

# Speech Acts in Announcements of Supermarkets and Hypermarkets in Bangkok during the COVID-19 Outbreak

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> announcements, coronavirus pandemic, hypermarket, speech acts, supermarket</p> <p><b>DOI:</b> <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v6i2.1121">http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v6i2.1121</a></p> <p><b>How to cite:</b> Wongthai, Nuntana. (2022). Speech acts in announcements of supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok during the COVID-19 outbreak. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 6(2), 361-378</p>	<p><i>This qualitative study aims to investigate speech acts in announcements posted at supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok, Thailand during the COVID-19 outbreak, under the framework of the speech acts theory. The communicative functions and hidden intentions in the language used are also examined. At the data collection stage, the definitions of 'supermarket' and 'hypermarket' were applied to determine the sources. Then, announcements posted at the entrances to branches of supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok were collected during the period of April 1 - 30, 2020, by taking photographs. The criterion for collecting the announcements was that they had to be information relating to activities stores dealing with the pandemic. The total number of announcements found was 239. After the elimination of those with identical content, 32 announcements were used for the analysis. The findings show four types of speech acts: representatives, directives, expressives, and commissives. Such acts perform the communicative functions of informing customers about sanitary measures, requesting cooperation in following government regulations, expressing feelings toward customers, and showing the determination to operate the business in an ethical manner. The indirect speech acts help reveal the intentions of the stores to create a positive image. The study also reveals characteristics of Thai society in terms of hierarchy and solidarity. The study has implications for knowledge of language use during crises and provides insight into the power of language to communicate things over and above literal meanings.</i></p>

## 1. Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which first began in China in early December 2019, rapidly spread worldwide. WHO officially announced that this novel and severe disease can be airborne, and spread via aerosol transmission (Thailand Medical News, 2020). During the early stages of the outbreak, the Government of Thailand declared a state of emergency for

the first time with effect from March 26 to April 30, 2020. It was prohibited to gather in many areas and places. The motto "Stay home, stop the disease, for the nation" was also launched, to urge people to help stop the spread of the virus. Due to the severity of the pandemic, people became increasingly worried about going out and spending time in public places. However, food and essential supplies were needed to survive during the crisis. One type of place that was inevitably visited to access these important items was a supermarket or hypermarket. Studies on shopping during the outbreak mostly investigate the impact of COVID-19 on consumer behaviors. Sheth (2020) examined changes in consumer habits on shopping due to lockdown and social distancing. Food Insight (2020); Shamim et al. (2021) investigated consumers' health safety practices and their concerns toward grocery shopping, as well as their eating behaviors and perceptions due to the disease. Public Health England (2020) studied trends in purchasing various types of food and beverages and volume spent by age and social class, as an impact of the pandemic. However, no studies on how supermarkets and hypermarkets communicate with their consumers during the early stage of the pandemic have been found. This neglected aspect is important for both store operators and customers, because of the fact that the outbreak was so sudden - no one was prepared to fight it in advance. In terms of store operators, even though they want people to spend money to support their business, they also need to comply with government measures, without negotiation, to prevent the spread of the virus in their venues. As for customers, they get anxious about having people around them, even closest relatives, and try to avoid getting infected by remaining secluded in their own homes. Therefore, it is interesting to study how the language used in the announcements communicates with customers. The study is also conducted to provide implications for knowledge regarding communication in times of crisis.

From observations during the early stages of the pandemic, there are plenty of announcements at the entrances of supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok, Thailand. Examples are shown as follows.

#### Example 1

เรียน ลูกค้าทุกท่าน

เพื่อสุขภาพและความปลอดภัย ร้านโกลเด้นเพลส ขอความร่วมมือลูกค้าทุกท่านปฏิบัติตามมาตรการของรัฐ โปรดเว้นระยะห่าง  
เมตรระหว่างกัน (Golden Place 1) 2

Translation:

Dear customers,

For your health and safety, Golden Place would like to ask for your cooperation in complying with government regulations. Please maintain a distance of two meters from each other.

From the above example, it can be seen that the announcement communicates with customers about the requirements they need to comply with while shopping.

It has been observed that the announcements not only communicate with customers concerning the requirements they need to comply with, as in Example 1, but also inform customers about the hygiene-related measures that the stores have adopted, as in Example 2 below.

## Example 2

รถเข็น/ตะกร้าบริเวณจุดนี้ได้ทำความสะอาดด้วยน้ำยาฆ่าเชื้อแล้วค่ะ (Lemon Farm 3)

Translation: All shopping carts and baskets in this area have been cleaned using a disinfectant.

