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Level: Bachelor

The Use of Syntax and Lexicon Structures in Political Discourse

A Case Study of Boris Johnson’s Speeches on COVID-19

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Abstract

In their book, Fairclough and Fairclough (2013) claim that political leaders’ main role is to make choices in difficult situations. Due to the coronavirus outbreak worldwide, every political leader was called to make difficult decisions and to announce them to their respective public. As a result, there is plenty of new data to be analyzed from a linguistic perspective. The goal of this study is to explore and analyze Boris Johnson’s ten first speeches on Covid-19 addressed to the nation between the 3rd and 23rd March 2020 (from herd immunity policy to strict lockdown). The corpus was examined in terms of lexicon structures (personal pronouns and verbs) and syntax structures (modal verbs), which, according to van Dijk (1997), are persuasive techniques. The findings suggest that the extensive use by Boris Johnson of the personal pronoun ‘we’ (exclusive) as well as the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ show his active involvement in the fight against Covid-19. This involvement is also corroborated through (a) his use of event verbs, which indicate a continuous action; and (b) his selection of modal verbs of obligation, which mostly follow the personal pronouns that refer to the Prime Minister and/or the decision makers. This paper concludes that syntax and lexicon structures were used in Boris Johnson’s speeches as tools of persuasive techniques.

Keywords: Boris Johnson, Covid-19, Lexicon Structures, Political Discourse Analysis, Syntax Structures
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1. Introduction

“Wash your hands” and “Stay at home if you have symptoms!” are phrases which are often heard in many kindergartens all over the world. Yet, since March 2020, such phrases were also addressed to adult citizens by political leaders due to the coronavirus. The spread of the coronavirus was enormous and found all countries unprepared for such a pandemic.

As a consequence of this situation, many political leaders addressed their nations often. One of them was Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK). The British Prime Minister has addressed many speeches regarding this issue over the last two years. During his speeches he was never alone, since the presence of scientists from different fields (economy, medicine, etc.) was necessary. After his speeches, Boris Johnson invited such scientists to talk to the “Nation” in order to inform the hearers about medical or economic issues. After the scientists had completed their speeches, journalists had the opportunity to address questions to Boris Johnson and to the scientists who were present.

Boris Johnson, in his first speech which was addressed to the people of the UK on the 3rd of March, was confident that Britain would be able to “defeat” the coronavirus with the help of the National Health Service (NHS). In the same period, most European countries had already been in lockdown. Boris Johnson was not willing to impose a lockdown and, thus he informed his Nation accordingly. In his address on the 23rd of March (twenty days after his first speech), the Prime Minister announced a hard lockdown and requested the citizens to help the NHS not to collapse.

For a Head of State it is not easy to address his/her nation so often in order to inform them about strict measures, deaths, people in A&E Departments (Accidents and Emergency, UK), cases of illness, restrictions, etc., since he/she has to be exposed a lot and he/she may also have to deliver controversial messages to people. Moreover, during the first months of the COVID-19 outbreak and spread, the person in charge of each country had to be
persuasive in order to convince the citizens to follow and observe the national guidelines and measures aiming at their protection. The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a fatal disease pertaining only to medical science but it has also impacted several other fields (politics, language, pedagogy, etc.). Within this context, speech writers had to act fast and use medical science terminology along with war and economic terminology, just to name a few. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine how the speeches delivered by Boris Johnson between the 3rd of March 2020 and 23rd of March 2020 differ from each other so that we can understand what persuasive techniques he uses when addressing his audience.

Political Discourse Analysis in relation to COVID-19 is a topic that has been extensively analyzed even though it is a relatively new subject. There are many studies that have analyzed different political speeches in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak and the use of war terminology, but not other discourse structures. The aim of this study is, therefore, to explore which discourse structures, as defined by van Dijk (1997), have been used in ten speeches made by Boris Johnson at the outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK (between 9.3.2020 and 23.3.2020). By identifying any lexicon and syntax structures in those speeches, the researcher aims to shed light on some of the persuasive techniques which Boris Johnson may have used in his addresses. The questions to be examined for the identification and analysis of these structures are:

a) Which personal pronouns (lexicon/syntax structures) did Boris Johnson use the most in his speeches?

b) Which verbs (lexicon structures) were frequently used by Boris Johnson in his speeches?

c) Which modal verbs (syntax structures) were used in Boris Johnson’s speeches?

d) How are these structures connected with persuasive techniques?
2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Political Discourse

This paper deals with political speech and the fact that there is no politics without the use of language (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002). As stated by Chimbarange et al. (2013), the primary aim of every politician, when addressing an audience, is to convince the hearers. Persuasion of the audience requires very talented speech writers. On the other hand, discourse, as described by van Dijk (1997:3), is a “text context”, and this definition is in the same spirit as Fairclough’s claim that discourse is social interaction while “text” is a part of it (Fairclough, 2013). Political discourse, according to Scaffner (1996), is a separate genre of discourse. Moreover, discourse has to fulfill two criteria in order to be characterized as political: (a) it has to be functional, and (b) it has to be thematic.

In this study, the researcher will analyze Boris Johnson’s speeches by using the eight discourse structures proposed by van Dijk (1997). These structures are: (a) Topics (political discourse may refer to any possible political topic, however, it could be linked to any other topic); (b) Superstructures or textual ‘schemata’ (discourse genres which are organized based on their content and which often introduce arguments); (c) Local semantics (on the local semantics of political discourse, politicians tend to present themselves and their parties in a positive way); (d) Lexicon (special words which are used in politics); (e) Syntax (choice of word order as well as the use of specific pronouns contribute to underline a specific meaning in sentences); (f) Rhetoric (optional discourse structures which are mainly used for manipulation purposes); (g) Expression structures (written and oral techniques which are used in order to emphasize or de-emphasize meanings); and (h) Speech acts and interaction (interaction between the speaker and the audience in order to identify the preferences of the audience). Further, Lexicon and Syntax structures will be analyzed as the main categories and the researcher will try to link these structures with the topic, the schemata, possible local
semantics and rhetoric. Since the researcher will analyze only the transcripts of the speeches, the two last structures, i.e. expression structures as well as speech acts and interaction, will not be included in the present study.

Two lexicon structures (Personal Pronouns and Verb Forms) and one syntax structure (Modal Verbs) will be examined and analyzed for the purposes of this research.

2.2 Personal Pronouns

The discourse analysis of political speeches often involves the use of personal pronouns. Personal pronouns are defined as substitutes of a noun (Wales & Katie, 1996:3). In political speeches, personal pronouns are used as a communicative device by the speaker, i.e. the politician, in order to place himself/herself closer to the hearer (for example, by using the ‘inclusive’ personal pronoun ‘we’) or in order to express his/her own point of view (for example, by using the personal pronoun ‘I’) (Wilson, 2005). An observation about the use of exclusive ‘we’ and ‘I’ was made by Partington (2000:60), who states that the selection of a personal pronoun shows how the speaker wants to approach the hearer, as an individual (by using ‘I’) or as part of a team (institution, government, political party).

There are many papers which focus on the use of personal pronouns in political speeches. In her research, Håkansson (2012) studied the pronouns used by Barack Obama and George W. Bush in their speeches. Håkansson (2012) wished to investigate which personal pronouns (State of the Union) were used the most and by which candidate, as well as to ascertain to whom the two candidates referred when they used the personal pronouns ‘I’, ‘We’, ‘You’ and ‘They’. Håkansson’s results showed that there were no significant differences in the speeches of Mr. Obama and Mr. Bush as to the use of the aforementioned personal pronouns.
Brozin (2010), in his research on the campaign speeches addressed by Barack Obama, underlines that the use of inclusive ‘we’ was selected by Mr. Obama in order to show to those who wanted to unite the nation (i.e. his voters), that he was not just the American President, but he was one of them as well as his representative. A similar observation was made by Proctor and Wen Su (2011) who concluded that politicians from the United States of America used the personal pronoun ‘we’ (inclusive) during their interviews and debates in order to be elected by approaching their voters through setting themselves closer to the people’s needs and problems.

Bull and Fetzer’s (2012) explored the use of personal pronouns ‘we’ and ‘you’ in political speeches and their results showed that each of the political leaders (of the three main British political parties) used personal pronouns to distance themselves from responsibility, to accept gratitude about a success, to deny their participation in anything involving a negative impact, as well as in order to identify supporters and opponents of their parties.

From all the aforementioned studies, it is obvious that the most frequently observed personal pronouns in political speeches are the first singular and first plural, as well as the second singular and second plural personal pronouns (‘I’, ‘We’ and ‘You’). This paper aims to identify personal pronouns (quantitative method) and analyze the most frequently used (qualitative method).

2.3 Modal Verbs
Modality is a very important category of semantics. However, there are only a few studies which link modality and Political Discourse Analysis. Modality often deals with possibility, obligation and necessity (Lillian, 2008). Lillian states that Fowler (1985:75) in his study explains that modality not only includes modal verbs (must, can, will, would and shall), but it
could include sentence adverbs (*probably, certainly*), adjectives (*certain, necessary*), as well as some verbs (*permit, prove*).

