

# Cultivation of Solidarity and Soft Power: Ukrainian President Zelensky's 2022 Speech to Japan

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*Received August 25, 2022; Revised September 22, 2022; Accepted December 9, 2022*

**Abstract.** Words not only describe the world but also influence the world or modify relationships (Austin, 1965; Pinker et al, 2008). Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has presented his competence in influencing or even shaping diplomatic relationships through his words and utterances. This study explores the ways in which he has been successful as a strategic speaker (Lee & Pinker, 2010), establishing solidarity with Japan using the soft power introduced by Nye (2004; 2011). By closely examining his 12-minute online speech at the Japanese parliament in March 2022, it investigates the extent to which his speech has exerted influence on the Japanese people as well as on the two countries' relationship. As for methodology, the data of an English-translated script were analyzed by adopting politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), which stems from the concept of "face" (Goffman, 1967), a positive social value in social interaction. Specifically, all of President Zelensky's utterances were evaluated by three factors that account for politeness strategies – relative power, social distance, and weight of imposition. Based on this analysis and the responses in Japan, this study argues that his speech adopted not only face-threatening but also face-boosting effects (Bayraktaroglu, 1991), building common ground as an affiliation strategy and generating solidarity and soft power. This study concludes that President Zelensky's speech to Japan contributes to consolidating solidarity in Japanese minds and soft power, which have encouraged the Japanese government and its citizens to continue supporting Ukraine financially, psychologically, and diplomatically.

**Keywords:** *Zelensky's speech, politeness theory, face, common ground, solidarity, soft power, speech act of request.*

**Мацуока Місато, Мацуока Рієко. Культивування солідарності та м'яка сила: промова президента України Зеленського в Японії 2022 року.**

**Анотація.** Слова не лише описують світ, а й впливають на світ або змінюють відносини (Austin, 1965; Pinker et al., 2008). Із моменту вторгнення Росії в Україну в лютому 2022 року президент України Володимир Зеленський продемонстрував свою компетентність у впливі або навіть формуванні дипломатичних відносин за допомогою своїх слів та висловлювань. Це дослідження аналізує шляхи, якими він досяг успіху як стратегічний оратор (Lee & Pinker, 2010), встановлюючи відчуття солідарності з Японією на основі інструменту «м'якої сили» (термін Нєє, 2004; 2011). Уважно вивчаючи його 12-хвилинну онлайн-промову в японському парламенті в березні 2022 року, ми дослідили, якою мірою його промова вплинула на японський народ, а також на відносини між двома країнами. Щодо методології, то дані англійської версії промови

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було проаналізовано на основі теорії ввічливості (Brown & Levinson, 1987), яка ґрунтується на концепції "обличчя" / "іміджу" (Goffman, 1967), що є позитивною соціальною цінністю у соціальній взаємодії. Зокрема, всі висловлювання президента Зеленського було оцінено за трьома факторами стратегії ввічливості – відносною владою, соціальною дистанцією та вагою впливу. На основі цього аналізу та реакції в Японії у дослідженні доведено, що його промова мала не лише загрозливий для іміджу, а й сприятливий для нього ефект (Bayraktaroğlu, 1991), будуючи спільні основи як стратегію афіліації та генеруючи солідарність та м'яку силу. Автори висновують, що промова президента Зеленського в Японії сприяє зміцненню у свідомості японців солідарності з українцями та «м'якої сили», що заохочують японський уряд та його громадян продовжувати підтримувати Україну фінансово, психологічно та дипломатично.

**Ключові слова:** промова Зеленського, теорія ввічливості, імідж, спільні основи, солідарність, м'яка сила, мовленнєвий акт-прохання.

## Introduction

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Ukraine has experienced Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II, and the country has also faced food shortages. In this context, President Volodymyr Zelensky has influenced or even shaped diplomatic relationships through his words and utterances. He requested support from countries around the world, including Japan, persuading them to support Ukraine, which has suffered from Russia's unceasing invasion. A prominent example through which his efforts can be understood is his online speech to the Japanese parliament in March 2022. There had been no precedent of making an online speech in the country, and more than 500 Japanese parliament members attended (*Jiji Press*, March 24, 2022; *Nippon.com*, March 16, 2022). Although this attempt was initially criticized, his speech eventually attracted wide attention among the Japanese audience, with high appraisal. Japan has maintained its relationship with Russia, given consideration of energy resources; however, President Zelensky has arguably been successful in strengthening Ukraine's solidarity with Japan using soft power (Nye, 2004; 2011). This article analyzes the script of the 12-minute online speech at the Japanese parliament to shed light on the significant role of language in changing the world, which seems to be implied by Austin's (1965) concept of the perlocutionary force of words.