Relying on the theory of speech acts (Searle, 1969), the messages from the above examples can be classified as directives and representatives respectively. In other words, the language used performs the role of getting customers to perform certain actions, as well as the act of representing states of affairs to customers. This study, therefore, aims to analyze the language used in the announcements of supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok to gain knowledge of what store operators communicate with their customers during the early part of the outbreak. It applies the framework of the speech acts theory, which has the theoretical background of producing some utterances as performing some actions. Examined through the lens of the speech acts theory, the results will reveal the actions performed by the language used in the announcements, as well as the linguistic expressions employed to fulfill those actions. The speech acts framework will also disclose the real intention hidden in the language used. The findings can provide an insight into the power of language to communicate things other than the literal meaning.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Related Studies

During the coronavirus outbreak, numerous studies have been carried out throughout the world concerning various aspects of speech acts. Some are studies investigating the use of speech acts, as in Nurkhamidah (2020); Phatthanasutinon and Rattanadilok Na Phuket (2021), while some are studies focusing on specific types of speech acts, as in Al-Azzawi and Majeed (2020); Anggraeni et al. (2020); Ogiermann and Spyridoula (2021). Phatthanasutinon and Rattanadilok Na Phuket (2021) analyzed press conferences held by the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration and broadcast on the "Thai Ku Fah Government House" YouTube channel between March, 26 and April, 30 2020. They discovered that four groups of speech acts were used (representatives, directives, commissives, and expressives). The objectives of those speech acts were to report the pandemic situation, to perform public relations, and to disseminate accurate and factual information to the public in order to promote good understanding. Nurkhamidah (2020) focused on a speech given by Donald Trump, the former President of the United States, about the COVID-19 outbreak on 11 March 2020. He found that Trump used all five types of speech acts, assertives being the most common and declaratives the least common. Al-Azzawi and Majeed (2020) investigated the use of advising, examples of which were categorized as directives, in COVID-19 instructions. Anggraeni et al. (2020) analyzed comments on an Instagram post made by Ridwan Kamil, the governor of West Java, Indonesia, about that country's President's announcement concerning the first patient infected with the coronavirus in Indonesia. The findings detected expressive speech acts of wishing, complaining, and protesting related to COVID-19. Another study on expressive speech acts is Ogiermann and Spyridoula (2021), which analysed signs displayed on the doors of closed businesses in Athens and London during the first COVID-19 lockdown. This study revealed four sub-types of expressive speech acts: greetings, apologies, thanks, and wishes.

In terms of research on communication from service providers to customers during the coronavirus outbreak, only the study of Wang and Lund (2020), on types of information provided in library announcements relating to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, was found. It was conducted through the content analysis approach and found that the three most prevalent kinds of information from the library announcements were the suspension of library programs, the closures of libraries, and remote library resources.

After reviewing studies concerning speech acts as well as the communication from service providers to customers during the coronavirus outbreak, it was found that no studies have been conducted to analyze speech acts in announcements at supermarkets and hypermarkets. This study, therefore, aims to fill the gap by applying the speech acts framework (Searle, 1969) to investigate the types of speech acts and the linguistic expressions used to fulfill those acts found in announcements at supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok during the coronavirus pandemic. Referring to this theory, it can be considered that the language used in these announcements does not only communicate messages to the customers but also performs certain actions. Studying these actions, therefore, helps reveal the information and intentions of the store operators when communicating with their customers during a time of crisis.

## 2.2 The Speech Acts Framework

In order to communicate with others, not only do we produce utterances containing words arranged in grammatical structures, we also perform certain actions by uttering those words. Yule (1996, p. 47) provides examples to show that actions can be performed by utterances, such as in: "You're fired". The action performed by this utterance is the termination of the employment of the employee being referred to using the pronoun "you". Actions performed by utterances are called speech acts. The theory of speech acts was introduced by Austin (1962), and was further developed by his student, Searle (1969). In a speech act, three acts are concerned. First, a locutionary act is an act that produces a meaningful linguistic expression. Second, an illocutionary act is an act that is performed by the communicative force of an utterance. Third, a perlocutionary act is the effect of an utterance, according to the speaker's intention.

Searle (1969) classifies speech acts, according to their general functions, into five types: declarations, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. Declarations are speech acts that the speaker declares something that has the potential to bring about a change, as in the example presented above: "You're fired". Representatives are speech acts that express the speaker's representations of the world as he or she believes it to be. For example, "Red, orange, and yellow are warm colors". Expressives are speech acts that express the speaker's psychological state, for example, pleasure or sorrow. The utterance, "I'm glad to see you", is an example of a speech act expressing a speaker's pleasure. When speakers say things in order to get others to do things, they are performing directives. For example: "Could you please come to pick me up at 5 pm?" Commissives are speech acts in which speakers commit themselves to do things in the future, for example: "I will finish this assignment within one hour".

Searle (1969) also proposes that a speech act needs to be performed according to certain types of conditions, which are the expected or appropriate circumstances for the performance of a speech act to be recognized as intended. Technically, these conditions are

known as felicity conditions. He uses the example of the act of promising in order to explain this concept. Promising consists of 1) a propositional condition (or content condition), meaning that the content of the utterance must be about the future; 2) a preparatory condition, meaning that the speaker is capable of performing what he or she says, and the circumstances are appropriate to its being performed successfully; 3) a sincerity condition, meaning that the speaker intends to carry out that future action; and 4) an essential condition, meaning that the speaker is obliged to carry out the action as promised.