As described by Palmer (2001), modality is divided into two main categories: (a) epistemic modality; and (b) deontic modality. Kreidler (2002:247) in his book defines *epistemic modals* as the modals which are used to express possibility and *deontic modals* as the modals which express obligation. On the other hand, Winiharti (2012:538) explains, by summing up Greenbaum (2009), that there is no clear distinction between modal verbs, since some modals could be used with different meanings, while appearing in different contexts. The findings of Winiharti, based on Greenbaum’s theory, are shown below (Table 1).

### Table 1
The use and meaning of Modal Verbs (Winiharti, 2012:538)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modal Verbs</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
<th>Deontic</th>
<th>Epistemic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can/Could</td>
<td>Permission</td>
<td>You can leave now.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Could I go now please?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility</td>
<td>Can it be sent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>I can speak French.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May/Might</td>
<td>Permission</td>
<td>You may smoke.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Might we have another one?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility</td>
<td>He may be at home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It might get too hot.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will/Would</td>
<td>Volition</td>
<td>I will answer you in a minute.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prediction</td>
<td>That will be the doctor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Who would have guessed he was to young?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shall/Should</td>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>You should write more legibly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regulative</td>
<td>The committee should consider the hearings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volition</td>
<td>We shall promise you to bring your father back home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probability</td>
<td>I shall be leaving soon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prediction</td>
<td>He should be very unhappy on the continent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must</td>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>You must be patient.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certainty</td>
<td>It must be your sister on the phone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In her paper, Lillian (2008) links modality to Canadian politicians and their intention to manipulate the voters. She explains the power of epistemic and deontic modalities in political speeches and she underlines the importance of modals in a text, especially from a linguistic perspective. Moreover, Sulkunen and Törrönen (1997) linked modality with power. Addae et al. (2022) examine both the use of personal pronouns and modals in Kwame Nkrumah’s (the former President of Ghana) speeches. They analyzed modals of obligation in order to show the relationship and the distance that the speaker chose to create between himself and his hearers.

This paper will identify and analyze only modal verbs and not other structures with a view to finding any possible pattern of modal verbs used by Boris Johnson in the selected speeches.

2.4 Verb Forms

As analyzed by Fetzer and Bull (2012), verb forms could be a means through which politicians may show their leadership skills while addressing their speeches. Fetzer and Bull (2012:132) also propose that “the semantics of the verb phrase lie at the heart of doing leadership.” For that reason, they present four verb categories which include all verbs depending on their meaning. Event verbs are verbs used to express a material action aiming at changing an established situation and some examples are verbs such as ‘do’, ‘act’, ‘move’ and ‘take’. Communication verbs include verbs such as ‘say’, ‘tell’ and ‘inform’. Intention verbs show the speaker's aim and comprise verbs such as ‘want’ and ‘intend’. Finally, the last category is Subjectification verbs, which describe the emotional or mental state of the speaker, for example, ‘think’ and ‘feel’. The aforementioned categories are illustrated in Table 2 (Kranert, 2017:187).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership dimension</th>
<th>Verb category</th>
<th>Revised definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Event verbs</strong></td>
<td>Material action</td>
<td>Reclaim, canvas, add, appoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Intention verbs</strong></td>
<td>Verb forms that express intention, including verbs denoting future actions if they denote intention</td>
<td>Intend, want, promise, vow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsiveness</strong></td>
<td><strong>Communication verbs</strong></td>
<td>Verbs of language production and language reception</td>
<td>Say, tell, ask, hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Subjectification verbs</strong></td>
<td>Verbs denoting mental processes and emotions</td>
<td>Believe, hope, assume, think, feel, like, fear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kirkham and Moore (2016) investigated which verbs Ed Miliband (former leader of the UK Labour Party) used in his speeches and their link to personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘We’. The said authors intended to show the different verb forms Miliband used when addressing different audiences, as well as the political profile he wanted to show, which was that of a sensitive political leader. Furthermore, Schnurr et al. (2015) underlined the importance of verb forms in political texts which had to deal with a ‘crisis’. Schnurr et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of verb selection in a text, when this has to be addressed to the audience and communicate the importance of a crisis.

Finally, Kranert (2017:199) concludes that, in the corpus that he used, political leaders from Germany and the U.K. used verb forms (event and intention verbs) along with inclusive ‘we’, in order to show to the hearers that they care about their countries and that they are reliable leaders.
This paper will identify and analyze all verb forms in order for the researcher to draw conclusions regarding the verbs used by Boris Johnson in his speeches during the selected period.

3. Material and Method

This research is a Critical Discourse Analysis of the speeches addressed to the United Kingdom by the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and more precisely from 3rd March 2020 to 23rd March 2020. The researcher will conduct a quantitative study in order to illustrate the numerical results of the research, as well as a qualitative study in order to explain the findings.

The corpus of data used for the analysis contains ten speeches delivered by Boris Johnson within a twenty-day period from 3.3.2020 to 23.3.2020, that is on 3.3, 9.3, 12.3, 16.3, 17.3, 18.3, 19.3, 20.3, 22.3 and 23.3. The total word count of the selected speeches is 8,020 words. Such speeches were retrieved from the official website of the British Government (gov.uk). The specific period was selected because it was the beginning of the pandemic and because in just twenty days a whole nation heard contradictory directives from the same person regarding the same issue. Each of these ten speeches can be described as a milestone in connection with the UK’s approach to the pandemic.

The data were analyzed through the use of the AntConc tool (Anthony, 2022). First, the researcher used this tool in order to find the personal pronouns (subjective and objective). After collecting the said data, the researcher found all modal verbs, as they have been defined and categorized above, by using the same tool, and then the results were reported. The study also includes verb form analysis, as discussed by Fetzer and Bull (2012). In this search, only verbs that followed the personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘we’ were identified.
Moreover, in order to ensure the accuracy of the results, a manual control was conducted with a view to finding possible latent data.

One of the aspects that may be interesting is the use of personal pronouns such as ‘we’. On the one hand, the Prime Minister used the personal pronoun to refer to himself and the rest of the decision-makers and, on the other hand, he used the same pronoun to address the citizens of the UK (including himself). For the purpose of this study, it may also be interesting to identify and analyze the verbs that follow such pronouns. By collecting all these data, it may be easier for the researcher to identify the changes in the vocabulary which were made during that period.

4. Results

The results are presented in three subsections. The subsections are divided based on the presentation in Literature Review section (i.e. Personal Pronouns, Modal Verbs and Verb Forms). Each subsection includes both quantitative and qualitative results. Quantitative results are presented through tables and figures, as well as with percentages and a short explanation. Qualitative results contain examples derived from the corpus and are linked to the aforementioned Literature Review.

4.1 Personal Pronouns

From the data shown in Table 3, it is clear that the most frequent personal pronoun used by Boris Johnson was the First Person Plural Pronoun ‘we’ (43.8%). This pronoun was used the most during the speech on 12th March. It is worth mentioning that during the first speech on 3rd March, Boris Johnson referred to the coronavirus as a ‘mild disease’, as well as he talked about Britain’s ‘fantastic NHS’. However, on 12th March, when he used the personal pronoun
‘we’ the most, he had already changed his mind (only nine days later than 3rd March) and for that reason he showed the unity of the decision makers (‘we’). Moreover, the British Prime Minister responded to those who compared the coronavirus to a ‘seasonal flu’ by saying ‘Alas… this disease is more dangerous’. During the same speech, Boris Johnson informed the public that they had to delay the peak in order for the NHS to become ‘stronger’.

Table 3
The Distribution of Personal Pronouns in Boris Johnson’s speeches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Data</th>
<th>3.3</th>
<th>9.3</th>
<th>12.3</th>
<th>16.3</th>
<th>17.3</th>
<th>18.3</th>
<th>19.3</th>
<th>20.3</th>
<th>22.3</th>
<th>23.3</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You (s)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You (o)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Us</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It (s)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It (o)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second most frequent Personal Pronoun is the First Person Singular pronoun ‘I’ (17%), on 18th March, when he announced that schools would close. The third was the Third Person Singular Pronouns ‘it’, and the fourth was the Second Person Plural Pronoun ‘you’ (10.8%), when he announced the lockdown. The rise in the percentages of use of personal pronouns ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘we’ coincides with the announcements of measures. The percentages of all findings are also illustrated in Figure 1.
One of the results that is worth mentioning is that on 17th March, the Personal Pronoun ‘you’ was not used at all. During that speech, Boris Johnson did not announce any measures. However, he repeated that coronavirus is “so dangerous and so infectious”, while that was the first time that he mentioned that they all had to protect both lives and the NHS.

The fact that Boris Johnson did not use the personal pronoun ‘you’ during his speech on 17th March may mean that Boris Johnson might have used inclusive ‘we’ instead, in order to address the people of Britain. It is also obvious from Figure 1 that the use of Personal Pronoun ‘we’ is extensive. The researcher read all the speeches so as to decide upon the context regarding ‘we’ categorization. The results in Table 4 show that the exclusive First Person Plural Pronoun ‘we’ was more used frequently by Boris Johnson than Inclusive ‘we’ (68.3% and 31.7% respectively, Table 4).
Table 4
The Distribution of Inclusive and Exclusive ‘we’ in Boris Johnson’s speeches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>3.3</th>
<th>9.3</th>
<th>12.3</th>
<th>16.3</th>
<th>17.3</th>
<th>18.3</th>
<th>19.3</th>
<th>20.3</th>
<th>22.3</th>
<th>23.3</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘we’ inclusive</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘we’ exclusive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As regards 17th March (see above), it is obvious that there is no such extensive use of the Personal Pronoun ‘we’ (29 hits in total). However, on 17th the distribution of inclusive and exclusive ‘we’ is balanced, namely 12 and 17 times respectively. There is no obvious explanation about of fact that Boris Johnson did not use the personal pronoun ‘you’ at all during this speech.

