

# Request or command? A preliminary analysis of COVID-19 speeches in English, Japanese and Chinese

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## Abstract

コロナウイルスによるパンデミック、とりわけその初期において、それぞれの国のリーダーたちが発した言葉は、言語の違いを超え、多くの場合、国民を守り、社会を率いるための共通した内容を伝えた。本稿は、内容が共通するメッセージがいかなる言語形式で表出されるかについて、言語間・言語共同体間に見られる違いを考察することを目的とし、英語圏の英国、オーストラリア、ニュージーランド、加えて、中国、台湾、日本の政治リーダーの国民に向けた16のメッセージやスピーチを分析した。発話行為、ボライトネス、話者と聞き手のデスタンスの捉え方を含むモダリティなどの観点から考察し、国民への協力の依頼、指示についてのメッセージ、事態の打開に向けた方策、展望の示し方、国民の団結を求め、鼓舞するメッセージ等について、モダリティの言語形式への反映にそれぞれ特徴的な違いがあることを示し、さらに、英語と中国語については、同じ言語間でも違いが見られる点も指摘される。これらの違いには、当然、各国の政治体制・法制度の違いによる政策の違いに起因すると考えられる部分もあるが、それを超えてなお顕著にあるそれぞれの言語と語用論的特徴の違いを示す。

Keywords: political speeches, COVID-19, Speech Act, modality, politeness

## 1. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption in all aspects of human life. Leadership communication has been put to the test as keeping the public informed of the changing policies and measures, as well as requesting or demanding cooperation from all fronts, became crucial during the crisis. Coronavirus discourse as a new genre for linguistic analysis has sparked interest in research areas such as critical discourse analysis (Wodak,

2021), corpus linguistics (McClaughlin et al., 2021) and public discourse analysis (Tulchinskii, 2020). While there is no 'universal' pattern or solution for crisis communication, previous studies suggest that there are some common strategies or frames such as expressing gratitude, calling for unity, and building trust in COVID-19 speeches by top leaders of the world (Wodak, 2021; McClaughlin et al., 2021). The current study aims to explore the language features and communication strategies of COVID-19 speeches from a cross-linguistic perspective. By examining public speeches delivered by top government leaders from the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, and Taiwan, in English, Japanese and Chinese, we unveil not only the high-level frames for organizing important messages in these speeches, but also the similarities and differences in deploying interpersonal meanings in the form of speech act and modality in each language community. The findings deepen our understanding of how different languages function in the context of political discourse, in particular crisis management.

## **2. Methodology**

To explore the linguistic features of political speeches on COVID-19 in English, Japanese and Chinese, 16 sample speeches were collected from official government websites (see Table 1).

The analysis of the speeches was conducted in two stages. First, we analyzed the speeches at the sentence level, teasing out language features such as Modality, Mood and Speech Function / Speech Act (cf. Palmer 2001; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) to identify patterns of speaker-listener interaction. Next, we examined collocates of Subject and Modality to investigate the linguistic strategy in relation to the Speech Act of Request and Command. Finally, we compared the language features in the sample speeches in English, Japanese and Chinese to identify similarities and differences in the representation of Request and Command in addressing the COVID-19 situation during the initial outbreak.

**Table 1 – Summary of sample data**

Language	Speech	Date	Source
English	Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19)	23 March 2020 10 May 2020	U.K. Government
English	Statement – COVID-19. PM Transcripts: Transcripts from the Prime Ministers of Australia	23 March 2020	Australian Government
English	Ministerial Statement on the Declaration of a National Emergency and Alert Level 4	25 March 2020	New Zealand Parliament
English	Prime Minister Boris Johnson's address to the nation on booster jabs	12 December 2021	U.K. Government
Japanese	Press Conference by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga regarding Novel Coronavirus	25 August 2021 9 September 2021	Prime Minister's Office of Japan
Japanese	Policy Speech by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to the 205th Session of the Diet	17 January 2021	Prime Minister's Office of Japan
Japanese	Policy Speech by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to the 208th Session of the Diet	8 October 2021	Prime Minister's Office of Japan
Japanese	Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe regarding Novel Coronavirus	28 March 2020 7 April 2020 17 April 2020 4 May 2020	Prime Minister's Office of Japan
Japanese	Press Conference by the Prime Minister Kishida Fumio regarding the request for application of the Priority Measures to prevent the spread of disease and other matters	9 February 2022	Prime Minister's Office of Japan
Chinese	President Tsai issues remarks regarding the coronavirus outbreak and responds to questions from the media	30 Jan 2020	Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan)
Chinese	Xi Jing Ping's speech after inspecting COVID-19 situation in Hubei Province 1.5 month after Wuhan Lockdown	10 March 2020	People's Daily China

### **3. COVID-19 speeches in English**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In March 2020, the then-Prime Ministers of Australia, New Zealand and the U. K. gave speeches about the nations' responses to the coronavirus, including outlining restrictions (such as social distancing), plans for action by the government to address the situation, expressions of sympathy for those affected, and encouragement to rally the public. All three speeches covered these topics with differences in modality, which are discussed and compared here. Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern's and Prime Minister of Australia Scott Morrison's speeches are of similar length, 1934 words and 1717 words respectively, while Prime Minister of the U.K. Boris Johnson's speech is much shorter, at only 898 words.

##### **3.1.1 Overview of speeches' content**

On 25 March 2020 the New Zealand (NZ) Prime Minister made a national emergency announcement to NZ's parliament, which also addressed the NZ public. Ardern declared a period of self-isolation due to early evidence of community transmission of the virus. The main focus of the speech is outlining restrictions on the community, justifying the restrictions, and explaining the extraordinary powers being granted to the Director of Civil Defense Emergency Management including:

- conservation and supply of food, fuel, and [other] essential supplies;
  - regulate land, water, and air traffic;
  - to close roads and public places;
  - to evacuate any premises, including any public place;
  - and, if necessary, to exclude people or vehicles from any premises or place;
- and the ability of the government to enforce these restrictions (Ardern, 25/03/20).

All citizens not involved in essential work were told to stay home and self-isolate for four weeks, a period twice that of the two weeks suggested in the United States in order to "flatten the curve". At this stage, the country had only five hospitalized cases of coronavirus, none of which were severe

enough to require intensive care. The speech also mentions the powers to be granted to the government's social service sector to enable them to grant emergency benefits to individuals financially impacted by the virus.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's speech to the Australian public on 23 March 2020 acknowledges at length the economic impact of the virus. It focuses on warning the public about the probable extent of restrictions to be placed on them and promises financial support for vulnerable citizens and business owners.

At this time, the number of infectious cases and deaths in Australia due to COVID-19 was relatively low, with some states only recording cases in the single digits. The greater concern for the federal government was the economic impact of COVID-19, which is reflected in the speech. Australia's biggest exports are natural resources (such as coal), tourism, and English education, with China being one of Australia's most important trading partners. The reduction of international tourists and international students, due to closing Australia's borders, and the impact of COVID-19 overseas, would significantly affect the Australian economy. Imposing lockdowns and restrictions on local businesses would also result in unemployment and businesses closing.

By the time of Johnson's speech on 23 March 2020, the number of infected cases in the U.K. had already swelled to over 10 000 and there had been over 400 coronavirus-attributed deaths (Worldometer, 2022). Accordingly, he reminds his listeners of the potential for a strain on the healthcare system, before explaining the lockdown and details of restrictions to be implemented. He lists the exceptions to the lockdown briefly in bullet point form. He then addresses commands directly to his listeners, and states that police will be authorized to enforce these restrictions (the lockdown measures legally came into force three days later). This is followed by brief reassurance of support for those affected financially, although no details are given. The final part of the speech focuses on giving hope to his listeners, stating they have a plan moving forward, supported by hard-working health professionals. Johnson ends with encouraging statements to rally his listeners.

### 3.2 Requests and commands

When describing the restrictions to be put in place in order to curb the spread of the virus, Morrison and Ardern tend to frame their “request and commands” as statements of strong certainty, while Johnson gives direct commands to his listeners. Ardern’s language is stronger and more direct than Morrison’s, using “will” or omitting modal verbs altogether in favor of statements using present tense, or even imperatives.

