

# PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE FOR RESOLVING THE ‘TO GET OR NOT TO GET VACCINATED’ DILEMMA

**Silvana Neshkovska**

“St. Kliment Ohridski” University - Bitola  
Faculty of Education - Bitola- Bitola  
*silvana.neshkovska@uklo.edu.mk*

**Zorica Trajkova-Strezovska**

“Ss. Cyril and Methodius” University- Skopje  
Faculty of Philology  
*trajkova\_zorica@flf.ukim.edu.mk*

## **Abstract**

In 2020 the pandemic-stricken world saw a glimmer of hope as a number of vaccines against the Covid-19 virus were discovered. However, the vaccination was not welcomed enthusiastically by everyone, despite constant appeals of authorities worldwide that the vaccination was safe and efficient. The aim of the research, which has a qualitative paradigm, was to conduct a pragmatic analysis of a corpus of pro-vaccination speeches, made by prominent politicians, in the second half of 2021. The stress was put on inspecting politicians’ position towards the vaccination process in their respective countries; the pro-vaccination arguments they used to make their statements more persuasive, and how they addressed the vaccinated and unvaccinated people in terms of what speech acts (Searle, 1976), politeness maxims (Leech, 1983) and strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987) they employed to reach out to them. The findings suggest that politicians’ persuasion efforts were in close correlation with the vaccination rate and that they rested on both the ‘loss’ and ‘gain’ frame; the varying of the speech acts with which the vaccinated and unvaccinated people were addressed; a strategic use of the positive, negative, bold on record and off record politeness strategies, as well as intermittent obedience and disobedience of politeness maxims.

**Keywords:** *vaccination, political discourse, persuasion strategies.*

## **1. Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic started at the end of 2019 and reached almost every corner of the world in a period of few months. The devastating effects of the corona virus immediately instigated massive investments in medicine, and as a result a number of vaccines against the virus were developed in record time. At the beginning of 2021 the world was set to start a massive immunization process, but the vaccination was not welcomed enthusiastically by everybody and the citizenry divided itself unequivocally along the pro and con vaccination line. Vaccination has been treated as a controversial issue for a very long time, but in light of this latest global health crisis, that became even more glaringly obvious (Blume 2006, as cited in Borah 2022). Consequently, despite the availability of vaccines in the developed countries, the vaccination rates varied significantly throughout 2021, with some countries

taking the lead (e.g. Israel, the United Arab Emirates, the UK)<sup>1</sup>, and others lagging seriously behind (e.g. Austria, Germany, Switzerland).<sup>2</sup>

Following their initial struggle to secure sufficient vaccine doses and to manage their distribution, governments were faced with yet another very serious challenge— to convince people to recognize vaccines' safety and efficacy (Saich and Martiniuk 2021). To that end, many governments worldwide resorted to imposing restrictions on the movement of the unvaccinated citizens in the middle of 2021 and introduced mandatory vaccination requirements on specific profiles of jobs (e.g., military and medical personnel, public administration employees, etc.). These measures boosted the vaccination rates significantly, but at the same time, provoked people's discontent and led to protests in many countries in the world (e.g., Australia, the USA, Germany, etc.) on the grounds that Covid-19 measures violate the basic human rights.

In the second half of 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic was still in full swing and the number of infections and fatalities was on the rise again due to the new wave of the pandemic, induced by the new more virulent Delta and Omicron variants. Political authorities, in an attempt to deaden its devastating effects, doubled down on their efforts to spread the message that massive vaccination was the sole panacea for reaching 'herd immunity'.

The events and implications of these turbulent times have attracted the attention of numerous researchers, and, consequently, a number of studies emerged, exploring the communication strategies political and medical authorities employed in addressing the public regarding the Covid-19 vaccination (Palm et al. 2021; Paul et al. 2019; Saich and Martiniuk 2021, etc.) and the reasons for the vehement vaccination opposition and resistance on the part of some portions of the population (Albrecht 2022; Debus and Tosun 2021; Gorman et al. 2020; Reuben et al. 2020; Rosenbaum 2021, etc.).

The studies that have focused on the communicative strategies of public authorities suggest that mere presentation of evidence and data often does 'little in isolation to convince the public', and that instead the narrative should 'weave together the context, problem and resolution, combined with evidence' in order to influence favorably people's opinions and behaviors (Jones et al. 2014, as cited in Saich and Martiniuk 2021). Also, the strategies used are deemed not fully effective because they separate the vaccinated segments of the population from those who decline immunization (Paul et al. 2019). Additionally, politicians and medical experts resort to reproaching and threatening the unvaccinated that they will bear the costs of testing on their own, as states and taxpayers do not have to pay for their irresponsible behavior (Diković 2021). Some studies highlight the fact that the public health efforts are not yielding the desired results, as they focus on Covid-19's lethality and induced dangers, instead of addressing people's actual concerns about the vaccines' long-term effects (Debus et al. 2019). Consequently, authorities are advised to frame their messages in a way in which people would understand that there is as much uncertainty about the corona virus and its future mutations in the long run, as there is uncertainty about the vaccines' long-term effects (Ray 2021, August 4). Message framing, in fact, is extensively explored in the realm of health communication and health prevention science even before the Covid-19 outbreak (e.g., Nan 2012a, 2012b; Park 2012, Von Sikorski and Matthes 2019, as cited in Borah 2022). Specifically, much attention has been paid to the 'loss' and 'gain' frames<sup>3</sup>, which are used to

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/04/covid-19-vaccine-questions-answered-who-video/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/f04ac67b-92e4-4bab-8c23-817cc0483df5>

<sup>3</sup> O'Keefe & Jensen (2008) and O'Keefe & Wu (2012) explored the loss and gain frames, which are drawn from the experimental work of Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) prospect theory, in the health communication domain.

present the same information differently and to influence people's behavior. The 'loss' frame accentuates the unpleasant consequences or disadvantages if one does not comply with the recommended behaviors; whereas, the 'gain' frame underscores the desirable and pleasant consequences in case one complies with the recommended behaviors. Previous research has shown that, in general, the 'loss' frame is slightly more persuasive when it comes to people's vaccination behavior (Nan, 2012a, 2012b; Park, 2012, as cited in Borah 2022); however, in the circumstances of this latest world health crisis, there are studies that indicate that there is no significant difference between the 'gain' and 'loss' frame when it comes to people's COVID-19 vaccine intention (Chen et al. 2021). Finally, there are studies that attribute the failure of authorities' communicative strategies to their taking a monolithic approach in putting their message across to the general public. What they propose, particularly, in the face of vaccination resistance, is addressing multiple audiences by applying varied methods of communication suited for different profiles of people (Ashworth et al. 2021).