By examining Figure 2, the reader may notice that there are at least three uneven distributions of inclusive and exclusive ‘we’. The most obvious ones concern the speech on 18th March (3 inclusive and 34 exclusive), the speech on 12th March (10 inclusive and 30 exclusive), as well as that on the 16th of March (9 inclusive and 26 exclusive). On the 18th of March, Boris Johnson announced stricter guidelines regarding people who had COVID-19 and those who shared the same household with them: “Whole household to stay at home for 14 days if one member in that household thinks he/she has the symptoms.” Moreover, he announced the Government's decision about schools: “after schools shut their gates from Friday afternoon, they will remain closed for most pupils”. It is important to note though that Boris Johnson was against the closure of schools and that on the 12th of March he stated that “We are not - repeat not - closing schools now. The scientific advice is that this could do more harm than good at this time.”

On 16th March, Boris Johnson said to the public that they should work from home if that was possible, as well as that there should not be any mass gatherings. Moreover,
he underlined that everyone should protect and support the NHS, and this is something that he would repeat often in all the selected speeches.

![Graph showing the distribution of inclusive and exclusive 'we' in Boris Johnson's speeches.](image)

**Figure 2.**

The Distribution (%) of Inclusive and Exclusive ‘we’ in Boris Johnson’s speeches

For the purpose of this study, some extracts from the selected speeches will be presented in the form of examples. The first example shows the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. As stated by Håkansson (2012), speakers who use inclusive ‘we’ intend to highlight the close relationship between them and the hearers (Examples 4.1(a) and 4.1(b)).

**Examples:** 4.1(a) But if we continue to look out for one another, to pull together in a united and national effort, I have no doubt that we can and will rise to that challenge.
4.1(b)... that **we can send coronavirus packing in this country** but only if **we take the steps, we all take the steps we have outlined**, 

Extract 4.1(a) is from the speech delivered on 9\textsuperscript{th} March, when Boris Johnson thought that the U.K. would be able to fight the coronavirus by using the herd immunity strategy. He wanted to remind the people of the U.K. that they had to be loyal and that he had faith in them (including himself). In 4.1(b) (19\textsuperscript{th} March), Boris Johnson stressed the importance of following the guidelines of the specialists in order for the U.K. to be able to win against the coronavirus. Once more, he included himself by adding the word ‘all’, thus highlighting that he himself had to follow the guidelines as well.

In extracts 4.1(c) and 4.1(d) below, while using the exclusive ‘we’, Boris Johnson referred to himself and the decision makers or the specialists who helped him to decide on UK’s further steps as regards the pandemic.

**Examples:** 4.1(c) **We are preparing various actions** to slow the spread of this disease in order to reduce the strain it places on the NHS.

4.1(d) And that’s why **we have been asking people** to stay at home during this pandemic.

The selection of this personal pronoun (exclusive ‘we’) may be perceived by the audience as an indication of the unity of the decision makers, as well as that they all share and act on the same vision: the defeat of the coronavirus (Examples 4.1(c) and 4.1(d)). Through Mr. Johnson’s choice of the exclusive ‘we’ instead of ‘I’, the audience may consider that Boris Johnson did not take all the decisions (good or bad) on his own, but he was supported by the Government as well as many experts. As mentioned in the introduction, Boris Johnson was
never alone during these ten speeches; he was always surrounded by different experts whom he also addressed during his speeches and who were presented to the audience by him and had the opportunity to talk after the completion of his speech.

Moreover, the personal pronoun ‘I’ is the second most frequently used pronoun in Boris Johnson’s speeches. Through the use of ‘I’, the audience may be reminded that the Prime Minister is the leader and he worries a lot about the situation. On the other hand, Example 4.1(e) could be considered as an appreciation of the efforts made to fight the virus, while Example 4.1(f) is an introduction to the update on the coronavirus.

Examples: 4.1(e) *I* want to thank everyone who is working flat out to beat the virus.

4.1(f) And so tonight *I* want to update you on the latest steps we are taking to fight the disease and what you can do to help.

Boris Johnson used the personal pronoun ‘I’ the most in order to thank the people of the U.K. or probably in order to show that he was a caring leader whose priority is the well-being of his people.

The personal pronoun ‘you’ is used the most on 16th, 19th and 23rd March. During those speeches, Boris Johnson announced that people should work from home and that the disease is not mild (16th March). He also informed the public what they should do in case they become ill (19th March), while he announced the lockdown on 23rd March.

Examples: 4.1(g) *You should not be* meeting family members who do not live in your home.
4.1(h) **You may think you are invincible**, but there is no guarantee **you will get** mild symptoms, and **you can still be a carrier** of the disease and pass it on to others.

By using the personal pronoun ‘you’ (subject form), Boris Johnson addressed the people of the U.K. in order to inform them about the decisions of the experts, as in the extract 4.1(g), in which the modal verb ‘should’ is also used to underline the necessity of staying at home. On the other hand, the Prime Minister used the personal pronoun ‘you’ in order to sensitize the public regarding the seriousness of the disease and in order to show them their share of responsibility with respect to the transmission of the disease (4.1(h)).

One of the findings that was not expected was the frequency of the personal pronoun ‘it’ (subject and object form). ‘It’ was used slightly more frequently than ‘you’ (11.1% versus 10.8%, respectively). The researcher conducted a manual search in order to identify and record the nouns to which the pronoun ‘it’ refers to. By examining the context, the researcher found that in only 1.8% of the total 11.1% of the cases, the personal pronoun ‘it’ (subject form) referred to the coronavirus or the coronavirus test. For the rest of the findings, no specific pattern was identified. On the other hand, as regards the object form of the personal pronoun ‘it’, almost all findings referred to the coronavirus, for example: “**we will beat it together**”. This reflects the fact that the speeches were all about coronavirus and thus it could be expected that ‘it’ would refer to the virus.

The use of personal pronouns during a speech is the means that a politician uses in order to approach the hearers and/or to take a distance from them (Håkansson, 2012).
4.2 Modal Verbs

Boris Johnson used modal verbs a lot while he addressed the public. The modal verbs used by the Prime Minister during the time period for this study are shown in Table 5, and illustrated in Figure 3.

Table 5
The Distribution of Modal Verbs in Boris Johnson’s speeches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Date 3.3</th>
<th>Date 9.3</th>
<th>Date 12.3</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.
The Distribution (%) of Modal Verbs in Boris Johnson’s speeches
As shown in Table 5, the most frequently used modal verb is ‘will’ (47.3%). This modal verb in the present corpus falls under two different categories: *deontic* and *epistemic*. It is worth mentioning that epistemic modality of ‘will’ is the most frequent, since it can be found in 123 out of 125 hits in the selected speeches. As regards the use of the epistemic modal ‘will’, Boris Johnson used it in order to predict actions or facts in the near future. As regards the deontic modality of ‘will’, the Prime Minister mentioned it to show volition. In the following examples both modalities are presented and explained:

Examples:  
4.2(a) All institutions will be under great pressure.

4.2(b) ... **you will** get mild symptoms.

4.2(c) ...that the government **will do** all we can to help you and your family during this period.

All the aforementioned examples are related to the future. However, as shown in examples 4.2(a) and 4.2(b), the modal verb ‘will’ shows prediction (epistemic modality). Boris Johnson, in the first example, predicts that if the coronavirus outbreak continues and if the public does not follow the experts’ advice, there will be great pressure on all institutions. In the second example, he cannot be sure how many people would get mild symptoms, but he predicts (and maybe wishes) that most people without serious health problems will not get serious symptoms. Finally, in the third example (4.2(c)), Boris Johnson informs the public that the Government (including himself) intends to do everything they can in order to help all people who need help. As a result, the modal verb ‘will’, which appears in the third example, falls under deontic modality (promise).
Furthermore, ‘can’, and its past form ‘could’, is the second most common modal verb in the selected speeches (17.2% and 2.7%, respectively). As described and analyzed before, ‘can’ shows epistemic and deontic modality in the selected speeches. In the following example, both cases will be shown and analyzed.

Examples: 4.2(d) …that the best thing we can all do is wash our hands for 20 seconds with soap and water.

4.2(e) Though to be clear, they can continue to provide take-out services.

4.2(f) Yes this enemy can be deadly, but it is also beatable.

As shown in Example 4.2(d), Boris Johnson used the modal verb ‘can’ in order to show that all in Britain can help by washing their hands (they have the ability to do it) and that by doing this, they can all (including the Prime Minister and the experts) contribute to the tackling of the disease. In the second example (4.2(e)), he uses the modal verb ‘can’ so as to explain further that cafes, pubs, bars and restaurants, which at that time were not allowed to serve customers (as announced on 20th March), had the permission to provide take-out services. Both examples involve deontic modality. Deontic modality is the most frequent in these speeches (42 out of 45 hits). On the other hand, the extract in 4.2(f) is an example of epistemic modality of the modal verb ‘can’. In this example, Boris Johnson expressed that coronavirus is likely to be deadly.

