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# Characteristics of Directive Speech Acts in the Dissemination of COVID-19 Mitigation Information in Japan

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#### **Abstract**

The global conditions in the current COVID-19 pandemic have instigated the public to try and take preventive measures against the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Preventive measure in the form of information dissemination regarding the COVID-19 virus is manifested in various forms, wherein one of them is through the posting of announcements in strategic locations with the expectation that everyone has the opportunity to understand what should be done in order to prevent the spread of the virus. The current study aims to describe the characteristics of directive speech act used in the dissemination of COVID-19 mitigation information in Japan. Data were obtained from written announcements concerning COVID-19 mitigation in public areas such as train stations, bus stops, public playgrounds, shopping venues, schools, hotels, and offices. The data were taken from 30 different locations throughout Japan. Sociopragmatic study was used as a method in this research with data in the form of directive speech acts found in written announcements concerning COVID-19 mitigation. As many as 50 directive speech acts were found in various linguistic forms (teineitai form and keigo form), and they were also found to be dominated by direct directive speech.

Keywords: covid-19, directive speech act, keigo, mitigation

## **Abstrak**

Kondisi dunia yang sedang dalam masa pandemic covid-19, membuat masyarakat berusaha melakukan tindakan pencegahan terhadap penyebaran virus covid-19. Pencegahan berupa sosialisasi mengenai virus covid-19 diwujudkan dalam banyak hal, salah satunya melalui pemasangan pengumuman-pengumuman yang dipasang di lokasi startegis dengan harapan setiap orang memiliki kesempatan untuk mengetahui apa yang harus dilakukan dalam rangka pencegahan penyebaran virus covid-19. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeksripsikan karakteristik tindak tutur direktif yang digunakan dalam sosialisasi mitigasi covid-19 di Jepang. Sumber data diambil dari pengumuman tertulis tentang mitigasi covid-19 di area public seperti stasiun, halte bis, taman bermain, tempat belanja, sekolah, hotel, dan perkantoran. Sumber data tersebut diambil dari 30 lokasi yang berbeda di Jepang. Kajian sosiopragmatik digunakan sebagai metode penelitian ini dengan data berupa tindak tutur direktif yang terdapat dalam pengumuman tertulis mitigasi covid-19. Ditemukan data tindak tutur direktif

sejumlah 50 tuturan dalam berbagai ragam Bahasa (ragam teineitai dan ragam keigo) dan didominasi dengan tuturan direktif langsung.

Kata Kunci: covid-19, tindak tutur direktif, keigo, mitigasi

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a grave issue throughout all countries including Japan, causing various mitigation efforts, in various aspects of health, economy, and socio-culture. Numerous measures are taken to mitigate the pandemic, wherein one of them is the use of announcement sheet as a media issued by the government or local authorities and posted in public spaces. The number of COVID-19 cases in Japan does not seem to be decreasing, even the 2020 Olympics in Japan has been delayed and rescheduled. Public activities in various sectors have sustained extraordinary impacts.

Several mitigation efforts have been carried out by all tiers of society and governments. One of the efforts is by disseminating information pertaining to COVID-19 virus with the expectation that the spread of the virus can be contained. Dissemination efforts through social media via the internet, television, radio, and fliers or pamphlets posted in strategic locations are conducted on quite a massive scale.

The current research discusses how local authorities and the public in Japan mitigate the spread of COVID-19 by using pamphlets as media. These pamphlets are distributed in locations that are considered strategic so that they can be noticed and read by the public. This research was conducted under the auspices of sociopragmatic study and it focuses on Japanese directive speech acts found in pamphlets with the theme of COVID-19 transmission mitigation as its object of study.

Based on the above explanation, we raise the issue of how features of directive speech are applied by Japanese people on written media in the form of announcements or pamphlets to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The features of directive speech include examining its grammatical and pragmatic features, as well as the politeness strategy utilized in the speeches.

