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# Imperativeness in Recommendations for Protection Against the Coronavirus

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## ABSTRACT

*In addition to changing the daily lives of the world population and strengthening internet communications, the COVID-19 pandemic has also influenced the language we use in daily communication. In this paper, on the example of recommendations for the prevention of the spread of the disease and protection of health issued by the National and Regional Civil Protection Headquarters, we focus on the morphosyntactic aspects of addressing the citizens. Qualitative analysis of the corpus reveals that different means of expressing imperativeness are used depending on the illocutionary strength of the message itself. The most frequent means are imperatives, particularly during certain stages of the fight against the coronavirus, which testifies to the severity of the situation ('state of war'). Infinitives and infinitives accompanied by modal verbs such as 'trebati' ('need'), 'morati' ('must'), 'valjati' ('must/should') are also frequent means of expressing the expected reaction, and they are used when the recipient is irrelevant (depersonalised) and the sender wishes to downtone the imperativeness of the message. Depersonalised structures have also proven to be frequent in various decisions relating to the introduction and cessation of various measures. Polite means of expressing imperativeness are the least frequent among the identified means, which suggests the importance of understanding the message about protecting oneself and others, and even more importantly, of behaving in accordance with it.*

**Key words:** Croatian, imperativeness, COVID-19, recommendation

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to changing the daily lives of people with respect to every aspect and raising the awareness about the importance of social interaction, has once again confirmed the role and importance of electronic media in contemporary society, but also the role and importance of the media. During the Corona crisis, which we have been following in Croatia since March 2020, the media have become the primary source of information on important issues, but also the focal points for entertainment, education, socialization and integration of people and ideas. On the other hand, they had a crucial role in determining the priority topics and shaping our understanding of them, and as a result, in creating opinions about events and people relevant in the newly arisen situation<sup>1</sup>. The media have the power to create attitudes, particularly when it comes to new topics, those that the public knows little about. This is precisely the type of topic that is related to sudden events that are difficult to predict and that frequently develop into a crisis<sup>2</sup>.

It is indisputable that, considering the introduction of mandatory social distancing in Croatia, during the pan-

demia it was the internet media that served as the primary source of information on the spread of the disease, on ways in which people can protect themselves against it, on the number of infected, but also on the rules and restrictions introduced as the result of the spread of the disease. „By observing the average ratio across all explored online news media, we found that the COVID-19-related publications cover more than the half of the media space (about 57%). Interestingly, during the period between the two waves of the epidemic, when the number of new cases dropped to zero, the number of publications related to the COVID-19 topics remained at a high 43%<sup>3</sup>.”

During the pandemic, and especially during the total lockdown, the social media became “as a source of information /.../ to know how to protect themselves from the disease and find details about the disease<sup>4</sup>”. Still, it was soon revealed that the internet media, and the social media in particular, have used the COVID-19 pandemic to spread panic through the use of propaganda and inflammatory (war) discourse.

Social crises are an inevitable part in the development of any community, but a global crisis such as the one re-

lated to the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has not been experienced by a number of generations that are alive today. When at the beginning of the spring of 2020 this new disease appeared in Croatia, the fear for one's own life felt by most of the citizens was a natural, justified, and understandable reaction. But this natural fear was systematically inflamed by the large number of daily media headlines and videos that bore testimony to the numerous victims of this disease. The metaphor of war became the central metaphor when it comes to conceptualising the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>5</sup>.

## Recommendations as a Text Type

As a text type, recommendations for the protection of one's own health and that of others against infection by the coronavirus, which make up the corpus used in this study, belong to a subtype of directives, the so-called instructives, whose primary function is to advise, i.e. "to tell the receiver (how) to do X, when the receiver benefits from X"<sup>6</sup>.

From the syntactic perspective, a recommendation is characterised by a transformation of an incentive "which affects the entire syntactic structure. It is used to express an utterance, which is contained within such a structure, as an incentive to be done or to happen" and "as a result the utterance is either thought/conceived or hypothetical"<sup>7</sup>. The transformation of the incentive is characterised by exclamatory intonation and particles *neka* ('let') and *da* ('(in order) to'), where the particle *neka* emphasises the incentive, while the particle *da* emphasises thought/conceiving and hypotheticality.

From the pragmalinguistic perspective, recommendations, along with instructions and advice, belong to directives, i.e., speech acts employed by the speaker to get the interlocutor to perform a certain action<sup>8</sup>, which leads us to the semantic-pragmatic imperativeness which is "directed towards the interlocutor from whom a certain action or reaction is demanded", which is in Croatian prototypically expressed with the help of the imperative "but can be expressed in a number of other ways: infinitives, future tense I, present tense of many verbs, 'da + present' or 'da + perfect' structures, 'imperativised' forms of the present tense of the verbs of the *dati* ('to give') or *ići* ('to go')-type verbs, but also some other, mostly, so-called light verbs (e.g. *gledati* ('to watch'), *vidjeti* ('to see'), *čuti* ('to hear'), *čekati* ('to wait') and similar), numerous imperative particles and/or defective verbs (*nemoj* ('do not'), *hajde* ('come on'), *de* ('come on'), *dede* ('come on'), *neka* ('let') and similar) and various types of imperative structures"<sup>9</sup>.