Moreover, ‘should’ (8.8%), ‘must’ (7.3%), ‘need to’ (6.9%) and ‘have to’ (3.4%) are often interchangeable since they all show “obligation” (deontic modality). However, ‘should’ is the only modal verb among these four which in these speeches also indicates ‘probability or prediction’. Below are five different examples that involve all the aforementioned categories for each modal verb.
Examples:  4.2(g) You **should not be meeting** friends.

4.2(h) - **you must stay** at home.

4.2(i) When **we have to take special** steps to protect the particularly vulnerable.

4.2(j) **I also need to remind** parents that, as we have already advised, **children should not be left** with older grandparents, or older relatives,

4.2(k) **Schools should only close if** they are specifically advised to do so.

As it appears above, the modalities of obligation and volition are the most frequently used (deontic modality). Epistemic modality was the least used in respect of ‘should’, since there were just 2 out of 24 pertinent hits in the selected speeches. In 4.2(g), (h) and in the second part of 4.2(j), Boris Johnson says to the public that they are obliged not to meet friends (4.2(g)), to stay at home (4.2(h)), as well as not to leave children with vulnerable grandparents (4.2(j)). The extracts in 4.2(i) and in the first part of 4.2(j), include modality of volition, since the Prime Minister expressed that the experts and he (by using the exclusive ‘we’) intend to take some special steps to protect the vulnerable population (4.2(i)), as well as that he intends to remind parents about their obligations regarding the coronavirus (4.2(j)). In all aforementioned examples, Boris Johnson employs deontic modality. However, in 4.2(k), the Prime Minister uses epistemic modality by expressing the prediction that schools will close if the circumstances change.

It should also be mentioned that the modal verbs ‘must’, ‘need to’ and ‘have to’ usually followed the personal pronouns ‘I’ or the exclusive ‘we’. This is an indication that Boris Johnson used ‘strict’ modals that show obligation in order to inform the people of the U.K. about new measures, restrictions and further steps. Moreover, the audience may assume that all the hard decisions were taken by the experts and Boris Johnson who had to and needed
to fight the coronavirus. On the other hand, the modal verb ‘should’ usually followed the personal pronoun ‘you’. The choice of such “gentler” modal verb was made so that the public follow the rules and do not react.

Finally, ‘may’ is the modal verb which Boris Johnson used in the selected speeches in order to express possibility (epistemic modality) (4.5%).

**Examples:** 4.2(l) ..., who **may** be particularly vulnerable or fall into some of the vulnerable groups...

In 4.2(l), Boris Johnson expressed the possibility that some people who are over 70 may be more sensitive and that the others should not expose them to the coronavirus.

All the previous examples show that the Prime Minister used many different modal verbs to show that he and the experts struggled to keep the coronavirus cases and deaths as low as possible. Deontic and epistemic modalities were used in favor of Boris Johnson and supported his persuasion techniques.
4.3 Verb Forms

The verb forms described by Fetzer and Bull (2012) often collocate with the personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘We’. Table 6 presents the distribution of the verbs that followed ‘I’ or ‘we’ in the selected speeches.

Table 6
The Distribution of Verb Forms, following ‘I’ and ‘We’, in Boris Johnson’s speeches

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<th>Date</th>
<th>3.3</th>
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</table>

The verbs which showed Boris Johnson’s and his team’s subjective thoughts and feelings were unequally distributed in the ten speeches. As shown in Table 6 and illustrated in Figure 4, the most frequently used verbs were the event verbs (55.8%). This result was expected since the Prime Minister wanted to inform the audience about the actions that had been taken, the actions in progress, as well as the actions planned to be taken.
Figure 5.

The Distribution (%) of Verb Forms, following ‘I’ and ‘We’, in Boris Johnson’s speeches

Examples:

4.3(a) ... **we are doing** everything **we can to combat** this outbreak

4.3(b) **we have produced** a huge and unprecedented programme of support both for workers and for business.

4.3(c) **We will beat** the coronavirus and **we will beat** it together.

Example 4.3(a) shows that Boris Johnson’s points out that he and the decision makers (exclusive ‘we’) know what should be done in order to keep the situation under control. Moreover, the use of ‘we’ may underline the unity of the team. The two *event verbs* used in this extract are the verb ‘do’, and the verb ‘combat’. Both verbs indicate an action in progress and, as defined by Fetzer and Bull (2012), a change in the present situation.

In example 4.3(b), the Prime Minister suggests that the team of experts worked in every direction to support the people of the U.K. In this extract, Boris Johnson again uses exclusive ‘we’ as well as the *event verb* ‘produce’, which shows that the action has already
been completed in favour of the people in need, i.e. people or businesses who needed financial support due to the coronavirus outbreak in Britain.

Finally, in the last extract 4.3(c), the Prime Minister probably used the inclusive ‘we’ in order to inspire the people of the U.K. and stress that there was hope that they would beat the coronavirus. This extract is part of the speech addressed by Boris Johnson on 23\textsuperscript{rd} March 2020, when he informed Britain that they are officially in lockdown. The \textit{event verb} used twice in the same sentence is the verb ‘beat’, which shows that the speaker implies that the scenario will change (i.e., we all together will beat the coronavirus).

The second most frequent type of verbs was this of communication (18.1\%). This result is also expected since the intention of Boris Johnson was likely to successfully communicate with the people of the U.K. Many \textit{communication verbs} were used on 16\textsuperscript{th}, 17\textsuperscript{th}, 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} March. On the two first dates, Boris Johnson changed his statements regarding the coronavirus and the NHS, as described in the previous section. On 18\textsuperscript{th} March, he informed the hearers about what they should do in case they had coronavirus, while, on 19\textsuperscript{th} March, there were no specific announcements, but he informed everyone about Britain’s progression regarding the coronavirus.

The following extracts include some \textit{communication verbs}:

\textbf{Examples:} 4.3(d) \textbf{But I can tell} you that across this country, people and businesses in my experience are responding with amazing energy and creativity to the challenge that we face, and I want to thank everybody for the part that you are playing and are going to play

4.3(e) \ldots those \textbf{I am announcing} today, are already slowing the spread of the disease.

4.3(f) \textbf{we’re asking} people not to socialise in the normal way
As shown in example 4.3(d), Boris Johnson informed the hearers about the situation in the whole country; thus he used the *communication verb* ‘tell’. Of course, nobody could verify that the businesses were “responding with amazing energy”. Yet, the message to the audience was that there was no need to worry and everything would be fine. In the second extract (4.3(e)), the Prime Minister sent an optimistic message to the hearers, namely that they were all together slowing down the spread. For that reason, he used the verb ‘announce’, which is a *communication verb* and is often used in official situations (Fetzer & Bull, 2012). Finally, the last example (4.3(f)) is different from the two aforementioned in two different ways. First, the subject in this case is an exclusive ‘we’ and not the personal pronoun ‘I’ as in the previous examples. Second, the Prime Minister and the experts ‘ask’ people not to socialize. It seems that since the Government decided on some restrictions which were announced to the public, the Prime Minister selected a “smoother” *communication verb* such as ‘ask’ in order to introduce some measures to the hearers. In addition, being an unpleasant leader could not have any positive effect; for that reason he did not use the personal pronoun ‘I’, but he became part of the team who decided such restrictions (use of exclusive ‘we’).

*Intention verbs* constitute the third most frequent category of the verbs (14.5%) used. As stated by their name (Intention verbs), Boris Johnson shows his intention by using the verb ‘want’. The distribution of *intention verbs* in the corpus is interesting, because they are evenly used in most of the speeches (1-6 hits per speech). However, in three speeches, more *intention verbs* are used. On 16th, 18th and 22nd March there are 13, 10 and 8 hits, respectively.

**Examples:** 4.3(g) But before that **I want** to stress the following things:
4.3(h) And so tonight I **want** to update you on the latest steps we are taking to fight the disease and what you can do to help.

4.3(i) And **I want** to thank everyone who is being forced to do something differently today.

In extracts 4.3(g) and 4.3(h), Boris Johnson, by using the *intention verb* ‘want’, indicates his intention concerning the action verb that follows. For example, his intention is to update (action) the audience about the latest steps. In the last example, though, the Prime Minister uses the *intention verb* ‘want’ in order to introduce a subjectification verb (thank).

When a politician uses *intention verbs* while addressing his/her people, he/she shows his/her plans regarding important issues (Fetzer & Bull, 2012). Therefore, he/she presents oneself as a determined leader who is willing to inform his/her people about his/her future plans.

Finally, the category least used was the *subjectification verbs* (11.6%). The speaker, by using such verbs, shows his/her mental process. The distribution of these verbs was even in the corpus. Yet, on 19th March no hits were found, and there is no clear explanation regarding this finding.

**Examples:** 4.3(j) **I know** the damage that this disruption is doing and will do to people’s lives, to their businesses and to their jobs.

4.3(k) And though huge numbers are complying - and **I thank** you all - the time has now come for us all to do more.

