



Discourse and communication during COVID-19: a comparison of prime ministers' statements announcing the first lockdown in Italy and the UK

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ABSTRACT: The outbreak of COVID-19 has produced serious consequences in social and economic terms. The speed at which this pandemic spread in the initial weeks led governments to take drastic measures in order to contain its devastating effects. To this end, lockdowns were imposed in many countries which lasted for months, affecting people's lives in important respects. The way in which the general public was apprised of these restrictions deserves attention, as communication plays a major role at the time of implementing measures impacting on people's freedoms. Based on these considerations, this paper provides a comparison of the rhetorical devices adopted by national governments to inform the public of the beginning of the lockdown. Specifically, the statements with which the Prime Ministers of Italy and the UK announced the implementation of lockdown measures will be examined, with a view to investigating their linguistic features in both Italian and English.

KEYWORDS: Occupational Health and Safety; Discourse Analysis; COVID-19; Comparative Analysis



In March 2020, the severity of the pandemic prompted national governments to adopt drastic measures in order to contain its spread and safeguard the life of millions of people. Wide-ranging restrictions were put in place, particularly after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that COVID-19 was to be characterized as a pandemic (WHO 1). As the number of COVID-19 cases continued to surge worldwide, a full lockdown was announced in many countries: limiting freedom of movement was regarded as a last-ditch attempt to mitigate the impact of this global threat. As a result, well over 100 countries had instituted either a full or partial lockdown by the end of March 2020 (BBC 1).

Arguably, apprising the general public of this measure required decision-makers to draft their public statements carefully considering the impact on the primary addressees, especially because this move would impinge on individual and collective freedoms. A range of communicative strategies were resorted to across countries to break the news, which had to take into account a number of linguistic aspects, giving rise to a variety of discourses. This is the case in consideration of the fact that “struggles to impose or resist the new order are partly struggles over language, both over new ways of language, and over linguistic representations of change” (Fairclough, *Language and Power* 204). With a view to examining the main characteristics of these discourses, this paper will consider the documents issued in March 2020 to inform the public of these drastic and unprecedented measures.

Specifically, the analysis will focus on the transcripts of the press conferences held by Giuseppe Conte and Boris Johnson—who at the time were respectively the Prime Minister (PM) of Italy and the UK—by means of which the first nationwide lockdown was announced. The rationale for investigating these two press conferences lies in the attempt to shed light on possible differences and commonalities in the way language was used to impose a lockdown in these countries. From a methodological point of view, this paper will adopt a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, drawing on the most recent research on the communication of public policy. This investigation will be carried out through a qualitative approach, i.e., focusing on the discursive elements in each text and highlighting common techniques. The paper will examine the rhetorical strategies adopted to frame the issue, to inform the public of the decision taken by the government and to outline the reasons justifying the policy choices.



The research questions this paper seeks to address are as follows: How was the discourse constructed to inform the public of the introduction of the lockdown? To what extent was the organization of discourse different in the two contexts examined? Were there any communication strategies that were peculiar to the statements considered? In order to deal with these answers, the paper will look at the distinctive characteristics and the common features of the speeches delivered by the PMs of Italy and the UK.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the next section will provide an analysis of the most relevant research on PM discourse, the aim of which is to highlight the most important developments in the literature. Next, the main findings resulting from the analysis of the data collected will be discussed. Lastly, some conclusions will be drawn, along with recommendations for future research.

REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS LITERATURE

Prime Ministerial statements and speeches have been examined from a number of perspectives and considering different settings. If we limit this review to CDA studies, this approach is frequently applied to political communication, with language perceived as a social practice. CDA considers the way language functions in political discourse. In this respect, language “implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) which frame it” (Fairclough and Wodak, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 258).

Considered as socially constitutive as well as socially shaped, rhetorical strategies at the micro-level of social interaction can contribute to discourses and their effects at the macro-level of social and political interaction (Ehrlich 17). The way discourse has been organized by decision-makers—PMs in our case—to inform the general public of policy choices has also been the subject of a substantial amount of research. Fairclough (*Critical Discourse Analysis* 15) has pointed out that strategies for achieving changes of a particular sort are pursued in more or less systematic ways by groups of social agents in different positions, with different interests or different objectives. By way of example, Caterina has investigated how CDA helps to reveal a broad range of long-term goals in line with the priorities laid down in a speech delivered by the former Italian PM, Mario Monti (231).

