

"From Alerting and Reassuring to Terrifying and Depressing: Analyzing Boris Johnson's Speech on Coronavirus"

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Abstract

Crucial situations distinguish the pithy and powerful leaders from the tactless and incompetent ones. Under the conditions of the global crisis of Coronavirus, from all around the world, the leaders rushed to deliver rich speeches to alert, warn, reassure, and advise their people. The name of Boris Jenson, the British Prime Minister, has risen to prominence globally after he delivered his official speech after the World Health Organization declared that the coronavirus is an epidemic. However, most of the reactions to his speech were negative. Many people considered his speech as a chilling one. By this, Boris has failed in achieving the goals of his speech. Thus, based on the speech act theory, this article analyzed why Johnson failed in achieving the perlocutionary objects of his speech. Searle's classification of the illocutionary acts was used. The results showed that Johnson's speech has achieved the perlocutionary sequels of terrifying and depressing instead of the intended perlocutionary objects because of his absolute directiveness. It is recommended to analyze the speeches of Macron and Marcel on coronavirus and compare them with Johnson's speech.

Key words: Speech act, Perlocutionary act, Illocutionary act, Representatives, Directives, Alerting, reassuring, Terrifying.

During World War II, the British forces evacuated en masse from Dunkirk (on the French coast). Back then, Churchill was the British Prime Minister (PM). He had to tell his people about the military evacuation disaster and warn them from a Nazi's possible invasion. Indeed, On June 4, 1940, Churchill delivered his popular speech "We shall fight on the beaches" to the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. At that time, Churchill's speech was described as "magnificent", "moving", and "rousing" (Gilbert, 1991) that "was worth 1000 guns, & the speeches of 1000 years" (Keohane, 2010, p.117). Until today, the speech still receives glowing reviews. Even Boris Johnson, the current British PM, and after more than seventy years, praised what Churchill did as a leader during the Second World War in his book *The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History*.

Based on the previous, we have to admit that the British people were fortunate to have such a witty and pithy PM who used to provide them with unforgettable speeches in their adversities! However, under the current adversity of the continuous spreading of the Coronavirus epidemic and after Boris Johnson's first speech on Coronavirus, the question is: Are the British people lucky with their current PM as they were with Churchill? Well, if the comparison between the two prime ministers is based on their speeches, definitely Boris won't be the winner! Although both of them delivered their speeches to calm down the British people and raise their spirits when it was most needed, each one of them received different public reactions. On the one hand, Churchill's speech accomplished its goal completely and brilliantly with no doubt. On the other hand, Johnson's speech was panned and slated for the negative impact that it left on the spirits of the people. Therefore, the goal of this paper is not going to be comparing the two speeches because this will certainly not be fair to Churchill's speech. Rather, this paper will focus on Boris Johnson's speech on Coronavirus to explain the reasons behind the failure of his speech to achieve its goals of alerting, warning, advising, and reassuring. The speech act theory is going to be the base of this paper considering that Johnson's speech reached the perlocutionary acts of terrifying and depressing whether these perlocutionary effects were intended or not.

Literature Review

The Speech Act Theory

Johnson spun his speech to reach something in his mind. However, what we want to know exactly is the way he reached the unintended effects. To do this, the speech act theory is going to be adopted since it is considered as a good choice to analyze the speech and see it from a deeper perspective.

Away from all the developments of the speech act theory and back to Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (a collection of his lectures), we will find the original roots of this pragmatic theory. After Austin took the initiative to develop a new realization of meaning analysis, in his eighth lecture, for the very first time, he presented the doctrine of three acts which are "the locutionary act which has a meaning; the illocutionary act which has a certain force in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is the achieving of certain effects by saying something" (Austin, 1962, p.120).

Many linguists, sociologists, and speech communication theorists tried to develop on Austin's work such as Searle, Bach and Harnish, and others. However, their efforts were headed towards defining, featuring, and classifying the illocutionary act. Despite the considerable importance of the illocutionary act, the perlocutionary act is not less important since the

forces of many illocutionary acts may work together to achieve just one certain effect! Thus, the focus is going to be on the perlocutionary act in the recent paper.