In 4.3(j) above, Boris Johnson expresses his subjective beliefs as regards the results of the decisions made the previous days. By using the verb ‘thank’, the Prime Minister, on the one
hand, shows his gratitude to the people of the U.K. for the sacrifices that they have done and, on the other hand, he prepares the hearers for the new measures and restrictions that he is ready to announce.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the use of personal pronouns, of modal verbs and of verb forms in Boris Johnson’s speeches at the outbreak of covid-19, as well as to analyze them as persuasive techniques defined by van Dijk (1997). Håkansson (2012) notes that in political speeches, the personal pronoun ‘we’ can be divided into two main categories: inclusive and exclusive. In Boris Johnson’s speeches, there is extensive use of ‘we’ (43.8%), and exclusive ‘we’ is used the most (68.3%). As Woods (2014) notes, the use of exclusive or inclusive ‘we’ in a political speech expresses the placement of the speaker in relation to the audience.

By using exclusive ‘we’ to such an extent, Boris Johnson tended to portray himself not as the decision maker but as one of the decision makers and as the leader of the country who announces experts’ choices about measures that had to be taken as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. On the other hand, by using inclusive ‘we’, he assures the audience that there will be no exclusions in these decisions and that he, the decision makers, the audience, and everyone will follow the same rules and will fight against the same threat, which is covid-19.

The personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ are also used by Boris Johnson in his speeches but not to a great extent. The personal pronoun ‘you’ was mostly used when Mr. Johnson informed the hearers about the decisions that they had to follow or in order to express his worries concerning the seriousness of COVID-19. On the other hand, ‘I’ was used by the British Prime Minister when he reminded the audience of his position as a decisive and/or
caring leader. This selection of personal pronouns by the speech writers can be described as strategic, since Boris Johnson presents himself as a leader who does not decide on his own, but he has created a team of experts to decide on the United Kingdom’s next move against COVID-19. Moreover, he places himself and the government in the same fragile position and points out that they all have to follow the same rules. The hearers should be persuaded that there is only one enemy and against this enemy everyone is equal, and therefore, there are no exceptions.

Winiharti (2012) underlines the importance of modal verbs in political discourse analysis. However, modal verbs cannot be easily categorized since they may have more than one use. For example, the modal verb ‘can’ may show possibility (Can it be sent?) or ability (I can cook). These are two of many categories which are included in epistemic and deontic modality. It is time-consuming for a researcher to identify modal verbs based on the context of a corpus; hence, when the results are recorded, modal verbs’ categories may give interesting results as regards political speeches.

‘Will’ was the most frequently used modal verb in the selected speeches by Boris Johnson. ‘Will’ used more to express epistemic modality than deontic modality (123 versus 2, respectively). Boris Johnson, by selecting epistemic modality, likely wanted to show the audience that he is a credible leader and that he can predict the results of some actions and/or decisions. During a crisis, the audience, by hearing a political leader reassure them that the health system is strong and that they will defeat the enemy (i.e. COVID-19) together, may feel secure and that they have to follow his/her lead.

‘Can’ is the second most frequently used modal in the corpus. It mainly indicates deontic modality in the present corpus, since it is mostly used in order to express permission or ability. Boris Johnson used the modal verb ‘can’ to underline that the people of the U.K. are able to fight and beat the enemy, as well as that they can help the system by
following some simple rules (“Wash your hands”). By engaging them in the whole procedure, Mr. Johnson could make them feel as part of the solution. He also announced some restrictions by using the modal verb ‘can’ in order to permit or not some actions, such as the continuation of take-out service or outdoor training.

Modals of obligation (must, should, have to, need to) were also used frequently in the speeches (26.4%). Such a result could be expected, especially after the realization that COVID-19 is not just a seasonal flu, since experts suggested that schools, pubs, restaurants and cafes should close. The Prime Minister had to inform everyone regarding these decisions; therfore, he decided to use the strictest modal verbs such as “must”, “have to” and “need to” in order to inform the people about the draconian measures which had to be followed. On the other hand, the milder modal verb ‘should’ was combined with people’s acts. Boris Johnson may have tried through the use of these modal verbs to convince the hearers that the decision makers and he are in a difficult position as they have to decide upon everyone’s future.

Fetzer and Bull (2012) suggested four verb categories (Verb Forms) which were examined in this paper. The results were as expected, since an emergent situation like covid-19 requires actions. For this reason, event verbs were used the most so that Boris Johnson could show that decision makers and he (verbs following exclusive ‘we’) as well as only the Prime Minister (verbs following ‘I’), had everything under control; the perception of the audience could be that experts’ knowledge and Boris Johnson’s leadership could lead the U.K. to a victory against covid-19. Moreover, subjectification verbs were used extensively, since Boris Johnson informed the audience about his thoughts and feelings, when he used subjectification verbs after the personal pronoun ‘I’. On the other hand, when a subjectification verb followed the exclusive ‘we’, the Prime Minister underlines the solidarity between the decision makers and himself. Finally, a subjectification verb which appears after
an inclusive ‘we’ shows that the speaker tries to create a collectivity (everyone including himself) against covid-19.

In this study, only some of the discourse structures presented by van Dijk (1997) were examined and analyzed (personal pronouns, modal verbs and verbs). Van Dijk, in his study, included more discourse structures as they have been presented in the Literature Review. The findings of this research can be linked to these structures. Firstly, van Dijk referred to macropositions of political discourse analysis (topic), by analyzing the use of personal pronouns, modal verbs and verb forms. The actions of a political actor can be easily identified in relation to such situations (covid-19). The second structure presented by van Dijk are superstructures or textual ‘schemas’. Van Dijk refers to “structures and strategies of argumentation”. The results of this study show that this persuasion technique is used by Boris Johnson because he refers extensively to “the benefit for the nation” (van Dijk, 1997:30). Local semantics is the third structure (van Dijk, 1997). This structure, in the selected speeches, uses national security as a means of persuasion. The results of this study showed the use of event verbs such as ‘beat’ followed by the noun ‘enemy’ or the personal pronoun ‘it’ (i.e. covid-19). Boris Johnson’s goal is likely to make everyone believe that there is a common enemy and that everyone has to protect the nation. This was communicated by the Prime Minister through the use of: (a) inclusive ‘we’, (b) the modal verb of obligation ‘should’ and event verbs (we should protect); and (c) the modal verb of ability ‘can’ and event verbs (we can send coronavirus packing in this country). Finally, the last structure which can be linked with the results of this study is rhetoric. Van Dijk (1997:35) highlights that repetition operations are often used as persuasive techniques, as the speaker creates a repetitive pattern which is easy to be memorized by the hearer. In Mr. Johnson's speeches there were many repetitions and in each speech the hearer could easily recall a similar
sentence which was repeated from a previous day ("Protect NHS”, “we can beat it”).

6. Conclusion

The coronavirus is an ongoing disease which has changed the world since its outbreak in 2019. Many leaders from different countries all over the globe had to communicate very important information to people by using the appropriate context, easy words, and lexical choices which would persuade the hearers, either by making them trust the speaker or by making them empathize with him/her.

This research aimed to examine the use of personal pronouns, modal verbs and verb forms (discourse structures) in Boris Johnson’s speeches at the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak. The researcher’s goal, by creating a corpus derived from the speeches of Mr. Johnson between 3rd and 23rd March 2020, was to investigate if any of the aforementioned structures were used by Boris Johnson as persuasive techniques.

The results showed that there was an extensive use of the personal pronoun ‘we’ (especially exclusive ‘we’) in Boris Johnson speeches. Exclusive ‘we’ often collocated with modal verbs of obligation as well as with modal verbs of validity and prediction. Such modal verbs were also followed by event verbs or communication verbs. By summarizing the aforementioned findings, Boris Johnson appears to have tried to convince the audience that he was supported by a reliable and hard-working team (exclusive ‘we’ plus event verbs) which was confident with respect to its decisions and their implementation (modal verbs). The use of such structures shows that Mr. Johnson likely tried to persuade the hearers that decision makers are competent and that the nation has to trust them, since a decision maker’s priority is people’s safety.

Personal pronouns ‘I’, ‘You’ and inclusive ‘We’ had also compelling collocations with modal verbs in combination with verb forms, depending on the date or
Prime Minister’s announcements. Based on the findings, Mr. Johnson’s goal was likely to create a trustful relationship between the hearers and himself, by repeating that he understands that it is a tough situation; by explaining all possible parameters to them; by promising that this situation will not last long; and finally by placing his team and himself in the worst possible position because they must decide, they need to inform and they have to take special steps.

The corpus created was limited because the researcher wanted to focus on the specific period (between 3rd and 23rd March 2020); the arguments behind such a decision are described in the introduction of this study. If the corpus included all the speeches of Boris Johnson on covid-19 (available on gov.uk), the results would probably be different since, after 23rd March 2020, the U.K. was on a strict lockdown.

Coronavirus is not over yet and several political leaders have addressed speeches since the outbreak of the virus. As a result there are plenty of corpora available to be examined. It could be interesting for a researcher to compare different approaches of political leaders of different countries in relation to covid-19. Boris Johnson or Donald Trump could be used as examples of political leaders who presented covid-19 as a mild disease at the beginning and who changed their mind some weeks later. Emmanuel Macron or any other political leader who believed since the beginning that covid-19 was a serious disease could be used as the leaders who did not refer to covid-19 as flu. Finally, the third category could include political leaders who addressed the nation regarding covid-19 only a few times and whose countries did not have strict measures, such as Stefan Löfven in Sweden. Furthermore, the most frequent words and war related words could give interesting results while comparing such different approaches.