In a similar vein, Machin and Mayr have examined a speech by Tony Blair, highlighting the role of ideology in the speech, particularly in terms of linguistic and grammatical choice (Machin and Mayr 5). Strunin-Kremer has examined how Netanyahu adopted certain communication devices—i.e., vagueness—in his statements, in order to avoid addressing controversial issues and exposing himself to criticism (Strunin-Kremer 125).



Comparison has also been adopted in CDA to identify commonalities and differences in the ways PMs address their fellow citizens in public statements across the world. More recently, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19, research has started to pay attention to how PMs have constructed their discourse at the national level. Lindqvist et al. have conducted a comparative analysis in four countries, highlighting the strategies implemented by heads of government to frame problems and put forward solutions to the spread of the virus during the initial phase of the pandemic (Lindqvist et al. 1). It has been argued that individual behavior has been characterized both as a cause of and a solution to the problem. Nevertheless, this characterization might give rise to some issues, in that empowering people as essential actors to deal with the pandemic might be problematic (Lindqvist et al. 1).

In other cases, the use of discursive and linguistic devices was examined in public statements by PMs to address the public during the pandemic (Kranert et al., *COVID-19: The World and the Words* 4). Finally, Crocchi and Dal Pozzo (4) have looked at the press releases issued by the PMs of Italy and Finland at the beginning of the first phase of the pandemic, assessing the effectiveness of their speeches. As seen, some recent studies have focused on the ability of PMs to convey an effective message during the pandemic. This paper intends to go a step further, considering the communicative strategies put in place to inform the public of the beginning of a full lockdown in Italy and the UK.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we will examine the transcripts of the two statements delivered in March 2020 by Giuseppe Conte and Boris Johnson, who at the time were the PM of Italy and the UK, respectively.

The analysis will be carried out adopting a CDA approach, which requires an account of complicated relationships between text, discussion, social opinion, society and culture. This method can cast light on how social interaction is reflected in the text (Van Dijk, *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis* 250).

The data were selected with a view to manual investigation. In other words, the texts were closely examined in order to identify excerpts containing lexical and discursive features relevant to CDA.

In order to provide some background information, a useful starting point is the fact that Giuseppe Conte addressed the nation on 11 March 2020. The situation at the time was a serious one: the total number of people infected with COVID-19 in Italy was almost 10,000 and some 500 people had already died of the virus. In his speech, Italy's head of government informed his fellow citizens that the lockdown—which was initially imposed only on northern regions—would be extended to the entire country, thus affecting 60 million people.

Boris Johnson gave his speech on 23 March 2020, just a few days after his Italian opposite number. As in the case of Italy, the UK was in the midst of the first wave of the



pandemic, reporting an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. More than 3,000 people tested positive for COVID-19, which took the life of some 340 people.

A COMPARISON OF THE ENGLISH AND THE ITALIAN STATEMENT

Table 1 below summarizes the communication strategies identified in the two statements considered, which will be examined in detail later on.

DISCURSIVE PHENOMENA	NO. OF OCCURRENCES IN THE ENGLISH STATEMENT (LENGTH: 898 WORDS)	NO. OF OCCURRENCES IN THE ITALIAN STATEMENT (LENGTH: 1,066 WORDS)
a) Lexical Choice		
Use of the term 'lockdown'	0	0
Recourse to euphemism	6	5
Use of the term 'restriction'	1	0
b) Use of pronouns		
"I"	7	14
"We"	25	16
c) Discourse Organization		
<i>captatio benevolentiae</i>	0	1
Quotation from External authority	0	1

Table 1. "Communication strategies in the texts examined". Source: Own Elaboration.

COMMON FEATURES

A) LEXICAL CHOICES

The first aspect that can be seen in an examination of the two transcripts concerns terminology. In this respect, it is significant that not once was the word 'lockdown' used when addressing the public.