Ardern uses “will” in an epistemic sense, to make declarative statements about the future. For example:

“...we will go about life very differently...” (03/25/20)

She also uses it in an obligation and permission (deontic) sense to explain restrictions on the community, for example:

“...only those in essential services will leave home” (03/25/20)

In the next line, an imperative is used to command the listeners as follows:

“All others stay home and stop interactions with those outside the home ...” (03/25/20)

Then major restrictions are stated similarly to bullet points, using no modal verbs at all.

“Events and gatherings are cancelled. Schools close.” (03/25/20)

Morrison also speaks about restrictions. In the first part of his speech, he uses “must” to urge the listeners to take direct action. Statements like “must self-isolate”, “must keep a healthy social distance”, and “must resolve...to come together,” are used with “we” to create a sense of unity and equality. Although direct language is used, it is framed as a plea for cooperation, rather than as a top-down command from the government.

Ardern uses “must” early in her speech when speaking of citizens’ attitudes, rather than actions. For example:

“...we must take this period of self-isolation deadly seriously.” (03/25/20)

Morrison repeatedly uses “will” to list specific examples of the changes in lifestyle that the listeners can expect due to COVID-19. For example:

“There will be no more going to the pub after work.” (23/03/20)

This and similar statements are definitive and leave no room for argument.

Using “there will be” also frames the situation as a change caused by uncontrollable external forces, rather than a restriction imposed by the government. At this stage there was also still uncertainty as to the extent of restrictions that would be imposed, reflected in Morrison’s use of weaker modal phrases such as “may need” and “are likely to need”.

Morrison gives advice rather than making direct requests or commands, without using modals or imperatives. Instead, he uses gerunds. For example,

“Washing your hands thoroughly, coughing and sneezing into your elbow, not touching your face are all practical measures that we can all observe to save lives.” (23/03/20).

Other restrictions that are framed in the same way include limits on the size of indoor and outdoor gatherings, social distancing for indoor non-essential gatherings and avoiding non-essential travel.

In contrast to Morrison and Ardern, Johnson uses obligation modal auxiliaries or imperative forms to request a change in his listeners’ behavior. Morrison’s speech does not use “should” at all, and Ardern’s speech uses “should” only twice, in neither instance making requests or giving commands. However, in Johnson’s speech “should” appears six times regarding restrictions on the listeners. For example,

“You should not be meeting friends. If your friends ask you to meet, you should say No.” (03/23/20)

He also uses “you” to give direct commands to his listeners. In this example,

“From this evening I must give the British people a very simple instruction - you must stay at home.” (03/23/20)

Johnson clearly delineates between himself and his listener but prefaces his command (“you must”) with his “I must” to express his own sense of obligation. This helps to soften the command by implying that both Johnson and his listeners are acting out of obligation to do the right thing.

Unlike Morrison, Ardern and Johnson both speak about the enforcement of the restrictions being outlined, using direct language. Johnson states,

“...the police will have the powers to enforce [the rules], including through fines and dispersing gatherings.” (03/23/20)

Compared to Johnson, Ardern speaks in more detail, and first acknowledges

that no other country with zero deaths is implementing such harsh restrictions. Then, she justifies the restrictions by claiming the situation would already be worse if such restrictions had not been imposed, and that the measures are intended to be preventative.

Following this, Ardern explains the powers being granted to the military and the police, who will be coordinating in relief efforts, but also will be enforcing restrictions. She uses “will” and “can” as follows:

“These moves will be enforced. And we will be the enforcer.”

“...the police and the military will be working together...”

“...if people do not follow the messages here today, then the police will remind people of their obligations...”

“...they can arrest if needed. They can detain if needed.” (03/25/20)

In an attempt to soften the tone of these statements Ardern says,

“New Zealanders want to see that these measures are being complied with but in a way that we’re used to seeing as New Zealanders.”  
(03/25/20)

This assertion projects the desire for compliance on members of the public rather than the government, framing the measures as a cooperative strategy rather than an imposition from above.

Morrison’s statements about restrictions are authoritative but stop short of mentioning enforcement of restrictions. In Australia, the power to impose restrictions is held by each state’s premier, rather than the federal government. Each state and territory had the power to close their borders to prevent infected people from other states entering. As of December 2021, the state borders re-opened, except for that of Western Australia, whose premier remained firm on keeping the state closed, despite criticism. This contrasts with Ardern’s and Johnson’s language, which reflects the fact that New Zealand’s and the U.K.’s governments had power to impose and enforce restrictions throughout the nation.

### 3.3 Future actions and prospects

When speaking about the government’s plans to cope with the impact of COVID-19, Morrison focuses on economic support. He uses “will” to declare



what the government is going to do, including providing economic support for the unemployed and to boost small and medium-sized businesses. He also promises that additional payments will be made to vulnerable Australians such as pensioners, caregivers, and the disabled. Again, this shows how the main concern of the Australian government at this time was the economic impact of the virus. Johnson also mentions “a programme of support” for impacted workers and businesses, but in this speech gives no further details.

Ardern’s speech also mentions economic relief, but focuses on individual workers, and omits mention of businesses. She uses “can” to explain the powers granted to various government bodies by the issuing of a national epidemic notice:

“- The Ministry for Social Development can grant emergency benefits to people who would otherwise not be entitled to them...” (03/25/20)

Like Morrison, Johnson also uses “I will/we will” to indicate future actions. He sometimes tries to emphasize his reassurance by having “I can assure you that...” as the superordinate clause as in the following quote:

“And I can assure you that we will keep these restrictions under constant review. We will look again in three weeks, and relax them if the evidence shows we are able to.” (03/23/20)

As the leader of a nation with large numbers of confirmed cases, and hundreds of COVID-related deaths already, Johnson states the necessity of the lockdowns to prevent collapse of the healthcare system. At the same time, he acknowledges the large number of deaths likely to be caused by the virus, again using “will” to express future certainty.

“The way ahead is hard, and it is still true that many lives will sadly be lost.” (03/23/20)

In Morrison’s speech, toward the end the topic turns to Australia’s future prospects after the virus has passed. At the time, few people expected that the virus would still be claiming lives two years later. As mentioned before, border restrictions and social distancing negatively affecting the economy was a greater cause for concern than the number of deaths and infections.

Both Johnson’s and Ardern’s speeches contain little or no mention of long-term prospects. Ardern focuses on the short-term, preparing her listeners for

the imminent restrictions, in predictions such as:

“...this will get worse before it gets better...”

“[if restrictions are not followed] we could be in lockdown for longer ...” (03/25/20)

### 3.4 Praise, empathy, commendation

The three prime ministers included words of praise and empathy in their speeches for their listeners, and commendation particularly for healthcare workers. Each was slightly different, reflecting the respective immediate challenges each nation was confronting. At this stage, New Zealand had experienced virtually no impact from the virus, so Ardern’s speech expresses in advance empathy for the upcoming isolation that the public would experience due to lockdown:

“...the joy of physically visiting other family, children, grandchildren, friends, neighbours -- for many, that is on hold now, because we’re all now putting each other first. And that is what we do so well as a nation.” (03/25/20)

In the final sentence of this quote, she also pre-emptively commends her listeners for their selfless spirit, which will help them to comply with the restrictions outlined in the speech.

Morrison expresses empathy early in his speech, similar to Ardern, anticipating the hard times approaching, saying,

“...the tests, hardships and sacrifices that will be placed on all of us, on our national character — will undoubtedly break our hearts on many occasions in the months ahead.” (03/23/20)

In keeping with the rest of his speech, Morrison expresses empathy for those suffering from economic impacts of the virus. He uses “will”, making a statement of strong certainty acknowledging how severely employees and employers alike will be affected.

“To those who have lost their jobs already and will, to those whose incomes are collapsing, to those who are barely holding their businesses together or who have already seen their dream taken from them by this virus, this is devastating and this is heartbreaking.” (03/23/20)

Morrison thanks the opposing political party and Australian banks for their cooperation, framing the crisis as a situation that requires a united front, and that transcends political and industry divisions. He commends his listeners in the form of expressing thanks as follows:

“I want to thank all of those who have come to this great challenge with such a unity of spirit.” (03/23/20)

Johnson in his speech expresses empathy to his listeners, with his use of “I” lending it a more personal feel.