Pinker et al. (2008) argue that language serves two purposes: to convey a proposition and to negotiate and maintain a relationship (p. 835). Zelensky's speech has the latter purpose of negotiating a relationship; as such, politeness theory enables his speech to be clarified. Politeness theory is a system of interpersonal relations "designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange" (Lakoff, 1990, p. 34), with both positive and negative politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) added the concept of "face," originally introduced by Goffman (1972), who defined it as something that is emotionally invested and can be lost or increased in communication. The concept of face sketches out the human desire to positively represent ourselves while avoiding any humiliation or embarrassment, and this builds the premise

that many speech acts are intrinsically threatening to face, which are known as “face-threatening acts (FTAs)” (Brown & Levinson, 1987). “Positive face” refers to the human need for approval from others, representing the desire for one’s own actions to be accepted, approved, and also praised by others. Therefore, positive politeness functions as a claim for closeness (Holtgraves, 1997). Conversely, “negative face” refers to the claim for territory, personal space, and preserving them, representing the wish for one’s own actions to be unimpeded by others and maintain private space. Holtgraves (1997) also noted that the most frequently used form of negative politeness is indirectness, and off-record politeness is considered a politeness strategy, which violates Grice’s conversational maxim.

“Politeness” in politeness theory purports to redress face-threatening acts (FTAs), in which certain speech acts would threaten the face of the interlocutor, with positive politeness that attends to positive face and negative politeness for negative face (Cutting, 2002). Politeness theory has three components – relative power (“power gap” in Holtgraves, 1997), which refers to the relative status of the audience; social distance, which refers to intimacy with the audience; and imposition, which refers to the size of the wanted speech act, such as a request. These components allow us to measure the degree of a FTA, which accounts for politeness strategies (Craig et al., 1986). Furthermore, a face-boosting effect (Bayraktaroğlu, 1991) allows the actors to establish common ground as an affiliation strategy, generate solidarity, and eventually soft power in the realm of diplomacy. In addition, Lee and Pinker (2010) proposed the theory of the strategic speaker, based on the premise that indirect speech has a strategic rationale and involves an uncertain mixture of cooperation and conflict. An off-record indirect request is an effort to gain cooperation despite the inefficiency of language use. Based on our study, Zelensky is likely to be labeled as a strategic speaker.

Soft power is another important concept when considering the effectiveness of Zelensky’s speech, which involves the use of economic, diplomatic, and institutional tools. Often used in contrast with hard power, the definition remains debated, but it refers to power that co-opts rather than coerces people.<sup>1</sup> While some scholars argue against a clear-cut differentiation between co-optation and coercion (Mattern, 2005), most empirical studies differentiate between soft and hard power by explicitly or implicitly linking them to resources. Foucault, Bourdieu, Gramsci, and others have also implied the role of soft power, which remains relevant for understanding states’ behaviors. Compared with hard power, soft power can be non-instrumental or passive, but it may also be used instrumentally (Chitty, 2020). Nye (2011, p. 82) unequivocally points out that soft power “is simply a form of power, one way of getting desired outcomes.” Nye (2011) takes a strategic view of soft power, explaining that it is important to consider targets’ view about agents, since attraction

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<sup>1</sup> While Nye’s conceptualization of soft power is reminiscent of Lukes’ “third face of power,” he even suggests that soft power can be linked to other faces of power (Nye, 2011). For example, whereas a promise of economic gain functions as “inducement” and can be exercised as hard power, this can also be interpreted as soft power in confirming their collective identity (Feklyunina, 2016).

and persuasion are constructed socially.<sup>1</sup> In the vein of soft power, attractiveness helps people be captivated by compelling messages, rather than to be captured and compelled (Chitty, 2020).

Furthermore, power and solidarity are two sides of one coin. As Tannen (1993, p. 22) states, any show of solidarity necessarily involves power, in that the requirement of similarity and closeness limits freedom and independence. At the same time, any show of power encompasses solidarity by involving participants in relation to each other. Soft power could be related to positive politeness strategies of giving reasons (showing one's own expertise) and giving gifts (tokens of one's own culture/pride), while pressure corresponds more to the negative politeness strategies of being conventionally direct, questioning, and hedging (Stopniece, 2018). Hence, this study suggests that the adoption of politeness theory and soft power enables us to show the influence of Zelensky's speech by focusing on his choice of words as well as the responses of the audience in Japan.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which Zelensky's speech has exerted influence on the Japanese people, as well as on the relationship between Ukraine and Japan, by analyzing all of his utterances. Based on the analysis of the text, our study discusses how Zelensky's speech adopts techniques stemming from politeness theory and soft power by examining the visible responses of the Japanese audience, including politicians. Furthermore, this study argues that the speech act of request has been adopted by making use of soft power.