On the other hand, researchers who deal with the issue of vaccination resistance and hesitancy point out that opposition started practically immediately after it was publically announced that vaccine development against Covid-19 was underway (Albrecht 2022). Given the novelty of the disease and the unusually rapid speed with which vaccines were developed, a number of studies list reasons for vaccination resistance and hesitancy which include: fears and concerns over vaccine side effects and long-term safety, and other uncertainties about COVID-19 vaccines (Gorman et al. 2020; Hwang 2020, Larson and Broniatowski 2021, etc.) as well as people's distrust of medical professionals and pharmaceutical companies (Reuben et al. 2020, Featherstone et al. 2019). Some attribute the opposition to broader conspiratorial beliefs according to which some covert influential organizations or governmental entities are responsible for the nefarious circumstances of the pandemic (Douglas et al. 2019) and that the vaccines are used for injecting microchips into people's bodies so that their behavior could be monitored, their DNA altered and their fertility controlled (Albrecht 2022). People's political affiliation is also considered to be among the key factors that determine people's stance towards the Covid-19 vaccination (Debus and Tosun 2021; Steel Fisher et al. 2021; Woolhandler et al. 2021). Thus, for instance, Debus and Tosun (2021) in their study claim that in the USA those who are on the right of the ideological spectrum tend to reject vaccination or are at least skeptical of it; whereas, in Europe, ideological extremism, i.e. being far from the center, either to the left or to the right on the left-right continuum, seems to contribute to people's negative attitude towards vaccination.

Taking into consideration all these findings of previous studies, in this paper we set out to investigate the narrative political leader employ during the last wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. More specifically, the paper analyses the persuasion strategies that politicians used in the designated period to boost the vaccination rates, reflected in their argumentation which is either in compliance with the 'loss' or the 'gain' frame, as well as the speech acts, the politeness strategies and politeness maxims they juggle with to persuade the hesitant and resistant portion of the population to resolve their dilemma and undergo inoculation.

## **2. Research methodology**

As the aim of this research, which has a qualitative paradigm, is to conduct a pragmatic analysis of pro-vaccination political discourse, a small corpus was compiled of speeches and statements delivered by three eminent politicians: the American president, John Biden; the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and the Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison.

Six speeches were analyzed in total, two by each politician, one delivered at the beginning of the second half of 2021 and one towards the end of 2021. This time continuum was deliberately selected in order to observe possible changes in their persuasion strategies in response to the unfolding of the vaccination process in their respective countries.

More precisely, in addition to inspecting politicians' position towards the vaccination process in the given time frame, we looked into the argumentation they put forth to make their statements more persuasive in terms of whether their arguments fitted into the 'gain' frame and accentuated the benefits of the vaccination or the 'loss' frame and stressed the consequences of not complying with the vaccination. Furthermore, the analysis was directed at inspecting whether the politicians addressed the vaccinated and unvaccinated people separately in their speeches and, finally, the accent was put on detecting the speech acts, the politeness maxims and politeness strategies they employed while stretching out to both categories of citizens.

In identifying the speech acts in politicians' statements and speeches, we drew on Searle's Speech Act Theory (1976)<sup>4</sup>, which distinguishes among: **declarations** (utterances such as: *I declare/I resign/I baptize...* which have the potential to change the world provided that they are uttered in the right context and by the right person); **representatives** (utterances that state what the speaker believes to be the case, when s/he is 'describing', 'hypothesizing', 'insisting', 'predicting'); **commissives** (utterances with which the speaker commits himself to future action as when s/he is 'promising', 'offering', 'vowing', 'volunteering', 'refusing'); **directives** (utterances that are aimed at making the hearer do something, as in 'commanding', 'inviting', 'requesting', 'forbidding', 'suggesting'), and **expletives** (utterances used to denote how the speaker feels about something, as in 'apologizing', 'praising', 'congratulating', 'deploring', 'regretting').

As to the unveiling of the politeness strategies, we relied on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987)<sup>5</sup>, according to which in all cultures people make use of several politeness strategies to avoid doing face threatening acts. These include: **avoid doing the face threatening act altogether** (do not say anything); **the off record strategy** (ask for something indirectly); and **the on record strategy** (ask for something baldly/directly), which further branches into **bold on record without mitigation** and **bold on record with mitigation**. The bold on record with mitigation distinguishes between **negative politeness strategies** (which include apologies, hesitation, questions, hedges to mitigate the imposition; pre-sequences with a negative-face-saving function; distance between the interlocutors by impersonalizing; stating the imposition as a general rule, etc.), and **positive politeness strategies** (which are intended to demonstrate closeness and solidarity by attending to hearer's interests, wants and needs by seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement; by offering, promising, assuming reciprocity, etc.). Finally, Leech's theory (1983)<sup>6</sup> served as a basis for the analysis of the

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<sup>4</sup>Austin (1969) was the first scholar to define speech acts as actions performed in saying something within his Speech Act Theory. However, his disciple, Searle (1976) further developed this theory and classified the speech acts in the following macro-classes: declarations, representatives, commissives, directives and expletives.

<sup>5</sup> According to Brown and Levinson (1987) in order for us to establish social relationships with other people we have to acknowledge and show an awareness of face, i.e. the public self-image, or the sense of self of the people that we address, which can be negative (their need to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not be imposed on by others), and positive (their need to be accepted and liked by others, and the need to be treated as a member of the group). Hence, Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory, which suggests that politeness is a universal characteristic across all cultures in the world, proposes 5 politeness strategies which people can choose from when they are in a position to perform a face-threatening act.

politeness maxims according to which politeness is achieved by not imposing and by showing concern for the interlocutor in the course of the conversation, via respecting several maxims: a) *the maxim of tact* (minimize cost to other, maximize benefit to other), b) *the maxim of generosity* (minimize benefit to self, maximize cost to self), c) *the maxims of approbation* (minimize dispraise of other, maximize praise of other), d) *the maxim of modesty* (minimize praise of self, maximize dispraise of self), e) *the maxim of agreement* (minimize disagreement between self and the others, maximize agreement between self and other), and f) *the maxim of sympathy* (minimize antipathy between self and other, maximize sympathy between self and other).

To sum up, within this study we try to answer the following research questions:

**R1.** Does politicians' pro-vaccination argumentation fall into the 'loss' or the 'gain' frame?

**R2.** Do politicians address the vaccinated and the unvaccinated separately in their speeches?

**R3.** What *speech acts* politicians use to address the (un) vaccinated people?

**R4.** What *politeness strategies* politicians use to address the (un) vaccinated people?

**R5.** What *politeness maxims* politicians use to address the (un) vaccinated people?

**R6.** Are there differences in the intensity of politicians' persuasive efforts at the beginning and at the end of the second half of 2021?