Neither Conte nor Johnson employed this word in their statements, even though the aim of their address was to inform the public that their freedom of movement would be limited.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a lockdown as "an emergency situation in which people are not allowed to freely enter, leave, or move around in a building or area because of danger" (1). This was exactly the situation millions of people were facing in the first stage of the pandemic, yet the drafters of the two statements carefully avoided using 'lockdown'. From a CDA perspective, this decision might be explained with the intention to tone down the message and to provide a more favorable (or less unfavorable) representation of this policy (Ädel 598). In order to achieve public acceptance and legitimization, other rhetorical devices were also put in place.



For example, the two texts made use of euphemism to refer to this measure. As a discursive phenomenon related to the strategy of attenuation, euphemism is used recurrently in political discourse as a means for blurring a particularly unpleasant reference to the real word (Fernandez Smith and Casas Gomez 32). Johnson resorted to more general expressions, such as “you’ve been asking to stay at home” or “you must stay at home”. Drafters of the Italian text also took care to adopt euphemism. However, a more cryptic expression was used at first: “*Ora è arrivato il momento di compiere un passo in più. Quello più importante. L'Italia sarà sempre una zona unica. L'Italia protetta*” (“Now it is time to make a step further. The most important one. Italy will always be one single zone. Protected Italy”, Own translation). This concept was clarified later on, though the word ‘lockdown’ was once again omitted “*Dobbiamo limitare gli spostamenti alle attività lavorative per motivi di salute o per motivi di necessità, come fare la spesa*” (We must limit movements, which are allowed only for reasons of work, health needs or basic necessities, e.g., buying groceries, Own translation).

When examining word choice in PMs’ statements, it is interesting to note that the word ‘restriction’—which is also negatively charged—was likewise avoided in the documents under examination (the English text contains one occurrence, the Italian text, none). Instead, more neutral terms were chosen, which are peculiar to political discourse—i.e., ‘step’, ‘approach’, or ‘measure’—in an attempt to avoid the negative connotation of the word ‘lockdown’. In other cases, other types of euphemisms can be found, placing the emphasis on the general public and their contribution to tackling the virus, e.g., ‘efforts’, ‘sacrifice’.

B) USE OF PRONOUNS

The use of pronouns in political discourse has been investigated extensively in a CDA perspective (Wales 61; Reyes 35, Hernandez Flores 179). In this respect, it has been stressed that pronouns are always particularly significant because they mark identity and forms of social maneuvering (Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* 145). More generally, pronoun use by political speakers has a significant persuasive function when referring to themselves, their party or their country as a whole (Simpson, Mayr and Statham 248).

The analysis of the statements made by the PMs in Italy and UK provides insights that are common to both contexts. For example, in some cases, the first personal singular pronoun was used by Conte and Johnson to sympathize with their audience and to ask them to increase their efforts further:



CONTE'S STATEMENT	JOHNSON'S STATEMENT
<p><i>I thank you because I know you are changing your lifestyles and making sacrifices.</i></p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>Vi ringrazio perché so che state cambiando le abitudini di vita, state compiendo dei sacrifici</i>)</p> <p><i>I would like to highlight that we are the first country that was hit hard by coronavirus.</i></p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>Siamo, lo ricordo, il Paese che per primo, in Europa, è stato colpito più duramente dal coronavirus</i>)</p> <p><i>I want to tell you one more thing: if we all comply with these rules, we will emerge from this crisis quicker.</i></p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>Voglio dirvi un'ultima cosa: se rispetteremo tutti queste regole usciremo più in fretta da questa emergenza</i>)</p>	<p><i>I know the damage that this disruption is doing and will do to people's lives.</i></p> <p>Though huge numbers are complying - and I thank you all - the time has now come for us all to do more.</p> <p>And I know that as they have in the past so many times. The people of this country will rise to that challenge.</p>

Table 2. "Use of first-person pronouns in the Italian and British statements to sympathize with the audience". Source: Own Elaboration. Emphasis added.

The excerpts above are indicative of the speakers' attempt to reduce the distance from the audience. These textual features confirm the arguments that the recourse to the first-person singular pronoun contributes to constructing groupness and solidarity (Kranert, *Discourse and Political Culture* 77).