## Methods

The data consists of the whole script of Zelensky's speech (1,498 words) to Japan translated into English from the original Ukrainian script publicized by the government of Ukraine. The actual speech to Japan was simultaneously translated into Japanese online at the parliament. As a first step, instead of selecting some utterances from the script, all the utterances were selected based on the belief that the utterances cannot be analyzed in isolation, as they are related to each other and thus harbor intertextuality (Kristeva, 1986) and illocutionary and perlocutionary effects (Austin, 1965). Second, the script was analyzed using politeness theory and soft power. Social distance, relative power, and weight of imposition – the three variables for gauging the degree of face-threatening or face-boosting acts – were explicated for each paragraph, and the degree of soft power was examined. As the aim of President Zelensky's speech was to ask Japan for support for Ukraine, the speech acts projected in his speech were mainly requests through developing solidarity. In addition, to assess the degree of solidarity being consolidated and the soft power being exerted on

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<sup>1</sup> Some propose a social constructivist take on soft power (Feklyunina, 2016; Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Stopniece (2018) synthesizes the concepts of positioning theory, politeness theory, and common ground. Borrowing terms of soft power and hedging from international relations, Stopniece offers a new and more comprehensive understanding of negotiation phenomena in a fivefold response scheme.

the Japanese audience, this study looks into their responses, which can be seen from social media. Finally, the results of the discourse analysis and selected public responses were compared and discussed with the concept of soft power, as Zelensky's speech has had an influential diplomatic effect on international society by briefly comparing it with his speech to Finland.

## Results

### Analysis

This section uses politeness theory and soft power to analyze the English translation of the original Ukrainian script of Zelensky's speech.

*1. Dear Mr. Hosoda! Dear Mrs. Santō! Mr. Prime Minister Kishida! Distinguished Members of the Japanese Parliament! Dear Japanese people! It is a great honor for me, the President of Ukraine, to address you for the first time in the history of the Japanese Parliament.*

This excerpt shows an inclusiveness of the people in Japan. By adding "Japanese people," it functions as an effort to include all the Japanese people instead of focusing exclusively on politicians. This functions as a mitigator of relative power, with closer social distance and less imposition. In other words, it can be considered as an attempt to form solidarity between Ukraine and Japan. While the first part is a fixed expression of greeting, the last part – "for the first time in the history of the Japanese Parliament" – has an effect of reducing the social distance that exists between the two countries. Many Japanese people are unlikely to be knowledgeable about Ukraine; therefore, this last phrase reminds the Japanese people of President Zelensky's effort to make the relationship closer and helps establish solidarity.

*2. Our capitals are separated by a distance of 8 thousand 193 kilometers. On average, it's 15 hours on a plane. Depending on the route. But what is the distance between our feelings of freedom? Between our desires to live? Between our aspirations for peace? On February 24, I did not see any distance. Even a millimeter between our capitals. Even a second between our feelings. Because you immediately came to our aid. And I'm grateful to you for that.*

This excerpt shows the contrast between the physical and mental distances, which functions to emphasize the close mental relationship between Ukraine and Japan; President Zelensky focuses on the similarity of the two countries. In this regard, the last utterance of not "even a millimeter" of distance seems to function as a perlocutionary act. It is interpreted, in other words, that Ukraine and Japan are so similar that this seems to attract Japan to assist Ukraine, making use of solidarity stemming from a common ground of similarity. As a result, with more imposition of the need for Japan's support from Ukraine, the Japanese side may feel more pressure from Ukraine. The last utterance is to express gratitude, which is a clear-cut speech

act. However, expressing gratitude may function as a speech act of request, or as an illocutionary and perlocutionary speech act (Searle, 1969), which is an indirect request from an utterance that expresses gratitude. This also leads to building solidarity; it can be argued that the soft power of Ukraine is being exerted to try to attract Japan to feel closer to Ukraine, thus leading to more support from Japan.

*3. When Russia destroyed peace for the entire Ukraine, we immediately saw that the world is truly against the war. Truly for freedom. Truly for global security. Truly for the harmonious development of every society.*

This part reveals face-threatening acts, which can be considered a meaningful prerequisite to asking for further assistance from Japan as a speech act of request. It can be inferred that this first factual statement provides a certain amount of relative power towards Japan, asking for understanding of the current circumstances between Ukraine and Russia. The second statement includes President Zelensky's positionality. This portion seems to be objective; however, its imposition is quite high, with a persuading effect. As the context is comprehensive, this helps build solidarity with agreement, based on the belief that Japanese people are pacifists.

*4. Japan has become the leader of this position in Asia. You immediately started working to stop this brutal war started by the Russian Federation. You immediately started working for peace in Ukraine. Hence, in Europe. And this is really very important. It is important for everyone on Earth. Because without peace for Ukraine, no person in the world will be able to look to the future with confidence.*

This part starts with a compliment, followed by an evaluation of what Japan did. It can be seen as a compliment and a positive evaluation from the Japanese perspective; however, both compliments and positive evaluations function as face-threatening acts, suggesting a possible expectation that Japan should continue to do so. In other words, the speech act of a compliment is a camouflaged request or an off-record indirect request. In this sense, both relative power and imposition seem to be cast with closer social distance, which again leads Japan and Ukraine to establish their solidarity. The message emphasizes the need to take action to keep the world peaceful, not only for Japan but also for Europe to support Ukraine. Therefore, this part also projects relative power and imposition with closer social distance by asking for understanding; it implies that the Japanese contribution may lead to world peace, shedding light on the importance of peace for Ukraine. This can be seen as another use of soft power by Ukraine, attracting Japan's support by emphasizing their relevance. Hence, there are two elements of soft power here: President Zelensky is intentionally attempting to attract Japan to assist Ukraine, and Ukraine is also trying to underscore Japan's global relevance.