In the upcoming section, we will discuss in detail the findings obtained from the thorough analysis of the 6 speeches by the three politicians, in turn. The links to the analyzed speeches, which are freely available online, are provided in the Appendix at the end of this research paper.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Analysis of Joe Biden's pro-vaccination speeches

For the purposes of this study we analyzed two pro-vaccination speeches delivered by the American President, Joe Biden – the first one was delivered in August, whereas the second in October, 2021 (see the links in the Appendix).

In his speech in August, President Biden states that “*more than 90% of seniors have at least one shot, and 70% of people over the age of 12 have gotten their first shot*”, on the basis of which it can be concluded that he has a positive stance towards the vaccination process in America. However, given that at this point, enough vaccines doses were provided for all eligible US citizens, he is not fully contented with the vaccination rate and this can be seen in his statement: “*We are making progress, but we need to go faster*”. In his October speech, his general assessment of the vaccination process is positive again, as he states that “*We've made real progress across the board; more than 75% eligible Americans had gotten at least one shot*”, but again his contentment is not complete because as he put it “*a quarter of people in the United States who were eligible for vaccination didn't get the shot*”.

President Biden's pro-vaccination argumentation is quite diverse in both speeches and encompasses the following arguments: the number of unvaccinated people who are infected with the virus is rising; the unvaccinated people are at greater risk of getting seriously ill, being hospitalized, and even of losing their lives; science and scientists should be trusted; the new variants are dangerous and easily transmissible; vaccines are free and easily accessible; mandatory vaccination requirements for some professions have already been put in place, consequently, those who refuse to take a job, practically risk losing their jobs; a high

vaccination rate will restore and normalize the country's economy; the majority of people have already undergone inoculation; people have been vaccinated in the past for mumps, polio, rubella, measles and the humankind is better off because of that.

The arguments listed above are present in both speeches. In addition to them, in his first speech, he mentions that the booster dose will boost people's immune system and will protect them from the new variants. In his second speech, he puts emphasis on several other lines of argumentations that he hadn't touched upon in his previous speech: getting vaccinated is a patriotic and humane act that saves lives and helps the country's economy recover faster; doctors and nurses are exhausted and the pressure that Covid-19 patients put on them becomes unbearable, etc.

Biden's large number of arguments suggest that his approach is in line with researchers' proposition, mentioned in the previous section, that public authorities should not focus only on the Covid-19's lethality and its negative long-term effects in approaching the public. However, a closer look at these arguments reveals that the president does not address people's primary concerns about the vaccines – their side effects, at all. Also, the nature of his arguments suggests that his communicative approach, to a great extent, is based on conveying fear-inducing messages, i.e., his argumentation is in line with the 'loss' frame which emphasizes the consequences people will suffer for not complying with the recommended actions. The arguments that fall into the 'gain' frame which emphasizes the benefits people get from the vaccination, are present among in both speeches too, but to a lesser extent.

The analysis of both Biden's speeches also reveals that he unequivocally segregates people into two categories – the unvaccinated and the vaccinated (see Table 1 below). When he addresses the vaccinated he praises and compliments them for going along with the vaccination process. More precisely, he reassures them that they have done the right thing (*Know that you are highly protected against severe illness and death from Covid-19*), and encourages them to take a booster dose (*This shot will boost your immune response, it will increase your protection from Covid-19, and it's the best way to protect ourselves from new variants that could arise*). He particularly commends employers who have imposed mandatory vaccination requirements on their employees (*And when the vaccine came out, you all stepped up and got the shots. And as a company, you're getting more shots in arms*) and politicians who put efforts into convincing people to get the shot (*Governor, you've done more than about anybody I can think of in any state. I mean that sincerely. You've stepped up... And you've been relentless in getting people vaccinated*). Biden in both speeches specifically commends his administration for the progress they have made in raising the vaccination rate throughout the USA (*We've made real progress across the board... Let me close with this: We have a plan. We have the tools. We're using them and we're making progress. We just have to finish the job*); for achieving equity among the vaccinated in terms of race and ethnicity (*We've made great progress on equity as well... Recent data shows that Latino Americans, Black Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans have now gotten vaccinated about the comparable rate as white Americans*), and for the donations of vaccines they have made to other countries (*Already we've put out one hundred and eighty million doses of vaccines to other parts of the world*).

This finding implies that in addressing the cooperative portion of the population, the president primarily employs the speech act of expletives. From the perspective of Brown and Levinson and Leech's politeness theories that is tantamount to using positive politeness and the maxims of approbation and sympathy, respectively.

**Table 1. Speech acts, politeness strategies and maxims in Biden’s speeches**

Vaccination rate		August speech		October speech	
		70% (one dose)		75% (one dose)	
		Vaccinated	Unvaccinated-	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated
<b>Speech acts</b>	representatives	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)
	expletives	✓ (praising)		✓ (praising)	✓ (deploring)
	directives	✓ (order)	✓ (plea)		✓ (order) (plea)
	commisives	✓ (promise)		✓ (promise)	✓ (promise)
	declarations				
<b>Politeness strategies</b>	avoid doing FTA				
	off record strategy				
	bold on record	✓			✓
	on record (positive politeness)	✓		✓	✓
	on record (negative politeness)		✓		✓
<b>Impoliteness</b>	do a FTA				✓
<b>Politeness maxims</b>	tact	✓	✓	✓	✓
	generosity	✓	✓	✓	✓
	approbation	✓		✓	*
	modesty				
	agreement	*			* ✓
	sympathy	✓		✓	*

Although infrequently, in his first speech Biden uses directives realized as orders in addressing the vaccinated (*Just remember, as a simple rule — rule: Eight months after your second shot, get a booster shot*). The order is a bold on record strategy, whose force is slightly mitigated by his choice of lexis (*‘just’* and *‘simple’*), however, at the same time, this is an instance of disobeying the maxim of agreement, as by ordering them to get the booster dose, he openly challenges them and increases the chances of involving himself in an open confrontation with his addressees.

On the other hand, in addressing the unvaccinated Americans, in his speech in August, President Biden points out that they are at great risk now that new dangerous variants have emerged and that the vaccines can save their lives and the lives of their loved ones (*Next, I want to talk to those who of you who can get vaccinated but you haven’t. The Delta variant is twice as transmissible as the Alpha variant. It’s dangerous, and it continues to spread*).

