

The Legitimation Strategies by the Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, in His Political Speeches Regarding the Aging Society

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Abstract

The former Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, declared that Japan has been facing a national crisis regarding the aging society. This kind of demographic transition affects several aspects of life, namely economic, health, and social culture. This matter was delivered during his speeches when in power. The former Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, applied several legitimation strategies to achieve his political purposes, related to the aging society. These legitimation strategies were required to gain the public trust, to maintain the political stability, and to create the social changes. Speeches delivered in the presence of the members of Diet, Japanese national legislature, showed a language function as a means to control the people. This qualitative research used the applied linguistic perspective with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to explain the relation among language, ideology, and power. Theories selected were the legitimation strategy by Leeuwen (2008), Systemic Functional Linguistics by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), and Japanese grammar.

Keywords: Legitimation, Aging Society, Critical Discourse Analysis

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Introduction

The aging society refers to a society having the increase in population aged older than 65 years, as well as the decrease in population aged under 15 years (Ismail et al., 2021). This phenomenon is caused by the increase in life expectancy age and the decrease in fertility rate. WHO and the UN have classified the aging society into 3 (three) phases, namely (i) a society with the population proportion older than 65 years at 7% of the whole population; (ii) a society with the population proportion older than 65 years at 7-14% of the whole population; and (iii) a society with the population proportion older than 65 years at over 21% of the whole population. Every state can have the aging population, but it occurs earlier in the developed states (D'Ambrogio, 2020, p. 2).

The aging population brings about complex consequences. According to Jones (2020) and the National Institute on Aging (2024), these consequences are (i) an obligation of population at the productive age to pay a higher tax rate to help their state pay pension fund and provide health service to the elderly people; (ii) the continuous increase in health care cost because of a tendency of the elderly people older than 65 years to have the chronic disease demanding a long-term treatment; (iii) the change of labor pattern potentially leading to the flow of capital or investment to other states, which can be translated into the transfer of economic strength; and (iv) the change of family function. In other words, the aging society has implication for the economic, politic, health, and sociocultural issues.

The aging society in the context of this research is the aging society in Japan. Japan itself is a state having the largest population of elderly people worldwide. Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Japan recorded that there were 36.27 million of elderly people in 124.71 million of Japanese people. Therefore, 29.1% of Japanese population was older than 65 years. This data estimate was based on the population survey until the 15th of September, 2022 (Nippon, 2022). Moreover, number of the elderly people aged older than 75 years reached 15% of total population (Kyodo News, 2022). It indicated that elderly people almost dominated Japan, thus bringing a term The Graying of Japan. It is predicted that the number of elderly people will keep increasing until 2060 (Ministry of Finance Japan, 2022).

As a state with the aging population, Japan definitely must adapt to the increasing number of elderly people. Some matters must be adjusted to make society function properly. Prime Minister, as the head of government, serves to communicate the changes required to the society. A political speech can be a means to communicate these changes, while language becomes an important tool for its realization. Prime Minister needs to show the legitimacy to make the decisions acceptable to the society. In this case, the legitimation refers to a relation between leader and the governed people.

The writer argues that the Prime Minister applied the legitimation strategy in a political discourse, which was speech, to promote the policies considered capable of solving several issues of the aging society. In this case, the government needs to plan and promote the innovative policies intended for the elderly society (Dautova, 2020).

This research was focused on the legitimation strategy applied by a Prime Minister, named Shinzo Abe, in power from 2012 to 2020. In 2013, the Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, declared that Japan faced a national crisis related to the aging society. The Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, worried about the growth of Japan's economy which got slow for having more elderly people, compared with people at productive age (the working age). In his speeches, the Prime

Minister, Shinzo Abe, communicated the changes made with the Cabinet he led to respond to challenges in the aging society.