*5. Each of you knows what Chernobyl is. Nuclear power plant in Ukraine, where a powerful explosion occurred in 1986. Radiation release. The consequences of which have been*

*recorded in different parts of the planet. The 30-kilometer zone around the Chernobyl station is still closed. It is hazardous. During the elimination of the consequences of the explosion at the station, thousands of tons of contaminated materials, debris and cars were disposed of in the forests in the closed area. Just in the ground. On February 24, Russian armored vehicles passed through this land. Lifting radioactive dust into the air. The Chernobyl station was captured. By force, by weapon.*

This part uses the nuclear power plant of Chernobyl as an example to explain Ukraine's suffering; it not only describes its situation but also hints at an affiliation with Japan and establishes common ground. Although the words "Japan" and "Fukushima" are not explicitly stated, the Fukushima nuclear power plant incident may be implied; as such, it could narrow social distance and build solidarity. It thus helps unveil the chaos and functions as part of a basis to provide certain degrees of imposition and relative power for Japan to support Ukraine, as well as to establish solidarity. By making use of this solidarity through establishing common ground, it is clear that Ukraine is attracting Japan's attention to the detrimental situation in Ukraine, revealing how President Zelensky is using soft power.

*6. Imagine a nuclear power plant where a disaster happened. Confinement that closes the destroyed reactor. Operating nuclear waste storage facility. Russia has turned this facility into an arena of war as well. And Russia is using this 30-kilometer territory, this closed zone, to prepare new attacks against our defense forces. It will take years after Russian troops leave Ukraine to investigate the damage they have done to Chernobyl. What sites of radioactive materials disposal were damaged. And how radioactive dust spread on the planet.*

This part further emphasizes the disastrousness of Ukraine's situation by describing the catastrophe caused by the Russian attack on a nuclear power plant, using "a theater of war" metaphorically. "Imagine" is a keyword that aims to influence the Japanese audience to think about what it would be like if such a situation happened to them. This specific description has a strong impact for illuminating the consequences, which might continue to harm the world. It also strengthens relative power and imposition, as well as closer social distance, developing solidarity because Japanese people are concerned about the effects of nuclear power, as the sole victim of nuclear bombs. With the use of the face-threatening effect, this section can be considered as Zelensky's manipulative use of soft power, which encourages the Japanese audience to pay more attention to the situation in Ukraine.

*7. Ladies and Gentlemen!*

*There are four operating nuclear power plants on our land! These are 15 nuclear units. And they are all under threat. Russian troops have already fired from tanks at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe.*

In this part, which is the middle of his speech, Zelensky reframes his speech by calling on "ladies and gentlemen," thus recapturing the attention of the Japanese

audience. This part functions as a general description of the nuclear facilities that Ukraine owns and focuses on Russian aggression in attacking the largest nuclear power plant in Europe. It sheds light on the gravity of the situation brought about by the Russian forces. The content includes imposition and relative power, drawing attention to the seriousness of the consequences of such destruction, and it establishes closer social distance by calling for the Japanese audience's attention. Similar to the previous excerpt, the issue of nuclear power plants could be successful in attracting Japanese attention, providing solidarity and closer social distance through the establishment of common ground.

*8. The fighting has damaged hundreds of plants, many of them particularly dangerous. The shelling threatens gas and oil pipelines. Coal mines. The other day, Russian troops also fired at a chemical plant in the Sumy region of Ukraine. There was a leak of ammonia. We are warned about possible chemical attacks, in particular with the use of sarin. As it was in Syria. And one of the main topics for discussion of world politicians is the question: how to react if Russia also uses nuclear weapons. Any confidence of any person in the world, any country is completely destroyed.*

This excerpt continues to describe various destructive acts by Russian forces, including the use of sarin, which is a familiar chemical to Japanese people due to the 1995 terrorist attack by the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo. Although the name of this incident does not explicitly appear in the speech, Japanese people may recall the incident that caused many casualties. As a result, this association may succeed in establishing common ground and eventually solidarity in the Japanese mind; instead of making a direct reference to the Tokyo sarin incident, being indirect seems to attract greater attention and sympathy from the Japanese audience. Meanwhile, the last utterance here has a strengthened impact on Japanese people, as the only victim of nuclear weapons. By adding this utterance, Zelensky seems to reference the overwhelming tribulations that Japanese people suffered during World War II. These two separate references facilitate solidarity by building common ground and narrowing social distance, balancing relative power with heavy imposition and face-boosting effects on the Japanese accomplishment of overcoming these significant hardships. Here, we can infer that the use of soft power by Ukraine is successfully attracting the Japanese audience.