Schiffin (1994) mentions the principles used to differentiate these types of speech acts. The first principle concerns the illocutionary point of an act, which is derived from the essential condition of an act to define what an act counts as. For example, the illocutionary point of directives is that they are attempts by the speaker (S) to get the hearer (H) to perform an act (A). The second principle concerns the relationship between words and the world. For example, commissives are built upon a world-to-words fit, while representatives are built upon a words-to-world fit. The third principle concerns the psychological state of the speaker, which is derived from the sincerity condition. For example, the psychological state of commissives is the intention of a speaker. There are other principles that differentiate speech acts within each of these five types. One principle concerns the different strengths with which the illocutionary point is presented. For example, insisting and suggesting are both classified as directives, but the former possesses more strength than the latter. Another principle concerns the preparatory condition of an act, which relates to the interests of S and H. For example, directives have to do with S's interests, while expressives relate to those of H. The last principle concerns the propositional content condition. For example, predicting and reporting, which are classified as representatives, differ in that the former must be about the future while the latter can be about the past or present.

According to Yule (1996, p. 54), speech acts can be divided into direct and indirect. A direct speech act is performed when there is a direct relationship between a sentence structure and a function. For example, a declarative sentence is used to make a statement, as in "I'm hungry". An indirect speech act is performed if a relationship between a sentence structure and a function is not straightforward. For example, a declarative sentence, as in "I'm hungry", is used to make a request. The use of indirect speech acts is therefore associated with the intentions hidden in the language used.

This study applies the framework presented by Searle (1969) to analyze the types of speech acts used in announcements at supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok during the coronavirus pandemic as well as the linguistic expressions used to perform these acts and Yule (1996) in investigating the intention hidden in the language used through the indirect speech acts.

### **2.3 Politeness in Thai**

As mentioned above, politeness can be performed by the use of indirect speech acts. It can be a case of using a declarative sentence to make a request. This example can be considered as polite because a listener is not forced to do some actions, compared with the use of a request, which is direct and forceful. However, politeness can also be expressed by other linguistic expressions. Khanittanan (1988) describes linguistic politeness in Thai, which can be classified into two categories: politeness expressed through modes of articulation and politeness expressed through the selection of words. For the first category, politeness can be

expressed by speaking softly and extending sounds. For the second category, politeness can be expressed through two types of words. The first type includes politeness particles (ค่ะ กราบ จ๊ะ) and loan words from Pali, Sanskrit, and Khmer, which are considered as high-level words such as บรรทม, a Khmer word, meaning “to sleep” to be used with members of the royal family. The second type includes words expressing the elevation of listeners (i.e. ท่าน ‘you’), self-effacement of speakers (i.e. กระหม่อม ‘I’, which literally means a head), words assisting the expression of politeness i.e. ขอ ‘ask, please’, กราบ ‘paying obeisance by prostration’, long and complex expressions from the combination of politeness words i.e. กราบเรียน ‘please be informed’.

In terms of the elevation of listeners, the use of terms expressing ranks or occupational duties are also found. This is caused by modern institutions and forms of work differing from the earlier agricultural society (Khanittanan, 1988, p. 357). Therefore, listeners were referred to as หัวหน้า ‘head, chief’, ประธาน ‘chairperson’. These lexical items were considered as new and entered the Thai language as a foreign influence. All lexical items mentioned in Khanittanan’s work are still used in the present time.

As one feature of politeness is words referring to listeners and speakers, many studies which were conducted on the topic of pronominal references in Thai (Haruethaivinyoo, 2002; Palakornkul, 1972; Sangsod, 1989; Tingsabath & Prasithrathsint, 1986) also found the use of pronouns to express politeness. The findings of those studies show that Thai society is a hierarchical one. Thai people are socially categorized into hierarchically ordered social groups and classes, determined by different characteristics such as age, gender, family lineage, social class or status, and occupational rank. Therefore, the use of pronouns can manifest inequality in Thai society. The appropriate use of pronouns to refer to speakers and listeners is considered as politeness.

From Example 1, politeness is expressed by the use of pronouns as in ลูกค้า ‘customer’ and ท่าน ‘you’ as well as the use of words assisting the expression of politeness as in ขอ, โปรด ‘ask, please’.

The concept of politeness manifested in the selection of words found in the announcements of supermarkets and hypermarkets will also be applied in the study to discuss the characteristics of Thai society.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Data and Sources of Data

According to the research objectives, the study was designed as qualitative research using the content analysis approach. In the data collection stage, the data sources were first determined by applying the definitions of a supermarket and a hypermarket. Morgan (2018) defines a supermarket as a big store providing groceries and items for daily use, while a hypermarket is bigger than a supermarket, its environment resembling that of a warehouse. In addition to groceries and other items for daily use, it typically also offers electronic appliances, toys, clothing, and furniture. The prices of goods in hypermarkets are cheaper than those in supermarkets. By applying these definitions, the supermarkets included in this study were Foodland, Golden Place, Gourmet Market, Lemon Farm, Max Valu, Tops, UFM Fuji, and Villa Market. The hypermarkets are Big C, Makro, and Tesco Lotus.