1.1. Literature Reviews

There has not been any study on directive speech acts performed in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Japan. However, there are numerous studies concerning Japanese directive speech acts that have been carried out before. Aryanto (2011) examined the mitigation of face-threat in Japanese directive speech act. The study focuses on politeness strategy to lessen speech participant's sense of face-threat to Japanese directive speech acts. IFIDs (Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices) were used in determining the directive speech acts so that both direct and indirect directive speech acts could be acquired.

Dunkley (1994: 125) conducted a study comparing directive speeches in English and Japanese by creating the following table of comparison:

Table 1. Comparison between Japanese and English directive speeches

Directive	English	Japanese	Category
Imperative	Shut the door	Doa o shimero	direct
		Doa o shimete kudasai	
		Doa o shimenasai	
Desire	I want you to shut the	Doa o shimete hoshii	
	door	Doa o shimete itadakitai	
Obligation	You have to shut the door		
Future	Will you shut the door?	Doa wo shimeru	Convention
Ability	Can/could you shut the		ally indirect
question	door?		
Future/	Will you shut the door?		
willingness			
Possibility		Doa o shimete moraemasenka	
		Doa o shimete	
		kudasaimasenka	
Why not?	Why don't you shut the		
	door?		
	How about shutting the		
	door?		
Embedded	May I ask you to shut	Doa o shimeru youni	
	the door?	Onegai shimasu	
Statement	The door's open	Doa ga aite imasu	Non-
	Its' cold in here	Samui ne	conventional
			indirect

Dunkley (1994:127) adds that donative verbs (verbs of giving and receiving) function as one of the features of Japanese directive speech act. Donative verbs serve as a manner of respect and modesty. For instance:

- (1) "Kono tegami wo yonde moraemasenka."
- (2) "Kono tegami wo yonde itadakemasenka."

English literal translation: 'Can't I receive the reading of this letter?'

In speech (1) there is the donative verb "moraemasenka", while in speech (2) there is the honorifics verb of "moraemasenka", namely "itadakemasenka".

The use of speech in the form of metonym can also be categorized as directive speech acts. The use of metonym is a request speech act employed by Japanese as one of their politeness strategies (Hirotoshi 2009:229). The use of *unagi bun* (lit: eel sentence, a sentence often used by Japanese during the summer when ordering eel at a restaurant) can be considered as a politeness strategy since the request speech is expressed indirectly and non-literally (Hirotoshi 2009:281). The following sentence illustrates an interlocutor at a restaurant intending to order eel.

```
(3) "Boku ha unagi da"
I (male) eel
Lit. I am an eel.
'I want the eel / I will have the eel'
```

The (3) speech is a form of representative speech act, but its illocutionary point is the speaker's request to the waiter to prepare an eel dish. The *unagi bun* phenomenon has a significantly close correlation with the culture of Japanese society. In their communication, Japanese are extremely cautious as not to directly reveal their individual or group desire. Verbal politeness is achieved by making use of existing contexts to express their request so that the speech is conveyed in an indirect manner (Hirotoshi 2009:226). Consequently, the illocutionary point of a speech may be different from the its actual speech form, and this may occur in the communication process.

Dunkley (1994:122) argues that a speech is considered as a directive speech act when it contains an illocutionary point compelling the speech partner to carry out what the speaker wishes. There are four conditions that a speech must satisfy to be categorized as a directive speech act. These conditions are called felicity conditions (Searle 1979:44). The felicity conditions for directive speech acts are: (1) preparatory conditions, the speech partner is able to do the activity; (2) sincerity, the speaker wants the speech partner to do the activity; (3) propositional content, the speaker tells the speech partner to do something; (4) essential conditions, the utterance is considered as an attempt by the speaker to get the speech partner to do something; (5) mode of achievement, based on the illocutionary point of a directive speech, the speech partner may act upon the request of the speaker or otherwise.