“I know the damage that this disruption is doing and will do to people’s lives, to their businesses and to their jobs.” (03/23/20)

Like Morrison, he uses “I want” when expressing thanks and acknowledging the efforts of public servants, again giving the statement a personal feeling of gratitude directly expressed to his listeners.

“I want to thank everyone who is working flat out to beat the virus. Everyone from the supermarket staff to the transport workers to the carers to the nurses and doctors on the frontline.” (03/23/20)

Johnson also twice makes use of key descriptive words to imply gratitude and praise. The adjective “amazing” is used to describe the workers of the healthcare system, and the adverb “sadly” is used to imply empathy for lives that will be lost. This enables him to keep his speech brief and concise (about half the length of Ardern’s and Morrison’s speeches), while including these important elements.

### 3.5 Rally

All three leaders conclude their speeches with encouraging statements to their listeners, in slightly different ways. Again, Ardern’s language is stronger and more direct than Morrison’s, in keeping with the rest of her speech up until this point. She reassures her listeners, stating with strong certainty,

“Firstly, you are not alone. You will hear us -- all of us -- and see us daily as we guide New Zealand through this period. It won’t always be perfect. But the principle of what we are trying to do here is the right one.” (03/25/20)

She uses imperatives, saying,

“...don’t be discouraged. Over time we will see change if we all stick to the plan.” (03/25/20)

and ends with a command to her listeners,

“...be calm, be kind, stay at home, and break the chain.” (03/25/20)

In contrast, Morrison’s speech contains encouragement throughout, early on making several historical references of hard times Australians survived or impressive feats they accomplished, as a way of stirring patriotic pride in the opening sentences. These events he refers to include Federation, World War I, World War II, the Great Depression, and the engineering of the Snowy Mountains River project.

To rally his listeners in the final part of the speech, Morrison repeatedly uses “will” such as in the following lines where it appears in declarative statements promising the government’s help, saying,

“...we will be there to ensure that Australians get back on their feet, that the businesses rebuild, that our economy resurges and that we go on in the great national story of this amazing nation, Australia.” (03/23/20)

He also goes on to use “will” repeatedly in the next lines, saying,

“...there are some who believe liberal democracies and free societies cannot cope with these sorts of challenges. We will prove them wrong here in Australia...we can do this, and will do this, and we will do this together”. (03/23/20)

This use of “will” creates a sense of strong certainty, while his use of “we” reinforces the implications of cooperation and unity throughout the rest of his speech. For example, the word “together” is used ten times in the speech, and “we” used in reference to the Australian people occurs 44 times, compared to only three instances of “you”. Ardern’s speech contains 40 instances of “we”, but in 33 of those instances “we” refers to the New Zealand government, describing the restrictions, and the actions to be taken.

In Johnson’s speech, similar to Ardern, he uses the pronoun ‘we’ (which occurs 23 times) very often to refer to the U.K. leadership collectively. Towards the end of the speech, he uses “we will” to make rallying statements to his listeners, saying,

“We will beat the coronavirus and we will beat it together.” (03/23/20)

Morrison’s speech is also notable for its religious references. A professed Pentecostal Christian, he encourages people of faith to pray even if they are unable to meet in person for worship. He also states that he himself is praying for the situation. He mentions religion again in the closing lines of the speech:

“May God bless us all — all Australians — at this most difficult time.”  
(03/23/20)

Ardern’s and Johnson’s speeches have no such religious references.

### 3.6 Concluding remarks on COVID-19 speeches in English

Ardern’s, Morrison’s and Johnson’s speeches show similarities in language use, even though the main focus of their respective speeches is different. All three prime ministers use “will” as an epistemic modal to express certainty about how the coronavirus would affect the country, and the actions their governments plan to take in order to respond to the situation. However, when mentioning restrictions, Johnson uses “should” repeatedly, while “will” is used to express prohibition and permission by both Ardern and Morrison, although more frequently by Morrison.

Ardern’s and Johnson’s language is stronger and more direct overall than Morrison’s, as evidenced by Ardern’s use of imperatives to give commands to her listeners, and Johnson’s use of “You should…” to give commands to his listeners. This is one of the most notable differences between the speeches. There are also significant differences in the focus of each leader’s speech, which reflects the different situations of the two nations. As mentioned above, Australia’s federal government left the states and territories freedom to decide their own restrictions and enforcement of them. In contrast, New Zealand’s and the U.K.’s governments granted themselves power to impose and enforce restrictions nationwide.

Unlike Johnson, who makes one vague reference to “the past”, both Ardern and Morrison mention specific historical events, although with different purposes. Morrison with the purpose of inspiring and rallying his listeners; Ardern with the purpose of justifying granting extraordinary powers to government bodies and services.

#### **4. COVID-19 speeches in Japanese**

This section analyses nine policy speeches delivered by the three Japanese Prime Ministers regarding COVID-19 since the outbreak of the disease in early 2020. Prime Ministers Abe and Suga left office in 2020 and in 2021, respectively, and the current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has been in office since October 2021. The themes and the foci of their speeches are different, reflecting the evolution of the pandemic over the past two years. Furthermore, in their spontaneous and impromptu communication, the three Prime Ministers unsurprisingly have different linguistic behavior to each other. That said, their policy speeches show significantly similar linguistic features in expressing what people are expected to do to cope with the situation, plans for actions by the government, and expressions of sympathy, and some of these features may not be found in the other languages in the equivalent contexts. The following analysis demonstrates that the Japanese speeches often use forms and constructions which express the core message indirectly and can obscure the speaker's commitment to the content of the message.

##### **4.1 Requests**

Unlike legally binding measures imposed in many countries, the state of emergency declared by the Japanese government on April 7, 2020, did not involve an enforced lockdown. As the national and local governments do not have a legal basis for restricting individuals' freedom even during a pandemic, the most that they could do was to ask the people of the nation to cooperate in the 'Stay Home' campaign and to refrain from travelling and going out to socialize. Therefore, when the prime ministers announced measures to prevent the spread of the virus, the measures were stated as requests rather than as legally binding commands or directions. This difference is naturally reflected in the linguistic forms used in their speeches. While as discussed in Section 3.2 in English the obligation modal or imperative forms are frequently used in statements requesting a change in people's behavior, such forms are used less often in Japanese statements.

#### 4.1.1 Direct requests in Japanese

A small number of imperative sentences are found in the speeches, especially at the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the number of infected patients was rapidly growing with no vaccines or curative medicines yet available. The following excerpts are from the remarks of then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in the press conferences during the spring of 2020.

- (1) Mittu-no mitu-ga yori nookoona katati-de kasanaru baa, naitokurabu,  
three-gen closedness-ga more intense form-in multiply bar nightclub  
karaoke, raibuhausu e-no deiri-wa hikaete-kudasai. [Abe 04/07/2020]  
karaoke live-music-club to-gen frequenting-top refrain-give (the favor of) imperative, polite  
'Please refrain from frequenting bars, nightclubs, karaoke parlors,  
clubs with live music, where the three C factors overlap more intensely.'
- (2) Dooka gaisyutu-o hikaete-kudasai. [Abe 04/07/2020]  
please out-dining-acc refrain-give (the favor of) imperative, polite  
'Please refrain from dining out.'
- (3) Iryoogenba-o sasaeru tame, sono hutan-o herasite-kudasai. [Abe 04/17/2020]  
medical setting-acc support to, its burden-acc reduce-give (the favor of) imperative, polite  
'In order to support medical professionals, please reduce the burden  
imposed on them.'
- (4) Minasan-no tikara de mirai-o kaete-kudasai. [Abe 04/17/2020]  
everyone-gen power by future-o change-give (the favor of) imperative, polite  
'Please change the future through the power of you all.'

The *V-te kudasai* form of the verbs used in the above sentences is the polite form of the imperative form *V-te kure*, which is composed of the gerundive form of V followed by the imperative form of the verb *kure(ru)*. When used as the main verb, *kure(ru)* means 'to give' for the benefit of the speaker/addressee. Either the speaker or someone who belongs to a group highly relevant to the speaker can be the indirect object of *kure(ru)*. In (1)-(4), *kure* is in the polite imperative form, *kudasai*. In these examples, *kure* is used as auxiliary verb attached to the gerundive form of the respective main verb to express 'to give the favor of doing the action expressed by the main verb', and the semantic

property of the main verb *kure(ru)* carries over to the use as auxiliary, i.e., the beneficiary of ‘giving’ must be the addresser.