When the venues for collecting data were determined, the announcements posted at the entrances to every branch of supermarkets and hypermarkets mentioned above in Bangkok, the city with the largest population in Thailand (10,539,415 residents) (World Population Review, 2020), during the period of April 1 - 30, 2020 (under the first Thailand's state of emergency over the COVID-19 pandemic) were collected by taking photographs. The criterion for collecting the announcements was that they must be the information relating to activities the stores conduct to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Those about information of viruses, delivery services, pick-up services, infographics, and visualizations were not included in this study.

For data validation, all announcements, which were collected, were reviewed to ensure that they met the criterion. The total number of announcements collected for this study was 239. After those with identical content had been eliminated, thirty-two announcements (nineteen from supermarkets and thirteen from hypermarkets) remained, and these were used as the data for this study. It should be noted that some announcements were monolingual (Thai), while others were multilingual (Thai and English, or Thai, English, and Japanese). However, the Thai-language data was the focus of this study.

### **3.2 Data Analysis Procedures**

From the photographs of announcements taken from the targeted supermarkets and hypermarkets, only texts found in the announcements were analyzed to identify types of speech acts, linguistic expressions used to fulfill each type of speech act, the felicity conditions for each type as well as the intentions hidden in the language used. The triangulation method was also employed to check the reliability of analysis by an expert in the speech act theory.

## **4. Findings**

By applying Searle's speech acts framework (1969), it was found that announcements at supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok during the coronavirus outbreak include directives, representatives, expressives and commissives. The frequency of the speech acts used in the announcements is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The frequency of the speech acts used in the announcements

Types of speech acts	Sub-types	Percentage	
Representatives	Reporting	35.42	37.5
	Asserting	2.08	
Directives	Requesting	29.17	29.17
Expressives	Thanking	10.41	29.17
	Expressing concerns	10.41	
	Apologizing	8.35	
Commissives	Promising	4.16	4.16
Total		100	100

Table 1 shows that four types of speech acts were used in the announcements of supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok during the coronavirus outbreak. It can be seen

that the speech act of representatives is found with the highest frequency (37.5%), followed by those of directives and expressives with the equal amount of frequency (29.17%). The speech act of commissive gains the lowest frequency among four types (4.16%). Considering the sub-types found in the study, reporting, under the speech act of representatives, is used the most (35.42%), followed by requesting which is under the speech act of directives. The third order is found in thanking and expressing concerns under the speech act of expressives. The sub-types with the percentage less than 10 are apologizing under the speech act of expressives, promising under the speech act of commissives, and asserting under the speech act of representatives respectively. The discussion of each type of speech acts and the linguistic expressions used to perform those acts will be followed.

#### 4.1. Representatives

Representatives are speech acts that express representations of the world as the speaker believes it to be. This type of speech act is found with the highest frequency (37.5%). The subtypes of acts in this category are reporting and asserting. In this study, reporting is the act of informing customers about the measures related to hygiene and safety which the markets have adopted. This type of act is found with the highest frequency (35.42%). The felicity conditions of the reporting speech act are as follows:

The propositional condition: Actions have been performed by the speaker.

The preparatory condition: These actions are related to the interests of the hearer, and the hearer had no prior knowledge of these actions.

The sincerity condition: The speaker wants to let the hearer know.

The essential condition: An attempt is being made to inform the hearer about these actions.

Asserting is the act of stating a fact with confidence. It is found with a frequency of 2.08%. The felicity conditions of the asserting speech act are as follows:

The propositional condition: Actions have been performed by the speaker.

The preparatory condition: These actions are related to the interests of the hearer, and the hearer had no prior knowledge of these actions.

The sincerity condition: The speaker wants to build confidence on the part of the hearer.

The essential condition: An attempt is being made to build confidence on the part of the hearer in what the speaker has done.

The following are examples of reporting speech acts and asserting speech acts.

##### Example 3

มาตรการที่เม็คโครดูแลความปลอดภัยให้ลูกค้าและพนักงานเพื่อป้องกันเชื้อไวรัสโคโรนา

- จัดให้มีจุดบริการเจลล้างมือ
- เก็บความถี่ทำความสะอาดและฆ่าเชื้อโรค รถเข็น และจุดที่มีการสัมผัสบ่อย
- รณรงค์ให้ใช้ถุงมือและที่คีบเสมอเมื่อสัมผัสอาหารสด
- จัดให้มีสบู่และกระดาษทิชชูในห้องน้ำตลอดเวลา (Makro 3)



Translation: Measures at Makro to take care of the safety of customers and staff in order to prevent the [spread of] coronavirus:

- provide hand gel stations,
- increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting carts and high-contact areas,
- promote the consistent use of gloves and food tongs when handling fresh food,
- provide soap and tissue paper in toilets at all times.

#### Example 4

มั่นใจได้ เราทำความสะอาด

- รถเข็นและตะกร้า
- อุปกรณ์และเคาน์เตอร์แคชเชียร์

ด้วยน้ำยาฆ่าเชื้ออย่างสม่ำเสมอ (Big C 2)

Translation: You can trust us. We clean

- carts and baskets
  - devices and cashier counters
- with disinfectant on a regular basis.