*9. Our servicemen have been heroically defending Ukraine for 28 days already. 28 days of full-scale invasion of the largest state in the world. But not the greatest in potential. Not the most influential. And the smallest from a moral point of view. Russia has used more than a thousand missiles against peaceful cities in Ukraine. Countless bombs. Russian troops destroyed dozens of our cities. Some were burned to the ground. In many towns and villages that have come under Russian occupation, our people cannot even bury their murdered relatives, friends and neighbors with dignity. They have to bury them right in the yards of broken houses, near roads, anywhere where it is possible... Thousands were killed, including 121 children. About 9 million Ukrainians were forced to leave their home, their native places, fleeing from Russian troops. Our northern territories, eastern, southern are becoming empty, because people are fleeing from this deadly threat. Russia has even blocked the sea for us.*



*Usual trade routes. Showing some other – potential – aggressors of the world how to put pressure on free nations by blocking sea navigation.*

This long excerpt details the ways in which Ukrainians and Russians are fighting, resulting in cruel attacks and the burial of bodies without dignity. These descriptions enable understanding of what is going on in his country, giving heavy imposition and relative power to force the audience to agree with continuous support even without making a direct request. The last utterance in this part adds the fear of food distribution problems caused by Russia blocking the sea. This generates heavy imposition and relative power in asking for support for Ukraine with a more persuasive matter. As mentioned earlier, Pinker et al. (2008) describe the two purposes of language: to convey a proposition and to negotiate and maintain a relationship dichotomously. This excerpt is an optimal instance of exerting these two purposes.

*10. Ladies and Gentlemen! Today, it is Ukraine, the partner states and our anti-war coalition that can guarantee that world security will not be completely destroyed. That in the world there will be a foothold for the freedom of nations. For people and for the preservation of diversity in societies. For security of borders. To make sure that we, our children, our grandchildren still have peace. You see that international institutions have not worked. Even the UN and the Security Council... What can they do? They need reform. They need an injection of honesty. To become effective. To really decide and really influence, not just discuss. Due to Russia's war against Ukraine, the world is destabilized. The world is on the verge of many new crises. And who is now sure what tomorrow will be like? Turbulence in world markets is a problem for all countries that depend on imports of raw materials. Environmental and food challenges are unprecedented. And most importantly, it is now being decided whether all the aggressors on the planet – explicit and potential – will be convinced that the war they have waged will lead to a punishment so powerful that they should not start a war. That they should not destroy the world. And it is absolutely logical and correct that the responsible states unite to protect peace.*

This excerpt starts with “ladies and gentlemen,” with an intention of changing the subject and again calling for attention; it emphasizes the importance of keeping the world peaceful. The term “anti-war” is another keyword that reminds Japan of its pacifism. President Zelensky also blames international organizations such as the UN for not functioning sufficiently to stop Russian aggression, which brought on greater crises. He reproaches such organizations’ incompetence in punishing Russia and seeks any alternative to do so to keep the peace, which implies that Japan should be in the position of leading the world. As a result, this provides further heavy imposition and relative power to ask Japan to punish Russia. These are face-boosting utterances because he gives Japan credit for leadership in an indirect manner, but it may also function as a face-threatening act because Japan has not taken on real leadership yet. Still, by evaluating Japan as a possible global leader, the Japanese people may feel proud to be Japanese and be willing to lend a hand to Ukraine. Clearly, this also stirs Japan’s pride, which makes evident that President Zelensky is attempting to strengthen Japan’s soft power. In terms of speech acts, a compliment

seems to be projected on the surface; however, his utterances purport to deliberately make an indirect request as a strategic speaker in Lee & Pinker's (2010) terms.

*11. I am grateful to your state for its principled position at such a historic moment. For real help to Ukraine. You were the first in Asia to put real pressure on Russia to restore peace. Who supported the sanctions against Russia. And I urge you to continue to do so. I call for the united efforts of the Asian countries, your partners, to stabilize the situation. So that Russia seeks peace. And stops the tsunami of its brutal invasion of our state, Ukraine. It is necessary to impose an embargo on trade with Russia. It is necessary to withdraw companies from the Russian market so that the money does not go to the Russian army. It is necessary to help our state, our defenders, our soldiers who are holding back Russian troops even more. It is necessary to start thinking about rebuilding Ukraine already now. About the return of life to the cities destroyed by Russia and the territories devastated by it.*

Related to the previous section, this section starts with expressing direct appreciation towards Japan for supporting Ukraine and emphasizes taking initiative to put pressure on Russia. This is again both face-boosting and face-threatening, as these utterances are based on an expectation or request to continue the sanction; however, the expression “pursue peace and stop the tsunami of brutal aggression” may assure the Japanese conscience. Because of its total defeat in World War II, Japan has kept its pacifist position, which President Zelensky should be aware of. The word “tsunami” is another keyword, as it recalls Japan's suffering from the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, when tsunamis killed many people. Using these words, Zelensky succeeds in establishing common ground and solidarity by narrowing the social distance; with heavy imposition and relative power, soft power is exercised rather than hard power.