Since by the imperative form *V-te kure*, the addresser commands or requests the addressee to perform the action expressed by the verb for the benefit of the addresser, in most contexts *V-te kure* imperatives sound very direct and impolite. With *kudasai*, the polite form of the *kure*, utterances no longer sound vulgar, but they are still direct commands or requests, not particularly polite or formal. The *V-te kudasai* form is often used in the context where an instruction is given, or the requested action is intended to benefit the addressee/listener.

The use of the desiderative form *-tai* also leads to an expression of a relatively strong request in Abe’s speech.

- (5) Desukara tihoo ni idoosuru nado-no ugoki-wa genni hikaete-itadaki-tai. [Abe 04/07/2020]  
 Hence province to travel etc.-gen activity-top strictly refrain-receive (the favor of) condescending-desiderative.  
 ‘So, I want you to kindly refrain from activities like traveling to provincial areas.’
- (6) Sudeni zibun-wa kansensya kamosirenai toiu isiki-o, tokuni wakai  
 already self-top infectee may be comp awareness especially young  
 minasan-o tyuusinni subete-no minasan ni motte itadaki-tai. [Abe 04/07/2020]  
 everyone-acc centering all-gen everyone for have-receive (the favor of) condescending-desiderative.  
 ‘I would like you all, in particular young people, to have consciousness that you yourself might be infected.’

In (5) and (6) the desiderative suffix *-tai* is preceded by the auxiliary verb *itada(ku)*, a condescending expression meaning ‘to receive the favor of’. *Itada(ku)*, either as main verb or auxiliary verb, is used when the subject, i.e., the recipient, is expected to condescend to the giver. Even with the use of the condescending expression, these sentences sound relatively strong and straightforward, taken as commands rather than requests, as they are conveyed as the addresser’s expectation or desire due to the presence of the desiderative morpheme.



Such direct expressions of command and request frequently mark the urgency and the gravity of the situation. However, instead of these, the prime ministers far more often used indirect language to ask members of the public for something.

#### 4.1.2 Less direct requests

In the following excerpts from one of Abe's speeches, the clause headed by the predicate with the desiderative morpheme *-tai* is the complement of the verb *omo(u)* 'to think' in the main clause. The request conveyed by the resulting complex sentence does not sound as straightforward as it would if the desiderative form were not embedded in the 'think' clause.

- (7) Taihen go-huben-o o-kakesitei-masu ga,  
 Much honorific-inconvenience-acc honorific-cause-polite although  
 sore-wa isso kibisii kono yoona kyookoosoti-o kaihisuru tame-no mono  
 it-top more severe this like binding measure-acc prevent for-gen thing  
 dearu koto-o mazu go-rikai-itadaki-tai to omoi-masu. [Abe 03/28/2020]  
 PRT<sup>assertive</sup> *koto*-acc first hon.-understand-condescending-desiderative Comp think-polite  
 '(Lit.) Though having been inconveniencing you greatly, I think I  
 want you to understand that it is a measure to prevent a situation that  
 necessitates even stricter forced measures like these.'
- (8) Syakai kinoo-o izisuru tameni hituyoona syokusyu-o nozoki, ofisu de-no  
 social function-gen maintain for necessary trade-acc except, office in-gen  
 sigoto-wa gensoku zitaku de okonau yooni site-itadaki-tai to  
 work-top principle own-home at conduct to do-condescending-desiderative  
omoi-masu. [Abe 04/07/2020]  
 Comp think-polite  
 '(Lit.) Except for essential work necessary to sustain social functions,  
 I think I want you to work in principle at home.'

A literal translation of sentence (7), for example, could be that 'I think that I want you to kindly understand...' However, it is not understood as a statement of the addresser's reflection on his desire. As the desiderative suffix expresses the addresser's psychological state, adding the verb of thinking '*omo(u)*' would be redundant in its literal sense. In the most natural interpretation of the

sentence, the verb *omo(u)* functions as a ‘hedge’ mitigating the strong effect of the desiderative *-tai*.

The same strategy is used in sentences where the modal expression *-beki* ‘should’ is followed by another verb of cognition, *kangae(ru)*, ‘to think.’

- (9) Seikatsu-no izi ni hitsuyoona baai-o nozoki, midarini gaisyutusi-nai-yoo  
 life-gen maintenance in necessary case-acc except, casually go-out-neg-to  
 yooseisu beki to kangae-masu. [Abe 04/07/2020]  
 request should Comp think-polite  
 ‘(Lit.) Except for cases necessary to sustain life, I think we should ask you not to go out casually.’

*Onegai-si-masu*, whose literal translation is ‘(I) make a request,’ and *onegai-itasi-masu* ‘I humbly make a request’ are also among the expressions frequently used by the prime ministers when they give instructions to people.

- (10) Mippei, missyuu, missetu; kono mittsu-no mitu-o sakeru  
 closedness, crowdedness, close contact; this three-gen closeness avoid  
 koodoo-o onegaisi-masu. [Abe 03/28/2020]  
 behavior-acc request-polite  
 ‘I ask you to avoid the 3Cs.’
- (11) O-hitori-o-hitori-ga risuku-no takai basyo, risuku-no takai koodoo-o  
 honorific-each-person-nom risk-gen high place, risk-gen high conduct-acc  
 sakete-itadaku-yooni onegai-itasi-masu. [Suga 08/25/2021]  
 avoid-receive (the favor of) to request-do<sup>condescending</sup>-polite  
 ‘(Lit.) I humbly ask each of you to avoid places and behaviors involving high risk (of spreading the infection)’

An even more polite and humble variant, *onegai-mousi-ageru* was also frequently observed. *Moosu*, the condescending form of the verb *iu* ‘to say’ is followed by *ageru*, an auxiliary verb to indicate respect for the addressee.

- (12) … kansenkakudai-no kakuzituna gensyoo ni tunageteiki-tai to omotte  
 … infection-spread-gen certain decrease to lead-go-desiderat. comp think-

-ori-masu node, go-rikai to go-kyooryoku-o kokoro kara onegai-  
 stay-polite because, hon.-cooperation-acc heart-from request-  
moosiageru sidai desu. [Kishida 02/09/2022]

say<sub>condescending</sub> circumstances be<sub>polite</sub>

‘…hoping to lead to a solid decrease in the spread of the infection,  
 I humbly express my sincere request for your understanding and  
 cooperation.’

## 4.2 Future actions and prospects

The styles used in the Japanese speeches to communicate future prospects and actions stand in contrast to the simple and straightforward expressions used in the English speeches (see Section 3.3). In Japanese, less direct, sometimes vague, expressions are chosen.

### 4.2.1 koto to itasi-masu

In the presentation of future prospects, many expressions used by Japanese prime ministers do not straightforwardly convey a sense of resolve, showing a clear contrast to more direct language used in the speeches in the other languages. The point may be illustrated by the frequent occurrence of *koto to itasi-masu* and its past tense form variant *koto to itasi-masita* in the Japanese speeches when presenting future projections. The word *koto* literally means ‘something, or a matter’ but in the usage relevant to the current discussion, its function is to nominalize the preceding clause. The particle *to* has the function of introducing a result, and *itas(u)* is, as already observed above, the condescending form of the verb *suru* ‘do.’

- (13) …kangosi nado-no iryoozinzai nituite-wa, kuni-ga zenmentekini siensi,  
 … nurse and the like-gen medical personnel about-top, state-nom entirely support,  
 zenkoku-no kooteiki/kooritu byooin kara haken-suru koto to  
 nationwide-gen public/state-run hospital from dispatch-do *koto to*  
 itasi-masu. [Kishida 02/09/2022]

do<sub>condescending-polite</sub>

‘…On medical personnel including nurses, the government will be  
 providing full support to send them from public hospitals nationwide.’