Significantly—albeit to a limited extent—the first-person singular pronoun was also used when giving instructions or when explaining decisions:

CONTE'S STATEMENT	JOHNSON'S STATEMENT
<p><i>When I adopted these measures, I was aware that they would be only a first step.</i></p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>Quando ho adottato queste misure ero consapevole che si trattava di un primo passo</i>)</p> <p><i>I will soon appoint a commissioner.</i></p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>A breve nominerò anche un commissario delegato</i>)</p> <p><i>Just a few days ago I asked you to change your long-standing routines.</i></p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>Soli pochi giorni fa vi ho chiesto di cambiare le vostre radicate abitudini di vita</i>)</p>	<p><i>I must give the British people a very simple instruction.</i></p> <p><i>I want to update you on the latest steps.</i></p> <p><i>I can assure you that we will keep these restrictions under constant review.</i></p>

Table 3. "Use of 'I' in the Italian and British statements to provide instructions and clarify decisions". Source: Own Elaboration. Emphasis added.



Arguably, the first-person singular pronoun is a linguistic device used to reassert leadership. The extracts supplied above seem to support the views of Fetzer and Bull, according to whom the usage of ‘I’ constitutes an explicit reference to the identity of a politician as a leader (*Well, I Answer it by Simply Inviting You to Look at the Evidence* 285).

The recourse to the first-person plural pronoun in the two statements examined is also relevant. Nevertheless, in this case a higher degree of vagueness could be found in relation to its usage. With respect to ‘we’, in some cases it was difficult to understand to whom it referred, though at times it denoted the government or the ruling party:

CONTE’S STATEMENT	JOHNSON’S STATEMENT
<p>We are aware that in a country as big, modern and complex as ours, a gradual approach is needed.</p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>siamo consapevoli che in un Paese grande, moderno, complesso, come lo è il nostro, bisogna procedere gradualmente</i>)</p> <p>But now we order the closure of all businesses.</p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>Ma ora disponiamo la chiusura di tutte le attività commerciali</i>)</p>	<p>And that’s why we have been asking people to stay at home during this pandemic.</p> <p>And that’s why we have produced a huge and unprecedented programme of support both for workers and for business.</p>

Table 4. “Use of ‘We’ in the Italian and British statements”. Source: Own Elaboration. Emphasis added.

In other instances, ‘we’ referred to the country as a whole, in order to build collective identity.

CONTE’S STATEMENT	JOHNSON’S STATEMENT
<p>We are part of the same community.</p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>Siamo parte di una medesima comunità</i>)</p> <p>We will see the results of this effort only in a few weeks, in a couple of weeks.</p> <p>(Original sentence: <i>L’effetto di questo nostro grande sforzo potremo vederlo solo tra poche settimane, un paio di settimane</i>)</p>	<p>And we will come through it stronger than ever.</p> <p>We will beat the coronavirus and we will beat it together.</p>

Table 5. “Alternative use of ‘We’ in the Italian and British statements”. Source: Own Elaboration. Emphasis added.

This line of reasoning confirms Fairclough’s view that this ambivalence is politically advantageous for a government that wants to represent itself as speaking for the whole country (Fairclough, *New Labour, New Language?* 83). Specifically, “the apparent inclusiveness of the language is at the expense of a vagueness that obfuscates difference” (Fairclough, *New Labour, New Language?* 36).



Looking at the way ‘we’ was used by the two PMs, a further interpretation might be that the first-person plural pronoun could also serve to avoid taking responsibility for policy decisions, particularly in relation to the measures implemented to tackle the virus. As the effectiveness of these initiatives remained to be seen, the recourse to ‘we’ might give rise to ambiguity when ‘placing the blame’ if the policies turned out to be unsuccessful. While this is not particularly surprising, the first-person plural pronoun contributed to sharing or diffusing agency from the individual speaker to a collective subject, and eventually diminishing the speaker’s own responsibility (Pavlidou 12).

C) DISTINCTIVE FEATURES?

A) DISCOURSE ORGANIZATION

The statements by the Italian and British PMs also present some differences in relation to the organization of discourse and the priority given to the information provided. Conte began his speech by acknowledging the work of healthcare professionals:

I would like to begin by first of all thanking, once again, the doctors, healthcare workers, and researchers who—while I am speaking to you—are working flat out in hospitals to tackle the health emergency to treat our patients.

(Original sentence: Vorrei cominciare ringraziando prima di tutto, ancora una volta, i medici, gli operatori sanitari, i ricercatori che semmai anche in questo momento che vi parlo stanno lavorando senza sosta negli ospedali per combattere l'emergenza sanitaria, per curare i nostri malati)

Table 6. “Conte’s Discourse Organization”. Source: Own Elaboration.

