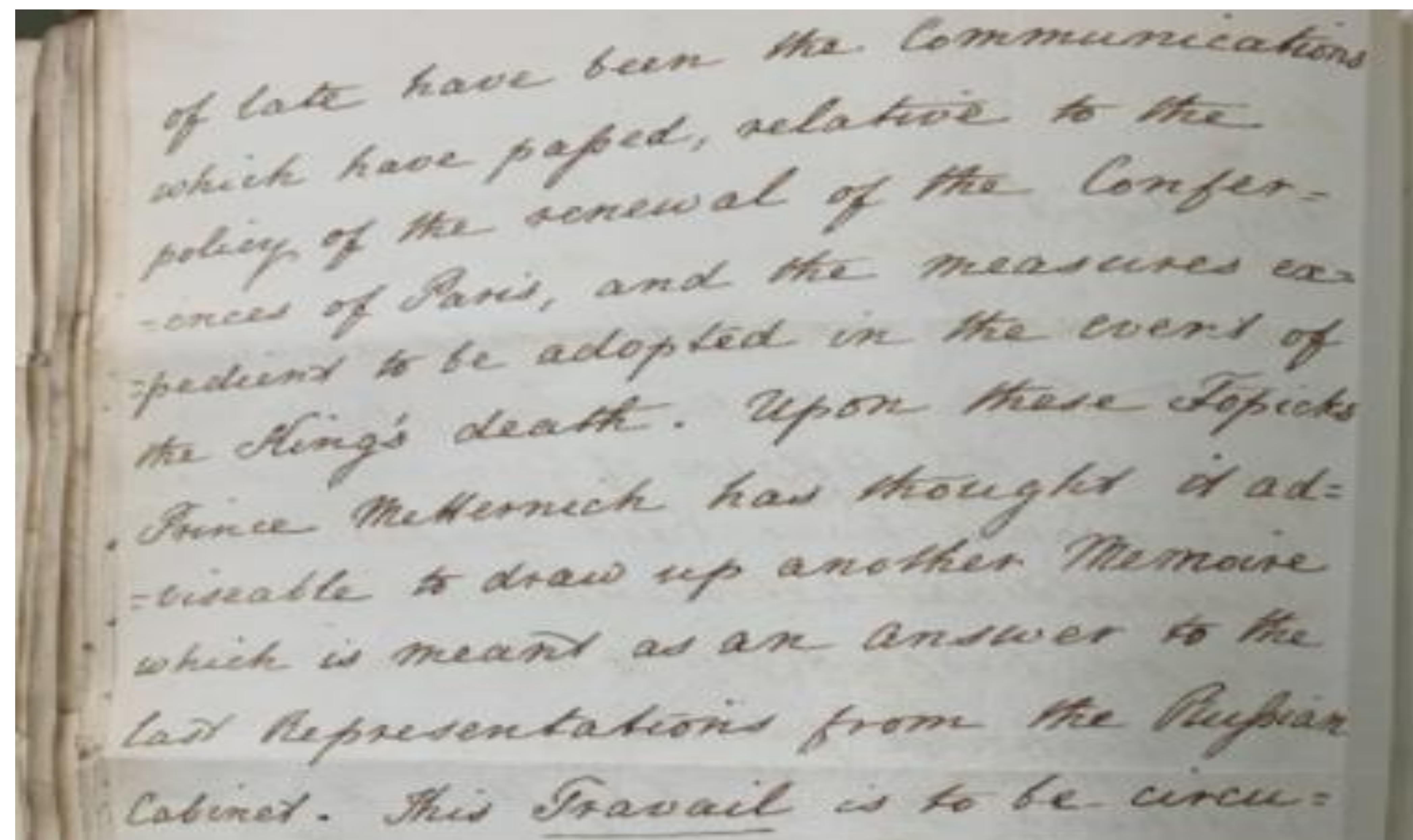


Figure 2. National Archives FO 7/143 Lord Stewart Austria May-Oct 1819



RESULTS

Throughout the letters, diplomatic language assigns political and moral roles to key actors during moments of instability and rebuilding of Europe.

- “to interest and amuse the Emperor of Russia...’Les bon principes’..lest he ‘tomber dans les manvaises’”. This part positions Alexander I, as a figure who is unstable ideologically and needs to be controlled.
- “spirt...making large encroachments towards Revolution and Anarchy...the time arrived...to make the great Blow” Positions political unrest and as acts of others as escalating, which makes repression necessary.
- “Paris...the Head Quarters of an Army in the midst of the Field of Battle...uncertain state of the government of France”. France and Paris itself is positions as a dangerous and fragile state. To conservatives, Paris is seen as a danger, as they refuse to have meetings there.
- “I endeavored as far as I could, to put Prince Metternich in possession of the opinions Your Lordship detailed to me” The envoys use their positions and language to influence the thoughts of others, which could change outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The diplomatic language used in the letters defines the position that each “player” had in the world. Through moral framing and roles assigned to them, envoys were actors that were able to frame instability and the actions of others. This speech affected the storyline, which then changed how the actors reported back to proceed. More letters will need to be transcribed to understand the full scope of the positions.

References