- (14) …Tokyoto-no Koike tizi, sosite Osakafu-no Yoshimura tizi  
 … Tokyo Metropolis-gen Koike gov. and Osaka Prefecture-gen Yoshimura gov.  
 to kyooryokusite, rinzi-no iryoosisetu-o gookei yaku sen-syoo, kyoodoode  
 with cooperating, ad hoc medical facility-acc total about 1000-bed, jointly  
 zoosetu-suru koto to itasi-masi-ta. [Kishida 02/09/2022]  
 increase-do *koto to do* condescending-polite-past  
 ‘…in cooperation with Governor Koike of Tokyo and Governor  
 Yoshimura of Osaka, it was decided that we would jointly establish ad  
 hoc medical facilities adding approximately 1000 beds in total.’
- (15) Kinoo kinkyuuzitaisengen-no kuiki-o nana todoohuken ni todomaru koto  
 yesterday state-of-emergency-declaration-gen area-acc seven prefecture to stay koto  
 naku, nihonzenkoku e to kakudai-suru koto to itasi-masi-ta. [Abe 04/17/2020]  
 without, Japan -all-country *to extend-do koto to do* condescending-polite-past  
 ‘It was decided yesterday that the area covered by the declaration  
 of a state of emergency would no longer be confined to the seven  
 prefectures but would be extended nationwide.’
- (16) Insyokuten-no zikantansyuku, telewaaku nado-no  
 dining-and-drinking establishment-gen shorter-hours, remote work etc.-gen  
 kansentaisaku-o keizoku-suru koto to itasi-masi-ta. [Suga 09/09/2021]  
 infection-measures-acc continue-do *koto to do* condescending-polite-past  
 ‘It was decided that shortening of business hours of restaurants and  
 bars, remote working and other measures to counter the spread of  
 infections were to be continued.’

The matrix verb in these examples is *itasi-masu*, the condescending form of *suru* ‘do’ to which is attached the politeness marker *-masu* (present) or *-masita* (past). The core messages conveyed by (13)-(16) above could be expressed by using a simpler construction without *koto to*, in which the verb formed by a Sino-Japanese noun followed by the light verb *-su(ru)*, or its politely condescending form *itasi-masu(u)*.

- (17) … zenkoku-no kooteiki/kooritubyooiin kara haken-itasi-masu  
 (cf. (13))  
 … kyoodoode zoosetu-itasi-masu  
 (cf. (14))

… nihonzenkoku e kakudai-itasi-masu

(cf. (15))

… kansentaisaku-o keizoku-itasi-masu

(cf. (16))

The resulting sentences as partially represented in (17) sound natural. They might be understood as slightly different from (13)-(16) as in the former, the planned policies are felt to be worked out in more detail and are more ready to be implemented than the situation described in the latter sentences with *koto to* in (13)-(16). The simpler form is sometimes used in the same speeches by the prime ministers in addressing future as in (18), which seems to be suggesting that the form with *koto to* is judged more appropriate for a certain topic or situation.

- (18) Koosita itizitekina ryoooyoosisetu-o kinkyuuzitaisengen-tiiki-o  
 such temporary recuperation-facilities-acc state-of-emergency-declaration-area-acc  
 tyuusinni sarani huyasite mairi-masu. [Suga 08/25/21]  
 centering further increase go condescending-polite  
 '(We) will increase further the number of such temporary recuperation  
 facilities further, centered on areas subject to the declaration of a state  
 of emergency.'

The *koto to itas(u)* construction can make an utterance sound more formal, authoritarian, and bureaucratic than those with simpler structure, but it can make the utterance sound as if the precise implementation of the plan is less definite. These effects associated with the *koto to itas(u)* construction may be related to the fact that nominalized clauses formed by *koto* often describe an abstract concept, rather than a concrete event.

#### 4.2.2 -Tai to omou/kangaeru

Verbs in the desiderative form with *-tai* are often used when the prime ministers state their own future actions and promises. The use of the desiderative form can give the impression that the Prime Ministers prepare an 'out' when they have difficulty in carrying out their plan despite their intention, hence

making their statement sound less definite. Furthermore, the desiderative forms are always followed by the verb of thinking, *omo(u)* or *kangae(ru)*. In this context, just as in the sentences to make requests discussed above, *omo(u)* and *kangae(ru)* are not interpreted with their literal meaning of contemplation, but they function as a ‘hedge’ to modify a straightforward expression of the speaker’s desire by *-tai*. The sentences below could all end with *-tai* or *-taidesu* with a politeness suffix, but they would sound too direct, lacking the formality appropriate in the context.

- (19) Kono mokuhyoo-tassei ni mukete, watakusizisin-ga zintoosiki-o tori,  
 this goal achievement to aim myself-nom lead-acc take,  
 zititai-no sessyu, aruiwa syokuikisessyu, saraniwa zieitai-no  
 municipality-gen vaccination, or workplace-vaccination, further SDF-gen  
 daikibo sessyu, koosita subete-no syudan-o hurukadoo-sasete-iki-tai  
 large-scale vaccination, such all-gen means-acc full-operation cause-go-desiderative  
 to omotte-i-masu. [Kishida 02/09/22]  
 Comp thinking-polite  
 ‘(Lit.) To achieve this goal, I think I want to take the lead in fully  
 mobilizing all the means including the municipal, workplace vaccination  
 programs, and also the SDF’s large-scale vaccination program.’
- (20) Sarani sessyu-peesu-o sokoagesi, itiniti hyakuman-kai made kasokuka-o  
 further vaccination pace-acc upgrade, one day 1 million doses to acceleration-acc  
 zitugensi-tai to kangaete-ori-masu. [Kishida 02/09/2022]  
 realize-desiderative Comp thinking-polite  
 ‘(Lit.) I think I want to accelerate the vaccination schedule and achieve  
 the rate of one million doses per day.’

The ‘hedge’ use of *omo(u)* or *kangae(ru)* is also observed after the modal expression of obligation, *naranai*.

- (21) Asu-no siharai ni mo taihenna gokuroo-o siteorareru minasan ni, itiniti  
 tomorrow-gen payment in even much trouble-acc doing-polite all for, one-day  
 mo hayaku, tukaimiti-ga mattaku ziyuuna genkin-o otodoke si-  
 even soon, purpose-nom entirely free cash-acc honorific-deliver  
 nakerebanaranai to kangaete-i-masu. [Abe 05/04/2020]  
 do-must comp thinking-polite

‘(Lit.) To those struggling to make payments due tomorrow, I think we must deliver cash as soon as possible that is entirely unrestricted in the purpose of its use.’

#### 4.2.3 Koto ni/to naru

Future projections are sometimes expressed in the *koto ni/to naru* construction. *Naru* is an intransitive verb meaning ‘become’, ‘turn out.’ As the argument of *naru*, the *koto*-headed clause describes a situation to be brought about. With this construction, the prime ministers do not directly state that they are going to take a certain action, but the action is described as part of how the situation turns out in the future. Hence, the engagement of the speaker with the described action is made less obvious in this construction. In the example below, the *koto to/ni naru* construction is followed also by a verb for thinking, *omo(u)*.

- (22) Senmonka ya, aruiwa zititai-no minasan-no iken mo humaenagara  
 expert and/or local government everyone-gen opinion too taking-into-account  
 handansite-iku toiu koto ni naru noda to omoi-masu. [Kishida 02/09/2022]  
 judge-go Comp *koto ni* become PRT<sub>assertive</sub> Comp think-polite  
 ‘(Lit.) I think it may be the case that we will be making a decision by  
 taking into account the opinions of experts and local governments.’

In the examples below, the prospect of making a request is stated in the *koto to naru* construction.

- (23) Koremade syuudankansen-ga kakunins-are-ta basyo-e de kakeru koto-wa,  
 to date group infection-nom confirm-passive-past place-to go *koto*-top,  
 hikitzuki zisyuku-o onegai-suru koto to naru to kangae-masu. [Abe 05/04/2020]  
 continued self-control-acc request-do *koto to* become comp think-polite  
 ‘(Lit.) I think it will happen that we will continue to ask you to  
 refrain from heading to places where group infections have been  
 confirmed to date.’