*12. People need to go back to where they lived. Where they grew up. Where they feel is their home. Their small homeland. I'm sure you understand this feeling. This need. The need to return to your land.  
We need to develop new security guarantees. So that it is possible to act preventively and strongly every time there is a threat to peace. Is it possible to do this on the basis of existing international structures? After such a war – definitely not. We need to create new tools. New guarantees. Which will work preventively and strongly against any aggression. Which will really help. Japan's leadership can be indispensable in their development. For Ukraine, for the world. I offer it to you. So that the world can feel confident again. Confident about what tomorrow will be like. Confident that tomorrow will come and will be stable and peaceful. For us, for future generations.*

This excerpt starts with a detailed explanation of the difficulties that Ukraine is now facing. From the middle part, Zelensky starts to compliment Japan again as a world leader, highlighting good points that Japan can be proud of, such as its history of development after WWII, its harmony and following of norms, its valuing of life, and its protecting of the environment. A compliment, as a speech act, is both face-threatening and face-boosting, and it effectively functions as a speech act of request. According to the lens of politeness theory, social distance becomes narrower, imposition becomes great, and relative power should be strong, as the degree of request to be a world leader seems to be large. Zelensky deliberately uses both

positive and negative politeness strategies here. In addition, his use of a compliment for a request that is an off-record indirect request indicates that he is a strategic speaker (Lee & Pinker, 2010). The use of soft power is clearly evident in the emphasis on the relevance of Japan's leadership.

*13. Ladies and Gentlemen! Japanese people! We can do a lot together with you. Even more than we can imagine. I know what a brilliant history of development you have. How you can build and defend harmony. Follow the principles and value life. Protect the environment. The roots of this are in your culture. Which Ukrainians really love. My words are not unsubstantiated. This is actually true. Back in 2019, literally six months after I became President of Ukraine, my wife Olena took part in a project for children with visual impairments. In the project to create audiobooks. And she voiced Japanese fairy tales. In Ukrainian. Because they are understandable for us, for children. And it was only a drop in the huge sea of our attention, the Ukrainian attention, to your attainment. We have similar values with you despite the huge distance between our countries. A distance that doesn't really exist. Because we have equally warm hearts. Thanks to joint efforts, thanks to even greater pressure on Russia, we will come to peace. And we will be able to rebuild our country. Reform international institutions. I am sure that Japan will be with us then – just as it is now. In our anti-war coalition. At this crucial time for all of us. Thank you! Arigato gozaimasu! Glory to Ukraine! Glory to Japan!*

In this paragraph, soft power is explicitly used to clarify the long-term effect, using the example of President Zelensky's wife creating an audiobook of a Japanese fairy tale.<sup>1</sup> This cultural phase is soft, and it is not obvious whether he utilizes this book, though the book was used for an educational purpose. Additionally, he uses the first-person plural pronoun "we" to be inclusive, establishing common ground and consolidating solidarity. Furthermore, he successfully exercises his persuasive power to make the audience believe that pressure on Russia will lead to world peace, with close social distance, high imposition, and deliberately manipulative relative power. The concluding utterances include not only fixed expressions of conclusion and appreciation; they also express "glory" to both countries. Adding the Japanese expression of appreciation "*arigato gozaimasu*" encourages the audience to feel closer and gives courtesy to Japan. Therefore, this part narrows social distance without heavy imposition nor asymmetric relative power. A positive politeness strategy is used; however, ironically, the last phrase "glory to Japan" may be interpreted to strengthen the speech act of request as relative power or pressure for Japan to assist and support Ukraine, which is an indirect speech act of request.

### **Responses of the Japanese Audience**

This section presents the responses of Japanese politicians as well as other Japanese audience members, which could be found on the SNS platform showing their responses to Zelensky's speech and its effectiveness in delivering his request to Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> It was later said that this fairy tale refers to *Momotaro* (Bunshun Online Special Report, 2022).

## Politicians

There were mostly positive comments about President Zelensky's speech. Japanese Prime Minister Kishida explained that he was impressed by the speech, stating that Zelensky renewed his belief that the international community as a whole must firmly support his people. He also mentioned that Japan would consider further sanctions against Russia and additional humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Foreign Minister Hayashi mentioned that the speech made him feel close to Ukraine and feel that Japan is with Ukraine. Yamaguchi, from the coalition party Komeito, stated that he was deeply moved by Zelensky's speech and shared his disappointment about the inability of the United Nations to suppress Russia's outrage; he also said that he thinks that Japan should work hard to make possible the creation of a system that prevents disasters such as the one happening in Ukraine (*NHK News*, March 29, 2022).