These utterances belong to the speech acts of representatives, as he is sharing the information with them, trying to inform them of the great danger of being unvaccinated. The lexis that he uses in these series of representatives has a clear negative connotation (e.g. *risk, dangerous, dying, die, tragedy, hospitalizations*, etc.) and is intended to scare those who refuse to get vaccinated. This suggests that this communicative strategy is based on conveying fear-induced messages, which, as mentioned earlier, is deemed inefficient (Debus et al., 2019). What is interesting in this context is that the president, in addressing the unvaccinated, utters a directive, realized as a plea (*So, please, if you haven't gotten vaccinated, do it now. Do it now*), which he reiterates towards the end of this same speech (*To all those of you who are unvaccinated: Please get vaccinated for yourselves and for your loved ones, your neighborhood and your community*). This means that although he is urging them to take a jab he is careful not to impose his will on them and that they are free to decide for themselves. This can be interpreted as an attempt to tend to their negative face, and consequently it is an instance of negative politeness. Conversely, in his speech delivered two months later, when there are still no drastic changes in the vaccination rates in the USA, the president addresses the unvaccinated with a visibly harsher tone. He starts his speech by openly blaming them for jeopardizing the health of the vaccinated people by overcrowding the hospitals and overburdening the health care system (*The fact is, this has been a pandemic of the unvaccinated. Unvaccinated. The unvaccinated overcrowd our hospitals, overrunning emergency rooms and intensive care units...*); for putting the country's economy at risk (*The unvaccinated also put our economy at risk because people are reluctant to go out*), and for restricting the movement of the vaccinated, who for fear of getting infected choose to stay at home (*Even in places where there is no restriction on going to restaurants and gyms and movie theaters, people are not going in anywhere near the numbers because they're worried they're going to get sick*). In blaming and criticizing the unvaccinated, the president resorts to using the speech act of deploring which is an expressive speech act. As to the politeness strategies, he is not employing any at this point; with his open criticism, he is, in fact, committing a face threatening act. Viewed through the prism of Leech's maxims of politeness, the president thus does not abide by the maxims of approbation, agreement and sympathy. At a later point in his speech, President Biden addresses the unvaccinated again but this time he issues a directive speech act in the form of an order (*And for folks who haven't gotten vaccinated, get it done. Do the right thing. It can save your life. It can save the lives of those around you*). This same utterance viewed from the perspective of the politeness strategies is a bold on record strategy without mitigation as the speaker directly tells his interlocutors what he expects them to do. However, in his following utterances, which belong to the speech act of representatives, he makes clear attempts to mitigate the force of his previous utterance by outlining the benefits they will get from the vaccines (*...it can save your life. It can save the lives of those around you...*). This is in line with Leech's maxim of tact. The president's attempt to mitigate the force of his command can also be noticed in the use of the noun 'folks', which as an informal counterpart of the noun 'people' is used to show solidarity and closeness to these people, even though they are 'uncooperative' at this point. Both the use of 'folks' and the mention of the benefits indicate that he tends to their positive face, i.e. he employs positive politeness strategy to make his speech sound more persuasive. Interestingly, by the end of his second speech, his harsh tone gradually wanes. The communicative strategy he adopts in order to enhance the effect of persuasion is still expressed in the form of a directive, but now in the form of a plea, i.e. he resorts to begging the unvaccinated to get the jab, as he did in his speech in August (*So, those of you who haven't gotten vaccinated who may be listening to this broadcast, please get vaccinated. Please; So, for God's sake, for your own sake, for the sake of your families get vaccinated*). President's avoidance to criticize the unvaccinated implies that he observes Leech's maxim of



agreement. His observance of the maxim of tact in the same context is noticeable in the fact that he emphasizes the benefits they will get if they get inoculated again (*It's easy, it's free, it's close by*). In addition, he refers to the unvaccinated by using the inclusive 'we' (*we are all in this together and we should act together and end the pandemic together*). The in-group identity marker 'we' indicates that the president tends to their positive face, i.e. he opts for a positive politeness strategy, which is reinforced by another positive politeness strategy, realized as a representative speech act, with which he informs them that they will waste neither time nor money to get to the vaccination spot as there are so many such points throughout the USA (*We made everyone eligible to get a vaccination and made it easy and convenient for them to find a place to get vaccinated — over 80,000 places around the country*).

In both his speeches, although infrequently, he makes use of the commissive speech act too, in the form of promises which are targeting the entire population (*I know that I'll have your back — they should know I'll have their back, as I have the back of the states trying to do the right thing as well; It will be easy. Just show your vaccination card and you'll get a booster. No other ID. No insurance. No state residency requirement; so, as President, I'm going to continue to do everything I can to get us out of this pandemic*). This is an instance of positive politeness as well as a clear observation of the maxims of generosity and tact.

In conclusion, President Biden, in order to sound as persuasive as possible, varies his communicative strategies when he addresses both the vaccinated and the unvaccinated. In addressing the vaccinated and the cooperative portion of the population, he uses *representatives* (when he informs them about the progress of the vaccination process and the pandemic in general), *commissives* (when he makes promises) which are intended for the benefit of all citizens not just the vaccinated, *expletives* (when he praises and compliments them) and at one point he uses a *directive* (when he orders them to get the booster dose). In addressing the unvaccinated he also uses *representatives* and *commissives* for the same reasons, but his *directives* are both in the form of orders and pleas, and his *expletives* are in the form of criticism. The presence of pleas, orders and criticism is more prominent in his second speech, which is logical, given that no drastic changes in the vaccination rate in the USA occurred after his previous speech and a new wave of the pandemic was looming on the horizon.

As to the politeness strategies, in addressing the vaccinated, he employs *positive politeness strategies* and *bold on record strategy* (on one occasion); however, with the unvaccinated he strategically shifts his strategies ranging from *negative politeness, impoliteness, bold on record*, and *positive politeness strategies* and this is particularly noticeable in his second speech and can be attributed to the fact he is intensifying his persuasion efforts in order to increase the vaccination rate.

When it comes to the maxims of politeness, with the vaccinated he obeys *the maxim of approbation, sympathy, generosity and tact* and only on one occasion (when he issues an order) he disobeys *the maxim of agreement*, but with the unvaccinated again he continuously shifts his strategies. Thus, when he first uses harsh and critical tone in his second speech, he completely disobeys *the maxims of approbation, agreement and sympathy*, then, when his tone softens, he observes *the maxim of tact, generosity and agreement*.