- (24) Hikituzuki, kokumin-no minasama ni-wa, manenboositoozyuutensoti ni  
 continue, Japanese people-gen everyone to-top, pre-emergency measure to  
 go-kyooryoku-o itadaku koto to nari-masu ga, ... [Kishida 02/09/2022]  
 honorific-cooperation-acc receive (the favor of)<sub>condescending</sub> *koto* to become-polite PRT<sub>concessive</sub>  
 ‘(Lit.) Although it will happen that the entire nation will be asked to  
 continue to cooperate in the pre-emergency measures, ...’

The prime ministers typically presented their future projections and promises in sentences with complex structures, sometimes with pleonastic expressions as discussed above. These strategies help to make the utterances sound formal, but they also seem to make the messages sound vaguer and more distant from the addressees.

### 4.3 Gratitude and Empathy

The prime ministers’ speeches often started by expressing gratitude to essential workers and sympathy for patients and the families of the deceased. The expressions used here are again very formal and polite, made up of a word meaning ‘gratitude’ or ‘sympathy’ and the condescending form of the verb of “to say” followed by an auxiliary verb to add a sense of humbleness, *moosi-age(ru)*.

- (25) Zenkoku kakuti-no isi, kangosi, kangozyosyu, byooinstaffu-no mina  
 all-nation each region-gen doctor, nurse, nurse assistant, hospital staff-gen all,  
 san, sosite kurasutaa taisaku ni tazusawaru hokenzyo ya senmonka,  
 and cluster busting for engage health center and expert,  
 rinsyookensagisi-no mina san ni nihonkokumin-o daihyoosite,  
 clinical laboratory technologist-gen all to Japanese people-acc on-behalf-of,  
 kokoroyori kansya-moosi-age-masu. [Abe 04/07/2020]  
 sincere thank-say<sub>condescending-humble-polite</sub>  
 ‘On behalf of the Japanese people, I express my sincere gratitude to  
 medical doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, hospital staff, public health  
 centers and experts busting clusters and clinical laboratory  
 technologists all over the country.’



- (26) Singata korona uirusu niyori nakuna-rare-ta katagata, sosite go-kazoku-novel corona virus by die-honorific-past everyone, and honorific-family-gen no minasamagata ni kokoro yori okuyami-o moosiageru totomoni, everyone to deepest condolences-acc say<sub>condescending</sub> in-addition-to, kibisii toobyooseikatu-o okutteor-are-ru katagata ni kokoroyori severe fighting-disease-life-acc spend-honorific-present people to deepest omimai-o moosi-age-masu. [Kishida 10/08/2021] sympathy-acc say<sub>condescending-humble-polite</sub>
- ‘I express my deepest condolences to those who have died of COVID-19 and their families, and also express my sympathy for patients who have been bitterly fighting the disease.’

When the prime ministers express their wish to convey their gratitude, condolences, etc., the expression *moosi-age(ru)* ‘say<sub>condescending-humble</sub>’ can be followed by the desiderative morpheme, *-tai*. In such cases, similar to the other contexts discussed above, the sentences sound most natural if *-tai* is followed by a verb of thinking, *omoi(u)*. Without *omoi-masu*, the following sentence could only be uttered by someone with magisterial authority.

- (27) Kinkyuuzitai-no naka ni attemo, watakusitai-no seikatu-o mamoru State-of-emergency-gen middle in being, we-gen life-acc protect tameni zigyoo-o, eigyoo-o keizokusite-kudasatteiru minasama ni for business-acc, operation-acc continue-giving (the favor of) everyone to kokoroyori kansya-moosi-age-tai to omoi-masu. [Abe 04/17/2020] sincere thank-say<sub>condescending-humble-desiderative</sub> Comp think-polite
- ‘I extend my sincere gratitude to all those who have continued operating their businesses to protect our daily lives even during this state of emergency.’

As in the general practice in Japanese formal language use, in the prime ministers’ speeches gratitude and sympathy were expressed in very formal, polite language, using verbs with condescending and humble meanings.

#### 4.4 Rally

The Japanese prime ministers seemed rather restrained in making statements

to encourage people to be part of the fight against COVID-19. Only a few sentences are found in the sample Japanese speeches. This is again a marked contrast to the speeches in the other languages. As observed in Section 3.5, the U.K.'s then-prime minister Boris Johnson, for instance, often used the pronoun 'we' to refer to the public and the leadership collectively.

- (28) Tomoni kono kinyuuzitai-o norikoete mairi-masyoo. [Abe 04/17/2021]  
 together this state-of-emergency-acc overcome come<sub>condescending</sub>-hortative-polite  
 'Together let us overcome the state of emergency.'
- (29) Watasitati-wa kono osorosii teki to hukutuno kakugo de tatakai-  
 we-top this dreadful enemy against unyielding determination with fight-  
 tuzukenuka-nakereba naranai nodesu. [Abe 03/28/2021]  
 continue-must-PRT<sub>assertive</sub>-polite  
 'With fortitude, we must keep fighting through against this dreadful enemy.'
- (30) …itumo-no sigoto, mainiti-no kurasi, kinyuuzitai-no sono saki ni aru  
 …usual-gen work, everyday-gen life, state-of-emergency-gen end at be  
 deguti ni mukatte, minasan to tomoni ippoippo zensin-site iki-tai to  
 exit to toward, you with together step-by-step move-forward go-desiderative com  
 kangaetei-masu. [Abe 05/04/2020]  
 thinking-polite  
 '(Lit.) …I think I want to move forward with you step by step towards  
 our everyday jobs, everyday life, as well as the exit beyond the state of  
 emergency.'
- (31) Kokumin-no minasan, imaitido, go-kyooryoku itadaki,  
 people-of-the-nation-gen all, once again, honorific-cooperation receive<sub>condescending</sub>,  
 tomoni kono kokunan-o norikoeteikou dewa arimasen-ka. [Kishida 01/17/2022]  
 together this national crisis-acc overcome be-not-Q  
 'People of the nation, I ask your cooperation once again and why  
 don't we get through this national crisis together.'

#### 4.5 Concluding remarks on Japanese COVID-19 speeches

The prime ministers delivered their speeches in a formal register of Japanese, but they do not sound excessively polite, using a level of politeness

normally expected for a politician's speech. The use of polite and respectful language may not be motivated by the status difference between the addresser and the addressee, but by the accepted social norm of behaving in a certain way in a specific context.

It has been claimed that in Japanese societies, as in many East Asian societies, politeness is a matter of socially agreed upon norm. Ide (1989) claims that linguistic politeness in Japanese society is largely governed by *wakimae* 'discernment' because the Japanese language is an honorific language, which is used to acknowledge the status difference between the speaker and the hearer and/or referent. The notion of *wakimae* 'discernment' presupposes the polite behavior is regulated by external factors such as the formality of social setting or the social distance between interlocutors. However, in the formal setting of the prime ministers' press conference the usage of polite forms of the language is expected as the socially standard norm rather than as the result of measuring the variables such as the social distance between the speaker and hearer, power of the speaker, or degree of the imposition of the message.

The speeches are also imbued with a sense of indirectness and slight vagueness due to the use of abstract expressions. On specific language features, the use of the verb of thinking, *omo(u)* and *kangae(ru)* preceded by a desiderative clause or modal clause as the complement was observed in the context of making requests, stating future actions, and elsewhere. In these contexts, these verbs seem to have a modal-like function, mitigating the directness conveyed by the embedded expression. The nominalizer *koto* also contributes to make a statement of future actions indirect. When the intransitive verb *naru* 'become' follows *koto to*, the sentence will have a meaning like 'it will happen that~,' in which the main clause has no agent.

The indirectness effect observed in the speeches may be at least partially due to the social distance between the addresser and addressee. The assumed social distance may contradict collective references to the leadership and the public. This could explain the relatively small number of rally-type statements in the Japanese speeches.

## 5. COVID-19 speeches in Chinese

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in China during January 2020, public release of the president's speeches or official remarks on the subject has been limited. Speeches published in the *Qiushi Journal* – the ruling Communist Party's top theoretical publication – showed that the president's speeches were mainly addressed to government officials. Plans to contain the virus were outlined in detail and measures imposed on the citizens were described as facts of an outcome rather than a demand or request for cooperation moving forward. In contrast, Taiwan has been proactive in keeping the public informed of its initiatives in addressing the COVID-19 situation. The president's speeches are aligned with those in other countries, which are usually timely in addressing the outbreaks, directing and requesting efforts and cooperation not only from government officials, but also from citizens.

