

# Comparative Analysis of the Usage Expressions of COVID-19 Prevention Signs in Japanese and Indonesian: A Case Study of Modern Shopping Mall

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## Abstract

*This study aims to analyse the expressions used on prohibition signs containing preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19 in Japan and Indonesia. Data were collected from modern shopping centres in Tokyo, Osaka, Jakarta, and Surabaya during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021-2022.*

*The expressions on COVID-19 prohibition signs are categorised based on the presence or absence of polite forms and the use of implicit or explicit sentence structures. Therefore, this research analyses the types of expressions used and aims to determine whether there are similarities and differences between Japan and Indonesia.*

*The result of this study found that there has a tendency to use implicit sentences rather than explicit ones on COVID-19 prohibition signs in Indonesia and Japan. However, there is a difference in the use of polite forms. Japan tends to use polite forms, while Indonesia tends to use non-polite forms.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the expressions used in signs containing prohibitions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as the object of study. COVID-19 prohibition signs include prohibitions that differ from other long-standing prohibition signs, as they began to emerge widely in the early months of 2020 when COVID-19 became a global pandemic. This study analyzes how communication is conducted through prohibition signs to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in both Japanese and Indonesian languages.

### Research Object

The dataset utilized in this research comprises prohibition signs containing information aimed at curtailing the spread of COVID-19 across Japan and Indonesia, collated from diverse locales. These locales encompass train stations, shopping centres (both conventional and contemporary), and zoological parks (tourist destinations). Subsequently, linguistic expressions employed in the collected prohibition signs are extracted for analysis, culminating in a comparative examination between Japanese and Indonesian languages.

Moreover, within the scope of this investigation, attention is directed not solely towards prohibition signs that explicitly forbid specific actions. Instead, all COVID-19 prohibition signs that regulate reader behaviour to mitigate the transmission of the virus are encompassed in this study. Look at the figures below.



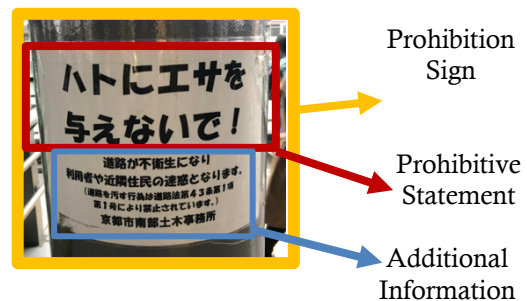
Picture 1. Prohibition sign “Don’t speak loudly.”



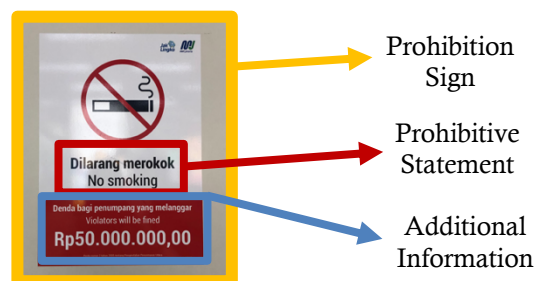
Picture 2. Prohibition sign “Keep your distance.”

The images depicted in Figures 1 and 2 above are COVID-19 prohibition signs, which serve as this study's focal point of analysis. The sign presented in Figure 1 employs prohibitive or negative imperative sentences, as exemplified by 「この位置の使用はご遠慮下さい」, whereas Figure 2 employs positive imperative sentences, such as 「距離をたもとう」. Despite Figure 2's absence of prohibitive sentences, both images intend to convey the same directive to readers: to refrain from sitting close to other visitors.

Furthermore, within this study, the information inscribed on the prohibition signs can be classified into three distinct types, as shown below.



Picture 3. Japanese Prohibition Sign



Picture 4. Indonesian Prohibition Sign

In Figure 3, depicted above, the entirety of the prohibition board is delineated by a yellow box, wherein the red box signifies the prohibition-related information. In contrast, the blue box represents supplementary details. The prohibition-related information encompasses fundamental particulars delineating actions that are proscribed. Conversely, the supplementary information is intended to facilitate readers in comprehending the substance of the prohibition-related information.