'Directiveness', which is characterised by imperativeness, can be expressed with a greater or weaker illocutionary force which depends on illocutionary purpose<sup>10</sup>, and as a result "when interpreting speech acts that contain indicators of imperativeness (either of morphosyntactic or implicative nature, i.e., contextual) we can start from the assumption that the speaker is using them to imply his

wish that the interlocutor should perform a certain action"<sup>11</sup>.

It is indisputable that within the theory of speech acts imperative utterances (both formal and categorical) belong to directives, i.e., speech acts used by the speaker to make the interlocutor perform a certain action<sup>8</sup>, but unlike in the case of prototypical imperative utterances (orders, commands and demands) "in case of advice, recommendations and warnings /.../ we can assume that it is in receiver's interest to act in accordance with the propositional content, where, in the case of warnings, potentially dangerous consequences in case of their nonacceptance are suggested to the receiver"<sup>12</sup>.

### *Public health instructions during the 19th century cholera epidemic*

Even before this pandemic both the world and Croatia have faced the spread of dangerous and frequently lethal diseases such as the plague and cholera, and, as a result, various ways of protecting public health were devised within the framework of the then available knowledge.

We can single out cholera which in 1830 reached Croatia and the Habsburg public health policy promptly responded by creating a series of instructions. Here we focus on three texts written in standard Kajkavian Croatian language published in 1830 and 1831. Two are translations from German (*Vputenje za zdravja upravitelstva (Sanitaets-Behörden) i za one časnike koji su kontumaciomih prepostavljeni ... za vezda obstojećem kužno-otrovnom betegu Kolera Morbus zvanom... Vu Budimu, 1830; Navuk kak se prvešine i nadstojnici općinah vu prigodi gda je izhodna kolera ... ravnati i ladati moraju*), and the third is a shorter version of one of them (*Navuk kak se ljuctvo vu vremenu vezda približavajučega kužnoga betega kolera zvanoga zadržavati ima. Dano vu Križevci 26. Juliusa 1831.*)

The first, *Vputjenje* ('Instruction'), is intended for medical personnel and consists of four parts: "1 on the need for the introduction of regulations that are applied in case of any contagious disease (*kužnem betegu*); 2 on the need to stay vigilant so that the disease does not spread to our country (= Habsburg Monarchy) – *da se beteg ... vu naše orsage ne razleje*; 3 prevention of spread (*rasplodenja*) in case that cholera should appear at the border; 4 on patient care (*baratanje z betežnemih*)"<sup>7</sup>.

By analysing the recommendations published in these three booklets we can notice that the contents are very similar, but there are some differences when it comes to the use of verb forms used to convey imperativeness.

Thus, large gatherings are forbidden:

*Nigdar nesme vnogo ljudih vu maleh, tesneh i niskeh hižah prebivati.*

(A greater number of people should never be present inside small, cramped and low houses at the same time.)

In order to prevent the disease, spaces should be ventilated:

*use hiže jednoga stanja, osebujno pako hiže betežnikov, moraju se vsaki dan prevetrati* ('All the houses belonging to a single household, in particular those of the sick, must be ventilated every day')

*večkrat vu nju čisti zrak pustiti.*

('fresh air should be let in several times a day')

Isolation and self-isolation are prescribed:

*hižu vu kojoj su sumlivi betežniki nahaja brez vsakoga najmenšeg štentanja i odvlačenja zadovolnum stražum budu dali opkoleti i zaprti...* ('a house in which there are suspected patients should without any doubt and without delay be surrounded by guards and closed off...')

*stanovniki koteri se jesu sumlivim betežnikom večkrat zestajali /.../ dužni jesu pri hiži ostati i vsakom društvu drugeh ljudi sebe ukloniti.* ('inhabitants who have met with suspected patients on more than one occasion /.../ must remain inside their houses and refrain from any socialising.')

They were also familiar with the lockdown and passes:

*da mesto ne bi zevsema i celovito zaprto bilo, zato vendar ni jednom človeku ne bude slobodno i dopušćeno iz takovog mesta prez pašuša, koj se od časnikov poglavarstva potrebuвати mora, kam oditi. Tak ni stranski koj človek nesme se vu koje mesto pustiti...* ('so that a settlement is not completely shut off, no one will be allowed to leave such a settlement without a passport, which can be requested from the officer attached to the municipality. The same way, foreigners cannot be allowed to enter any settlement...')

*... je potrebno da nadstojniki i poglavari vu prigodi potreboće otrovanu državu i općinu s kordonom ne smo zapreju, neg takajše vsako općenje i društvo z onemih državamih i općinamih kotere su zaprte prepovedaju* (...it is necessary that the supervisors and municipality chiefs, if the need to close off a tainted/poisoned country and municipality arises, not only cordon it off but also prohibit any socialising with the inhabitants of those countries and municipalities which are open')

*... takaj ni stranski koji človek ne sme se vu koje mesto pustiti, doklam ne bude vukazal da je od časnika zrućenim pašušem proviđen* (... in the same way, a foreigner is not allowed to leave a settlement until he can prove with a passport obtained from an officer that he has been cleared by a physician')

If we look closely at these sentences, we can notice that the bearers of imperativeness are the following words and phrases: *nesme* ('must not'), *moraju se* ('must/have to'), *dužni jesu* ('are obliged to'), *ne bude slobodno i dopušćeno* ('is not allowed or permitted'). Instructions contained in these booklets are clearly defined, they are direct commands or prohibitions and must be complied with.