This means that the president in addressing the unvaccinated is strategically juggling with more types of speech acts, politeness strategies and maxims than when he addresses the vaccinated, and this is particularly visible in his second speech when the president probably feels obliged to intensify his persuasion efforts.

### 3.2 Analysis of Boris Johnson's pro-vaccination speeches

The first pro-vaccination speech of the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson that was analyzed for the purposes of this study was delivered at a press conference in July and the second speech in November, 2021 (see the links in the Appendix).

In his speech in July, the British Prime Minister puts the accent on lifting the restrictive measures in the UK, even though at that moment the pandemic was not abated, which can be seen in his words *“both hospitalization and deaths are sadly rising”*. These are the arguments he offers to justify his logic regarding the opening up policy: the restrictions failed to prevent hospitalizations and deaths; the vaccination rate in the UK is very high; and it would be impossible to lift the restrictions during the winter months when the virus is more virulent. However, he calls for caution as *“this pandemic is far from over”*, and encourages people to get vaccinated and to make *“the wall of immunity in the country even higher”*. He has a clearly positive stance towards the vaccination in the UK since, as he puts it, *“96% over 50s and 83% of 30-50 year olds have taken up the offer”*, however, he also points out that not all eligible people had stepped up to get the jab (*But there are still 35% of 18-30 years olds – 3 million people who are completely unvaccinated ... We need even more young adults to receive a protection*). In his speech in November, he acknowledges with pride that because of the high vaccination rate the UK<sup>7</sup> is doing fairly well, but as the virus is sweeping across Europe again, he reminds the British people to stay on alert. In fact, he primarily addresses the fully vaccinated people, urging them to take a booster, then, the teenagers who at that point are supposed to receive the second jab (since the period of 3 months after their first jab has elapsed), and finally, he reminds the unvaccinated that it is never too late to change their mind about the vaccination.

The British Prime Minister in his statements about the vaccination does not explicitly segregate people into the vaccinated and the unvaccinated, although the co-text reveals who his addressees are at specific points of his speeches (see Table 2 below). Also, the arguments he puts forward in favor of the vaccination are not many either. Thus, in both speeches he informs people that the pandemic is not over; that hospitalizations and deaths are rising, and in this way he alludes to the importance of the vaccines and makes use of the fear inducing messages. Then, in his first speech, his argumentation is in line with the ‘gain’ frame as he talks about: the personal benefits of getting vaccinated – the vaccines can save people’s lives and the lives of their family members and friends; the vaccinated will be allowed to travel and to go to nightclubs; the vaccination will bring back normality. The same is the case in his second speech when he particularly underscores that the vaccination essentially means no more restrictions and lockdowns; the booster doses will protect people from the newer variants of the virus and that the countries with high vaccination rates (the UK included) have lower infection rates than the countries with low vaccination rates.

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<sup>7</sup>Since the PM does not present the vaccination rates in specific numbers in his November speech, we used the official Covid-19 statistics released by the British NHS at 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2021 (at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/11/COVID-19-weekly-announced-vaccinations-25-November-2021.pdf>). According to this data as of 21st November 2021, almost 9 in 10 individuals aged 12 and over have been vaccinated with at least one dose (42,179,946, 87.2%); more than 8 in 10 individuals aged 18 and over have been vaccinated with both doses (38,297,118, 86.1%); and more than half of individuals aged 50 and over have received a booster or 3rd dose (11,097,650, 52.1%).

**Table 2. Speech acts, politeness strategies and maxims in Johnson’s speeches**

		July speech		November speech	
		Vaccinated	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated
<b>Vaccination rate</b>		96% over 50s and 83% of 30-50 year olds		87.2% children, 86.1% adults, 52.1% booster dose	
<b>Speech acts</b>	representatives	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)
	expletives			✓ (praise)	
	directives	✓ (orders)	✓ (orders)	✓ (plea)	✓ (recommendation, plea)
	commisives	✓	✓		
	declarations				
<b>Politeness strategies</b>	avoid doing FTA				
	off record strategy				
	bold on record	✓	✓		
	on record (positive politeness)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	on record (negative politeness)			✓	✓
<b>Impoliteness</b>	doing a FTA				
<b>Politeness Maxims</b>	tact	* ✓	* ✓	✓	✓
	generosity	✓	✓	✓	✓
	approbation			✓	
	modesty				
	agreement	* ✓	* ✓		✓
	sympathy			✓	

In both speeches, Mr. Johnson states facts about the pandemic and the vaccination process in the UK, so he mainly relies on the speech act of representatives. However, the Prime Minister concludes his July speech in a rather authoritative and assertive manner by issuing several directives, i.e. orders that pertain to both to the unvaccinated and the vaccinated who were supposed to take a booster dose (*We are asking you to come forward and get your jabs now*). This means that he opts for a bold on record politeness strategy, and since he openly challenges his addresses and does not offer any further explanation as to why they should get vaccinated, the Prime Minister fails to obey the politeness maxims of agreement and tact.

He starts his speech in November with a series of representatives, outlining the importance of receiving a booster dose (*...booster is absolutely crucial, ...the third jab boosts protection back up to over 90 per cent against symptomatic infection*); he also announces the exact number of people in the UK who have already had a booster dose (*So far around 12.6 million people across the UK have had that booster, including in England three-quarters of all people over 70 and 80 per cent of eligible older people in care homes*). Nevertheless, he

also opts for the speech act of directives, which is essentially a plea targeting those who should get a booster dose (*Please go and get that third jab*). As pleas leave people an option to decide what they want to do, this is an instance of employing negative politeness as a persuasion strategy. His plea is followed by a direct warning that unless they get the third dose they might get seriously ill or even die (*Because it would be an utter tragedy if, after everything we have been through, people who had done the right thing by getting double vaccinated ended up becoming seriously ill or even losing their lives because they allowed their immunity to wane by not getting their booster*). The grim overtone of the warning is slightly softened by positive politeness strategies such as the use of the inclusive pronoun ‘we’, with which the Prime Minister signals that they all have been through a lot in the course of the pandemic as a community, and appraise that his addressees were dutiful citizens when they took the first and the second jab. The praise is a case in point of an expressive speech act and a clear observance of the politeness maxims of approbation and sympathy.