There can be no doubt that praising healthcare professionals is appropriate in consideration of their contribution to tackling the virus. Arguably, starting the statement by recognizing their efforts might also perform another discursive function. From a CDA perspective, the emphasis on the incredible work carried out by Italy’s healthcare system can be regarded as a way to justify the more stringent measures to be implemented. In other words, the commitment of those working on the frontline was not enough to tackle the pandemic, and nor were the sacrifices made by the general public—to whom Conte expressed great admiration, making appeal to national pride:

Right now, the whole world is looking at us [...] they see a country that is in struggling, but they also appreciate us because we are showing great rigor and resilience.

(Original sentence: In questo momento tutto il mondo ci guarda [...] vedono un Paese che è in difficoltà ma ci apprezzano anche perché stiamo dando prova di grande rigore, di grande resistenza)

Table 7. “Conte’s Appeal to National Pride”. Source: Own Elaboration.



Consequently, the situation called for new actions to be taken. Confirming this interpretation is the fact that further on in the document, the Italian PM stressed that: “The time has come to take an additional step” (Own translation, original utterance: “*Ora è arrivato il momento di compiere un passo in più*”).

As far as Johnson’s speech is concerned, it is interesting to note that the introductory remarks focused on the seriousness of COVID-19 and its pernicious effects:

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.

Table 8. “Johnson’s Discourse Organization”. Source: Own Elaboration.

Prioritizing information concerning the gravity of the pandemic performs an important function in the British statement. Starting the address by highlighting the detrimental consequences of the virus could be another way to justify the strict measures that would be outlined later on in the document.

In keeping with Fairclough and Fairclough’s analysis of political discourse, future action is justified by providing reasons. In so doing, how the context of action is represented and explained affects the course of action proposed (Fairclough and Fairclough 134). In Johnson’s speech, the relationship between the context of action and the course of action could be found in the link between the impact of COVID-19 (context of action) and the adoption of the lockdown (course of action).

Consequently, Johnson’s reference to the virus and its effects might be regarded as an attempt to legitimize the restrictions the UK government intended to impose.

It is significant that, unlike Johnson, Conte also made use of a form of *captatio benevolentiae*, a discourse structure the first goal of which is to influence positively the context models of the recipient (Van Dijk, *Discourse and Knowledge* 593). Employed to create common ground with the audience (Lorenzetti 162), in this case the *captatio benevolentiae* strategy was adopted to ask for further sacrifices in the context of the pandemic. Nevertheless, while resorting to two different and peculiar rhetorical strategies, both Johnson’s and Conte’s organization of discourse sought to fulfil the same communication purposes, i.e., winning the heart of the audience and preparing them to accept the lockdown.

B) RECOURSE TO QUOTATION

Another significant aspect is that the statement made by Conte contains a quotation. Quotation is intended to have a significant illocutionary force and communicative intention. What is quoted, who is quoted and where the quotation was first uttered is adapted to the contextual constraints and requirements of the quoting discourse, the quoter’s goal and its intended perlocutionary effects (Fetzer and Bull, *Quoting Ordinary People in Prime Minister’s Questions* 82). In his speech, Conte made use of Norbert Elias’ words:



We are a society of individuals, as Norbert Elias would say.

(Original sentence: Una comunità di individui, come direbbe Norbert Elias)

Table 9. "Norbert Elias' Quotation in Conte's Speech". Source: Own Elaboration.

There are two considerations that arise when examining this quotation. The first one is of a more general nature and concerns the position of Elias' quote within Conte's statement. His words were placed at the very end of the Italian PM's address to the nation. Its conative function is therefore more relevant—as its position makes it more likely to be framed in the memory—and it might contribute to securing common ground between the media frame comprising the entire interaction to be mediated and its audience (Fetzer and Bull, *Quoting Ordinary People in Prime Minister's Questions* 82).

The second consideration that can be made in relation to the recourse to quotation in Conte's speech concerns the meaning of the words of the speaker quoted. In this case, the Italian PM chose to refer to Norbert Elias, a German sociologist who argued that we are 'a society of individuals', with this sentence which might lend itself to different interpretations.