## Materials and Methods

Literature on important messages that governments convey to their people and our corpus have revealed that any analysis should focus on several aspects in order to get a clearer picture of the various ways in which imperativeness is realised. Therefore, it is necessary to employ both interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary approaches. The interdisciplinary approach implies including medical, sociological, and psychological research, which is outside of the scope of this paper. As a result, we will primarily focus on the intradisciplinary approach within philology as a discipline. We start from grammatical approach, but complement it with pragmalinguistic and stylistic remarks. The next step would be to include sociolinguistic, semantic and wholistic stylistic approaches, which is at present outside of the scope of this paper.

Grammatical indicators are focused on the morphological and syntactic levels and the results will be presented in the form of four groups: imperative, infinitive, present tense and forms that indirectly convey imperativeness. This classification of the materials will also serve as the basis for discussion.

Every grammatical realisation will be accompanied by an analysis of the sociolinguistic framework, in particular of the directedness of the message (directed at everyone or at special groups) and the reactions to the messages (primary focus is on imperativeness as a way of shaping the message and less on the content of the reactions). This part of the discussion will also include the results of the analysis of a sub-corpus consisting of calls to get vaccinated and public signs studied as a part of two other studies<sup>13,14</sup>.

A complete stylistic analysis of the corpus would be outside of the scope of this paper, and we focus on synonymy and near-synonymous syntagms/sentences where nuances depend on the choice of the imperative form.

The corpus includes guidelines for citizens found on the official web pages of the county and town Civil Protection Headquarters in the Republic of Croatia (National Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia is the government body in charge of dealing with catastrophes), that is, those that were transmitted via electronic media. The listed sources have been chosen as relevant when it comes to information on the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and prevention of the spread of the disease among the population.

The changes in the course of the fight against the pandemic are also reflected in the corpus, and as a result we analyse it within three cycles which are related to the slogans (messages) employed:

1. 3 March 2020 – 5 May 2020: OŠTANIMO DOMA! (STAY HOME!)
2. from 5 May 2020: OŠTANIMO ODGOVORNI! / BUDIMO ODGOVORNI (STAY RESPONSIBLE! / BE RESPONSIBLE!)

### 3. from 26 December 2020: MISLI NA DRUGE. CIJEPI SE! (THINK OF OTHERS. GET VACCINATED!)

The corpus covers the time period since the first messages at the beginning of March 2020 until the end of September 2021.

We consider the collected corpus to be primarily qualitative since we believe that daily publication of new and relevant messages does not enable us to conduct a statistical analysis of the corpus which would still be appropriate as the corpus grows. This is particularly obvious when it comes to the expansion of ways in which imperativeness is expressed during the observed time-period. Also, the same messages-slogans are repeated frequently and on daily basis and this would also skew any attempt at quantification. As a result, we opted for a qualitative analysis.

We will not comment on other linguistic changes caused by the pandemic in our analysis. For more information on the “language of the pandemic” in Croatia see the web site of the Croatian Institute of Language and Linguistics <https://jezik.hr/koronavirus>; in particular for neologisms<sup>15</sup>.

## Results and Discussion

### Imperative

Imperative is the expected grammatical form when it comes to expressing commands<sup>14</sup>, which is also supported by its synonymous term ‘imperative mood’. Since this is a grammatical mood used to convey commands, it is primarily linked to the interlocutors and persons who are not involved in the communicative situation. Thus, we expect to see verb forms for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person. Giving commands to oneself is not something that is expected, so the form for the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular does not exist. Also, giving commands to a group that one belongs to is also unlikely, so the form for 1<sup>st</sup> person singular is extremely rare.

Still, this theoretical assumption is based on the function of the imperative. Our corpus reveals that the opposite is true – imperative is frequently used in the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural.

Imperatives are used to convey messages-slogans that have marked numerous communicative situations during this pandemic. We will demonstrate the differences found when it comes to choosing the grammatical categories of person and number.

The first group consists of messages that employ imperatives in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular:

*Ostani doma* (‘Stay at home’)

*Drži razmak* (‘Keep physical distance’)

*Cijepi se* (‘Get vaccinated’)

*#SpasiZivote* (‘#SaveLives’)

*#OstaniKodKuće* (‘#StayAtHome’)

Due to the use of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular and directiveness towards an individual, the receiver can understand the message in two ways. One is that he could perceive himself as an interlocutor and understand the message as personal. The other is that he might feel singled out, as if he were the only one who should behave this way, while others do not have to, which might be followed by a negative reaction.

Let us now take a look at the same messages expressed with the help of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural of imperative:

*Ostanite doma* (‘Stay at home’)

*Držite razmak* (‘Keep physical distance’)

*Cijepite se* (‘Get vaccinated’)

These stress the second possible tone of the first group expressed with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular even more because they imply that the recommendations are directed only towards some people, and not towards all and that they exclude the person giving the order. These could never lead to a positive reaction like the one that the messages from the first group can lead to. They would not only be unsuccessful, but could also trigger a negative reaction, and as a result they are avoided.