Similarly, Izumi, the head of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, one of the major opposition parties, stated that Japan must continue to support the Ukrainian people and do everything in its power to stop Russia's aggression. Fujita, the secretary-general of the Japan Restoration Party, also noted that Japan should make its best efforts toward a ceasefire by taking steps to resolve the conflict. Leader of the Democratic Party for the People Tamaki, appraising the speech, said at the party's general assembly of members of both houses that Japan must consider further pressure and strengthening sanctions while monitoring the development of the situation. Japanese Communist Party Chairman Shii remarked that he could feel deep resentment against Russia's aggression and war crimes, arguing that Japan should provide economic sanctions and non-military reconstruction assistance by raising Japan's voices against the use of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons (*NHK News*, March 29, 2022).

## Social Media

In addition to the politicians' statements, there were many positive comments on the SNS, specifically Twitter, regarding the content of President Zelensky's speech. For example: "It was a restrained and dignified speech. I think President Zelensky narrowed down his keywords well" and "the emotional appeal was very much for Japanese." Another comment stated, "Because of Japan's devotion to peace diplomacy after World War II, I think that it is not a difficult request, such as the provision of weapons, but a light one, such as cooperation in response to further economic pressure" (*NHK News*, July 13, 2022).

The below graphs compiled by NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai, or Japan Broadcasting Corporation) indicate the number of posts on Twitter. The first one shows nearly 300,000 posts about Ukraine immediately after February 24, when Russia invaded Ukraine, dropping to around 100,000, and then starting to rise on March 23, when Zelensky gave the online speech. The second graph shows that the number of posts referring to Zelensky and the number before the Russian invasion on

February 24 was nearly zero, but the number increased up to 20,000 for a week and then surged to nearly 80,000 after his online speech. These graphs prove the impact of President Zelensky's speech.

Figure 1<sup>1</sup>

*The number of posts about Ukraine immediately after February 24, 2022*

*Source: NHK News (2022, July 13)*



Figure 2

*The number of posts referring to Zelensky*

*Source: NHK News (2022, July 13)*



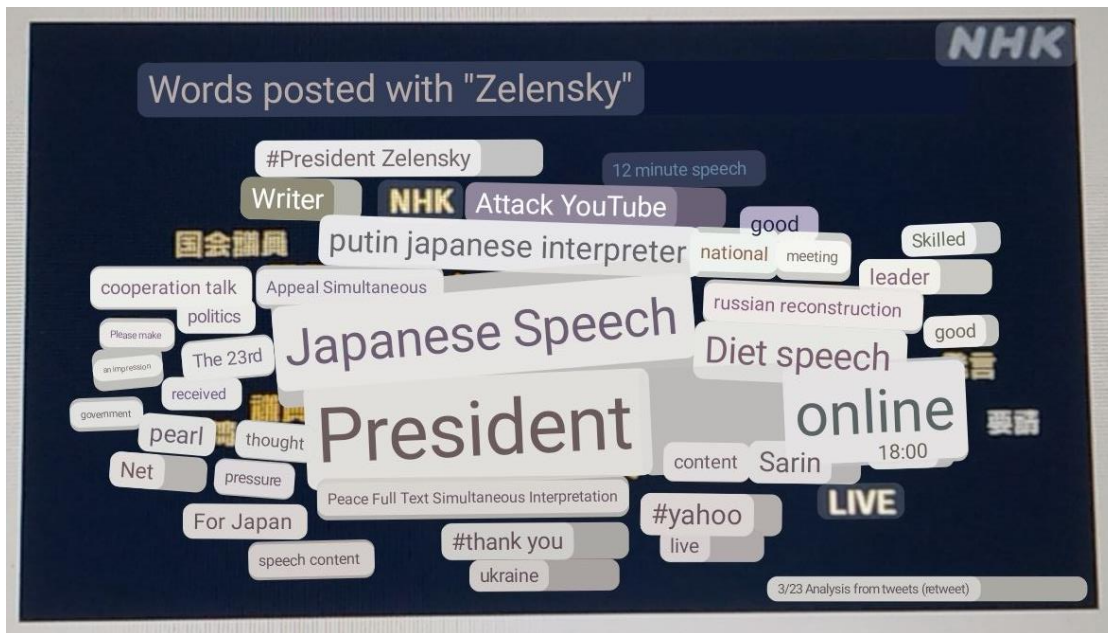
<sup>1</sup> Google Translate was used to translate Japanese into English for Fig. 1, Fig. 2, and Fig. 3. As for Figure 1's vertical numbers, 30 is 300,000, 20 is 200,000 and 10 is 100,000 whereas, regarding Figure 2's vertical numbers, 8 is 80,000, 6 is 60,000, 4 is 40,000 and 2 is 20,000.