The two Chinese speeches we analyzed were President Xi Jing Ping's public address on the first COVID-19 lockdown in China when he visited Hubei in March 2020 and President Tsai's speech on the coronavirus outbreak in Taiwan in January 2020. Similar to the speeches in English and Japanese, requests and commands are two important speech acts that are employed to communicate the main messages of the president's speeches in Chinese. Other communicative strategies including the expression of gratitude and empathy to the frontline staff and those infected, the reassurance of future prospects and action plans, as well as rallying for unity, are also observed in the Chinese speeches.

### 5.1 Requests and commands

Engaging the audience using the speech act of request and command is a common strategy in presidents' speeches during the COVID-19 period. In Tsai's speech, requests and commands with different levels of directness are deployed to demand efforts from government officials as well as general citizens to contain the coronavirus. For example, the word *zhǐshì* 'instruct' is used to explicitly enact a direct command to the government officials to carry out the plans. Moreover, the speech act of request, both direct and indirect, is also observed in Tsai's speech. Requests are generally explicit and direct, and are realized in the form of lexical items such as *yāoqiú* 'request' and *qǐng* 'ask /

request’.

Direct command

Wǒ yě zhǐshì xiāngguān bùmén cǎiqǔ yíxià yīnyìng cuòshī

I also instruct relevant departments take following countermeasures

‘I also instruct relevant departments to take the following countermeasures’

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

Direct request

Wǒ yāoqiú fángyì zhǐhuī zhōngxīn dìng dìng fángyì xíngwéi zhǐyǐn

I request epidemic prevention command center formulate epidemic prevention behavior guidelines

‘I request the epidemic prevention command center to formulate guidelines for epidemic prevention behavior’

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

Qǐng jīngjì bù tíxíng bìng xiézhù chányè

Request Ministry of Economy remind and assist the industry

‘I ask the Ministry of Economy to remind and assist the industry’

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

Qǐng guóréngùyào kǒnghuāng qiǎnggòu kǒuzhào

Request citizens do not grab buy mask

‘I ask you the citizens, please do not snap up masks’

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

In addition to direct requests using *yāoqiú* ‘request’ and *qǐng* ‘ask / request’, sometimes requests are realized indirectly. For example, the use of the modal expression *xīwàng* ‘hope’ showing inclination and desire functions as an indirect request for the local government to cooperate with the central epidemic prevention work.

Indirect request

*Wǒ 'xīwàng dìfāng zhèngfǔ, nénggòu jījī pèihé zhōngyāng fángyì gōngzuò*

I hope local government able actively cooperate central epidemic prevention work

'I hope that the local government can actively cooperate with the central epidemic prevention work'

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

In contrast, no linguistic construction of request is observed in Xi's speech. As the top leader in China, Xi's speech is highly authoritative with frequent choice of words that construe commands. The elliptical Subject together with the use of imperative mood signifies a command or order rather than a promise or request. Using a combination of rhetorical relations of sequencing through cohesive conjunctions such as *dì yī* 'First', *xià yībù* 'Next step', Xi imposes the future action plan on the government officials in a sequential order emphasizing the 'obligation' and 'commitment' of the government using the modal adverb *yào* 'have to / must / should'.

*dì yī, bǎ yīliáo jiùzhì gōngzuò bǎi zài dì yī wèi.*

First, BA medical treatment work put on the first position.

'First, put medical treatment work on first priority'

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

*xià yībù, yào qiǎng zhuā yuán è yīhù lìliàng,*

Next step, have to MOD-obligation seize the aid to Hubei power

'Next, have to seize the important window period'

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

*guójiā wèi jiàn wěi yào zhǐdǎo*

The National Health Commission must MOD-obligation guide

*dìfāng jīnyībù luòshí "sì jízhōng" cuòshī,*

local governments further a step secure "four concentration" measures

'The National Health Commission must guide local governments to further implement the "four concentration" measures',

It is observed that the most frequent type of modality identified is directives under the deontic type (cf. Palmer, 2001; 71). In particular, the modal adverb *yào* ‘must’, which is a spoken form of *bìxū* ‘must or absolute necessity’ has been repeatedly used throughout the speech. Moreover, the use of directives in deontic modality emphasizes the commitment and obligation of the government and the party in laying out future action plans to address different aspects of the COVID-19 situation.

Instead of using the first-person plural pronoun *wǒmen* ‘we’ as the Subject of the action plans as seen in Tsai’s speech, the Subject of the action plans in Xi’s speech is elliptical, or if made explicit, is each government department who is being ordered to take action. The use of modal *yào* ‘must or should’ functions as an indirect command to government officials, ordering them to carry out specific tasks. Sometimes the command is directed to specific parties e.g., ‘The National Health Commission must guide local governments to further implement the “four concentration” measures.’

## 5.2 Gratitude and empathy

Both Chinese speeches started by expressing praise, empathy and gratitude toward the general citizens. In Xi’s speech, the praise and gratitude was directed toward the Wuhan citizens who have suffered the lockdown that was imposed on them during the outbreak. In expressing praise and empathy, the use of explicit expressions such as *chéngzhì de wèiwèn* ‘sincere condolences’ was observed.

*wǒ shì lái kànwàng wèiwèn húběi rénmin hé wūhàn rénmin de!*

I be come visit console Hubei people and Wuhan people DE SFP

‘I have come to visit and console the people of Hubei and Wuhan!’

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

*xiàng zhèngzài tóng bìngmó zuò dòuzhēng de huànzhě jí qí jiāshǔ, yīn gōng xùnzí rényuán jiāshǔ, bìng wángzhě jiāshǔ, biǎoshì chéngzhì de wèiwèn!*

to currently with illness fight of patients and their families, because of work sacrificed workers their families, people died of illness families,

express sincere condolences

'I would like to express my sincere condolences to the patients and their families who are struggling with the disease, the families of those who have died on duty, and the families of the deceased!'

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

In praising the Wuhan people for their contribution to the containment of the coronavirus, a combination of idioms and phrases such as bù wèi jiānxiǎn 'not afraid of hardship and danger' and wánqiáng bùqū 'tenacious and unyielding' that carry positive evaluation and appraisal was employed.

*wǔhàn rénmín bùkuì wèi yīngxióng de rénmín*

Wuhan people worth being heroic people

'and the people of Wuhan are worthy of being a heroic people'

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

*wǔhàn rénmín shí dàtǐ, gù dàjù, bù wèi jiānxiǎn, wánqiáng bùqū*

Wuhan people understand act gracious, protect overall situation, not afraid hardship, persisting strong unyielding

'The people of Wuhan are aware of and take into account the overall situation, are not afraid of hardships and dangers, and are tenacious and unyielding'

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

The expression of appreciation also extends to the citizens and frontline staff and is a common strategy to obtain goodwill in both Chinese speeches. In constructing gratitude, the Subject is usually made explicit and collocates with verbs of gratitude.

*dǎng hé rénmín gǎnxiè wǔhàn rénmín*

The party and people thank Wuhan people

'The party and people thank the people of Wuhan'

(Xi, 3/10/2020)



*biǎoshì chónghāo de jìngyì*

express highest respect

'I would like to express my highest respect'

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

In Taiwan, where the situation was less severe at the beginning of the outbreak and no lockdown was imposed, expressions of empathy and gratitude were mainly directed toward the frontline medical staff. Gratitude is mainly realized in explicit expressions of empathy *gèwèi xīnkǔle* 'everyone has undergone tremendous hardship (Thanks for your hard work) and gratitude *xièxiè* 'thank you'.

*wǒ yào xiàng zài fǎngyì dì yī xiàn de tóngren,*

I must to at the front line DE everyone,

*shuō yī shēng 'gèwèi xīnkǔ le'*

say a word "everyone hardship LE"

I want to say to my colleagues on the front line of epidemic prevention, "Everyone has undergone tremendous hardship" (Thanks for your hard work)

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

*zhè shì dàjiā tōnglì hézuò de chéngguǒ, wǒ yào dàibiǎo suǒyǒu de guóren tóngbāo xiàng gèwèi shuō yī shēng xièxiè.*

This BE everyone cooperation DE result, I must MOD-oligation represent all of the citizens and compatriots to everyone say a word 'thank you'.