Speeches need to be studied using the CDA to see the dialectical interplay between discursive and non-discursive aspects (Fairclough, 2014). Therefore, the problem formulation in this research is the legitimation strategy applied by a Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, in his political speeches when in power, concerning the aging society. Problems of this research are described on some research questions as follows:

- (1) What are the legitimation strategy types applied by the Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe?
- (2) How is the linguistic realization from the legitimation strategy?
- (3) What ideology is in the speeches by Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, concerning the aging society?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach focusing on a relation among language, discourse, and power. This approach views the language as one of the social practices (Fairclough, 2006). Therefore, a social context from the use of language must be paid attention. Social contexts in this case are what is being said, by whom, and where.

Fairclough & Wodak (1997) stated 8 (eight) principles of CDA. Eight principles of the CDA are 1) a focus on social issues; 2) discursive power relation; 3) a discourse to establish society and culture; 4) a discourse to work ideologically; 5) historical discourse; 6) having relevance between text and society; 7) interpretative and explanatory analysis; and 8) discourse which is social practice. These principles of CDA can be references in analyzing a research topic. In this case, topics which are the objects of CDA discussion can be domination, discrimination, power, and control as manifested through language (Wodak, 2001).

Experts of the CDA stated their views related to the purposes of CDA application in the research:

- (1) CDA aims to explore the social function of a language and to express ideology in a text (Fairclough, 2006).
- (2) CDA aims to critically investigate the social inequality as expressed, hinted, created, and legitimated through the use of language or presented in discourse (Wodak, 2001b).
- (3) CDA can be used for making the discursive aspects explicit, related to disparity and inequality (Meyer, 2001).
- (4) CDA aims to analyze text (written or oral) for legitimating, reproducing, and refusing the misuse of power, domination, and inequality. This research aims to analyze the linguistic features from the political speech text as well as to discover aspects behind text, such as power relation and ideology (T.A. Van Dijk, 2005).

Legitimation Strategy

Van Leeuwen (2008) stated 4 (four) types of legitimation strategies, namely (i) authorization; (ii) moral evaluation; (iii) rationalization; and (iv) mythopoesis. Authorization is a legitimation strategy through certain authority, like the use of opinions from experts, role model, law, rules, regulation, tradition, and customs. Furthermore, rationalization is a legitimation obtained through the social practice. The next legitimation strategy is

mythopoesis, referring to a legitimation obtained through the storytelling in which the stories have moral values. The last is moral evaluation legitimation. This legitimation is obtained with an analogy expressing moral evaluation.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Halliday & Hasan (1989) stated three situational context features which can be used for interpreting text, namely field, tenor, and mode. Field refers to an occurring event and the discussed topic, tenor is related to the parties playing their roles in a discourse, and mode refers to the role of language in a discourse. These three features of situational context related to meta-function (a basic function of language) as stated by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) are as follows:

- (1) Ideational function, to explain and interpret the experience of human beings.
- (2) Interpersonal function: a relation between sender and recipient of a message in the communication process.
- (3) Textual function: related to mode, implying the role of language in a social interaction as reflected through text.

Ideational function can be reflected through lexicalization, metaphor, euphemism, and the use of verb. Furthermore, interpersonal function can be expressed through modus and modality. Meanwhile, textual function can be shown through active and passive structures, theme and rheme, and information structure.

Ideology

Definition of ideology and guidelines for exposing an ideology behind the text need to be elaborated in this section because CDA is related to ideology. A philosopher named Shelby (2003) stated some characteristics of ideology, namely 1) ideology is a set of beliefs which can change false assumptions to be true, in which these assumptions are related to crucial matters directly influencing society; 2) ideology is used by certain group of people to achieve power, domination, and control over other groups; 3) ideology is used for legitimating the interests of group in power in certain society; 4) ideology is a set beliefs and rules for manipulating and persuading people for the interests of a dominating group in society; 5) ideology is a twisted assumption for hiding social contradictions for the interest of the dominating society; and 6) ideology is basically deviant, reflecting the domination of people in power.