During the last stage which is marked by calls to get vaccinated, due to a strong and joint resistance to vaccination in a certain segment of the society, messages that contain the 3<sup>rd</sup> person imperatives are never used. Instead, those that contain the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural imperatives are used.

It has been found that the third option, which employs the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural imperatives is the best option:

*Ostanimo doma* (‘Let’s stay home’)

*Držimo razmak* (‘Let’s keep physical distance’)

*Cijepimo se* (‘Let’s get vaccinated’)

This option is frequently used since it includes all the members of the society, those for whom the message is intended, but also those who are sending the message. During a time when fear of disease is prevalent, the protective function of the group one belongs to and being connected to others are very important. Therefore, messages that use the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural imperatives represent a call to unity and are felt to be less ‘commanding’ than those that use the 2<sup>nd</sup> person (both singular and plural).

This is precisely how messages-slogans were formed during all three stages of the pandemic: need for complete isolation in order to prevent the spread of the disease during the beginning of the pandemic, need for physical distancing once we were out of the lockdown and acceptance of vaccination as a solution.

In our corpus imperatives appear in various types of messages related to the pandemic, such as instructions, guidelines, and advice. It is interesting that the imperative is foregrounded even in those messages that bear the word ‘recommendation’ in their title. Recommendation is “that which is given as a piece of advice”<sup>16</sup>, so one might

expect to see some milder form used to express the imperative mood than the imperative itself.

Still, it is realised with the help of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural of the imperative, as demonstrated by nine out of ten recommendations titled Recommendations for persons who were placed under medical supervision in self-isolation at home:

*Svakodnevno kontaktirajte nadležnog epidemiologa* ('Contact your epidemiologist every day')

*Mjerite tjelesnu temperaturu ujutro i navečer* ('Take your temperature in the morning and in the evening')

*Obratite pažnju na pojavu simptoma respiratorne infekcije (temperatura, kašalj, otežano disanje...)*

('Pay attention to the appearance of symptoms of respiratory infection (fever, cough, laboured breathing...')

*Redovito perite ruke sapunom ili koristite hidroalkoholnu otopinu*

('Wash your hands regularly with soap or use a hydroalcoholic solution')

*Redovito provjetravajte prostoriju*

('Ventilate your room regularly')

*Koristite zasebnu posteljinu, ručnike i pribor za jelo*

('Use separate bedding, towels and eating utensils')

*Osigurajte odvojenu sobu i odvojeno koristite kupaonicu*

('Stay in a bedroom and use a bathroom separate from other people in your home')

*U slučaju potrebe za odlaskom u zdravstvenu ustanovu prethodno se javite telefonom liječniku obiteljske medicine.*

('In case you need to go to a medical facility first contact your physician by phone')

Only one recommendation is formed without the help of an imperative, but it includes a clear prohibition expressed with the help of the syntagm 'nije dozvoljeno' ('not allowed'):

*Nije dozvoljeno izlaziti iz kuće.*

('It is not allowed to leave one's house.')

Usually, the same grammatical category is used in the entire message, but sometimes differences in the way information is combined can be observed:

*Prijavite se za cijepljenje / preko web stranice / cijepise.zdravlje.hr*

('Register for vaccination/ via web page/ cijepise.zdravlje.hr')

*Zaštitimo sebe i svoje najbliže / #ostajem kući.*

('Let's protect ourselves and our dearest/ #I'm staying home')

This is even more frequent in the sub-corpus of public signs where we can find examples of combining of different forms of categories of person and number (*ostani : zaustavimo* ('stay : stop')) and of a full-stop and an exclamation mark:

*Ostani doma. Zaustavimo koronavirus!*

('Stay at home. Let's stop the coronavirus!')

Imperativeness in messages containing imperative can also be amplified or downtoned. Amplification is most frequently achieved by using an exclamation mark at the end of the message:

*Ostanimo odgovorni!* ('Let's stay responsible!')

*Ostanimo sigurni zajedno*

('Let's stay safe together!')

while downtoning is most frequently achieved by adding a plea:

*Molimo nosite zaštitnu masku*

('Please wear a face mask')

*Molimo sačekajte dok jedna osoba izađe.*

('Please wait until someone exits.')

*Molimo Vas da se u prostoriji ne zadržavaju više od dvije osobe.*

('We ask that no more than two persons be present in the room at any time.')

*Molimo da se pridržavate sljedećih uputa.*

('Please follow the instructions below.')

Still, it should be noted that this type of messages is more frequent in the sub-corpus of public signs, such as the following signs which can be found on posters placed at the entrances to shopping centres:

*Molimo vas, dezinficirajte ruke.*

('Please, disinfect your hands.')

*Molimo vas, držite međusobni razmak od 2 m.*

('Please keep a 2-meter distance between yourself and other people.')

Finally, we can say that the imperative is the primary morphological choice for commands, but also that there is a gradation of imperativeness from milder, expressed with the help of the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, over that expressed with the help of the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular to the strongest expressed with the help of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural of the imperative, which is caused by the fact that the sender of the message is excluded from its scope.