This study concludes that there is an indissoluble relation between political speeches and persuasion, since politicians ‘do’ politics by using the art of communication.
References


Appendix


03/3/2020

Good morning and thank you for coming along, and I am very glad to be joined this morning by the government’s Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor.

Today we have published the Coronavirus Action Plan setting out how all four parts of the UK will take all necessary and reasonable steps to tackle this outbreak.

The plan has four strands. Containing the virus, delaying its spread, researching its origins and cure, and finally mitigating the impact should the virus become more widespread. That is, contain, delay, research, mitigate.

And let me be absolutely clear that for the overwhelming majority of people who contract the virus, this will be a mild disease from which they will speedily and fully recover as we’ve already seen.

But I fully understand public concern, your concern, about the global spread of this virus. And it is highly likely that we will see a growing number of UK cases.

And that’s why keeping the country safe is the government’s overriding priority. And our plan means we’re committed to doing everything possible based on the advice of our world leading scientific experts to prepare for all eventualities.

Let’s not forget – we already have a fantastic NHS, fantastic testing systems and fantastic surveillance of the spread of disease.

We will make sure the NHS gets all the support it needs to continue their brilliant response to the virus so far.

The plan does not set out what the government will do, it sets out the steps we could take at the right time along the basis of the scientific advice.

Our country remains extremely well prepared, as it has been since the outbreak began in Wuhan several months ago.

Finally, crucially, we must not forget what we can all do to fight this virus, which is to wash our hands, you knew I was going to say this, but wash our hands with soap and water. And forgive me for repeating this but there will be people who will be tuning into this for the first time: wash your hands with soap and hot water for the length of time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice.

It’s simple advice but it’s the single most important thing we can do, as I think our experts would attest.
But at this stage, and with the exception of all of the points I have just mentioned, I want to stress that for the vast majority of the people of this country, we should be going about our business as usual.

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09/3/2020

This morning I chaired a meeting of the government’s COBR emergency committee on the Coronavirus outbreak.

The First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland also attended and we agreed to continue to work closely in the weeks and months ahead.

We received a detailed briefing from the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Advisor. And again I repeat my gratitude to both Chris and to Patrick.

There have now been four deaths from coronavirus in the UK, and our deepest sympathies are obviously with their friends and families.

Our action plan as you know sets out the four phases of our approach to tackling the virus: Contain, Delay, Research, and Mitigate.

We remain in the Contain phase of the outbreak, but watching what is happening around the world, our scientists think containment is extremely unlikely to work on its own, and that is why we are making extensive preparations for a move to the delay phase.

We are preparing various actions to slow the spread of this disease in order to reduce the strain it places on the NHS. The more we can delay the peak of the spread to the summer, the better the NHS will be able to manage.

Patrick and Chris will give you some more detailed information on the latest advice we are giving the public today - and how we expect that advice to change as the outbreak develops.

As things stand I’m afraid it bears repeating that the best thing we can all do is wash our hands for 20 seconds with soap and water. We will also take questions, because I know there are lots of things the public want to hear from our advisors about.

But before that I want to stress the following things:

First, we are doing everything we can to combat this outbreak, based on the very latest scientific and medical advice.

Second, we have a truly brilliant NHS, where staff have responded with all the determination, compassion and skill that makes their service so revered across the world. And they will continue to have this government’s full support, my support, in tackling this virus on the frontline.
Third, we will set out further steps in the days and weeks ahead to help people protect themselves, their family and in particular the elderly and vulnerable.

And finally, while it is absolutely critical, it’s absolutely critical in managing the spread of this virus that we take the right decisions at the right time, based on the latest and best evidence. So we must not do things which have no or limited medical benefit, nor things which could turn out to be counterproductive.

There is no hiding from the fact that the coronavirus outbreak will present significant challenges for the UK, just as it does in other countries.

But if we continue to look out for one another, to pull together in a united and national effort, I have no doubt that we can and will rise to that challenge. And I’m now going to ask Patrick and then Chris to give their own perspective on where we are.

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12/3/2020
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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16/3/2020
Good afternoon everybody, thank you very much for coming. I wanted to bring everyone up to date with the national fight back against the new coronavirus and the decisions that we’ve just taken in COBR for the whole of the UK.

As we said last week, our objective is to delay and flatten the peak of the epidemic by bringing forward the right measures at the right time, so that we minimise suffering and save lives. And everything we do is based scrupulously on the best scientific advice.

Last week we asked everyone to stay at home if you had one of two key symptoms: a high temperature or a new and continuous cough.

Today, we need to go further, because according to SAGE [the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies] it looks as though we’re now approaching the fast growth part of the upward curve.

And without drastic action, cases could double every 5 or 6 days.

So, first, we need to ask you to ensure that if you or anyone in your household has one of those two symptoms, then you should stay at home for fourteen days.
That means that if possible you should not go out even to buy food or essentials, other than for exercise, and in that case at a safe distance from others. If necessary, you should ask for help from others for your daily necessities. And if that is not possible, then you should do what you can to limit your social contact when you leave the house to get supplies.

And even if you don’t have symptoms and if no one in your household has symptoms, there is more that we need you to do now.

So, second, now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel.

We need people to start working from home where they possibly can. And you should avoid pubs, clubs, theatres and other such social venues.

It goes without saying, we should all only use the NHS when we really need to. And please go online rather than ringing NHS 111.

Now, this advice about avoiding all unnecessary social contact, is particularly important for people over 70, for pregnant women and for those with some health conditions.

And if you ask, why are we doing this now, why now, why not earlier, or later? Why bring in this very draconian measure?

The answer is that we are asking people to do something that is difficult and disruptive of their lives.

And the right moment, as we’ve always said, is to do it when it is most effective, when we think it can make the biggest difference to slowing the spread of the disease, reducing the number of victims, reducing the number of fatalities.

And as we take these steps we should be focusing on the most vulnerable.

So third, in a few days’ time – by this coming weekend – it will be necessary to go further and to ensure that those with the most serious health conditions are largely shielded from social contact for around 12 weeks.

And again the reason for doing this in the next few days, rather than earlier or later, is that this is going to be very disruptive for people who have such conditions, and difficult for them, but, I believe, it’s now necessary.

And we want to ensure that this period of shielding, this period of maximum protection coincides with the peak of the disease.

And it’s now clear that the peak of the epidemic is coming faster in some parts of the country than in others.

And it looks as though London is now a few weeks ahead.
So, to relieve the pressure on the London health system and to slow the spread in London, it’s important that Londoners now pay special attention to what we are saying about avoiding non-essential contact, and to take particularly seriously the advice about working from home, and avoiding confined spaces such as pubs and restaurants.

Lastly, it remains true as we have said in the last few weeks that risks of transmission of the disease at mass gatherings such as sporting events are relatively low.

But obviously, logically as we advise against unnecessary social contact of all kinds, it is right that we should extend this advice to mass gatherings as well.

And so we’ve also got to ensure that we have the critical workers we need, that might otherwise be deployed at those gatherings, to deal with this emergency.

So from tomorrow, we will no longer be supporting mass gatherings with emergency workers in the way that we normally do. So mass gatherings, we are now moving emphatically away from.

And I know that many people – including millions of fit and active people over 70 – may feel, listening to what I have just said, that there is something excessive about these measures.

But I have to say, I believe that they are overwhelmingly worth it to slow the spread of the disease, to reduce the peak, to save life, minimise suffering and to give our NHS the chance to cope.

Over the last few days, I have been comparing notes and talking to leaders around the world and I can tell you that the UK is now leading a growing global campaign amongst all our friends and allies, whether in the G7, the G20, the UN, the IMF – all those bodies in which we play a significant role.

We’re leading a campaign to fight back against this disease.

To keep the economy growing, to make sure that humanity has access to the drugs and the treatments that we all need, and the UK is also at the front of the effort to back business, to back our economy, to make sure that we get through it.

I know that today we are asking a lot of everybody. It is far more now than just washing your hands - though clearly washing your hands remains important.

But I can tell you that across this country, people and businesses in my experience are responding with amazing energy and creativity to the challenge that we face, and I want to thank everybody for the part that you are playing and are going to play.

I want to go through our overall plan for beating this new coronavirus.
First, we must stop the disease spreading to a point where it overwhelms our NHS. Every country in the world has the same problem.

This is a disease that is so dangerous and so infectious that without drastic measures to check its progress it would overwhelm any health system in the world.

I have used the Italian health system, it is excellent, and the problem is not the health system, it’s the numbers of sufferance.

That is why we announced the steps yesterday that we did – advising against all unnecessary contact – steps that are unprecedented since World War 2.

They will have an effect on the spread of the disease.

The shielding of vulnerable groups will also reduce suffering, and I want to thank everybody at this stage for what we’re all doing to follow this advice.

I stress that although the measures announced are already extreme, we may well have to go further and faster in the coming days to protect lives and the NHS.

Secondly, we are doing all we can and as quickly as we can to increase the capacity of the NHS. That means more testing, more beds, more ventilators and more trained staff. It means greater support for NHS and other staff. And it means much better data and much better technology.