Methodology

This study used the qualitative research design. Data used in this research were transcriptions of the speeches by the Prime Minister of Japan, when ruled by Shinzo Abe. Speech texts in Japanese language and their translation in English were downloaded from the official site of Prime Minister's Office Japan (<https://japan.kantei.go.jp/>) and Web Archiving Project (<https://warp.ndl.go.jp/>). Statements taken in this research were related to the aging society. Data analysis technique was based on the qualitative research steps by (Creswell, 2021). Data were classified based on the legitimation strategies and their linguistic aspects were explained. Ideological contents in the speeches were revealed based on legitimation strategy analysis and linguistic aspects.

Analysis and Discussion

A. Legitimation Authorization

Findings of this research show the legitimation through a personal authority. Excerpts from the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, concerning the aging society, with an application of the authorization legitimation strategy, are detailed as follows:

Data 1

介護と仕事も、両立しやすい社会を創っていかねばなりません。まずは、その第一歩として、両立するための知識やノウハウを、働く方々や職場に周知して、様々な支援を受けられるようにします。地域のお年寄りの皆さんに、質が高く、必要な介護が行われる体制も整えます。

(Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 183rd Session of the Diet-February 28, 2013)

In data 1, the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe used a second-person pronoun, disappeared in the sentence. A disappearance of this pronoun is one of the characteristics of non-straightforwardness in Japanese language. A second-person pronoun *wareware* (we) refers to the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the government he led. In the aforementioned excerpt, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the government made a promise to create a climate in the companies where their employees can balance work and activities of caring for the elderly family members. The use of a modality *~ikanebanarimasen* 'must' and the sentence pattern *~younishimasu* 'to ensure that' also showed an authority owned by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Data 2

私たちが政権を奪還する前、「日本はもはや成長できない」、「日本は黄昏を迎えている」といった、未来への不安を煽る悲観論すらありました。しかし、決して諦めてはならない。強い意志を持ち、努力を重ねれば、未来は、必ずや変えることができる。安倍内閣は、さらに未来への挑戦を続けてまいります。

(New Year's Reflection by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe - January 1, 2017)

In data 2, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe criticized the previous government led by former Prime Minister from the opposition party. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated his views regarding the previous government, *nihon wa mohaya seichou dekinai* (Japan could no longer grow) and *nihon wa tasogare o mukaeteiru* (Japan has been into its twilight years). These two sentences indicated that the Japan's economy got slower and this issue was difficult to be changed. Afterwards, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated that he and his cabinet (*Abe Naikaku*) would face several challenges appearing in the future. The use of an intensifier, like in a phrase *tsuyoi ishi* (a strong determination) and a sentence *mirai wa kanarazu kaeru koto ga dekiru* (the future will be definitely changeable) aimed to make people acknowledge the legitimation owned by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

B. Instrumental Rationalization

This type of legitimation was used to ask for the approval from people on action or decision made by their government by stating an urgency concerning a matter and positive effect which will be brought about in the future.

Data 3

その日本ブランドが揺らぎかねない事態が、起きています。ホテルなどで表示と異なる食材が使用されていた偽装問題については、不正表示への監視指導体制を強化します。悪質商法による高齢者被害の防止にも取り組み、消費者の安全・安心を確保してまいります。

(Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 186th Session of the Diet - January 24, 2013)

In data 3, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated his concern over dishonest business practices. Many hotels, restaurants, and other business practices used foodstuff with quality different from what was written in the package. That issue definitely led to discomfort, particularly for the elderly consumers. The use of foodstuff with different quality can lead to health issues, namely allergy and the like. A legitimation strategy (*instrumental rationalization*) was used to show an urgency of the need for inspection towards the business practices endangering elderly people. The use of verbs *kyoukashimasu* (to strict) and *kakuhoshimasu* (to make sure) aimed to show a promise on action which brings about a change to be better in the future.