In addition to that, some message contents can be understood more as advice than commands which further downtones the imperativeness of such imperatives, e.g.:

*Budimo odgovorni.* ('Let's be responsible.')

*Budimo odgovorni – pridržavajmo se mjera.* ('Let's be responsible – let's adhere to the measures.')

*Budimo pametni.* ('Let's be clever.')

*Zaštitimo sebe i druge.* ('Let's protect ourselves and others.')

*Čuvajmo naše zdravlje i zdravlje naših bližnjih.*

('Let's protect our health and the health of our dear ones.')

*Misli na druge.* ('Think about the others.')

The sub-corpus of calls to get vaccinated<sup>16</sup> contains a great number of messages from celebrities who list reasons why they believe that vaccination is the only way out of the pandemic. These messages are also formed with the help of imperatives, with a special emphasis at the end: *Cijepi se!* ('Get vaccinated!').

### Structures with infinitives and modal verbs

"Since the prototypical illocutionary force of an imperative utterance is that of a command, which implies either social equality or the speaker's social superiority over the interlocutor (his authority!), it is logical that in communicative situations in which relations between the participants in the speech act are different its intensity and directness has to be downtoned"<sup>17</sup>. In our corpus the downtoning of the intensity and directness of imperatives is facilitated by frequent use of other means with a weaker illocutionary force, such as the modal verbs *morati* ('must'), *trebati* ('need'), *valjati* ('must/should'), and, to a lesser extent, *moći* ('can/be able to') in structures containing infinitives, or, infrequently in syntagms containing both members.

Infinitive absolute is one of the alternative grammatical means of expressing a demand (incentive), which is, among other things, characterised by depersonalisation. "Such an infinitive is impersonal, and it speaks to all persons. *!...!* The absolute use of infinitive is mostly restricted to commands, warnings, and instructions. It belongs more to the technical sphere and outside it, it is perceived as harsh and clumsy. Thus, it is not a part of the more refined Croatian literary expression."<sup>13</sup>

Here we single out one of the first pieces of advice that the Ministry of Health published on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020, after the first news about the spread of the coronavirus in Europe and of the consequences that this spread had in Italy<sup>18</sup>:

*Prati ruke* ('Wash hands')

*Izbjegavati kontakt sa domaćim i divljim životinjama*  
(Avoid contact with domestic and wild animals')

*Koristiti maramice* ('Use tissues')

*Nositi masku* ('Wear a face mask')

*Konzultirati liječnika.* ('Consult a physician.')

The first word in each of these pieces of advice is an infinitive. We analyse the first piece of advice:

*Prati ruke.* ('Wash hands')

In this sentence, the word *prati* is a predicate, and the word *ruke* an object. In the syntax of the Croatian language, infinitive is more commonly used as verbal adverbs along with a predicative verb which is a modal verb, and

which expresses verbal grammatical categories: person and number (possibly even gender).

Modal verbs that can appear alongside the verb *prati* ('to wash') in the sentence *Prati ruke* ('Wash hands') include: *moći* ('can/be able to'), *smjeti* ('be allowed to'), *trebati* ('need'), *morati* ('must'), *valjati* ('must/should'). Since this sentence is a part of a list of advice titled preventive measures, the list of modal verbs is reduced to two, *trebati* ('need') and *morati* ('must').

We present all possible realisations with both of these modal verbs below:

#### (I.) *trebati* ('need')

*Ja trebam prati ruke. Mi trebamo prati ruke.*

('I need to wash my hands.') ('We need to wash our hands.')

*Ti trebaš prati ruke. Vi trebate prati ruke.*

('You need to wash your hands.') ('You need to wash (your hands.')

*On/ona/ono treba prati ruke. Oni/one/ona trebaju prati ruke.*

('He/she/it needs to wash his/her/its hands.') ('They need to wash their hands.')

#### (II.) *morati* ('must')

*Ja moram prati ruke. Mi moramo prati ruke.*

('I must wash my hands.') ('We must wash our hands')

*Ti moraš prati ruke. Vi morate prati ruke.*

('You must wash your hands.') ('You must wash your hands.')

*On/ona/ono mora prati ruke. Oni/one/ona moraju prati ruke.*

('He/she/it must wash his/her/its hands.') ('They must wash their hands.')

Recommendations in the left column are directed towards individuals, as indicated by the use of the singular form of the modal verb. When it comes to the right column, the example *Vi trebate/morate prati ruke* ('You need to/must wash your hands') can also be interpreted as directed towards an individual, since the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural form is used as a sign of respect when addressing individuals in Croatian, and the pronoun that serves as the subject is spelled with a capital letter.

Messages in the right column are marked by the grammatical category of plural and they are directed towards a greater number of people (two or more). The grammatical category of person indicates who needs to/must follow the procedure in the given piece of advice. If we put together both of these grammatical categories, we can see towards whom the message is directed.