The current research does not only seek forms of directive speech acts, but also forms of politeness as a strategy of the speaker (writer) to mitigate face-threat of the speech content upon the speech participants. Directive speech acts may be referred to as efforts in expressing the speaker's stance or position concerning action that will be performed upon the speech partner. However, Brown and Levinson (1996) state that every speech act has the potential to become a face-threat to speech participants, hence effort is required to lessen the impact of face-threat, which is realized as politeness strategy.

#### 1.2. Methods

This research is based on the acquired data which were collected using the field method, meaning data were obtained from direct observation results made by the researchers, so the researcher did not apply any interventions to make the data available (Clark-Bangerter. 2004: 25). The conditions of the locations for data collection, which was done when the COVID-19 pandemic became a massively discussed topic throughout Japan, had restricted the researchers' mobility to look for data in more extensive areas.

The descriptive qualitative method was employed in the current research. Data were collected from written announcements or pamphlets pertaining to mitigation of COVID-19 transmission in 27 public areas throughout Japan, such as train stations, bus stops, schools, offices, shopping venues, and public transport. From these areas, data containing 36 directive speech acts were acquired then categorized based on the manifestation of the directive speech act and its mitigation content. IFIDs (illocutionary force indicating devices) were used to ensure the validity of these directive speech acts and to determine their illocutionary point. Once the illocutionary points were found, we began the analyses by searching for pragmalinguistic features indicating its directive speech act. Subsequently, analyses on the speech level and speech delivery strategy were also conducted to examine the mitigation of face-threat made by the speaker. Data triangulation was done by involving native Japanese speakers to verify the data. Such measure was taken to minimize errors in data selection and categorization so that accurate data can be gathered.

## 2. Discussion

Three categories of directive speech acts were found, namely direct, begging, and invite. These categories were classified based on the illocutionary point of the speeches. The

form of request is essentially a form of modified imperative. Directive speech acts with the illocutionary point of request are usually indicated with the grammatical feature '~kudasai' that functions to mitigate face-threat to the speech partner. In the context of the mitigation of COVID-19 transmission, it can be categorized as a 'strong request' leaving the speech partner with no other option aside from carrying out what is requested by the speaker. Furthermore, there is also the use of donative verbs (morau, kureru, itadaku, kudasaru) in Japanese or the expression "onegai shimasu" (lit. Please) as an indicator. Invite speech acts refer to speech acts used by the speaker to invite the speech partner to do something or to invite the speech partner to be involved in a joint activity.

### Direct

In the study, as many as 14 data relating to directive speech acts with direct illocutionary point were gathered. Some of the data samples are as follows:

Data 1 is in the form of a command to wash one's hand, which is found written in a shopping venue (camera store).



Figure 1. Data 1 in a shopping venue.

ご来店いただき誠に ご来店いただき誠に ありがとうございます。アルコールの洗浄液で、手指の洗浄にお使いください。

"goraiten itadaki makoto ni arigatou gozaimasu. Arukooru no senjoueki de, **teyubi no senjouni otsukai kudasai.**"

'Thank you very much for visiting (our) store. Please use the alcohol cleaning solution to clean (your) fingers/hands'

Table 2. Determining illocutionary points using IFIDs in data 1

preparatory	The store manager assumes that visiting consumers are able to do the
condition	activity in accordance with the store manager's desire, which is to
	clean their hands with the alcohol cleaning solution provided by the
	store manager
sincerity	The store manager wants the activity to be done by the consumers in
	the future.
propositional	The store manager requests the consumers to clean their hands
content	
essential condition	This is considered as an attempt by the store manager to get the
	consumers to do something
mode of	There is no option for the consumers for not doing what the store
achievement	manager wants.
Illocutionary Point	Directive: the store manager requests the consumers to clean their
	hands.
Type of illocution	Request

The directive speech act in data 1, apparently, uses the pragmatic feature of "kudasai" (please) preceded by the preposition "o"+verb wherein the "masu" form has been omitted, leaving it with "tsukai" (to use). The structure of "o + tsukai + kudasai" is a form of keigo that is specified as sonkeigo.