Third, we must do all we can to boost science and research. We must study this disease, test drugs that already exist and have been through medical trials to see what helps treat severe cases, and search for a vaccine. Fourth, we must act like any wartime government and do whatever it takes to support our economy. That’s the main purpose of this press conference this afternoon.

We must support millions of businesses and tens of millions of families and individuals through the coming months. And to do that the government machine must and will respond with a profound sense of urgency. Thousands of brilliant officials are already working round the clock but we must do more and faster. The Chancellor will be saying much more about this in a moment, with further announcements in the coming days.

Fifth, we will need to strengthen other public services that will be under great pressure from the direct and indirect effects of the disease, such as the effects of staff shortages, and from the economic pressures. All institutions will be under great pressure and we will therefore invest hugely in the people that we all rely on, and again I want to thank all our public servants for what they are already doing.

Ultimately, to beat this crisis we will need a combination of better science, technology, medicine, data, government operations, economic support, learning from other countries and social support. As time goes on we will learn more and more about the disease and the effects of our actions. And while we need national unity, we also need international cooperation. And although we now need to impose physical distance between ourselves, we must at the same time have closer social support for each other.
Yes this enemy can be deadly, but it is also beatable – and we know how to beat it and we know that if as a country we follow the scientific advice that is now being given we know that we will beat it.

And however tough the months ahead we have the resolve and the resources to win the fight.

And, to repeat, this government will do whatever it takes.

I will now handover for more on that to Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

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18/3/2020

Good afternoon. And thanks for coming or for indeed tuning in to these daily updates. I want to introduce, I’m sure you know Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, and you know Sir Patrick Vallance, Chief Scientific Advisor.

I want to tell you where we got to in our national fightback against the coronavirus. Today the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies met to discuss the latest evidence on the spread of the virus and the effects of the measures we have already taken to slow its spread. And Patrick is going to update us in a second about that.

I want to repeat that everyone – everyone – must follow the advice to protect themselves and their families, but also – more importantly – to protect the wider public. So stay at home for seven days if you think you have the symptoms. Remember the two key symptoms are high temperature, a continuous new cough.

Whole household to stay at home for 14 days if one member in that household thinks he/she has the symptoms. Avoid all unnecessary gatherings – pubs, clubs, bars, restaurants, theatres and so on and work from home if you can. Wash your hands.

And we have already announced in the last few days we will massively scale up our testing capacity in the weeks ahead so we hit 25,000 tests a day.

A huge public information campaign is being rolled out so people get all the information they need to protect themselves and others.

We are asking retired healthcare professionals to come back and help us cope, help the NHS to cope, with this unprecedented challenge.

And we will continue as we have from the beginning to do the right thing at the right time and to follow the best scientific advice.

And we come today to the key issue of schools where we have been consistently advised that there is an important trade off. And so far the judgment of our advisers has been that closing schools is actually of limited value in slowing the spread of the epidemic.
And that is partly because counterintuitively schools are actually very safe environments. And in this disease and epidemic children and young people are much less vulnerable.

And hitherto the advice has been that we should keep schools open if possible in order to reduce the pressure on the NHS and on all other public services. But I think you’ll agree I have always been very clear that this is a balanced judgment and one that we have kept under constant review.

So looking at the curve of the disease and looking at where we are now – we think now that we must apply downward pressure, further downward pressure on that upward curve by closing the schools.

So I can announce today and Gavin Williamson making statement now in House of Commons that after schools shut their gates from Friday afternoon, they will remain closed for most pupils – for the vast majority of pupils- until further notice. I will explain what I mean by the vast majority of pupils.

The objective is to slow the spread of the virus and we judge it is the right moment to do that.

But of course, as I’ve always said, we also need to keep the NHS going and to treat the number of rising cases. So we need health workers who are also parents to continue to go to work.

And we need other critical workers with children to keep doing their jobs too – from police officers who are keeping us safe to the supermarket delivery drivers, social care workers who look after the elderly and who are so vital. We will be setting out more details shortly about who we mean in these groups.

So we therefore need schools to make provision for the children of these key workers who would otherwise be forced to stay home. And they will also need to look after the most vulnerable children.

This will mean there will of course be are far fewer children in schools and that will help us to slow the spread of the disease. And these measures are crucial to make sure the critical parts of the economy keep functioning and public services keep functioning.

So we are simultaneously asking nurseries and private schools to do the same, and we are providing financial support where it is needed. We are making provisions to supply meals and vouchers for children eligible for free school meals. And where some schools are already doing this, I want to make it clear we will reimburse the cost. And of course this does mean that exams will not take place as planned in May and June. Though we will make sure that pupils get the qualifications they need and deserve for their academic career.

Now I know that these steps will not be easy for parents or teachers. And for many parents, this will be frustrating, and it will make it harder for them to go out to work.

And of course that is one of the reasons we haven’t wanted to go ahead and that’s why we are working now on further measures to ensure that we support not just businesses but also
individuals and their families to keep our economy going as Rishi Sunak the Chancellor outlined yesterday.

I also need to remind parents that, as we have already advised, children should not be left with older grandparents, or older relatives, who may be particularly vulnerable or fall into some of the vulnerable groups and I know that will be difficult too. And I want to thank families for their sacrifice at this difficult time. I want to thank whole country for the efforts people are making to comply with these measures.

I particularly want to thank the teachers, head teachers and all the support staff who keep schools going who will make these exceptional arrangements work, for the benefit of us all.

By looking after the children of key workers they will be a critical part of our fightback against Coronavirus. As I have said, we will take the right steps at the right time, guided by the science.

We believe the steps we have already taken, together with those I am announcing today, are already slowing the spread of the disease.

But we will not hesitate to go further, and faster, in the days and weeks ahead.

And we will do whatever it takes to so that we beat it together.

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19/3/2020

I want to begin by thanking everyone, by thanking you, in the media, and also thanking everyone for the huge efforts that the country is making to comply with the advice that we’ve been given

And we’re asking such a huge amount,

asking students to put their education on hold,

we’re asking people not to socialise in the normal way

And already we can see the impact that this is having on the UK economy and on business, on great, great companies

And so it’s vital that we in Government stand behind them when what we are asking everyone to do is so crucial for saving literally thousands of lives by defeating this virus

And I am conscious as the days have gone by that people will want to know how long we are expecting them to keep it up

And I wanted to try to say something today about how I see the timescale of this campaign and where we’re going and what we need to do
I do think, looking at it all, that we can turn the tide within the next 12 weeks

And I am absolutely confident that we can send coronavirus packing in this country but only if we take the steps, we all take the steps we have outlined,

And that is vital because that is how we are going to reduce the peak

and once we’ve achieved that, and I think that we will, if take the steps that I have said,

then the scientific progress that we’re making will really start to come into play and I wanted to discuss a little bit of that this afternoon with you

because we are rapidly becoming so much better at understanding the genomics at the heart of this virus, a lot of that is going on in this country,

we’re getting better at understanding the medicines that may treat and cure it

And today we have put the first British corona patient into a randomised trial for drugs that may treat the disease

UK experts and scientists expect to start trials for the first vaccine within a month

And above all we are getting better at testing

This crisis is so difficult because the enemy is invisible

And the answer is to remove the cloak of invisibility

And to identify the virus, and to be able to know which of us, is carrying it or who has actually had it and now got over it

And to give you an idea of what is coming down the track

We are in negotiations today to buy a so called antibody test

As simple as a pregnancy test

That could tell whether you have had the disease

And it’s early days, but if it works as its proponents claim then we will buy literally hundreds of thousands of these kits as soon as practicable because obviously it has the potential to be a total gamechanger

Because once you know that you have had it, you know that you are likely to be less vulnerable, you’re less likely to pass it on, and you can go back to work

And of course by the same token we are massively increasing the testing to see whether you have it now
And ramping up daily testing from 5000 a day to 10,000 to 25,000 and then up to 250,000

And that knowledge of where the virus is, will make a huge difference to our management of the disease and our ability to reduce disruption and economic difficulties

And I wanted to set that out because this is rapidly coming down the track as I say, but it will take time to come on stream

And that is why in the meantime, to get back to a theme that you know I’m going to repeat, it is absolutely vital that we follow the advice that we’ve been hearing over the last few days,

The announcements we’ve already made about staying at home if you have the symptoms, if your family has the symptoms,

about avoiding unnecessary contact

Avoiding gatherings where you may pick up the disease

pubs, bars, restaurants

Please, please follow all that advice scrupulously

Work from home if you possibly can

Wash your hands, wash your hands

And it’s by this combination of ruthless, determined, collective action and scientific progress that we’re already seeing that we will succeed

And I know how difficult it may be, or it may seem right now, but if we do this together we will save, as I say, many many thousands of lives

and to everybody in the UK, business world, everybody who is worried about their jobs, and everybody who faces difficulties because of the advice that we are giving,

I say to business, stand by your employees, stand by your workers because we will stand by you

And you’ll be hearing more about that in the course of the next day or so

And that is how, by a mixture of determined, collective action and scientific progress, I have absolutely no doubt that we will turn the tide of this disease and beat it together.

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20/3/2020

Good afternoon and thank you for coming again,
Today I am joined by the Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak and Jennie Harries deputy chief medical officer.