A piece of advice is "a recommendation on what to do and how to do it or what action to take under certain circumstances"<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, it is logical that advice is given to others, both those present (2<sup>nd</sup> person singular and plu-

ral) and those not present (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and plural) and that it does not include the person who is giving advice into the pool of potential realisers. On the other hand, if the utterance is in the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, then it includes the person giving advice into the pool of those who need to/must follow the piece of advice in question. Because the person giving advice is also included, the piece of advice in question becomes more acceptable to others, i.e., they do not feel that it is being imposed. Utterances in the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular are excluded from this analysis because they represent auto-suggestive constructions.

Imperativeness expressed in these sentences is of a varying intensity – messages containing the verb *trebati* ('need to') are less imperative in tone than those containing the verb *morati* ('must'). In other words, if we need to wash our hands, then we can either do it, or not do it. However, if we must wash our hands, then we have no choice – we are obliged to do this.

The verb *valjati* ('must/should') is similar to the verbs *trebati* ('need') and *morati* ('must') in terms of meaning. However, it can only be used in depersonalised structures (*Valja prati ruke* ('Hands must/should be washed')), meaning that it is limited to a general conclusion/statement or a lower level of imperativeness. Such an utterance, in terms of semantics, belongs to those of the type *Dobro je prati ruke* ('It is good to wash hands'), and is therefore considered to be an incentive rather than a command.

The analysis conducted on the sentence *Prati ruke* ('Wash hands') can also be applied to other sentences found in this group of advice (here we present forms for the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular):

*Trebaš/moraš izbjegavati kontakt s domaćim i divljim životinjama.*

('You need to/must avoid contact with domestic and wild animals.')

*Trebaš/moraš koristiti maramice.*

('You need to/must use tissues.')

*Trebaš/moraš nositi masku.*

('You need to/must wear a face mask.')

When it comes to the last piece of advice on the list (*Konzultirati liječnika* ('Consult your physician')) it should be pointed out that it does not fit the norm of the standard Croatian language and the correct form would be:

*Konzultirati se s liječnikom.*

('Consult your physician.')

Therefore, if it contained a modal verb, this piece of advice would be as follows:

*Trebaš se /moraš se konzultirati s liječnikom.*

('You need to/must consult your physician.')

This does not exhaust all the syntactic options in Croatian that could be derived from the original sentence *Prati ruke* ('Wash hands'). When we nominalise the sentence *Prati ruke* ('Wash hands') we get a nominal syntagm *pranje ruku* ('washing hands'). Categorization of the attribute in this syntagm as an object genitive contains the

deep relation between the predicate and the object. While the sentence *Prati ruke* ('Wash hands') can potentially include information contained in a modal verb (*trebati* ('need') or *morati* ('must')), the nominal syntagm cannot, and such an utterance is even further away from the clear imperative utterance *Peri ruke* ('Wash your hands'), i.e., from a command expressed with the help of an imperative.

Finally, the three alternative utterances: *Peri ruke* ('Wash your hands')/ *Prati ruke* ('Wash hands')/ *pranje ruku* ('washing hands'), that is, expressions of imperativeness that employ an imperative, an infinitive and an attributive syntagm with an object, express different and clearly delineated levels of imperativeness, that is, of illocutionary force.

We should also add that the infinitive as a part of a sentence that expresses imperativeness can also be found in negative sentences, such as the following found at the beginning of the Recommendations for persons who have been placed under medical supervision in self-isolation at home:

*Nije dozvoljeno izlaziti iz kuće.*

('It is not allowed to leave one's house.')

Imperativeness expressed by this utterance is at a high level and it is encoded with the help of a semantic component (*nije dozvoljeno* ('it is not allowed')), that is, it expresses a complete denial of the possibility of performing the action expressed with the infinitive (*izlaziti* ('leave')).

Such a high level of imperativeness is also noticeable in messages that contain the amplifier *obavezno* ('obligatory') which implies obligation, that is, that someone has to do something:

*Obavezno držati razmak!*

('It is obligatory to keep physical distance!')

*Obavezno dezinficirati ruke.*

('It is obligatory to disinfect one's hands.')

*Obavezno nas kontaktirajte.*

('It is obligatory to contact us.')

*Na cijepljenje obavezno donijeti osobnu iskaznicu / zdravstvenu iskaznicu HZZO-a.*

('It is obligatory to bring your ID or Health Insurance card issued by HZZO to vaccination.')

#### *The present tense*

In Croatian, imperativeness can also be expressed with the help of the present tense, which, when used as present absolute, is used to refer to actions taking place in the present.

We have seen that some recommendations were formed with the help of the imperative, while others were formed with the help of the present tense. In this group of recommendations issued by the crisis headquarters the predicative verb is *preporučuje se* ('it is recommended'), and the recipients are clearly marked at the beginning of the recommendation:



*Preporučuje se boravak na otvorenom...*

(‘It is recommended to spend time in the open...’)

*Roditeljima se preporučuje da ne vode djecu u vrtiće i škole...*

(‘Parents are advised against taking their children to the kindergartens and schools...’)

*Ugostiteljskim objektima preporučuje se ograničavanje/skraćivanje radnoga vremena do 22 sata...*

(‘It is recommended that hospitality establishments limit/shorten their working hours to 10 p.m. ...’)

*Trgovačkim objektima preporučuje se uvođenje kontrole ulaza...*

(‘It is recommended that shops start controlling the number of people entering...’)