In the announcements in Examples 3 and 4, the speech act of reporting informs customers about the measures taken by the stores in relation to safety and hygiene. The linguistic forms performing this purpose are the action verbs ดูแล 'take care of', ป้องกัน 'prevent', เพิ่ม 'increase', รณรงค์ 'promote', จัดให้มี 'provide', and ทำความสะอาด 'clean'. These action verbs always co-occur with phrases expressing the frequency of the actions taken to prevent the spread of the virus: ตลอดเวลา 'at all times' and อย่างสม่ำเสมอ 'on a regular basis'.

Example 4 also reveals the use of the speech act of asserting. The linguistic form performing this function is the psychological verb มั่นใจ 'trust'. These two acts, through the language used, can be considered as indirect speech acts, which intend to build trust on the part of customers that the sites are virus-free, due to having been subjected to regular and constant cleaning. In using the speech acts of representatives, the stores are communicating their attempts to take good care of their customers and look after their health and safety during the pandemic through the frequent and consistent implementation of various sanitary measures.

#### 4.2. Directives

Directives are speech acts that speakers use to get others to do things. In the data, this type of act is the second most frequently found, examples of which belong to the sub-type of requesting (29.17%). The felicity conditions of the requesting speech act are as follows:

The propositional condition: Actions will be performed by the hearer in the future.

The preparatory condition: The hearer will be able to perform these actions. The hearers would not perform these actions in normal situations.

The sincerity condition: The speaker wants the hearer to perform these actions.

The essential condition: An attempt is being made to get the hearers to perform these actions.

The linguistic expression used to perform this type of speech act that was found in the data is the use of the requesting markers ขอ 'ask for' and โปรด 'please'.

#### Example 5

เพื่อเป็นการปฏิบัติตามมาตรการของรัฐบาล ขอความกรุณาลูกค้าทุกท่านสวมหน้ากากอนามัยก่อนเข้าห้างบิ๊กซีและตลอดเวลาที่ใช้บริการ เพื่อป้องกันการระบาด COVID-19 และเพื่อความปลอดภัยในการใช้บริการของลูกค้าทุกท่าน ด้วยความห่วงใยพี่น้องชาวไทยทุกท่าน บิ๊กซีขอขอบคุณค่ะ (Big C 1)

Translation: To comply with government measures, Big C asks for each customer's kindness in wearing a sanitary mask before entering the store and at all times while inside the store in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and for your safety while we are serving you. With care for all of our Thai siblings.

Thank you.

#### Example 6

เรียน ลูกค้าทุกท่าน

เพื่อเป็นไปตามประกาศสถานการณ์ฉุกเฉินจากรัฐบาล กรณีการป้องกันการแพร่ระบาดของโรคโควิด-19 เมื่อวันที่ 26 มีนาคม 2563

ขอความกรุณา โปรดสวมหน้ากากอนามัยหรือหน้ากากผ้าเมื่อเข้ามาใช้บริการภายในห้าง

บริษัทฯ ขอขอบพระคุณอย่างสูงในความร่วมมือของลูกค้าทุกท่าน พร้อมกับขออภัยในความไม่สะดวกมา ณ ที่นี้ (AEON Max Valu 2)

Translation:

Dear customers,

In accordance with the declaration of the state of emergency by the government in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 [issued] on March 26, 2020, we ask for your kindness in wearing a sanitary mask or fabric mask while shopping inside the store.

The company would like to thank all customers very much for your kind cooperation, and apologize for any inconvenience.

#### Example 7

ทางแม็คโคร ใคร่ขอความร่วมมือในการตรวจคัดกรองก่อนเข้าพื้นที่บริการ ค่ะ/ครับ (Makro 2)

Translation: Makro would like to ask for your cooperation in screening before entering the service area.

In the above examples, the requesting marker ขอ 'ask for' is followed by the nouns ความกรุณา 'kindness' and ความร่วมมือ 'cooperation'. In Example 6, the requesting marker โปรด 'please' precedes the action requested (wearing a sanitary mask). This linguistic expression is used by the stores in order to express politeness toward the customers. The stores also show a higher degree of politeness through the use of the word ใคร่ 'would like' prior to the requesting marker ขอ 'ask for', as seen in Example 7.

It is noticeable that the speech acts of requesting in the announcements are found to co-occur with references to the necessities of the requests, as seen in Examples 5 and 6. The government declarations and measures are referred to indicate the obligation of the stores to comply with them and the consequent need for customers to act in accordance with their requests.

Referring to another text within a text is known as intertextuality. According to Fairclough (1992a, 1992b), intertextuality refers to the relationships between a text and prior texts. Kristeva (1986) drew upon the work of Bakhtin when coining this term. In the announcements, references to the government's emergency decree are used in the text. This strategy is used along with requests for customers to perform certain actions for sanitary purposes. It is also used to assure customers that their hygiene and safety will be taken care of in accordance with the measures set by the authorities. This kind of reference is called sequential intertextuality (Fairclough, 1992a). This strategy is also used to communicate to the consumers that what the store operators are doing complies with a legitimate government order and that violators will be punished. The store operators are required to strictly adhere to the provisions of this order for the benefit of customers. Ensuring customers' safety is also given as a justification for the measures in the requesting speech acts, as seen in Example 5. As the acts of requesting are performed by the corresponding linguistic expressions, there is no hidden intention to reveal, except to ask the customers to cooperate with them.