Prime Minister Johnson does not criticize nor blame the unvaccinated in his speeches. He addresses them directly only once in his second speech, and in that context he utilizes the speech act of directives realized as a recommendation (*And if you haven't even had one dose, it's not too late. In fact there's never been a better time to get that vital protection as we head into winter*), which is followed by a plea (*so please, please go and get vaccinated*). With both his recommendation and plea, he leaves people room to make up their mind as to what they want to do, which implies that he is employing a negative politeness strategy. However, given the fact that he proceeds by addressing them with the inclusive ‘we’ (*we can help to ensure that we can continue in the way...*), which is a sign of solidarity and membership in the same group, he makes use of positive politeness too. By making mention of the benefits the unvaccinated will get if they get vaccinated, in this context, the British Prime Minister obeys the maxim of tact too (*...to protect yourself and others, and in doing so we can help to ensure that we can continue in the way that we are sticking to our plan of using vaccination to control this virus*). Also, since he does not resort to direct criticism nor blaming, he observes the politeness maxim of agreement.

In Mr. Johnson's speeches several instances of commissives were also detected with which he makes promises to the entire population in the UK (*I want to assure you that we will protect crucial services including the staffing of our hospitals and care homes, the supplies of food, water, electricity and medicines, the running of our trains, the protection of our borders...*). As he shows concern and care for the wellbeing of the UK citizens this is an instance of positive politeness as well as obedience of the politeness maxims of tact and generosity, and is present in both his speeches.

To sum up, due to the high vaccination rate in the UK in the second half of 2021, Johnson is pleased with the vaccination rate in the UK and at this point of the pandemic he does not seem to invest much into his persuasion strategies. This is clearly visible in the fact that he doesn't come forward with a long list of pro-vaccination arguments. The primary purpose of both his speeches is to bring the public up to date regarding the latest pandemic- and vaccination-related developments in the UK. Consequently, he resorts to using the speech acts of *representatives* for the most part. There are, however, a few *commissives* and *directives* with which he addresses the entire UK population, without explicitly segregating them into the vaccinated and unvaccinated citizens. The commissives are in the form of promises and the directives that are in the form of orders are noted in his earlier speech and they pertain equally to both the vaccinated (to get the booster dose) and the unvaccinated (to get vaccinated). Clearly, the Prime Minister's communicative style at this point is more authoritative and stern as there are more people who should undergo vaccination than towards the end of the year, i.e. when he delivers his second speech, in which he uses

directives in the form of pleas to refer to both the vaccinated and the unvaccinated UK citizens. His replacement of the orders with pleas suggests that as the vaccination rate in the UK reaches its peak, his authoritative communicative style gives way to a more lenient communicative style.

The analysis shows that the Prime Minister is very frugal with the expletives, as he only uses them on one occasion to commend the vaccinated for taking the first and the second jab, and in that context to encourage them to take the booster dose. This means that he refrains from specifically praising the vaccinated just as he refrains from explicitly commending his government for handling the health crisis and the vaccination process successfully.

As to the politeness strategies, the Prime Minister employs them only sparingly as he is focused on stating facts rather than on addressing directly distinct profiles of citizens. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy is that in his first speech, when the vaccination rate is still somewhat lower in the UK, he uses *positive politeness* (when he makes promises) and the *bold on record* strategy (when he issues orders to all citizens – to the vaccinated to get a booster dose, and to the unvaccinated to get the jab). When the vaccination rate improves significantly, although rather infrequently, he uses only *positive* and *negative politeness strategies*, targeting both the vaccinated and the unvaccinated UK citizens.

In Boris Johnson's political discourse intermittent obedience of the politeness maxims is noticeable. Thus, in his July speech in addressing the entire population he *disobeys the maxims of agreement* and *tact* when he orders them to get along the vaccination process without bringing out the benefits they will gain from it. However, when he makes promises to secure everything they need in their daily lives, he obeys *the maxim of tact* and *generosity*. In his later speech, he obeys *the maxims of approbation* and *sympathy* with respect to the vaccinated, and *the maxims of tact* and *agreement* with respect to the unvaccinated. What these findings suggest is that he is somewhat more careful, or rather more polite with the unvaccinated, and slightly more aggressive towards the vaccinated. This makes sense given that the vast majority of people in the UK have already complied with the vaccination requirements in the second half of 2021 and now he only needs to persuade them to take the booster dose, as the continued success of the vaccination process depends on it. In other words, the fact that he appears to be more lenient towards the unvaccinated citizens (he does not criticize nor blame them) can be attributed to the small percentage of such people, which, in turn, cannot undermine the overall success rate of the vaccination process in the UK.

### 3.3 Analysis of Scott Morrison's pro-vaccination speeches

The last part of our tailor-made corpus consisted of two speeches delivered by the Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison – one delivered in August and one in December, 2021 (see the links in the Appendix).

The purpose of Morrison's August speech is to inform the public about the efforts the Australian government is making to supply enough doses of vaccines and the progress of the vaccination process in Australia in general. In this speech, the Prime Minister also touches on the dire situation in New South Wales and justifies the full lockdown measures imposed on that part of the country. In his December speech, first, he compliments Australians for the successful realization of the vaccination process; then, he lays emphasis on the importance of the booster doses and reveals his plans to open plants for manufacturing vaccines in Australia.

In both speeches the Prime Minister states that he is pleased with the vaccination rollout in his country. In fact, in his speech in August, he states that he is hopeful that in a period of one

week “one in two eligible Australians would have had their first dose”; whereas, in his speech at the end of 2021, he announces that 80% of the population has undergone inoculation against Covid-19 (*We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world, and that vaccination program is taking another big step, with Western Australia joining the 80 per cent club today, the last of the states and territories to do that*). On this occasion, he profusely praises both Australians and his government for the way they handled the pandemic (*We've made some big calls. We've got the balance right, I believe, working together as a country, working together with states and territories, working together with our health and medical science and research community, which has enabled us to achieve incredible things in this country; ...Australia is ranked two in the world for pandemic preparedness*).

As to his pro-vaccination argumentation, the analysis shows that it revolves around a number of arguments whose interpretation rests mainly on allusions. Thus, for instance, in August, the Prime Minister explains that they are experiencing serious difficulties in securing the vaccines, which implies that there is a high demand for the vaccines worldwide, i.e. that the vaccines are accepted by the vast majority of the world population, so the Australians should do the same thing; he also pledges that the government will continue to do their best to secure the vaccines needed for the Australian citizens, which, in turn means that people should appreciate the government's efforts and they should reciprocate by getting vaccinated; he further claims that all his decisions are based on advice given by medical authorities, the allusion here being that people should get the jab because medical experts and scientists say so, not politicians like himself, and that the vaccination is vital as it prevents the spread of the virus, particularly in some vulnerable and sensitive indigenous communities. In his second speech, by stating that they are among the countries with the highest vaccination rate in the world, he again alludes that a lot of Australians have undergone vaccination and the rest should do the same; vaccination has enabled them to open safely, so if they don't want to see another round of lockdowns, they should go along with the vaccination process; he also purports that the mRNA vaccines have proven to be the biggest scientific discovery over the course of this pandemic, in other words, people should trust science; booster doses are important particularly in light of the emergence of the new variants of the corona virus; the government is investing in building plants for manufacturing vaccines, which implies that the vaccines should be accepted as something normal in the future, i.e. they are here to stay. From the listed arguments above it is clear that he is not using fear-inducing communication approach and his argumentation is aligned predominantly with the 'gain' frame.