*Preporučuje se organizacija rada uz provođenje mjera sprečavanja epidemije i primjeni odgovarajućih metoda procjene i kontrole rizika od epidemije COVID-19.*

(‘It is recommended that measures for the prevention of the epidemic be implemented in the organization of work and that appropriate methods for the assessment and control of risk from the COVID-19 epidemic be applied.’)

The fact that the predicate verb is depersonalised (*preporučuje se* ‘it is recommended’) stresses the objectivity of the recommendation. Naturally, not all verbs in the present tense found in our corpus are depersonalised, and the following highly suggestive message contains a verb in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular of the present tense:

*Ograničavanjem svog kretanja spašavaš živote!!!*

(‘By limiting your movements, you are saving lives!!!’)

Direct imperativeness would be expressed in the following way:

*Ograniči kretanje i spašavaj živote*

(‘Limit your movements and save lives’)

but even this type of structure conveys indirect imperativeness, because on the one hand we have a simple activity (*ograničavanje kretanja* ‘limiting of movements’), and on the other a great heroic message: *spašavaš živote* (‘you are saving lives’), followed by three exclamation marks. You, as an individual can do great deeds (plural).

Let us take a look at the messages directed towards the young population to whom the need to get vaccinated is explained in the context of taking care of the older members of their households and older family members. The next sentence, which contains a verb in the present tense, does not convey imperativeness, but as the last sentence which stresses the meaning of the entire discourse on vaccination being a good choice, it actually rounds up an imperative message:

*Izabrali ste zdravlje.* (‘You have chosen health.’)

The majority of the Headquarters’ messages were focused on restrictions, but after a while, decisions on the abolishment of previous restrictions were made. Thus, new commands were given, only this time they were perceived

as positive messages and this type of imperativeness did not affect the recipients. What is more, the nullification of previous messages was perceived as an expression of freedom, even though they still contained limitations when compared to the time before the pandemic.

Such messages were mostly expressed with the help of the present tense:

*Ukida se obustava plesnih škola;*

(‘The ban on the operation of dance schools is lifted’)

*Omogućeno je održavanje radionica i dječjih igraonica te pružanje zabavnih i rekreacijskih usluga i u zatvorenim prostorima, uz strogo pridržavanje protuepidemijskih mjera i preporuka;* (‘It is now possible to organise workshops and indoor play areas are allowed to open again. It is also possible to provide entertainment and recreational services in indoor spaces provided that anti-epidemic measures and recommendations are strictly adhered to.’)

*Amaterske kulturno-umjetničke izvedbe, programi i manifestacije mogu se održavati samo na otvorenim prostorima;* (‘amateur performances, programs and events can only be organised in open spaces’)

*Sajmovi i drugi oblici gospodarskih i turističkih događanja i priredbi gdje se prodaju, izlažu ili prikazuju proizvodi mogu se održavati na otvorenim prostorima, uz obavezno korištenje zaštitnih maski ili maski za lice;* (‘Fairs and other forms of business and tourist events where products are sold, displayed or shown can be held in open spaces provided that face masks are worn’)

*Ukida se ograničenje od maksimalno 40 posto popunjenosti javnog prijevoza; korištenje maski je i dalje obvezno.* (‘The limitation of public transport to 40 percent of maximum capacity is abolished; use of face masks is still mandatory.’)

In this case, the present tense is a good choice for the verbal predicate because it expresses an action which refers to the present time or to the time when the message is read. It activates the notion of the present tense as a tense used to express a permanent action in a receiver who is eager to get back to “the old normal”, which in turn links the sememe of permanence to such messages.

The fact that these are still restrictions can be seen from the addition which excludes something at the end of each piece of information (*osim u školskim dvoranama* ‘with the exception of school gyms’), *samo na otvorenim prostorima* (‘only in open spaces’), *korištenje maski je i dalje obvezno* (‘use of face masks is still mandatory’), etc.). The cost of this relaxation is a strict adherence to the anti-epidemic measures and recommendations.

*Indirect speech acts with imperative meaning*

Moving towards the periphery of imperativeness, we must also note examples that include “indirect speech acts with imperative meaning/function”<sup>9</sup>, which pragmalinguistic literature, in general, believes to be a more polite form of communication<sup>11,18</sup>. These are utterances in which a recommendation is made only by making a clear and

unambiguous claim (which, with the choice of words and structure, leaves no room for any doubt as to its veracity):

*Konзумiranje alkohola NEĆE vas zaštititi od COVID-19.*  
(‘Consuming alcohol WILL NOT protect you from COVID-19.’)

*Imajte na umu da sve što čujete o koronavirusu nije nužno tačno.*

(‘Bear in mind that not everything you hear about the coronavirus is necessarily correct.’)

*Samo odgovorno ponašanje svih pojedinaca može utjecati na suzbijanje širenja koronavirusa!*

(‘Only responsible behaviour of every individual can have an impact on the prevention of the spread of the coronavirus!’)

*Kako bi proveli sve preventivne mjere, trebamo i vaš doprinos.*

(‘In order to implement all the preventive measures, we need your contribution.’)

*Solidarnošću protiv korone.*

(‘With the help of solidarity against Corona.’)