#### **4.3. Expressives**

The speech acts which rank third in terms of frequency in the data are expressives, acts which state what the speaker feels. The sub-types of this category of speech act are thanking, apologizing and expressing concerns. Linguistic strategies used to perform these acts involve the deployment of words expressing emotion. In the announcements included in this study, these speech acts are used to show the feelings of the store operators towards their customers. Among these three acts, thanking and expressing concerns are the most frequently seen (10.41% for each). Thanking is observed in expressions of appreciation towards the customers for following the markets' requests. The felicity conditions of the thanking speech act are as follows:

The propositional condition: An action was performed by the hearers in the past.

The preparatory condition: The action is beneficial to the speaker.

The sincerity condition: The speaker feels appreciative for the hearer's action.

The essential condition: There is an attempt to express this appreciation.

##### **Example 8**

ลูกค้าทุกท่าน กรุณาสวมหน้ากากอนามัยก่อนเข้าร้านเลมอนฟาร์ม ขอขอบคุณค่ะ (Lemon Farm 1)

Translation: Dear Customers, please wear a sanitary mask before entering the shop. Thank you.

In the above example, the emotion word used to show appreciation is ขอบคุณ 'thank you'. The customers are thanked for doing what they have been asked to do. In this case, it is wearing a sanitary mask. The action performed by the customers is beneficial to the stores, helping

them to operate their businesses in a crisis in a strict accordance with government declarations and measures, as well as for society as a whole, helping to reduce the number of infections.

The example above also includes the use of the requesting marker ขอ 'ask for' to show politeness toward the customers. Actually, the action of thanking someone does not need to require the hearer's approval. It is therefore not necessary to use the requesting marker. However, the stores use it to show respect toward their customers. A higher level of politeness is also found in this example in the use of the politeness particle ครับ, which is normally used at the end of utterances by female speakers.

It was observed that the act of thanking can be performed using a variant of the linguistic form ขอบพระคุณ 'thank you', which is ขอบพระคุณ (an honorific form) seen in Example 6:

บริษัทฯ ขอขอบพระคุณอย่างสูงในความร่วมมือของลูกค้าทุกท่าน พร้อมกับขออภัยในความไม่สะดวกมา ณ ที่นี้ (AEON Max Valu 2)

Translation: The company would like to thank all customers very much for your kind cooperation, and apologize for any inconvenience.

The linguistic form ขอบพระคุณ 'thank you' (an honorific form) expresses a higher level of respect towards the customers. In fact, the store operators and the customers enjoy equal status. The store operators sell merchandise and/or provide service, receiving money from the customers in exchange. The way in which the stores perform the act of thanking using honorific forms indicates their deep appreciation towards the customers.

In expressing concern, the announcements use language to show expressions of good will on the part of the stores toward their customers in a difficult situation. The felicity conditions of the expressing concern speech act are as follows:

The propositional condition: The hearer is experiencing difficulties.

The preparatory condition: These difficulties cause the hearer inconvenience.

The sincerity condition: The speaker has concern for the hearer.

The essential condition: An attempt is made to express that concern to the hearer.

#### Example 9

วิลล่า มาร์เก็ต ขอความร่วมมือลูกค้าทุกท่าน โปรดสวมหน้ากากอนามัยก่อนเข้าสู่เปอร์มาร์เก็ตและตลอดเวลาการใช้บริการ

เพื่อสุขอนามัยและความปลอดภัยต่อลูกค้าทุกท่าน ด้วยความห่วงใยจาก วิลล่า มาร์เก็ต (Villa Market 1)

Translation: Villa Market asks for the cooperation of all customers. Please wear a sanitary mask before entering the supermarket and at all times while inside the shop for your health and safety. With care from Villa Market.

The emotion word ความห่วงใย 'care' is used to show the concern of the markets for their customers. Also, Example 5 contains this kind of expression in the phrase ด้วยความห่วงใยพี่น้องชาวไทยทุกท่าน 'With care for all of our Thai siblings'. The customers are referred to as พี่น้องชาวไทย 'Thai siblings' in order to create a feeling of solidarity. This term of address is used in each of these cases to refer to the customers as part of the store's family. Members of a family would always do their best to take good care of and support each other. This strategy

can influence the feelings of customers, leading them to feel a sense of unity and togetherness with the stores.

The last sub-type of the expressive speech act found in the data is apologizing, which is observed in 8.35% of cases. It can be considered that the markets are expressing guilt at having to request the customers to comply with the measures referred to in the announcements. Such apologies express the stores' awareness of the difficulties experienced by their customers in complying with the markets' requests. The felicity conditions of the apologizing speech act are as follows:

The propositional condition: An action was performed by the speaker in the past.

The preparatory condition: The action causes some difficulties for the hearer.

The sincerity condition: The speaker feels guilt toward the hearer.

The essential condition: An attempt is made to express this feeling of guilt.