According to Nakazaki (1999), most information inscribed on prohibition signs stems from enforcing societal regulations, thus obviating the need for refined linguistic forms. Additionally, Nakazaki (1999) delineated further rationales behind the dispensation of refined language in prohibition signs.

- ① In emergency scenarios, effectively communicating information to readers via prohibition signs takes precedence over averting Face-Threatening Acts (FTA) towards readers.
- ② The advantage predominantly favours the creators of prohibition signs, thereby diminishing the likelihood of FTAs directed towards readers.
- ③ Prohibition sign creators wield greater social authority than prohibition sign readers. Consequently, the surrounding societal context normalises any damage to readers' social face.

However, Kishie (2011) and Kurabayashi (2020) have presented differing perspectives from Nakazaki (1999) in their respective studies. According to Kishie (2011), prohibition signs employ clear and concise language without refined linguistic forms, while others utilize less direct language, polite forms, and alternative delivery methods. Kurabayashi (2020) argues that prohibition signs in service-oriented establishments tend to employ polite language to mitigate the occurrence of Face-Threatening Acts (FTA), given that most readers of these signs are customers or guests with a higher social status. This contrasts with prohibition signs found in universities. These signs are created by university authorities, with students as the target audience.

The university authorities are perceived to possess greater social authority than the students, reducing the likelihood of FTAs even when utilizing straightforward language.

Additionally, prohibition signs designed to protect readers from life-threatening risks prioritize the conveyance of prohibition information to readers. Consequently, the use of clear and straightforward language without the use of polite forms poses no issue. These examples align with the viewpoints espoused by Kishie (2011) and Kurabayashi (2020). Since the onset of 2020, amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic, numerous prohibition signs have surfaced to curb the transmission of the virus. It is well-recognized that the disease induced by COVID-19 can be fatal in some instances. Hence, COVID-19 prohibition signs are regarded as measures to avert life-threatening hazards. However, concerning prohibition expressions in the Indonesian language, Sasanti (2013) asserted in her research that Indonesian prohibition statements tend to employ straightforward expressions. Sasanti (2013) identified 9 common types of prohibition expressions in the Indonesian language.

Regarding prohibition expressions in the Indonesian language, Sasanti (2013) posited in her study that prohibition statements in Indonesian typically employ direct expressions. Sasanti (2013) identified nine common prohibition expressions commonly used in Indonesian.

- **Using “Terimakasih” (Thankyou)**

Example:

“Terimakasih anda membuang sampah pada  
**Thankyou you dispose trash on**  
 tempatnya.”

**its place**

**Thank you for disposing of trash properly.**

- **Using “Tidak boleh” (Should not)**

Example:

“Tidak boleh merokok di ruangan ini.”

**Not should smoking in room this.**

**Smoking is not allowed in this room.**

- **Using “Jangan” (Don’t)**

Example:

“Jangan buang sampah sembarangan.”

Don't dispose trash carelessly.  
Don't litter.

- Using “Dilarang” (Prohibited)

Example:

“Dilarang menginjak rumput.”

Prohibited stepping grass

Stepping on the grass is prohibited.

- Using “Mohon tidak” (please do not)

Example:

Mohon tidak merokok di ruangan ini.

Please not smoking on room this

Please refrain from smoking in this room.

- Using “Sebaiknya tidak” (better not)

Example:

“Sebaiknya tidak diminum Bersama-sama

Its.better not drunk together

dengan obat lain.”

with dugs other

it's better not to be consumed together with

other medications.

- Using warning message

Example:

“Kena panas bisa meledak.”

Contact hit can explode

Exposure to heat can cause an explosion.

- Using explanatory sentence

Example:

“Ruangan khusus petugas.”

Roon especially officer

Staff only room

- Using interrogative sentences

“Apakah anda bisa diam sejenak.