*Ograničavanjem svog kretanja spašavaš živote!!!*

(‘By limiting your movements, you are saving lives!!!’)

*Sada je vrijeme za pametne odluke.*

(‘Now is the time for smart decisions.’)

In such examples, in addition to the absence of typical indicators of imperativeness, “the directedness of the imperative mood towards a person is downtoned during direct communication between the speaker and interlocutor”<sup>19</sup> frequently by the use of passive and depersonalised structures:

*Prije prve uporabe maske poželjno ju je oprati.*

(‘The mask should be washed before you use it for the first time.’)

*Maska se pere na temperaturi od najmanje 60 °C, a preporučuje se i na 90 °C.*

(‘The mask should be washed at the temperature of at least 60 °C, and the recommended temperature is 90 °C.’)

*Razmak između korisnika usluge minimalno 2 metra.*

(‘Physical distance between clients should be at least 2 meters.’)

*Po isteku samoizolacije osobu se testira prije puštanja u kolektiv ustanove.*

(‘After the period of self-isolation has ended the person is tested before they are allowed to join the collective of the institution.’)

When it comes to other ways of conveying imperative messages in the context of the pandemic, we have also found gerunds:

*Obavezno nošenje zaštitne maske.*

(‘Wearing of face masks is obligatory.’)

*Obavezna dezinfekcija ruku!*

(‘Disinfecting your hands is obligatory!’)

*Obavezno uporaba ručnika!*

(‘Using towels is obligatory!’)

As already mentioned, the intensifier *obavezno* (‘obligatory’) leaves no option when it comes to complying with the recommendation – the action named in it has to be performed.

## Conclusion

The speed of the appearance of the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease and their global spread have been proportional to the media coverage of the new disease and its consequences. Very quickly a ‘total war’ was declared on this great threat.

The time of the pandemic has been marked by numerous messages to citizens to protect themselves and others from the virus. In Croatia, these messages were based on the recommendations of the National Civil Protection Headquarters.

Although comparison with the messages sent to citizens during the cholera epidemic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the area where the Kajkavian standard Croatian language was spoken reveals that the measures implemented back then had a much more direct command tone in communicative terms, the fact that in our corpus the imperative was the most frequent form used to instruct the citizens on how to protect themselves against the virus bears witness to the level of ‘conflict’ and the need to ‘suppress’ the ‘attack’ of the virus. Especially during the first stage of the confrontation with the coronavirus, imperatives and structures with the modal verb *morati* (‘must’) served as direct, unambiguous messages to the citizens on the need to behave in a responsible way in the newly arisen situation.

Structures with the present tense, especially depersonalised present tense, were frequently used during the periods in which certain measures were relaxed (*ukida se* (‘be abolished’)) and in ‘real’ recommendations (*preporuča se* (‘it is recommended’)) that leave open the possibility of acting in a different way.

Although no less important, recommendations employing indirect speech acts with imperative meaning, in the context of war, command discourse of other means of addressing the public, have certainly led to a stronger reaction when it comes to some people than those that employed imperatives, precisely because of the lower directedness of the imperative mood towards the interlocutor.

Qualitative analysis based on grammatical features, complemented by pragmalinguistic, sociolinguistic and stylistic notes has shown to be an appropriate method considering the topic of this paper. One of the limitations is the collected corpus which does not include all the texts relevant to the topic. Still, the paper identifies the forms which are used to communicate with the citizens during crisis situations, that is, structures with greater and weaker illocutionary force. Further research should be performed on an expanded corpus and future public ad-

dresses should employ those forms of recommendations that will have a better success when it comes to their acceptance (e.g., messages on the importance of getting vaccinated, on wearing face masks, on self-isolation, etc.).

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## IMPERATIVNOST U PREPORUKAMA ZA ZAŠTITU OD KORONAVIRUSA

### SAŽETAK

Osim što je promijenila svakodnevicu svjetskoga stanovništva i ojačala internetsku komunikaciju među ljudima, pandemija bolesti COVID-19 utjecala je i na jezik svakodnevne komunikacije. U radu se na primjeru preporuka nacionalnoga i regionalnih stožera civilne zaštite za sprječavanje širenja bolesti i očuvanje zdravlja promatraju morfosintaktički aspekti obraćanja građanima. Kvalitativna analiza korpusa pokazuje da su korišteni različiti načini iskazivanja imperativnosti (zapovjednosti) ovisno o ilokucijskoj snazi same poruke. Najfrekventnijim se pokazao imperativ, što svjedoči o ozbiljnosti situacije ('ratnom stanju'), napose u pojedinim fazama borbe protiv koronavirusa. Infinitiv i infinitiv s modalnim glagolom *trebati*, *morati*, *valjati* također je čest oblik iskazivanja očekivane reakcije, a javlja se kada primatelj nije relevantan, obezličan, a želi se ublažiti zapovjedni ton poruke. Također, obezličene su se konstrukcije potvrdile kao česte u odlukama o početku ili prestanku pojedine mjere. Uljudniji oblici iskazivanja zapovijedi najrjeđi su među navedenim načinima, što sugerira važnost razumijevanja poruke o zaštiti sebe i drugih i, još više, djelovanja u skladu s njom.