'This is the result of our concerted efforts. On behalf of all our compatriots, I would like to say thank you to all of you.'

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

### 5.3 Future actions and prospects

To construct future actions and plans, the modal verb 'will' in English is frequently used. Not only does it indicate action in the future, but it also indicates inclination of the speaker, sometimes in the form of a promise,

towards the proposition. It is interesting to note that while both Chinese speeches talked about a detailed implementation plan that itemized the actions to be taken in the future, explicit promises using the modal verb *huì* ‘will’ were only found in Tsai’s speech. Promises such as ‘We will continue to strictly monitor (the situation)’ and ‘We will definitely give priority to epidemic prevention’ are made explicit with the modal *huì* ‘will’ that collocate with *wǒmen* ‘we’, the first plural pronoun that represents the government. Furthermore, inclination to help is also expressed in the word *yuànyì* ‘willing’.

*wǒmen huì chǐxù yángé jiānkòng*

We HUI MOD-inclination continue strict monitoring

‘We will continue with strict monitoring.’

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

*wǒmen yě huì jiāqiáng fángyì wùzī de kòngguǎn.*

We also HUI mod.inclination strengthen epidemic prevention materials control.

‘We will also strengthen the control of “materials” for epidemic prevention.’

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

*wǒmen juéduì huì yǐ fángyì yōuxiān*

We definitely HUI mod.inclination treat epidemic prevention priority.

‘We will definitely give priority to epidemic prevention.’

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

*wǒmen yě yuànyì tíngōng bìyào de xiézhù*

We also willing provide necessary assistance.

‘We are also willing to provide necessary assistance.’

(Tsai, 1/20/2020)

However, in Xi’s speech, the fact that the modal verb *yào* ‘have to / must / should’ is selected over *huì* ‘will’ to direct effort to contain the coronavirus presents a very different communicative strategy, one that displays authority by ‘ordering’ that actions be implemented as opposed to a strategy that shows a strong inclination to make things happen in the future.

#### 5.4 Rally

Rallying is a common feature in political speeches to engage the audience through an emotional and national identity appeal (Lambert et al., 2010). In Xi's speech, rally effects are observed toward the end of his speech. In contrast to Tsai's speech, where expressions of inclination are used for promises, inclination in Xi's speech is used as a rally with the attempt to unify the spirits of the audience. It is realized lexically in *jiānxìn* 'firmly believe' together with the modality of ability *nénggòu* 'can/able to' to express their belief in the future success of the Wuhan people, which is enabled by the government and the support by the party, uniting people from every part of society.

*wǒ jiānxìn, yǒu dǎng zhōngyāng jiānqiáng lǐngdǎo, [...], yīngxióng de wǔhàn rénmín yīdìng nénggòu chèdǐ zhànshèng yìqíng, yīdìng nénggòu yù huǒ chóngshēng, yīdìng nénggòu chuàngzào xīn shídài gèngjiā huīhuáng de yèjī!* (Xi, 3/10/2020)

I firmly believe, HAVE the Party Central Committee strong leadership  
[...] heroic DE Wuhan people definitely ABLE<sub>MOD.ability</sub> completely win  
epidemic, definitely ABLE<sub>mod. Ability</sub> shower ashes reborn, definitely  
ABLE create new era even glorious performance!

'I firmly believe that with the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee, [...] the heroic Wuhan people will definitely be able to overcome the epidemic thoroughly, to be reborn from the ashes, and to create new things and more glorious performance of the times!'

It is observed that other lexical items and expressions in exclamative mood are used to engage the audience through rallying. For example, common features of rallying in Chinese such as the use of the vocative *tongjimen* 'Comrades!' and set phrases such as *jiayou* 'fight' and *bixing* 'must win' as well as a rally for national identity are employed in Xi's speech.

*wǔhàn jiāyóu! Húběi jiāyóu! Zhōngguó jiāyóu!*  
wuhan fight! Hubei fight! China fight!  
'Wuhan, fight! Hubei, fight! China, fight!'

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

*wūhàn bì shèng! Húběi bì shèng! Quánguó bì shèng!*

Wuhan sure WILL MOD.possibility win! Hubei sure WILL MOD.possibility win!

The whole country sure WILL MOD.possibility win!

‘Wuhan must win! Hubei must win! The country must win! (National victory)’

(Xi, 3/10/2020)

### 5.5 Concluding remarks on Chinese COVID-19 speeches

On 23 January 2020, the central government of China imposed a lockdown in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei in an effort to quarantine the center of an outbreak of COVID-19. The action was commonly referred to as the Wuhan lockdown, which set the precedent for similar measures in other Chinese cities. President Xi delivered a public speech in Hubei Province about one and a half months after the Wuhan Lockdown to reassure the citizens of the government’s commitment to implementing plans for tackling the illness. In addition, the speech was a part of a political campaign to express gratitude to Wuhan citizens for their contributions in enduring the hardship of the lockdown imposed on them in January 2020. It was observed that language of praise, empathy and gratitude was used to acknowledge the Wuhan citizens. The major content of the speech was a discussion of the future plans that listed a sequence of measures and actions to be implemented by the government, which was mainly realized in the speech act of command with a high degree of modality of obligation *yào* ‘have to’. The command was directed towards the government officials and no request was given to the citizens. It could be explained by the fact that in China, the COVID-19 measures were imposed on the citizens as rules or laws rather than commands or requests for cooperation. In contrast, a greater variety of ‘request’ and ‘command’ is observed in Tsai’s speech, from direct command *zhǐshì* ‘instruct’ to direct request *yāoqiú* request and *qǐng* ‘ask / request’ to indirect request *xīwàng* ‘hope’ expressed mainly in lexical words.

## 6. Overall conclusions

Over the past two (approaching three) years, the coronavirus pandemic has been a constantly evolving situation. The public, bombarded by information on a daily basis, has needed to keep up to date with frequent changes in restrictions on their everyday lives. Public speeches by politicians became an important source of disseminating new information to the public. These speeches were not only sources of key updates on the changing circumstances, but also included requests and commands, and expressions of praise, gratitude and empathy, discussion of future prospects, and rallying their audiences.

We have examined speeches delivered by top government leaders in English, Japanese and Chinese, and revealed common strategies in the content and organization across the three languages. Our analysis also illuminated differences in how the leaders from each language community communicated interpersonal meanings in the form of speech act and modality used in each language.

In particular, it revealed marked differences in the ways the leaders made requests and gave commands to their audiences. In the English speeches, the leaders tended to use language with high modality to explain restrictions, and to express the obligation of the public to comply with these restrictions. The New Zealand and U.K. prime ministers tended to use more direct language than the Australian prime minister, reflecting the differences in their authority to exert control over their respective nations. Similar to the speeches by the New Zealand and U.K. leaders, China's leader used a high degree of modality in his speeches when stating restrictions and measures to address the situation. This contrasted with the speeches of Taiwan's leader and the Japanese leaders, who used a variety of speech forms including indirect requests. The speeches in Japanese had the lowest degree of grammatical mood, employing several different language features to mitigate the directness of requests and commands.

Another difference was observed among the leaders when it came to the "rallying" aspect of the speeches and expressing gratitude and empathy. The Japanese leaders seemed to adhere to cultural norms of social distance between speaker and audience in their speeches, thus reducing the directness of their speeches. This meant that "rallying" was relatively minimal in the

Japanese speeches, when compared with the speeches in English and Chinese. Like the U.K.'s prime minister, and the leaders of China and Taiwan, the Japanese speeches included gratitude to frontline workers, to the public for their cooperation, and also empathy to patients and families of victims of the virus. Again, however, the language features used by the Japanese prime ministers created a distance between the speaker and audience, in comparison to the more direct language used by the other leaders.

Through cross-linguistic analysis of language groups across multiple nations, this analysis illuminates not only the differences among the three languages English, Japanese and Chinese, but also the differences across English-speaking and Chinese-speaking nations. Each leader responded according to the circumstances of their public during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, using language features deemed to be sufficient for communicating not only their authority, but also their support, to their listeners. In doing so, their speeches formed an important element of national crisis management during the pandemic.

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