Does you can silent a.moment

Could you please be quiet for a moment?

However, the research conducted by Sasanti (2013) solely examined the use of prohibition sentences in the Indonesian language within conversational contexts (spoken language). Until now, there has been no investigation into the expression of prohibitions on prohibition signs, which represent written language forms.

Muthi (2020) scrutinized the expressions of prohibition employed on prohibition signs located at train stations in Indonesia and Japan. The study yielded several findings. 1) Various politeness and directness were observed in the

expressions used on prohibition signs at train stations in both Indonesia and Japan. 2) Polite expressions on Japanese prohibition signs utilized 敬語 (keigo), whereas polite expressions on Indonesian prohibition signs utilized vocabulary indicative of politeness. 3) The intended audience of prohibition signs at train stations comprises station users, yet polite expressions are infrequent at train stations in Indonesia. This study solely focused on generic prohibition signs, with no analysis conducted on prohibition signs related to the prevention of COVID-19, which have proliferated widely in recent times.

### Research Issues

Drawing from the previous studies delineated above, several inquiries have delved into the expressions of prohibition employed on prohibition signs containing general prohibitions that have traditionally existed. However, the signs that prohibit COVID-19 prevention represent a recent addition. Given the novelty of COVID-19 prevention prohibition signs, these signs may utilize different expressions than other longstanding prohibition signs. The following research problems are addressed in this study:

- I. The range of expressions utilized in COVID-19 prevention prohibition signs found in modern shopping centres in Japan and Indonesia.
- II. Disparities and commonalities in utilising expressions in COVID-19 prevention prohibition signs discovered in modern shopping centres in Japan and Indonesia.

### RESEARCH METHOD

The data for this study was gathered from modern shopping centres in Japan and Indonesia. The selection of modern shopping centres as the data collection sites was based on their status as venues where many individuals congregate and are subjected to various restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021-2022. The cities and shopping centres chosen for data collection in this research are outlined as follows: Japan:

- Tokyo → Roppongi Hills

- Osaka → Grand Front Osaka

Indonesia:

- Jakarta → Mall Grand Indonesia
- Surabaya → Tunjungan Plaza

Data collection in this study employed the fieldwork method, referencing the linguistic landscape research method pioneered by Backhaus (2006). During data collection, the researcher traversed the designated data collection areas, capturing photographs of all visible COVID-19 prohibition signs. Subsequently, these data were transcribed into an Excel file to facilitate analysis.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### Expressions Used on COVID-19 Prohibition Signs

Based on the compiled data, it can be inferred that the installation of prohibition signs is typically carried out by staff or employees, with the intended readers being guests of the premises. As noted by Kurabayashi (2020), signage (including prohibition signs) targets guests in Japan as the audience tends to avoid using impolite language to mitigate the risk of damaging the reader's social image.

An examination was conducted on the gathered prohibition signs by categorizing the expressions of prohibition utilized from two perspectives. Firstly, whether the prohibition expressions employ polite forms or not.

Secondly, whether they utilize direct language or not, due to the distinct characteristics of Japanese and Indonesian languages, distinct methods are necessary to categorize prohibition expressions in Japanese and Indonesian.

### 1. Classification of Prohibition Expressions in Japanese

This study categorised prohibition expressions on COVID-19 signs based on the expression groups proposed by Muthi (2020), consisting of four expression groups. This categorization is based on two perspectives: whether the prohibition expressions utilize polite forms and whether the prohibition expressions employ explicit or implicit language. Using polite forms in Japanese refers to the presence or absence of keigo (敬語) vocabulary. In contrast, polite forms in Indonesian refer to politeness markers in the Indonesian language as delineated by Rahardi (2005) and the Language Development and Enhancement Agency (2017). The division of these groups can be illustrated in the diagram below:

Diagram 1. Categorization of prohibition expressions based on the use of polite language