The perlocutionary act

The perlocutionary act, regarding Austin (1962), is the certain “consequential effects” (such as: reassuring, persuading, terrifying, surprising, warning....etc.) that often be produced upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the hearer when the speaker says something. However, those consequential effects are not always intended by the speaker.

According to Levinson (1983), a perlocutionary act may include intended or unintended, and often indeterminate effects. Levinson’s view is consistent with Austin’s who says that the perlocutionary act may achieve the intended effect of the speaker (the perlocutionary object) or fail to achieve it and get an unintended effect (the perlocutionary sequel). Based on Strawson’s view, fulfilling the perlocutionary object (the intended perlocutionary act) is required to have successful communication (as cited in Bach & Harnish, 1989). Having successful communication means having a solid base of illocutionary acts. Thus, it is not possible to overlook the crucial role that the illocutionary act plays in reaching the perlocutionary object or sequel.

The illocutionary act

In his last lecture, Austin essentially focused on the illocutionary act. He identified five classes of utterances and classified them according to their illocutionary force as Verdictives, Exercitives, Commissives, Behabitives, Expositives (1962, p.150). However, Austin himself was not satisfied with this classification. Therefore, in 1976, Searle, Austin’s student, presented a new taxonomy of the illocutionary acts that was built on his teacher’s classification depending on twelve dimensions of variation. He presented a list of the basic categories of illocutionary acts: the Representatives, the Directives, the Commissives, the Expressives, and the Declarations (As shown in Figure 1).