In laying out the pro-vaccination arguments, the Prime Minister mainly relies on the speech act of representatives (Table 3). The same goes when he talks about their plan to build plants for manufacturing vaccines (*So we set about the task of ensuring that we have the manufacturing capability to do that, first of all, to keep Australians safe and to protect their health not just against COVID, but against the many other communicable diseases*). In this context, he observes the politeness maxim of tact. All these arguments can also be interpreted as a deliberate use of the off record politeness strategy on the part of the Prime Minister, as he basically alludes to the benefits of the vaccination and indirectly asks Australians to get vaccinated. At the same time, the pragmatic analysis shows that he tends to his addressees' negative face as well, since he gives them an option to decide if they share his opinion about his manufacturing plans or not. He achieves that by inserting the discourse marker 'I think' to mitigate the force of some of his utterances (*We work with a number of states and we came to the very, I think, sensible conclusion that here in Victoria, we have the strong foundation to continue to build not just a great research and collaboration infrastructure, but a powerhouse of medical manufacturing; And the partnership with Moderna and the state government, I think, is a cracking partnership for Australia*).

**Table 3. Speech acts, politeness strategies and maxims in Morrison’s speeches**

Vaccination rate		August speech		December speech	
		1 in 4 Australians fully vaccinated		80% of the entire population	
		Vaccinated	Unvaccinated	Vaccinated	Unvaccinated
Speech acts	representatives	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)	✓ (assertions)
	expletives	✓ (praises, thanks)		✓ (compliment, thanks)	
	Directives	✓ (plea)	✓ (plea)	✓ (advice)	
	commisives	✓ (promise)	✓ (promise)		
	Declarations				
Politeness strategies	avoid doing FTA				
	off record strategy	✓	✓		
	bold on record				
	on record (positive politeness)	✓	✓	✓	
	on record (negative politeness)	✓	✓		
Impoliteness	do a FTA				
Politeness maxims	Tact	✓	✓		
	Generosity	✓	✓		
	Approbation	✓		✓	
	Modesty				
	Agreement		✓		✓
	Sympathy	✓		✓	

Even though the Prime Minister does not segregate the population into the vaccinated and the unvaccinated explicitly, still, in his speech in August, he singles out the vaccinated and expresses appreciation for them (*And I want to thank Australians for turning up. I want to thank Australians for enduring. I want to thank Australians for pushing through. I want to thank those Australians who are complying with those public health orders ...*). He also thanks those who helped him secure enough vaccine doses, including the Polish Prime Minister (*And I particularly want to thank Prime Minister Morawiecki... I want to thank him personally and his government for their support of Australia’s Covid-19’s response during this very challenging time*). In thanking the vaccinated and those who helped him, he is using an expressive speech act. This at the same time means that he is employing a positive politeness strategy and that he obeys the maxims of approbation and sympathy. In the same context, he uses a commissive speech act as well, i.e. he makes a promise that he and his government will do everything they can to procure more doses of the vaccines (*I want to assure Australians that I will continue, and my government will continue to leave no stone unturned in ensuring that where there opportunities such as these, we will secure them*). Making a promise is a positive politeness strategy according to Brown and Levinson’s theory, and since he promises to do it (secure vaccines) for the benefit of others, with this utterance

he is observing the maxim of generosity. Also, in his speech in August, he simply asserts (uses the speech act of representatives) that in the coming period young Australians will be targeted for vaccination (*Now, the one million doses... will be targeted to Australians aged 20 to 39 years of age who are identified... as the peak transmitters for Covid-19; And in just days, these jabs will start going into the arms of Australians over the course of the week*). Formulating the imposition as a general rule that applies to everyone, helps him save his addressees' negative face, i.e. in this context he opts for negative politeness. Finally, he finishes his address with an expressive speech act, i.e. a plea to people from New South Wales to stay at home and to get vaccinated (*I have a simple plea to the people right across New South Wales... So my plea to my fellow Australians, particularly my fellow Sydneysiders, stay at home... I need you to stay at home and you needed more vaccines from us. ..This is the only way we can get on top of it, those two things combined, working together, suppress and vaccinate*). The plea seems to target equally the vaccinated and the unvaccinated. In this sequence of utterances, he combines negative and positive politeness – negative because the directive speech act is a plea and gives his addressees an option to opt out, and positive because he reminds them that they belong to the same group, they are his 'fellow' Australians and they can prevail only by 'working together'. Since he is not criticizing and challenging openly those who oppose his plans regarding the vaccination, he obeys the maxim of agreement and since he claims that this is for their own good he is observing the maxim of tact, at the same time.

In his speech in December, he commends his government for their achievements in these challenging times (...*We have the lowest fatality rate of almost any country in the world saved more than 30000 lives. We have one of the strongest economies powering through this pandemic... And of course, we have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world...*); then, he praises all Australians for their resilience (*We are resilient and we're able to move forward because of the great experience that we've drawn together to ensure that we can face down this pandemic...*); finally, his compliments and thanks go to the medical staff for their dedicated work and the great sacrifices they have made in achieving the high vaccination rate (*particularly those here in this room who've enabled us to achieve that and the wonderful health and workers who are out there on the front lines even now, each and every day*). In all these cases, there is no doubt that the Prime Minister is using the expressive speech acts of complementing and thanking and also in doing that he tends to the positive face of his addressees, i.e. he employs positive politeness. Viewed from the perspective of Leech's maxims of politeness, in this context Mr. Morrison displays clear obedience of the maxims of approbation and sympathy. In his second speech, he particularly addresses the citizens who should get a booster dose and he does that by means of a directive in a form of advice (*And that booster program is continuing to grow and grow, and I encourage all Australians to go and get their boosters*). He never explicitly mentions the citizens who show vaccination hesitancy and resistance, let alone criticize them. In terms of Leech's maxims, since he is neither criticizing nor berating the unvaccinated, he is observing the maxim of agreement.