Before the request speech act in the example above, we can find a pre-request using the keigo speech level that begins with an expression of gratitude to customers who have visited the store, namely "goraiten itadaki makoto ni arigatou gozaimasu" 'thank you very much for visiting (our) store.' The use of the preposition "o" in "raiten" followed by the donative verb "itadaki" and the use of the expression "makoto ni" (lit. very much) then followed by the expression of gratitude "arigatou gozaimasu" (lit. thank you). Such expression of gratitude can be considered as one of the attempts made by the speaker (the store manager) to mitigate face-threat upon the speech partner (consumers).

The illocutionary point of data 1 is that the store manager, by using the pamphlet posted at the entrance, requests that all customers clean their hands with the alcohol cleaning solution provided by the store manager. This is carried out as one of the health protocols to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The use of the keigo honorific speech level, specifically the sonkeigo type, indicates that there is a formal distance between the store manager and the customers, as well as the top-down hierarchical relationship, wherein the

store manager places the customers position in a higher tier. This is understandable as customers in the Japanese business community are treated as "kings".

## **Begging**

Data 2 is in the form of an announcement at a restaurant located in a theater.

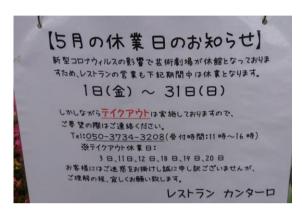


Figure 2. Data 2 an announcement at a restaurant

新型コロナウィルスの影響で芸術劇場が休館となっておりますため、レストランの 営業も下記期間中は休業となります。

"Shin-gata korona birusu no eikyou de, geijutsu gekijo ga kyuukan to natte orimasu tame, resutoran no eigyou jikan mo kakikikanchuu ha kyuugyou to narimasu."

'Due to the effect of the new coronavirus, the art theater is closed, consequently, the restaurant will also be closed during the period listed below.'

.

. . ※テイクアウト休業日: 3日、11日、12日、18日、19日、20日

お客様にはご迷惑をお掛けし誠に申し訳ございませんが、**ご理解の程、宜しくお願** 

レストランカンターロ

い致します。

"Teiku auto kyuugyouhi: mikka, juuichinichi, juuni nichi, juuhachi nichi, juuku nichi, hatsuka" "okyakusama niha gomeiwaku wo okakeshi makotoni mooshi gozaimasenga, gorikai no hodo, yoroshiku onegai itashimasu"

"resutoran Kantaaro"

'Take-out closed on: the 3rd, 11th, 12th, 18th, 19th, and 20th.'

'We sincerely apologize for the inconvenience caused to our customers, and thank you for your understanding.'

Table 2. Determining Illocutionary points using IFIDs in data 2

preparatory	The manager considers the customers able to carry out the activity in	
condition	accordance with the manager's desire, which is getting the customers	
	to understand the restaurant's inoperable condition but that it still	
	caters to take-out orders.	
sincerity	The manager wants the activity to be done by the customers in the	
	future.	
propositional	The manager begs the customers to pay attention to the restaurant's	
content	amended time of business operation.	
essential	This is considered as an attempt made by the manager to get the	
condition	customers to do the activity in the future.	
mode of	There is an option/opportunity for the customers to either do what	
achievement	the manager wants or otherwise.	
Illocutionary	Directive: the manager begs the customers to be understanding of the	
Point	changes in schedule and services provided by the restaurant	
Type of illocution	Begging	

The illocutionary point of data 2 is that the restaurant manager begs the customers for their understanding concerning the change of the restaurant's schedule of operation and services. This is in order to avoid the spread of the COVID-19 virus as elaborated by the restaurant manager at the start of the announcement.