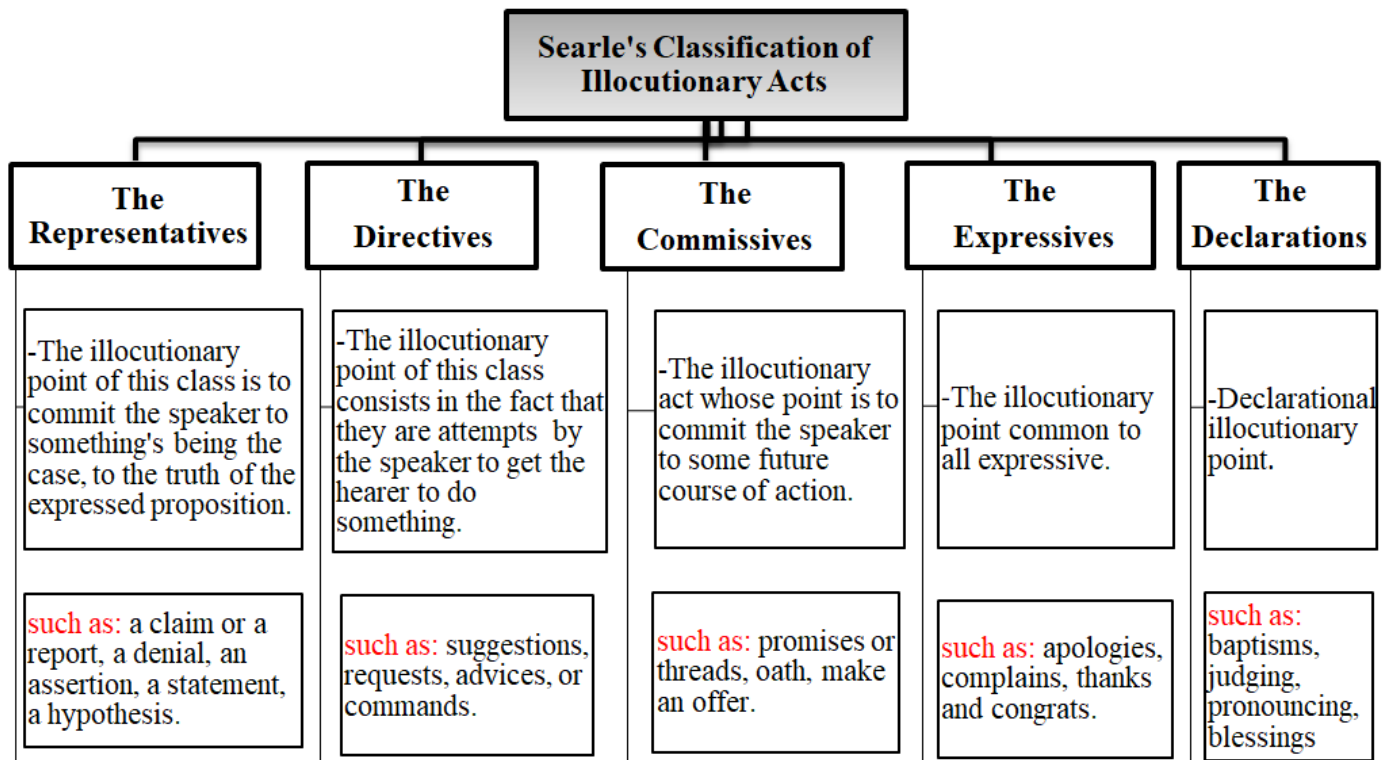


Figure 1: Searle's classification of illocutionary acts

Boris Johnson's Speech on Coronavirus

On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that the coronavirus is a pandemic. Immediately After this announcement, Boris Johnson delivered a speech on coronavirus. Johnson's speech aimed at informing the British

people of the latest news about the pandemic, alerting them to the seriousness of the situation, and reassuring them that things are still under control. However, between all the speeches around the world, Johnson's speech has received a great number of views. After the speech, the prime minister was hit with a hail of criticisms. He has become a household name that the whole world talks about.

Methodology

This paper aims at analyzing the speech made by the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on coronavirus. The transcript of the speech was taken from GOV.UK, and it is exactly as it was delivered from the Prime Minister's Office (see appendix A).

Johnson's statement was chosen because it has hit the headlines and received a wide public interaction. On social media networks, clips, and quotations from the British Prime Minister's statement have become trending and people have shared them virally. The speech was described as "terrifying" after it alerted the British families that they're "going to lose loved ones before their time" because of the inevitable spread of the new virus through the population.

This paper has used a qualitative descriptive analysis. Johnson's speech was analyzed and described to find out the real reasons that caused the negative comments. To analyze the speech, the following steps were followed: a) reading the speech several times, b) identifying the type of speech act if found in the sentences, c) presenting and discussing the results in two stages.

Searle's classification of the illocutionary acts was utilized in identifying the different illocutionary acts in Johnson's speech. Despite the fact that there are many developed classifications of the illocutionary acts, Searle's taxonomy was used because it fulfills that aim of this paper sufficiently; especially that the focus is on the perlocutionary act rather than the illocutionary one.

Analysis and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of this paper is to analyze the language of Johnson's speech to find the reasons that deviated the speech from achieving its intended perlocutionary act (perlocutionary object). As he is a politician, and his speech has been delivered under the same common conditions of most of the presidents and prime ministers of the world, identifying the perlocutionary object of his speech is reachable.

In times of crisis, people often look for reassurance and guidance from their leaders (Lyal, 2020). After the WHO's announcement, the objects of many of the speeches around the world were the same; the American, the German, the French, etc. Most of them wanted to alert their peoples to the upcoming danger, and advice and reassure them at the same time. On the one side, Donald Trump, the American president, declared a national emergency after less than 12 hours of the announcement. He announced a series of measures designed to support the economy. Even though he took advantage of the situation to, indirectly, attack the European Union and China, he advised the old people to take care and stay home and the young ones to wash their hands all day. Trump did not leave any chance to reassure the American people by confirming that they "will get through this, this country will get through this epidemic, just as it has got through many tougher experiences before if we look out for each other and commit wholeheartedly to a full national effort." (2020)

On the other side, and within 18 hours, the President of France Emmanuel Macron warned the people from the "greatest health crisis in France in a century." He talked about schools' and universities' closures to slow the spread of the virus. Also, he emphasized the importance of protecting the financial and economic sectors by reacting "strongly and quickly." After Macron's speech, it was Angela Merkel's turn. The chancellor of Germany announced that the virus has arrived in Europe but she reassured the Germans by commending the German preparedness in contrast with other European

countries. Meanwhile, she clearly and frankly alerted that 60 to 70 percent of the population could be infected if this remains the case according to experts (Barker, 2020).