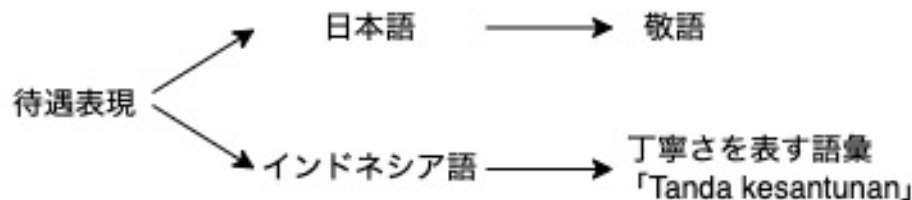
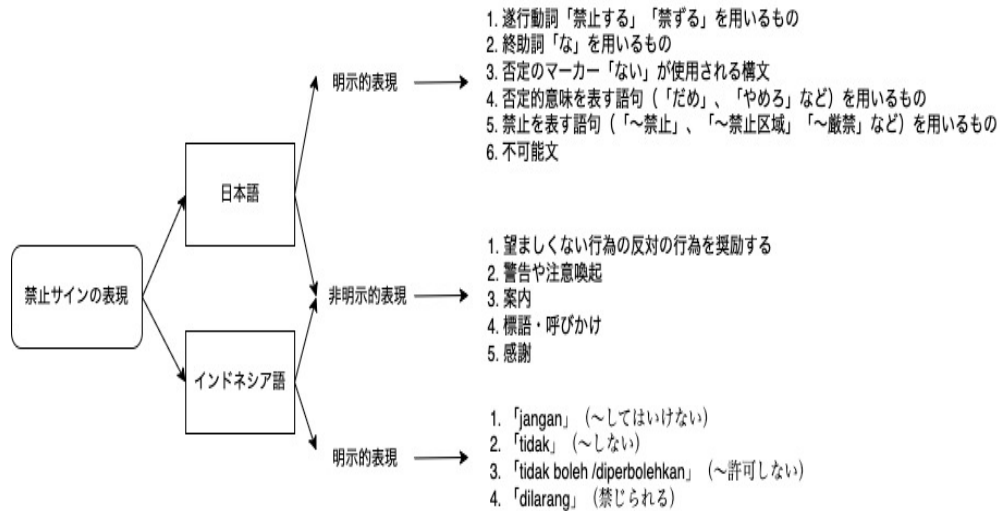


Diagram 2. Categorization of prohibition expressions based on the use of explicit and implicit language



The four groups of prohibition expressions organized from the two perspectives above are:

① impolite expressions with explicit sentences (無待遇型明示的表現), ② impolite expressions with implicit sentences (無待遇型非明示的表現), ③ polite expressions with explicit sentences (待遇型明示的表現), and ④ polite expressions with implicit sentences (待遇型非明示的表現). Presented below are several examples of prohibition expressions categorized into these groups.

## 2. Prohibition expressions in Japanese signage

### ① Impolite expressions with explicit sentences (無待遇型明示的表現)

Example:

- 1) [～禁止] → 「ゴミ捨て禁止」
- 2) [～な] → 「わたるな！」
- 3) [～しない] → 「大きい声を出さない！  
走らない！」
- 4) [～しないで] → 「ドアに触れないで！」
- 5) [～しないこと] → 「手すりから体を乗り出さないこと」
- 6) [～やめて] → 「餌やりやめて！ 其のあと、鳩が来て大変や！」

### ② Impolite expressions with implicit sentences (無待遇型非明示的表現)

Example:

- 7) 「手すりにつかまる 歩かず立ち止まる」 <支持>
- 8) 「幼児を乗せるときは保護者が手をつなぐこと。」 <支持>

### ③ Polite expressions with explicit sentences (待遇型明示的表現)

Example:

- 9) [～おやめください] → 「駆け込み乗車はおやめください」
- 10) [～お断り致します] → 「長大荷物持ち込みはお断りさせていただきます。」
- 11) [～ご遠慮ください] → 「ペットの同伴はご遠慮ください」
- 12) [～しないでください] → 「荷物から手を離さないでください」