The directive speech act in data 2 is apparently indicated by the expression yoroshiku onegai itashimasu (thank you for (looking forward to) your cooperation). This expression is commonly used by Japanese when the speaker pleas for assistance or cooperation from the speech partner to do what is expected by the speaker. Upon observation of the speech level, the utterance is categorized as a keigo honorific variant of the kenjougo type, i.e. a polite form that positions the speaker as being lower than the speech partner. The expression yoroshiku onegai itashimasu makes the directive speech act of data 2 have a direct characteristic. Nonetheless, to mitigate face-threat upon the speech partner (the customers), the manager employed several strategies of face-saving act. The first strategy is by using the kenjougo (humble form) speech level, which results in an asymmetrical stance between the speaker and the speech partner. The speaker positions him/herself below that of the speech partner. The second strategy is by using utterances that can be considered as pre-begging in the form of apology using the super polite variant of "gomeiwaku wo okakeshi makotoni moushi wake arimasen".

#### Invite

Unlike the previous two directive categories, in the invite speech act it is not only the speech partner that does what the speaker expects them to do in the future, but even the speaker engages in doing the same thing as what he/she says. One of the examples is provided below

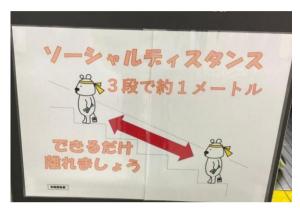


Figure 3. Data 3 an announcement at the JR station

#### Data 3

ソーシャルディスタンス 3段で約1メートルできるだけ **離れましょう** *Soosharu disutansu san dan de yaku ichi meetoru dekiru dake hanaremashou*'Let's keep (our) social distance 3 steps about 1 meter away as much as (we) can'

The announcement is posted at a railway station owned by Japan Railways (JR) Group in the Tokyo area. During certain periods, railway stations in the Tokyo area are constantly filled by numerous passengers, bearing in mind that trains are a very popular mode of public transport in Japan. The station manager's concern of COVID-19 transmission is indicated with the attempt to carry out mitigation, particularly in terms of having railway passengers practice social distancing measures.

Table 3. Determining illocutionary points using IFIDs of data 3

preparatory condition	The railway station manager assumes that the passengers are
	able to carry out the activity in accordance with the manager's
	desire, which is the ability to practice social distancing measures.
sincerity	The railway station manager wants the activity to be done by the
	passengers in the future.
propositional content	The railway station manager invites the passengers to practice
	social distancing measures as an attempt to mitigate the spread
	of COVID-19.

essential condition		condition	This is considered as an attempt made by the railway station
			manager to get the passengers to do something in the future.
mode of achievement		achievement	There is the option/opportunity for the passengers to either do
			what the railway station manager wants or otherwise.
	2.1.	Illocutionary	Directive: the railway station manager invites the passengers to
		Point	practice social distancing measures.
Type of Illocution		locution	Invite

The directive speech act of data 3 is direct in nature on account of the pragmatic feature "hanaremashou" (lit. let's keep ... away), which is constructed from the basic verb "hanare-" (keep away) followed by the "teinei" (polite) form of "-mas" and affixed with the suffix "-shou" that functions as an indicator for inviting to do something. The choice of the pragmatic feature with the illocutionary type of invite is essentially a direct directive, but it is coupled with a strategy of face-threatening act mitigation. By using the invite expression, both the speaker and speech partner will mutually do the activity contained in the speech in the future. Moreover, the use of the utterance "dekiru dake" (as much as possible) can also be considered as the speaker's attempt to reduce the "coercive" impression of a directive utterance conveyed to the speech partner (the passengers). In other words, the face-saving act strategy was also employed by the railway station manager (as the speaker) to mitigate face-threatening act upon the railway passengers (as the speech partner), and it is performed simultaneously, namely by: 1) using the utterance "dekiru dake"; 2) using the teinei (polite) variant; 3) using directive utterance with the illocutionary point of invite.

In another data, we found the use of more than one directive utterances with several different illocutionary points. Data 4 below was taken from a supermarket in the Tokyo area.



Figure 4. Data 4 an announcement at supermarket

店内混雑緩和のため複数名でのご来店は出来る限り、(4.1)ご遠慮願います。

"Tennai konran kanwa no tame fukusuumeide no goraiten ha dekiru kagiri, **goenryou** negaimasu"

'In order to reduce overcrowding, (4.1) **please refrain** from having multiple people coming into the store.'