The three countries almost went through the same stages of the speech of the British prime minister; especially the American one. Trump and Johnson started with generally highlighting the seriousness of the situation. Then they moved to talk about the readiness of their countries to contain the pandemic and delay its spread to minimize the suffering. They also talked about the high danger of coronavirus for the elderly population. Finally, they both ended by recommending some general health advice for people to protect themselves from this virus.

Overall, the goals of the speeches were alerting, warning, and advising the public to buy more time and protect the majority, in addition to reassuring them to empower the solidarity against the disease. In other words, the main perlocutionary object of Johnson's speech is clear; his object won't be different from the others. So, after defining Johnson's intended perlocutionary acts of alerting, warning, advising, and reassuring, the question remains: Why did the British PM fail in achieving his intended perlocutionary acts and achieve the perlocutionary acts of terrifying and depressing instead?

To explain and understand the results (the perlocutionary acts), the reasons should be comprehended and analyzed thoroughly first. Based on this, and according to Austin's view, the perlocutionary act that the speaker receives from the hearer, whether it was intended or not, is just the effect of the locutionary and illocutionary acts of the speaker's utterance (1962). Based on this, the second step in this paper is going to be analyzing Johnson's speech sentence by sentence and word by word to find what lies between those lines!

At the beginning of his speech, and after his warm welcomes, Johnson informed that he was in a meeting with the government's emergency committee including ministers from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This informative representative sentence is deemed as an introductory to indicate, in a way or another, that he is aware of the general situation of the country. Besides, this sentence implied that the upcoming speech is the essence of direct discussions with several trusted people. Until now, the speech seems okay and promising, however, the problems start to appear from now on. The following two stages summarize the main points of Johnson's speech.

Stage 1: Terrifying and Depressing instead of Alerting and Warning

Directly, and with no filters, he started to throw shells of representative sentences that reported the fact of the continues spread of COVID-19 across the world and Britain over the next months. His sentences held a slight sense of alerting but a huge amount of depressing. The prime minister used adverbs like "sharply" to emphasize and describe the strong, quick, and severe raising number of cases. Moreover, he made matters worse and used another representative sentence to confirm that "the true number of cases is higher - perhaps much higher - than the number of cases we have so far confirmed with tests."

After this, the British prime minister did the same thing the French president did and used the descriptive act to describe the situation as "the worst public health crisis for a generation." Unfortunately, this description was not followed by any reassuring or supporting words. On the contrary, he informed, by another representative sentence, that this disease is much and more dangerous than the seasonal flu. also, he predicted that "it's going to spread further." Till now, his words seem to be depressive and gloomy, and this is okay since the general climate around the world is the same! However, Johnson's upcoming words have changed the climate from gloomy to scary!

With a sentence of no more twelve words, Boris Johnson has shaken up the whole world! The speech was described as "chilling" after he confirmed and alerted the British families that they're "going to lose loved ones before their time." Some household names were shocked by what the prime minister said. Sam Coates, who works as a deputy political editor at Sky News, tweeted wondering: "When did a Prime Minister last have to say something like that!" As for the editorial director at The Yorkshire Post James Mitchinson, he was overwhelmed by the PM's words and he commented "There is something chilling about a Prime Minister addressing a nation with a message like this."

Thousands of different interpretations and analytical tweets from the public have sprouted up too. On the one hand, loads of people were "horrified," "amazed", and "shocked" from what he said. Some others sarcastically compared Johnson to Trump, saying "I think that was Trump's line." Moreover, Johnson was accused that he "doesn't mind other people dying" because "he's a nazi" and his announcement that loved ones will die was "shocking & surreal." Several people analyzed the

“disgraceful” implications of what his words indirectly say. Some of them considered that he is saying that as an attempt to absolve himself of any blame. While others thought that “this is his way of saying no one is safe.” On the other hand, some people showed respect to the scrupulous honesty of the PM. They tweeted that what he said is shocking but true. So many of them expressed that they disagree with most of what he says and does but they think that being honest about the current situation is the correct thing to do since many people are not taking the disease seriously!