### ④ Polite expressions with implicit sentences (待遇型非明示的表現)

Example:

- 13) 「出入り口につきドアが開くことがございます。もたれかかると危険です」 <理由>
- 14) 「従業員専用」 <許可の範囲>



- 15) 「自転車は降りて通行してください」  
<支持>

### 3. Prohibition expressions in Indonesian signage

- ① Impolite expressions with explicit sentences  
(無待遇型明示の表現)

The prohibition expressions in Indonesian signage that fall into this category are those utilizing the words "Jangan", "Tidak", and "Dilarang", which are Indonesian prohibition expressions. According to Sasanti, Y. N. (2013), prohibition expressions employing the words "Jangan", "Tidak", and "Dilarang" are considered explicit prohibition expressions. Below are examples:

sentence structures that are not explicitly prohibitive to constrain reader behaviour. While the signs in this category use imperative expressions, they aim to deter readers from engaging in behaviour contrary to the instructions. Below are examples from this category:

- 19) Berdiri di atas garis kuning  
<Imperative expression>

- ③ Polite expressions with explicit sentences  
(待遇型明示の表現)

Prohibition expressions that utilize words such as "Jangan" (Don't), "Tidak" (No), and "Dilarang" (Prohibited), accompanied by markers of politeness such as "mohon" (please), "tolong" (please), "terimakasih" (thank you), and so on, belong to this category. Below are examples of prohibition expressions that belong to this group:

- 20) Mohon untuk tidak bersandar.

- ④ Polite expressions with implicit sentences  
(待遇型非明示の表現)

- 16) [Jangan~] →  
「Jangan Bersandar pada pintu elevator」

- 17) [Tidak~] →  
「Tidak Mengibaskan tangan yang masih basah ke lantai」

- 18) [Dilarang]→  
「Dilarang buang sampah」

- ② Impolite expressions with implicit sentences  
(無待遇型非明示の表現)

Prohibition expressions in Indonesian signage Impolite expressions with implicit sentences. The prohibition expressions in Indonesian signage categorized in this group employ imperative, declarative, and other

The variety of expressions in prohibition signs that fall into this category is those employing imperative sentences, declarative sentences, and other sentence structures that are not explicit prohibitions, along with polite forms to constrain reader behaviour. The distinction between this group of expressions and group ② lies in the use of polite forms such as "mohon" (please), "tolong" (please), "terimakasih" (thank you), and so on. Below are examples that belong to this category:

- 1) Mohon lipat sepeda anda sebelum memasuki stasiun kereta

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Graph 1 and Table 1 below summarize the types of expressions used in COVID-19 prohibition signs at train stations. There may be only one or several prohibition sentences within a single sign. Therefore, in Graph 1 below, some percentages consist of more than one expression group.

Graph 1. Percentage of expression group usage on COVID-19 prohibition signs in modern shopping centers