The following image is a word cloud showing the words posted with “Zelensky.” The words “online,” “Japanese speech,” and “Diet speech” appear with larger fonts than other words, meaning that the Japanese people paid plenty of attention to Zelensky’s speech conducted online at the Diet.

Figure 3

A word cloud showing the words posted with “Zelensky”

Source: NHK News (2022, July 13)



## Discussion

The above observations generally prove that President Zelensky effectively delivered his speech and may change history. Many utterances in his speech exercise perlocutionary force (Austin, 1965). Compared to Zelensky’s speeches to other countries such as to Finland, which consisted of plenty of direct (on-record) requests with more specific examples (*The Independent* 2022), his speech for Japan was milder. This is evident in how he gradually made use of face-threatening and face-boosting effects, increasing the emphasis on the need for Japan’s soft power in the latter sections of his speech, especially as seen in Excerpt 10. In his speech to the Finnish parliament, he used the speech act of an on-record request, starting to describe the specific example of a Russian attack on the train station and asking for concrete support from Finland, which lasted longer than the speech to Japan by more than five minutes (*The Independent*, 2022). Concerning the stark contrast between his speeches to Japan and to Finland, it seems that President Zelensky deliberately modifies the method of delivering his speeches by taking into account the countries’ relationship and sociocultural background.

As discourse analysis of requests using politeness theory suggests, and based on the aforementioned responses of the Japanese audience, Zelensky's speech succeeds in building common ground and generating solidarity, leading to the decision of continuing support from the Japanese government. His speech also demonstrates that he is a strategic speaker (Lee & Pinker, 2010). This is evidenced by Prime Minister Kishida's talk in which he explicitly mentioned his willingness for further humanitarian support to Ukraine. In addition, Foreign Minister Hayashi mentioned that he would support Ukraine in the international community's fight against Russia. Other politicians have also shown determined support for Ukraine, being impressed by President Zelensky's speech. Indeed, this is also evident from Japan's action for additional sanctions following the US and Europe, as well as Japan's request for reforming the UN (Liberal Democratic Party, 2022). These responses mean that the "speech act of request" (Searle, 1969) that President Zelensky exercised was accomplished with perlocutionary force (Austin, 1965). The politicians of the leading parties and the opposition parties have presented similar attitudes towards President Zelensky's speech, asserting their support for Ukraine and agreeing to strengthen sanctions against Russia.

Furthermore, as pointed out in the section of discourse analysis earlier, Zelensky's reference to Chernobyl should remind the Japanese people of Fukushima. This may involve intertextuality (Kristeva, 1986), as an analogy in the Japanese mind may be generated through inner speech. Similarly, the word "sarin" may remind Japanese people of the Aum Shinrikyo incident that happened in Japan in 1995, as pointed out in the previous section. The wording of "tsunami of invasion" also gained expert attention (Bunshun Online Special Report, March 24 2022) because "tsunami" has a significant negative impact in Japanese minds and may allow them to feel closer to Ukrainians. Regarding the selected keywords that attract the attention of the Japanese audience, it can be said that an "empathy switch" was effectively turned on (Ushio, 2022). The speechwriter Kageyama (2022) also highlights the skill in establishing emotional solidarity by using the phrase "you and I." Similarly, the term "we," which appears in a deliberate manner, may be considered an effort to build solidarity (Chilton, 1990).

Analysis using politeness theory for the discourse of request investigates three variables – social distance, relative power, and imposition – and evaluates the degree of face-threatening and face-boosting acts (Bayraktaroğlu, 1991) that could lead to solidarity, which eventually becomes soft power. Our analysis reveals that most of Zelensky's utterances were able to establish solidarity through a face-boosting effects, and the solidarity that the Japanese audience may develop thus enhances its soft power in the international community. Keywords such as "nuclear power", "sarin", and "tsunami" expand the interpretation into the unexpressed realm, with the intertextual implication that Japan is the sole victim of nuclear power.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shinoda gave an analogy of a Japanese haiku with a sense of 'wabi sabi' embodying the Japanese minimalist mentality (Bunshun Online Special Report, March 24 2022).



## Conclusion

The present study investigated the ways in which Ukrainian President Zelensky's speech to Japan affected Japanese minds, using discourse analysis of the speech and the public responses available online. The results of the analysis indicate that all the passages produce solidarity and soft power. His efforts to successfully deliver the speech are embedded in the flow of narrowing social distance and reducing relative power but increasing the weight of imposition, which is the size of the request. The responses of politicians and citizens available from social media show that Zelensky's speech was successful in gaining support from Japan as a whole, including the government. These findings reveal that his speech, his discourse of request, succeeded in establishing solidarity, common ground, and soft power, eventually persuading Japan to continue to support Ukraine by pressuring Russia. Although Zelensky has strategically used different forms of speech to different countries, this study showed the potential for language to change the political scene in an effort to bring peace.

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