The minority who liked and appreciated what Johnson said had a point! Johnson must have been honest. The public must know the reality; they must understand what is going around them to take precaution and to refute what the sceptics say. However, The British Prime Minister could have been honest without being brutal. The least he can do as a politician is to show tact. Despite the fact that Johnson, mostly, intended to confirm and inform the public by using the illocutionary act of representing in his popular sentence (many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time), he failed in achieving the perlocutionary object of alerting (to make the British people aware of seriousness of the situation) and he received the perlocutionary sequels of frightening and terrifying instead.

In general, any intended effect (the perlocutionary object) can't be achieved without having a successful presentation of the other two involved acts (the Locutionary and illocutionary acts). In Johnson's case, and based on the reactions of the hearers, it seems that there was something wrong. The prime minister was so direct in getting the attention of the public to make them alert to the upcoming danger. At the end of the day, he is not a doctor or a scientist! He is a politician who should have informed such a delicate and unpleasant subject tactfully and left the harsh facts and projections to the Chief Scientific Adviser.

Political language is mainly characterized as “purpose-oriented” that avoid conflict out of concern for the feelings of the audience (Crespo-Fernández, 2014). In other words, politicians' language should be a mild and polite sounding language that tends to avoid words or expressions that may have unpleasant associations. However, the language of the prime minister was not indirect. Rather, in cold blood, he informed the British people and asserted that they are going to lose their loved ones.

Recently, the threat of the virus occupied so much of our thinking, and this constant feeling of threat has its “insidious” effects on our psychology (Robson, 2020). We all have that kind of fear of the pandemic, whether it is the idea of ourselves suffering or the loss of our loved ones. Thus, it is normal to be anxious about the health of our family and friends; however, what is not normal is how Johnson's speech raised, exponentially, the fears and worries inside the hearts and minds of the British people. Consequently, his words have damaged their souls.

Stage 2: Making Things Better by Reassuring and Advising

After he said his unforgettable words about losing the loved ones, he tried to make things better and confirmed that they have a clear plan that they are now working through. Besides, he informed them that they are now moving to the next phase in that plan since the attempts tend to delay the spread of the virus rather than only containing it. Johnson wanted to reassure and comfort the British people.

By using several representative acts, he predicted that the delay of the peak may save time for NHS (national health organization) to become in “a stronger state” in addition to the weather improvement that lower the number of respiratory diseases which means saving more beds and more time for medical research.

From this point, the prime minister started to use the directive act instead of the representative. He advised anyone who has coronavirus symptoms (cough or high temperature) to stay at home to protect others and help slow the spread of the disease. In addition, as most of the leaders did, Johnson asserted that protecting the elderly (all those over 70) during the peak weeks is their priority and he advised them, in addition to all those with serious medical conditions, against attending social gatherings. However, at the same time, he reported that the decision of banning major public events and closing schools is still under consideration since the scientific advice has not recommended banning such events yet confirming that, at all stages, science is their guidance. In this way, he tried to reassure the public by affirming that the government “will do the right thing at the right time.”

Moreover, based on his emphasis on the seriousness of the virus, he used the directive act of requiring instead of the directive act of advising (as he did before to advise the people who have coronavirus symptoms). He used verbs like “stress” and “urge” when he talked about the inevitable necessity of the people who have potential symptoms of the virus

to stay at home. He stated this more than once because he wanted his people to remember and to make his idea clearer and more memorable. Johnson also repeated what he said about protecting elderly people. He used the rhetorical device of repetition to add emphasis and stress on his point. However, the different thing this time is the sense of warning in Johnson's words. Directly he spoke to the older people and used the directive act of warning to assert that this disease is particularly dangerous for them ("A warning can serve two functions, directive or assertive depending on the presupposed interests of both hearer and speaker." (as cited in Ayodele, 2017) He also used the directive act of advising and asked his people to help and support each other to protect their elderly relatives, or "the more vulnerable members of their family" as he described them.

Finally, at the end of the speech, the prime minister promised that the government will do all they can to help everyone and provide "money and many other forms of support, and helping communities to support each other." He also promised that they will continue to provide as much clear scientific and medical information as they can. He used the directive act of requesting to remind them to wash their hands. And lastly, he tried to reassure and support them by promising that they will "get through this epidemic, just as it has got through many tougher experiences before if we look out for each other and commit wholeheartedly to a full national effort."