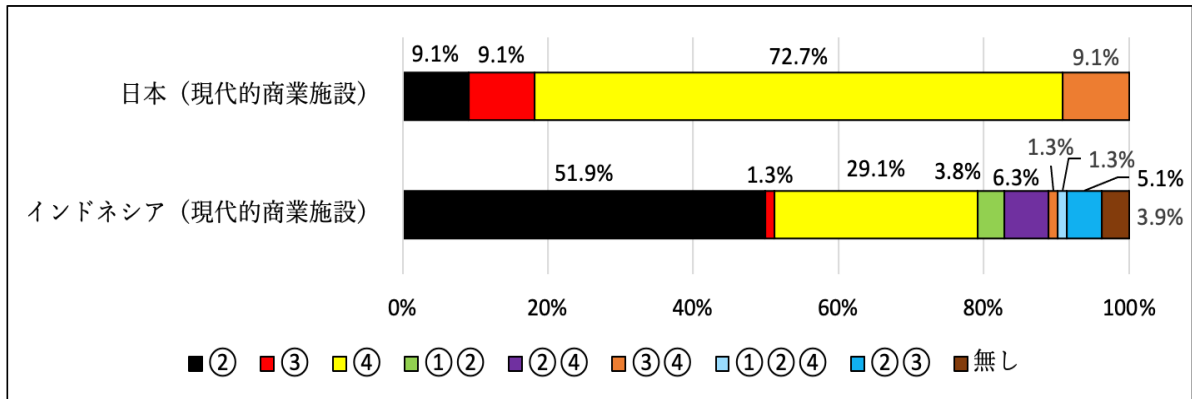


Table 3 summarizes the use of polite and impolite expressions, while Table 4 summarizes the use of implicit and explicit sentences. To

determine whether there are significant differences or not, statistical calculations using  $\chi^2$  are used.

Expression Types	Jp	Ina
なし	0	33
② Impolite expressions with implicit sentences	1	38
③ Polite expressions with explicit sentences	1	1
④ Polite expressions with implicit sentences	8	4
① ② Impolite expressions with explicit sentences + Impolite expressions with implicit sentences	0	3
② ③ Impolite expressions with implicit sentences + Polite expressions with explicit sentences	0	4
② ④ Impolite expressions with implicit sentences + Polite expressions with implicit sentences	1	5
③ ④ Ragam sopan dengan kalimat eksplisit + Polite expressions with implicit sentences	0	1
①②④ Impolite expressions with explicit sentences + Polite expressions with explicit sentences + Polite expressions with implicit sentences	0	1
Total	11	90

Table 1. Number of expression usage on prohibition signs in modern shopping centers.

Table 2. Comparison of the usage of polite and

impolite expressions on COVID-19 prohibition signs in modern shopping centers.

	Jp n n:1 1	Ina n:57	Nilai fleksib ilitas	Nilai $\chi^2$	Nilai p
Impolite	1 9.1 %	41 71.9 %	2	27.5471	p<0.001 ***
Polite	9 81.8 %	6 10.5 %			
Impolite + Polite	1 9.1 %	10 17.5 %			

(†: p<0.1, \*: p<0.05, \*\*: p<0.01, \*\*\*: p<0.001, n.s: p>0.05)

Table 4. Comparison of the usage of implicit and



explicit sentences on COVID-19 prohibition signs in modern shopping centers.

	Jp n: 11	Ina n: 57	flexibility	$\chi^2$	p
Explicit	1 9.1%	1 1.8%	2	3.5028	0.141 n.s
Implicit	10 90.9%	47 82.5%			
Explicit + Implicit	0 0.0%	9 15.8%			

(†: p<0.1, \*: p<0.05, \*\*: p<0.01, \*\*\*: p<0.001, n.s: p>0.05)

Table 3 indicates a significant difference in the usage between polite and impolite expressions. The Japanese data suggests a higher prevalence of polite expressions, whereas the Indonesian data leans towards impolite expressions.

This variance in preference for politeness levels may stem from the tendency of Japanese speakers to employ more formal language, not only on prohibition signs but also across informational signage and various contexts. For instance, the informational sign 「本日は定休日」 is progressively being replaced by 「本日は店を休ませていただきます」, which incorporates a more courteous tone.

Conversely, Table 4 reveals no discernible difference in using explicit and implicit sentences. Both Japanese and Indonesian datasets prefer implicit sentences over explicit ones.

The analysis suggests similarities and disparities in the types of expression groups utilized on COVID-19 prohibition signs across the two nations. While both display a comparable inclination towards implicit sentence structures, Japan tends towards using polite expressions, whereas Indonesia leans towards impolite expressions.