#### Example 10

เพื่อความปลอดภัยสูงสุดของทุกท่านตามประกาศสถานการณ์ฉุกเฉิน ศูนย์การค้า ดี เอ็ม โพรเรียม

จึงขอความร่วมมือปฏิบัติตามระเบียบการเข้าพื้นที่

-สวมหน้ากากอนามัยขณะอยู่พื้นที่ตลอดเวลา

-ผ่านการตรวจอุณหภูมิก่อนเข้าพื้นที่และอุณหภูมิไม่เกิน 37 องศาเซลเซียส

ขออภัยในความไม่สะดวก (Emporium 1)

Translation: For your utmost safety [and] in accordance with the declaration of the state of emergency, Emporium department store asks for your cooperation in acting in accordance with these rules for entering the shopping precinct:

- Wear a sanitary mask at all times while in the precinct.

- Undergo a temperature check before entering and have a temperature not exceeding 37°C.

Sorry for any inconvenience.

The emotion word ขออภัย 'sorry' is used to express the store operator's empathy towards the customers in relation to any inconvenience experienced by them in having to act in accordance with the sanitary measures for eliminating the disease.

Not only does the data include singular speech acts of thanking and apologizing, but combinations of these types of speech acts are also found, as in Example 5.

บริษัทฯ ขอขอบพระคุณอย่างสูงในความร่วมมือของลูกค้าทุกท่าน พร้อมกับ ขออภัยในความไม่สะดวกมา ณ ที่นี้ (AEON Max Valu 2)

Translation: The company would like to thank all customers very much for your kind cooperation, and apologize for any inconvenience.

These three sub-types of the expressive speech acts can be considered as indirect speech acts, which intend to get customers to perform certain actions as they need. By using these acts, the stores can also build rapport with their customers by showing appreciation (from thanking) and empathy (from expressing concern and apologizing) towards them.

#### 4.4. Commissives

These types of speech acts are those that speakers use to commit themselves to performing certain actions in the future. In this study, this type of speech act occurs with the lowest frequency (4.16%). In the data, the sub-type of promising is found. The felicity conditions of the promising speech act are as follows:

The propositional condition: An action will be performed by the speaker in the future.

The preparatory condition: The speaker believes that the hearer wants the action to be performed. The speaker is able to perform the action, which has never been done before and will be beneficial to the hearer.

The sincerity condition: The speaker is willing to perform the action.

The essential condition: An attempt is made to make the hearer believe that this action will be performed by the speaker in the future.

The linguistic expression used to fulfill this act is action verbs.

In this type of speech act, the stores show their determination to provide good service to their customers by operating their businesses in an ethical manner, by improving their service, as well as by supporting their customers, as seen in Examples 11 and 12.

##### Example 11

เรายังคงมุ่งมั่นที่จะให้บริการด้วยสินค้าที่มีคุณภาพดีราคาถูก ไม่ฉวยโอกาสขึ้นราคาโดยเด็ดขาด (AEON Max Valu 4)

Translation: We are still determined to serve you with quality goods at cheap prices. We are definitely not taking advantage [of this situation] to increase our prices.

##### Example 12

เราพร้อมที่จะพัฒนาให้ดียิ่งขึ้น และจะเดินเคียงข้างลูกค้าและผู้ให้บริการไปด้วยกัน (Foodland 2)

Translation: We are ready to improve [ourselves] and walk side-by-side with [our] customers and [other] users of our services.

The action verbs, มุ่งมั่น 'determine', ไม่ฉวยโอกาส 'not to take advantage' in Example 11, พร้อมที่จะพัฒนา 'be ready to improve [ourselves]', and เดินเคียงข้าง 'walk side-by-side' in Example 12, are used to show the commitment of the stores in doing business on a fair and honest basis, even during the most difficult of times.

This type of speech act can be considered as an indirect speech act, which intend to build trust on customers that even the major impact of the coronavirus 2019 on their financial stability, the stores always prioritize customers.

From the analysis, the speech acts of declaratives are not found. According to the definition of declaratives, which are speech acts that change the world, it implies that the status of a speaker and a hearer are not equal. One can say something that affects the conditions experienced by another. However, in this study, the speakers are the business operators who need to obtain the support of their customers. They are not in a privileged position to be able to perform this type of act.

## **5. Discussion**

The study reveals what supermarkets and hypermarkets communicate to their customers in Bangkok via announcements during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic. Four types of speech acts are found: representatives, directives, expressives and commissives. Analyzing the language used in these announcements, those speech acts are found to perform the communicative functions of informing customers about sanitary measures taken by the store operators to prevent the spread of coronavirus; requesting customers' cooperation in following government regulations; expressing their feelings of appreciation, regret, empathy toward their customers; and showing the store operators' determination to operate their businesses in an ethical manner.

Comparing the results of this study to those of Phatthanasutinon and Rattanadilok Na Phuket (2021), it is found that the same types of speech acts are used in the communication of the COVID-19 situation. However, there are more sub-types under the speech acts of directives, expressives, and commissives found in the study of Phatthanasutinon and Rattanadilok Na Phuket (2021). The difference may be due to the genre of language used. The previous study analyzed the spoken discourse transcribed from video clips, whereas the present study analyzed the written discourse in announcements. The sub-types of acts which have not been found in this study are recommending which is under the speech acts of directives, threatening which is under the speech acts of commissives, and expressing condolences, admiring, congratulating, and blessing which are under the speech acts of expressives. Moreover, communicative functions performed by each type of speech acts are different due to different contexts and purposes.