As mentioned earlier, this paper had no aim to compare the speeches of Churchill and Johnson but to find the reasons behind the failure of Johnson's speech in achieving the perlocutionary objects of alerting, warning, and reassuring. Yet, it still worthy to mention the high number of Twitter comments that talked about how Boris Johnson wanted to be the new Churchill through his speech of coronavirus. After the publication of his book *The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History* in 2014, the doubts about Johnson's goal to compare himself with Churchill were confirmed. It became very clear that Boris Johnson likes to compare himself to Winston Churchill (I. Cyr, 2019). When he was the Mayor of London, the media pointed out that Johnson has made lots of attempts to draw a parallel between himself and Winston Churchill (Kampfner, 2014).

After the threat of the coronavirus, Johnson's dream of being in charge during a big threat to give powerful inspiring "Churchillian" speeches to the nation came true! However, this does not mean that he accomplished what Churchill did. Dr. Martin Treacy (2019), the associate lecturer of psychology at the Open University, says that "Boris Johnson compares himself to Churchill" but

in fact, he "is the opposite of Churchill." Moreover, Fielding (2020), the professor of political history at the University of Nottingham, considers that "By comparing himself to Churchill, Johnson has set himself a very high bar." On the one hand, Churchill's best-known speech at a time and his acclaimed signature "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" is still considered as a breathtaking example on a leader's successful and stimulating mark that was a light for the people in the darkest of times. When the morale of the British civilians was at the rock bottom, Churchill managed with his rhetorical skill not only to alert his people but also to motivate, support, and assure them of their ability to resist and never "flag or fail." On the other hand, Johnson had a signature too. "many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time" is his panned signature that no one can forget; he accomplished something at least!

Conclusion

Although the Coronavirus crisis created a glorious opportunity for Boris Johnson to achieve his dream of appearing as a seasoned politician like his ideal Churchill, he never succeeded. Johnson's speech was not completely dreadful; the second stage in his speech was full of promises and advice. However, it seems that one tactless sentence overshadowed all the good talk. His speech was deeply criticized instead of being lauded, and the reason was the brutal directness of his "signature" sentence.

Johnson used inappropriate language in a very sensitive situation. Committing such a mistake by a politician in such circumstances is unacceptable because it means that he is insufficiently aware of the politeness rules. As a politician, he must know the rules that determine the choice of the accepted language forms to maintain the feelings of his people. Ignoring these rules impeded the successful communication between him and the British people. His words caused panic. Johnson has failed in achieving the perlocutionary objects of a whole speech because of a sentence; a very direct sentence!

Finally, after analyzing the speech of Johnson's speech to know the reasons behind its failure, it would be recommended to analyze the reasons for the success of Macron and Marcel's speeches on coronavirus.

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Appendix A

PM statement on coronavirus: 12 March 2020

Good afternoon everybody and thank you very much for coming.

I've just chaired a meeting of the government's emergency committee including ministers from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

And it's clear that coronavirus, COVID-19, continues and will continue to spread across the world and our country over the next few months. We've done what can be done to contain this disease and this has bought us valuable time.

But it is now a global pandemic.

And the number of cases will rise sharply and indeed the true number of cases is higher - perhaps much higher - than the number of cases we have so far confirmed with tests.

I've got to be clear, we've all got to be clear, that this is the worst public health crisis for a generation.

Some people compare it to seasonal flu. Alas, that is not right. Owing to the lack of immunity, this disease is more dangerous.

And it's going to spread further and I must level with you, level with the British public, many more families are going to lose loved ones before their time. And the Chief Scientific Adviser will set out the best information we have on that in a moment.

But as we've said over the last few weeks, we have a clear plan that we are now working through.

And we are now moving to the next phase in that plan.

Because this is now not just to attempt to contain the disease as far as possible, but to delay its spread and thereby minimise the suffering. If we delay the peak even by a few weeks, then our NHS will be in a stronger state as the weather improves and fewer people suffer from normal respiratory diseases, more beds are available and we'll have more time for medical research.

We can also act to stretch the peak of the disease over a longer period so that our society is better able to cope.

The Chief Medical Officer will set out our lines of defence. We have to deploy these at the right time to maximise their effect. The most important task will be to protect our elderly and most vulnerable people during the peak weeks when there is the maximum risk of exposure to the disease and when the NHS will be under the most pressure. So the most dangerous period is not now but some weeks away depending on how fast it spreads.