Table 5. Prohibition signs regarding face mask

usage with explicit and implicit sentences

Content t	Japan		Indonesia	
	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	Implicit
Mask usage	マスク未着用の方は入店をご遠慮させていただきます。ありがとうございます。	マスクの着用とアルコール消毒のご協力をお願い致します。	Pengunjung yang tidak mengenakan masker dilarang memasuki area toko	Kenakan masker selama berada di dalam toko

The examples of implicit sentence usage commonly found on COVID-19 prohibition signs are presented in Table 5 above. Table 5 displays sentences with similar content but using different sentence types. In the Japanese example, we have 「マスク未着用の方は入店をご遠慮させていただきます」 and 「マスクの着用とアルコール消毒のご協力をお願い致します」。The first sentence uses an explicit sentence, while the second employs an implicit one. However, the intended message for the readers remains the same: to enter the store, one must wear a mask, and those not wearing masks are prohibited from entering. The same applies to the Indonesian examples in Table 5.

As previously explained in Table 4, COVID-19 prohibition signs predominantly use implicit sentences. This analysis contradicts the findings of Muthi (2020), who stated that in Japan and Indonesia, more explicit sentences were used on prohibition signs.

Several reasons might explain these differing results. First, the activities or actions restricted or prohibited on COVID-19 prohibition signs are new and previously nonexistent. Kurabayashi (2020) noted that many prohibition signs using implicit sentences have emerged in recent years. For instance, signs saying 「汚さないで下さい」 (Please do not make it dirty) in explicit language are increasingly being replaced by 「トイレをいつも綺麗にご使用いただきありがとうございます」 (Thank you for always

using the restroom cleanly), an implicit sentence. Therefore, the COVID-19 prohibition signs, which have emerged only in recent years, tend to use implicit rather than explicit sentences.

Second, health protection advisories to prevent the spread of COVID-19 issued by the WHO and various governments tend to use positive rather than negative imperative sentences. This likely influences the expression patterns and sentences used on COVID-19 prohibition signs in Japan and Indonesia.

As seen in Table 1, the number of COVID-19 prohibition signs in Indonesia is significantly higher than those found in Japan. This could be attributed to differences in COVID-19 prevention policies between Japan and Indonesia and the concept of 'seken' in Japanese society.

The first-factor concerns differences in COVID-19 prevention policies. COVID-19 prevention policies in Indonesia are stricter than those in Japan. Indonesia has regulations issued by the Ministry of Health regarding COVID-19 prevention, which can penalize those who violate efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In contrast, Japan does not have written legal regulations governing the prevention of COVID-19 spread. Therefore, COVID-19 prevention efforts lack binding regulations in Japan and are only advisory.

The second factor concerns the concept of 'seken' (世間) in Japanese culture, which originates from Buddhism. This concept leads Japanese individuals to be highly concerned about the perceptions of others around them. Consequently, Japanese people avoid standing out or drawing attention from their surroundings, aiming to prevent inconveniencing or harming others. This concept facilitates the prevention of COVID-19 transmission in Japan. For instance, regarding the use of face masks in public places, aside from being a customary practice, Japanese individuals may feel hesitant if they are the only ones not wearing face masks in public. Furthermore, they may feel apprehensive about potentially exposing others to COVID-19 by not wearing a mask, which could lead to harming them.

Indeed, similar communal living concepts akin to 'seken' in Japanese society exist in communities worldwide, albeit with varying degrees. This includes Indonesia. However, Indonesian society exhibits significant heterogeneity compared to Japan, where societal homogeneity is more pronounced. Indonesia's diversity of ethnicities and cultures results in divergent social customs and concepts. Consequently, applying strict legal enforcement would be more suitable in Indonesia than relying on advisory concepts, as practised in Japan.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn: COVID-19 prohibition signs in Japan tend to employ polite language, while those in Indonesia lean towards less formal expressions. This discrepancy may be attributed to the Japanese preference for increasingly refined language over time.

COVID-19 prohibition signs commonly utilize implicit rather than explicit language, observed in both Japanese and Indonesian contexts. This tendency may be influenced by language evolution and the adoption of implicit language in health protocol guidelines issued by the WHO and various governments worldwide.

The prevalence of COVID-19 prohibition signs is higher in Indonesia compared to Japan. This disparity may stem from differences in COVID-19 prevention policies between the two countries, as well as the influence of the Japanese communal concept known as 'seken'.

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