In summary, the Australian Prime Minister is satisfied with the vaccination rate in Australia, particularly, towards the end of 2021; consequently, his speeches, for the most part, are intended to inform the public about the current state of affairs related to the pandemic and the vaccination in Australia. He does not segregate people overtly into the vaccinated and the unvaccinated category, and never ventures into criticizing or blaming the unvaccinated. However, he too fails to address the concerns of these people. His persuasion efforts, which seem to target the entire Australian population, are clearly visible in the pro-vaccination arguments which are aligned with the 'gain' frame. In fact, when the vaccination rates are lower (in August), he addresses the entire population – he calls the unvaccinated to step up



and get the jab and the vaccinated to get a booster dose. But when the vaccination rate is higher (towards the end of 2021) his persuasion efforts are primarily directed at the vaccinated citizens to get their booster dose.

His political discourse is pervaded by the speech act of *representatives*, however, he often resorts to using *expletives* in the form of thanking and complimenting the citizens who have cooperated with the authorities (the vaccinated); the authorities themselves for their efforts to procure vaccines; the medical staff for conducting the vaccination process, and the political leaders of other countries who have helped him with the procurement of vaccines. In both speeches there are instances of *directives* too, which, in August, are in the form of pleas and with which he targets both the unvaccinated and the vaccinated. However, his directives in December target only the vaccinated and are in the form of advice for them to get the booster dose. Finally, in his first speech, he uses *commissives* as well when he makes promises that he will do everything he can to secure more vaccines and these are addressed to the entire Australian population. The frequent use of thanking and complimenting as well as pleas and advice addressed to the vaccinated suggests that his attention is turned more towards the cooperative portion of the population, and that the Prime Minister relies on their future cooperation when it comes to maintaining the high vaccination rate in Australia. He never explicitly criticizes nor blames the unvaccinated.

In terms of the politeness strategies, the analysis shows that he too uses intermittently *positive* and *negative politeness strategies*, which means that he tends to his addressees' both positive and negative face, but he also uses the *off record strategy* (asking the interlocutor to do something indirectly). His usage of the politeness strategies is more clearly obvious in his August speech, which suggests that given the lower vaccination rate at that point of time, he invests more energy into persuading people. He does not use the bold on record strategy, which implies that Mr. Morrison avoids issuing orders.

As to the politeness maxims, their presence is more frequent in his speech in August, which again points to more intensive persuasion tactics. In addressing those who go along with the vaccination process, he uses the *maxims of tact, approbation, sympathy* and *generosity*; by not criticizing the unvaccinated when he implores them to get vaccinated he is observing *the maxim of agreement*, in addition to *the maxims of tact* and *generosity*, when he explains the benefits they will have and what his government will do for them.

## Conclusion

If we compare the vaccination rates of the USA, the UK and Australia in the second half of 2021, the USA has the lowest vaccination rate and commensurate with that our findings show that the American president puts much more efforts into persuading people to get vaccinated than his Australian and British counterparts. That can be seen primarily in the fact that out of the three politicians, he comes forth with the longest list of varied pro-vaccination argumentation. In contrast, the British and the Australian Prime Minister seem to be more complacent with the vaccination rates in their respective countries and focus more on stating facts related to the pandemic and the vaccination process than on persuading people to get the jab. Consequently, the arguments that fall into the 'loss' frame are much more prevalent in Biden's speeches than in the speeches of the other two politicians where the focus seems to be on arguments that belong predominantly to the 'gain' frame. Also, Biden unequivocally separates in his address the vaccinated from the unvaccinated citizens and openly criticizes and calls on the unvaccinated to comply with the vaccination process. Johnson and Morrison, on the other hand, address the public without overt references to the one or the other category

of people, except for a few rare instances where they explicitly encourage the unvaccinated to cooperate. In fact, to put it in more precise terms, both Johnson and Morrison's arguments seemed to be directed at the general population which for the most part has already undergone inoculation, the aim being to persuade them to take a booster dose. This finding is logical given the high vaccination rate in the UK and Australia in the designated period.

A common feature of the communicative approach of all three politicians is that they use representatives (to state facts and to depict the situation). But they also use directives which range from orders to recommendations, advice and pleas. The usage of pleas is particularly striking as by using them the authorities literally resort to begging people to get vaccinated. Both representatives and directives target the entire population, i.e. the vaccinated and the unvaccinated citizens. However, the three politicians also use expletives— thanking and complimenting, in particular, and these are directed merely to the cooperative portion of the population. Out of the three politicians, Johnson seems to be the most frugal when it comes to commending the vaccinated. The other two politicians, Biden and Morrison, use expletives (thanks and compliments) profusely in reference to their administration too. All three politicians use commissives, with which they obligate themselves to find more vaccine doses (Morrison), to protect the population (Biden) and to provide all people with unimpeded access to all their daily necessities (food, transportation, health care, etc.).

The intermittent and strategic use of positive and negative politeness strategies is also another interesting finding derived from this research and it pertains to all three politicians. They seem to deliberately tend to both the positive and negative face of their addresses (both vaccinated and unvaccinated), meaning they try to persuade them to get vaccinated by showing them they are part of the group, that they are all in this (the pandemic) together, but also by respecting their freedom and free choice, which is seen in the usage of pleas, advice and recommendations. In Biden and Johnson's speeches there are instances of the bold on record strategy when they are instructing the unvaccinated to get the vaccine (in the case of Biden) and the vaccinated (to get a booster dose) (in the case of both politicians). Morrison, on the other hand, prefers the off record strategy and, in stating his pro-vaccination arguments, he is dropping clear hints that he expects unvaccinated people to get the jab and the vaccinated to get a booster dose.

The same observation can be made with respect to the maxims of politeness which are occasionally obeyed and disobeyed, except in the case of Morrison who never disobeys any of the maxims. A clear pattern that emerges, however, is that all three politicians observe the maxim of approbation in relation to those who comply with the vaccination and all of them observe the maxim of agreement with respect to the unvaccinated, as they probably do not wish to confront them openly and stir revolt and discontent on that portion of their electorate.

Finally, as to the last research question that referred to the changes in the intensity of politicians' persuasive efforts, our research shows that that was the case only in Biden's second speech. Namely, as no drastic changes were made in the vaccination rate in the USA in the period between both his analyzed speeches, it is evident that in his second speech he intensifies his efforts by varying the speech acts he employs to address the unvaccinated in particular and by his interchangeable obedience and disobedience of the politeness maxims, which is a clear attempt to strike the right balance between reprimanding them and motivating them to do the 'right' thing.

Although the research at hand is based on a small scale, tailor-made corpus, still, we are hopeful that the findings and insights gained from it will make a small but meaningful contribution to the pool of studies that investigate politicians' persuasive strategies in the context of Covid-19.

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