Yesterday I set out the ambition of this government to turn the tide against coronavirus within 3 months. And I want to repeat that determination today.

We are going to do it with testing. We are going to do it with new medicines, and with new digital technology that will help us to see the disease as it is transmitted, and thereby, by eliminating it, to stamp it out.

And above all, now we are going to defeat this disease with a huge national effort to slow the spread by reducing unnecessary social contact.

And I want to thank everyone for following the guidance we issued on Monday:

to stay at home for 7 days if you think you have the symptoms,

for 14 days if anyone in your household has either of the symptoms – a new continuous cough or a high temperature.

To avoid pubs, bars, clubs and restaurants.

To work from home if at all possible.

Keep washing your hands.

I know it has been tough.

I know it has been inconvenient.

But these actions that we’re all taking together are already helping to take the strain off our NHS.

Bit by bit, day by day, by your actions, your restraint and your sacrifice, we are putting this country in a better and stronger position, where we will be able to save literally thousands of lives, of people of all ages, people who don’t deserve to die now.

People whose lives can, must, and will be saved.

And as we take these actions together and as we make these sacrifices, we can see the impact on the real economy.

Already, fantastic British companies, already under huge strain, big and small.

Workers who are finding that their jobs are under threat or are going, through no fault of their own. And to all of them, we in government say: We will stand by you.

And I say that to companies, remember our joint objective: to beat this virus. And we will do everything in our power to help.
And in just a minute, Rishi is going to explain how we are going to help workers of all kinds to get through this crisis,

Supporting you directly in a way that Government has never been done before, in addition to the package we have already set out for business.

And of course these measures are intended to be temporary and of course I am confident that, in time, the UK economy is going to bounce back.

Of course it is.

But I must be absolutely clear with you: the speed of that eventual recovery depends entirely on our ability, our collective ability, to get on top of the virus now.

And that means we have to take the next steps, on scientific advice and following our plan, we are strengthening the measures announced on Monday which you will remember.

And of course people have already made a huge effort to comply with those measures for avoiding unnecessary social contact.

But we need now to push down further on that curve of transmission between us.

And so following agreement between all the formations of the United Kingdom, all the devolved administrations,

We are collectively telling, telling cafes, pubs, bars, restaurants to close tonight as soon as they reasonably can, and not to open tomorrow.

Though to be clear, they can continue to provide take-out services.

We’re also telling nightclubs, theatres, cinemas, gyms and leisure centres to close on the same timescale.

Now, these are places where people come together, and indeed the whole purpose of these businesses is to bring people together. But the sad things is that today for now, at least physically, we need to keep people apart.

And I want to stress that we will review the situation each month, to see if we can relax any of these measures.

And listening to what I have just said, some people may of course be tempted to go out tonight. But please don’t.

You may think you are invincible, but there is no guarantee you will get mild symptoms, and you can still be a carrier of the disease and pass it on to others

So that’s why, as far as possible, we want you to stay at home, that’s how we can protect our NHS and save lives.
To repeat, I know how difficult this is, how it seems to go against the freedom-loving instincts of the British people. And I also know much, right now, workers and business deserve the financial reassurance we are giving them.

But we will get through this.

We will get through it together, and we will beat this virus.

And to ram that point home: the more effectively we follow the advice that we are given, the faster this country will stage both a medical and an economic recovery in full.

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22/3/2020

Good afternoon everyone

Thank you for coming, and thank you to Robert Jenrick, the Communities Secretary, and Dr Jenny Harries, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

I want again to thank everyone in the country today for the huge effort that we are collectively making.

I want to thank the amazing workers in the NHS, everybody working in social care, in every sector, in food distribution, transport, you name it – absolutely everyone who is keeping this country going today.

And I want to thank everyone who is being forced to do something differently today.

Everyone who didn’t visit their mum for Mother’s Day but Facetimed them, Skyped them, rang them instead.

Thank you for your restraint and for what you did.

Everyone who was forced to close a pub or a restaurant or a gym or any other business that could have done fantastic businesses on a great day like this.

Thank you for your sacrifice, I know how tough it must be.

And I can tell you again that this government will be standing behind you – behind British business, behind British workers, employees, self-employed – throughout this crisis.

And the reason we are taking these unprecedented steps to prop up businesses, support businesses and support our economy and these preventative measures is because we have to slow the spread of the disease and to save thousands of lives.

Today we have come to the stage of our plan that I advertised at the outset, when we first set out the plan of the UK government.
When we have to take special steps to protect the particularly vulnerable.

I said the moment would come where we needed to shield those with serious conditions. There are probably about 1.5 million in all.

And in a minute Robert Jenrick will set out the plan in detail.

But this shielding will do more than any other single measure that we are setting out to save life. That is what we want to do.

Also to reduce infection and to slow the spread of the disease.

We have to do more to make sure that the existing measures that we are taking are having the effect that we want.

So it is crucial that people understand tomorrow that the schools are closed.

And tomorrow you should not send your child to school unless you have been identified as a key worker.

And more generally in the view of the way people have responded over the last few days to the measures we have set out I want to say a bit more about how we interact outdoors.

Of course I want people to be able to go to the parks and open spaces and to enjoy themselves – it is crucial for health and mental and physical wellbeing.

But please follow the advice and don’t think that fresh air in itself automatically provides some immunity.

You have to stay two metres apart; you have to follow the social distancing advice.

And even if you think you are personally invulnerable, there are plenty of people you can infect and whose lives will then be put at risk.

And I say this now – on Sunday evening – take this advice seriously, follow it, because it is absolutely crucial.

And as I have said throughout this process we will keep the implementation of these measures under constant review and, yes of course, we will bring forward further measures if we think that is necessary.

Always remember that in following this advice- and I know how difficult that is – that each and every one of us.

You are doing your bit in following this advice to slow the spread of this disease.

The more we collectively slow the spread, the more time we give the NHS to prepare, the more lives we will save, the faster we will get through this.
And always remember – we will get through this, and we will beat it together.

Next Robert Jenrick to outline the shielding measures.

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23/3/2020
Good Evening,

The coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced for decades – and this country is not alone.

All over the world we are seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer.

And so tonight I want to update you on the latest steps we are taking to fight the disease and what you can do to help.

And I want to begin by reminding you why the UK has been taking the approach that we have.

Without a huge national effort to halt the growth of this virus, there will come a moment when no health service in the world could possibly cope; because there won’t be enough ventilators, enough intensive care beds, enough doctors and nurses.

And as we have seen elsewhere, in other countries that also have fantastic health care systems, that is the moment of real danger.

To put it simply, if too many people become seriously unwell at one time, the NHS will be unable to handle it - meaning more people are likely to die, not just from Coronavirus but from other illnesses as well.

So it’s vital to slow the spread of the disease.

Because that is the way we reduce the number of people needing hospital treatment at any one time, so we can protect the NHS’s ability to cope - and save more lives.

And that’s why we have been asking people to stay at home during this pandemic.

And though huge numbers are complying - and I thank you all - the time has now come for us all to do more.

From this evening I must give the British people a very simple instruction - you must stay at home.

Because the critical thing we must do is stop the disease spreading between households.

That is why people will only be allowed to leave their home for the following very limited purposes:
• shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible
• one form of exercise a day - for example a run, walk, or cycle - alone or with members of your household;
• any medical need, to provide care or to help a vulnerable person; and
• travelling to and from work, but only where this is absolutely necessary and cannot be done from home.

That’s all - these are the only reasons you should leave your home.

You should not be meeting friends. If your friends ask you to meet, you should say No.

You should not be meeting family members who do not live in your home.

You should not be going shopping except for essentials like food and medicine - and you should do this as little as you can. And use food delivery services where you can.

If you don’t follow the rules the police will have the powers to enforce them, including through fines and dispersing gatherings.

To ensure compliance with the Government’s instruction to stay at home, we will immediately:

• close all shops selling non-essential goods, including clothing and electronic stores and other premises including libraries, playgrounds and outdoor gyms, and places of worship;
• we will stop all gatherings of more than two people in public – excluding people you live with;
• and we’ll stop all social events, including weddings, baptisms and other ceremonies, but excluding funerals.

Parks will remain open for exercise but gatherings will be dispersed.

No Prime Minister wants to enact measures like this.

I know the damage that this disruption is doing and will do to people’s lives, to their businesses and to their jobs.

And that’s why we have produced a huge and unprecedented programme of support both for workers and for business.

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.

But at present there are just no easy options. The way ahead is hard, and it is still true that many lives will sadly be lost.

And yet it is also true that there is a clear way through.
Day by day we are strengthening our amazing NHS with 7500 former clinicians now coming back to the service.

With the time you buy - by simply staying at home - we are increasing our stocks of equipment.

We are accelerating our search for treatments.

We are pioneering work on a vaccine.

And we are buying millions of testing kits that will enable us to turn the tide on this invisible killer.

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.

But in this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly enlisted.

Each and every one of us is now obliged to join together.

To halt the spread of this disease.

To protect our NHS and to save many many thousands of lives.

And I know that as they have in the past so many times.

The people of this country will rise to that challenge.

And we will come through it stronger than ever.

We will beat the coronavirus and we will beat it together.

And therefore I urge you at this moment of national emergency to stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.

Thank you.