In terms of the real intentions hidden in the language used as proposed by Yule (1996, p. 54), the findings show that, from four types of speech acts used, three of them are used to perform other acts. The speech act of representatives, which performs the acts of reporting and assuring customers about the measures implemented for safety and hygiene, is also used to perform the act of building trust with customers that their shopping venues are virus-free. The speech act of expressives, which performs the acts of thanking, apologizing, and expressing concern to customers, is also used to perform the act of getting customers to perform actions as the stores required. The speech act of commissives, which the stores use to demonstrate their commitment to doing business with fairness and honesty was also used to build rapport with customers and assure them that they would get the best services and reasonable prices from the stores as in a normal situation.

The speech acts, both direct and indirect ones, and linguistic expressions found in this study are used by the store operators to demonstrate their status as responsible entrepreneurs complying with government orders. These speech acts help them to create a positive image in the eyes of government authorities and customers, showing that they are conducting their business operations with consideration for the welfare of society, and not only for their own benefit. These speech acts also help customers to feel confident that they are very important people being taken good care of and protected from the disease while they are shopping, even though being in public places increases the likelihood of their becoming infected.

Considering the expressions used to perform acts found in the announcements of supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok, the findings show the correspondence with what Khanittanan (1988) proposes. Some characteristics of Thai society also can be seen to

have been reflected. It is apparent in the speech act of expressives, which is used indirectly to perform the act of getting customers to perform specific actions as required. It is found that the stores displayed a high level of politeness toward their customers by using the requesting marker ขอ 'ask for' in the acts of thanking and apologizing. Moreover, the act of thanking is also performed by a variant of the word ขอบคุณ 'thank you', which is ขอบพระคุณ (an honorific form). This variant is normally used with people who are highly respected by the speaker, including people who are older than the speaker and those with higher qualifications. In the context of store operators and customers who are in the same status, the selection of words reveals hierarchical relationships in Thai society.

Another finding to support the hierarchical characteristic of Thai society is that the stores always address their customers as ท่าน 'you' (an honorific form), in the announcements. This may be considered as a strategy on the part of the stores to make customers feel that they are very important persons (VIPs).

What have been found in this study fall into the category of politeness expressed through the selection of words according to Khanittanan (1988). The language used in the announcements includes politeness particle (ค่ะ), words expressing the elevation of listeners (ท่าน 'you', ขอบพระคุณ 'thank you'), words assisting the expression of politeness (ขอ 'ask for', ใ้ 'would like'), and long and complex expressions from the combination of politeness words (ขอความกรุณาโปรด 'ask for your kindness please', ใ้ขอ 'would like to ask for').

Another characteristic of Thai society is revealed by the act of expressing concern. The term of address used to refer to customers as พี่น้องชาวไทย 'Thai siblings' shows solidarity in Thai society. Addressing others who are not members of one's own family by using kinship terms is common in Thai culture as also found in the studies of Haruethaivinyoo (2002), Palakornkul (1972), Sangsod (1989), Tingsabadh and Prasithrathsint (1986). The usage of kinship terms to refer to customers is found in the study of address terms used by department store vendors (Banthuchai, 2006). The findings show that most department store vendors used kinship terms as address terms. By using kinship terms, the stores can build rapport with their customers by counting them as members of their own families. This finding also corresponds with Hofstede Insights (n.d.), which claims that Thailand is considered to be a highly collectivistic country, where people belong to "in-groups," both within the family and within the extended family. By using these speech acts and the expressions which show a high-level of politeness in the announcements, the stores have tried to keep their business going in the difficult COVID period.

One interesting finding from the study is the use of the word ลูกค้า (customer), which can be considered as new and entered the Thai language recently. As mentioned above, Banthuchai (2006) found in his study that vendors mostly used kinship terms to refer to their customers. However, it is apparent that the word ลูกค้า (customer) is commonly used in the announcements of supermarkets and hypermarkets during the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak. It might be due to the influence of the social media since the first post by a Facebook user in November 28, 2017 to show the negative opinion after being addressed so by a seller (Voice TV, 2017). The post went viral and sellers started to use this term to manifest the equal status between sellers and customers. This may be considered as the first movement to call for the equality of this kind of relationship.



## 6. Conclusion

The results of the study reveal how examples of public places, supermarkets and hypermarkets in Bangkok, Thailand, communicate to their customers during the first attack of COVID-19 disease in 2019. Applying the framework of speech acts, it is found that the language used in the announcements by these stores aims at creating a positive image of the stores. Politeness found in the announcements help make customers pleased to gain a high level of respect and to be treated as important ones. By the power of language which conveys these positive messages to customers, their business can survive during the pandemic.

This study, however, focuses mainly on language use, and does not involve other elements, such as sign, color, picture, or font styles. These factors need to be considered in further research to enrich the results of the study.

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