※入場制限をお願いする場合がございます。(4.2)あらかじめご理解願います

"Nyuujouseigen wo onegaisuru baai ga gozaimasu. Arakajime gorikai negaimasu." 'We may ask to restrict (the number of people entering) entry, (4.2) please understand in advance'

(4.3)店内ではお客様との距離を空けて、お買い物をお楽しみください。

"Tennai deha okyakusama to no kyori wo akete, **okaimono wo otanoshimi kudasai**." 'Please keep (your) distance with other customers and **please enjoy shopping at (our) store**.'

(4.4)ご来店の際は、出来る限りマスク着用の上、店頭の消毒液のご使用をお願いします

"go raiten no sai ha, dekiru kagiri masuku chakuyou no ue, tentou no shoudokueki no goshiyou wo onegai shimasu".

'During (your) visit to (our) store, please use the antiseptic solution (provided) at the storefront and wear (your) mask as much as possible'

In the directive utterances of (4.1), (4.2), and (4.4), there is a similar pragmatic feature expressing begging, namely the polite variant (teineitai) of the verb "negau" (please). The three data indicates the directive illocutionary point of begging. Data (4.1) is in the form of a plea to restrict the number of customers coming to shop in order to anticipate overcrowding

in the shopping area. Data (4.2) is a follow-up to the directive of data (4.1), wherein the manager begs the customers for their understanding concerning the restriction on the number of customers allowed in the supermarket area. Meanwhile, in data (4.4) the manager begs the customers to wear their mask and wash their hands with the cleaning solution provided by the supermarket manager. In addition to the three data, it is also apparent that there are attempts made by the speaker to lessen face-threat, namely by: 1) using the kenjougo variant which positions the speaker lower than the speech partner; 2) using the teineitai (polite) variant as an attempt to display a formal attitude; 3) using a pragmatic feature (in data (4.1) and (4.4)) that functions to soften the content of the directive utterances, which is the expression "dekiru kagiri" (as much as possible). By using that expression, the speaker, indirectly, provides the customers with another alternative in case they do not comply with the speaker's plea.

In data (4.3), the directive speech act of direct contains a command for the customers to keep their distance when shopping so that they can shop in comfort, and this is indicated by the directive feature "~kudasai". Data (4.3) also employs the teinital kenjougo (humble) variant, which can be considered as the speaker's attempt to lower his/her position before the speech partner (supermarket customers).

## 3. Conclusion

Upon observation of the data gathered for the study, it can be concluded that the mitigation contents in those data are not very different from those in Indonesia, which, among others, are about social distancing, using face mask, washing hands, maintaining immunity, changes in operating hours and services in shopping venues, and sneezing and coughing etiquette. Announcements relating to the mitigation of COVID-19 transmission in Indonesia can also be observed in crowded public areas such as railway stations, bus stops/terminals, offices, schools, shopping centers.

Based on the collected data, only three categories of directive speech act illocutionary points were identified, namely: direct, begging, and invite. Furthermore, indirect directive speech act, such as the use of implicature, was not found in the data. The characteristic of directive speech act, with its potential face-threat to both the speaker and the speech partner, forces the speaker (which in this case is the announcement creator) to try and

mitigate the face-threat of directive speech. Such efforts can be considered as a face-saving act, which are manifested by using the keigo and teineigo variants. The use of the keigo variant creates an asymmetrical position between the speaker and the speech partner (wherein the speaker is positioned lower than the speech partner), while the teineigo variant is used to maintain formal distance between the interlocutors.

In addition to using the *keigo* and *teineigo* form, another attempt made by the speaker or writer to mitigate face-threat is by using pragmatic features that can reduce "coercion" upon the speech partner or reader, as shown in the sample data above using the expression "dekiru kagiri", and "dekiru dake" (lit. as much as possible). Nonetheless, there are several other types of utterances that were not found in Japan, such as the use of satire, be it in the form of irony, cynicism, or sarcasm.

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