Today therefore we are moving forward with our plan. From tomorrow, if you have coronavirus symptoms, however mild – either a new continuous cough or a high temperature – then you should stay at home for at least 7 days to protect others and help slow the spread of the disease.

We advise all those over 70 and those with serious medical conditions against going on cruises and we advise against international school trips.

At some point in the next few weeks, we are likely to go further and if someone in a household has those symptoms, we will be asking everyone in the household to stay at home. We are not introducing this yet for reasons Sir Patrick will explain, but I want to signal now that this is coming down the track.

We are considering the question of banning major public events such as sporting fixtures. The scientific advice as we've said over the last couple of weeks is that banning such events will have little effect on the spread.

But there is also the issue of the burden that such events can place on public services. So we're discussing these issues with colleagues in all parts of the United Kingdom and will have more to say shortly about the timing of further action in that respect.

At all stages, we have been guided by the science, and we will do the right thing at the right time.

We are not - repeat not - closing schools now. The scientific advice is that this could do more harm than good at this time. But we are of course keeping this under review and this again may change as the disease spreads. Schools should only close if they are specifically advised to do so. And that remains our advice.

There is no escaping the reality that these measures will cause severe disruption across our country for many months.

The best scientific advice is that this will help us slow the disease and save lives. There will be detailed information available on the NHS website and from 111 online. But I want to stress something that is very important in the wake of what we're saying this afternoon - I urge people, who think in view of what we're saying about their potential symptoms that they should stay at home, not to call 111 but to use the internet for information if they can.

I also want at this stage to speak directly to older people. Because this disease is particularly dangerous for you, for older people, even though the vast majority this will be a mild to moderate illness, I know that many people will be very worried. And I think we should all be thinking about our elderly relatives, the more vulnerable members of their family, our neighbours, and everything we can do to protect them over the next few months. We're going to need to mobilise millions of people to help and support each other. And I just want to you to know that the government will do all we can to help you and your family during this period. We're not just going to be as you saw yesterday supporting the economy during this period, we will be providing money and many other forms of support, and helping communities to support each other.

And as we have done over the last few weeks, we will continue to provide, as soon as we have it, as much clear scientific and medical information as we can.

So I'd like to end by repeating the two important messages, with which you will have become familiar - it is still vital, perhaps more vital than ever - that we remember to wash our hands.

And lastly of course even if things seem tough now, just to remember, that we will get through this, this country will get through this epidemic, just as it has got through many tougher experiences before if we look out for each other and commit wholeheartedly to a full national effort.

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"من التنبيه والطمأنة إلى الرعب والإحباط: تحليل خطاب بوريس جونسون عن فيروس كورونا"

اسم الباحثة: بيان روبين ربحي النتشة.

الملخص

تميز المواقف الحاسمة القادة البليغين والأقوياء من أولئك الغير لبقين والغير أكفاء. في ظل ظروف الأزمة العالمية لفايروس كورونا، هرع القادة من جميع أنحاء العالم لإلقاء خطابات غنية لتنبية وتحذير وطمأنة ونصح شعوبهم. برز اسم رئيس الوزراء البريطاني بوريس جونسون على نطاق واسع بعد أن ألقى خطابه الرسمي بعد أن أعلنت منظمة الصحة العالمية عن حقيقة أن فيروس كورونا عبارة عن وباء. ولكن، كانت معظم ردود الفعل على خطابه سلبية. اعتبر الكثير من الناس خطابه مخيفاً وبهذا فشل بوريس في تحقيق أهداف خطابه. بناءً على نظرية أفعال الكلام (the speech act theory)، حلت هذه الورقة سبب فشل جونسون في تحقيق أهدافه من الخطاب باستخدام تصنيف سيرل للأفعال. وقد أوضحت النتائج أن خطاب جونسون قد حقق أهدافاً غير مرجوة من الرعب والإحباط بدلاً من الأهداف المقصودة بسبب لغته المباشرة. يوصى بتحليل خطابي ماكرون وميركل حول فيروس كورونا ومقارنتها بخطاب جونسون.