One possible explanation for using this quotation in the context examined here is that, as individuals forming part of a community, we are all called on to make a contribution to tackling the pandemic, complying with the new rules in order to reduce the spread of the virus. In this sense, this quotation is intended to appeal once again to the audience's sense of national unity, fulfilling its persuasive function.

The question arises as to whether Italians from any walk of life—to whom the message was addressed—were familiar with Norbert Elias and his work. Nevertheless, it may be the case that priority was given to the significance of Elias' quote in the context of the pandemic rather than to whether the public would be familiar with his work. This is so also in consideration of the fact that 'a fitting quote might sometimes say more than a dozen eloquent lines' (Adam 219).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examined the rhetorical strategies adopted by decision-makers to announce a nationwide lockdown. Specifically, a comparison was made of the communicative strategies characterizing the statements by which Giuseppe Conte and Boris Johnson—Italy's and the UK's PM, respectively—informed the general public of the new restrictions, which were implemented to tackle the rise in COVID-19 cases. A number of linguistic tools emerged which were both common and peculiar to the two statements.

In the Italian and the English texts, the way terminology was selected was of particular interest. For example, the drafters of the two statements made sure not to employ the word 'lockdown'—which for example was widely adopted in newspapers and TV programs—probably because of the negative connotation characterizing it. 'Lockdown' conveys a sense of immobility, of being forced or confined to a certain place,



as its etymology derives from the act of confining prisoners to their cells or inmates in a psychiatric ward (Trnka and Graham Davies 172). Avoiding using 'lockdown'—and limiting the usage of terminology pertaining to prison discourse, i.e., restrictions—could be interpreted as an attempt to seek acceptance of these new measures on behalf of the population, which had already faced stringent policies to prevent the spread of the virus.

Another characteristic which was investigated was the use of pronouns in the two statements. Alternation between the first-person singular ('I') and plural pronoun ('we') seemed to hint at different communication purposes. Specifically, the recourse to 'I' was linked to the speaker's attempt to create a sense of solidarity with the addressees and to acknowledge the sacrifices faced by the general public.

The first-person singular pronoun was also used to reassert leadership, especially when discussing the new measures that would be implemented. On the contrary, it was found that 'we' was mostly used to generate a feeling of national unity when 'fighting' against the virus, while giving rise to a certain degree of vagueness in order to avoid assuming responsibility.

The way discourse was organized also yielded some insights, particularly in terms of persuasive effects. Significantly, the introductory part of the two statements had a different focus.

Conte acknowledged the significant contribution made by healthcare workers to manage the virus, while Johnson's speech emphasized the seriousness of the virus. While structured differently, the two opening paragraphs might have performed the same linguistic function, namely serving as a justification for the new initiatives. Confirming this argument was the fact that the appreciation for the work of healthcare professionals in Conte's statement and the reference to the gravity of COVID-19 in Johnson's were followed by a passage which presented more stringent measures in both countries.

Finally, Conte's use of a quotation by Norbert Elias could be interpreted as carrying out a significant conative function. Rather than the audience's familiarity with the German sociologist, it is the aptness of the quotation—i.e., the appeal to providing an individual contribution—which made this quotation particularly resonant in the statement.

In conclusion, the communicative choices made by the two PMs seem to have been intended to head off social unrest in their respective countries. In addition to seeking to promote acceptance of the measures adopted, the choices can be interpreted as an attempt to ensure social order. This is particularly the case for example when comparing reactions to the first lockdown and then following the entry into force of the EU Digital COVID Certificate, as numerous demonstrations were staged against the implementation of this measure. This goal is pursued by Conte, as the communicative approach he adopted focused on providing as much detail as possible about the nationwide lockdown (in his statement, he took care to specify all the businesses and venues which were to be closed down). Johnson's plain communication



style can also be seen as an effort to promote social order. However—unlike Conte—the recourse to straightforward language seemed to be intended to provide a general overview of the measures implemented.

It is also significant that certain rhetorical devices were common to both statements, in spite of possible cultural differences in the specific national contexts. Further research might address other aspects which were not covered in this paper—among others, the usage of second- and third-person singular pronouns, differences and commonalities in the use of metaphor, and the way the appeals to values such as solidarity and unity were framed.

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