Data 4

女性や高齢者など、多様な人材が自分のライフスタイルに合わせて仕事ができるワーク・ライフ・バランスに考慮した労働制度の見直しも大きな課題です。

(Passage of the budget for fiscal year 2014 - Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe - March 20, 2014)

In data 4, a lingual marker of the legitimation strategy (*instrumental rationalization*) was a verb *minaosu* (to review), which refers to a promise made by government to review the labor system for allowing women, elderly people, and others to balance their work and daily life in a harmonious way in the future.

C. Theoretical Rationalization

Theoretical Rationalization is realized through the citation of opinions from experts in certain fields or important figures to validate knowledge and understanding on a matter. It aimed to make people follow the plan made by their government.

Data 5

まずは、様々な御意見がございましたが、一人一人の能力を上げていく、一人一人が学びたい、仕事をしたい、その要求に応えていくことができれば。かつ、高齢者の方々は経験を持っている。その経験をいかしていくと新たな取組が可能となっていくのではないかと。また学び直しをしていくことによって、新たな人生を歩んでいただくことによって社会に貢献していただけるし、

あるいは、それぞれの人生が100年、もっと充実したものになっていくのではないか。このように思います。

70歳は昔の60代、50代。私も今年63になるわけではありますが、まだ52、3の気持ちでやっていると思うわけでありまして、先ほどもグラットンさんとお話をさせていただいたのですが、ドイツをあの敗戦から回復させた名宰相のアデナウアーは、73歳で首相になった人で、87歳までやって、4年後に亡くなっているわけです。私はそんなに長くやるということは全く考えていませんから、誤解を呼ばないようにしたいと思いますが、つまり、それぞれの世代の人たちが、その力を十分に発揮していけば世の中はより豊かになり、そしてそれぞれがより豊かな人生を暮らせるのではないかと思います。

(Council for Designing 100-Year Life Society - September 11, 2017)

Data 5 shows an intellectual persuasion carried out by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Japan has experienced the increasing number of elderly people who can live until the age of 100 years. Therefore, government needed to think about a way to make elderly people capable of living their life actively for as long as they can. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe cited a story by Ms. Gratton about the experience of a German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, who was still in power from the age of 74 to 88 years. A clause *saki hodo mo Guratton-san to ohanashi o saseteitadaita no desu ga* (as what has been stated by Ms. Gratton...) showed a legitimization strategy through theoretical rationalization.

D. Mythopoesis

A legitimization strategy through *mythopoesis* was carried out by using narrative or storytelling to persuade people to believe action or decision made by their government.

Data 6

150年前、明治日本の新たな国創りは、植民地支配の波がアジアに押し寄せる、その大きな危機感と共に、スタートしました。国難とも呼ぶべき危機を克服するため、近代化を一気に推し進める。その原動力となったのは、一人ひとりの日本人です。これまでの身分制を廃し、すべての日本人を従来の制度や慣習から解き放つ。あらゆる日本人の力を結集することで、日本は独立を守り抜きました。今また、日本は、「少子高齢化」という国難とも呼ぶべき危機に直面しています。身分、生まれ、貧富の差にかかわらず、チャンスが与えられる。明治という新しい時代が育てた数多(あまた)の人材が、技術優位の欧米諸国が迫る「国難」とも呼ぶべき危機の中で、我が国が急速に近代化を遂げる原動力となりました。

(New Year's Reflection by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe - January 1, 2018)

In data 6, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a historical event, a massive modernization during the Meiji Era (1868-1912). Japan, which sought to preserve its tradition during the isolation period, had to open itself to the influence of foreign countries in Edo Era (1603-1867). Systems existing in the society were adjusted to the Western Culture (from Europe and America). However, Japan is among states which never experienced colonialism by foreign

nation. A narrative about this historical event was told by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to persuade his people that Japan can pass the current crisis, namely the aging population.

E. Moral Evaluation

Legitimation through a moral evaluation can be obtained through some methods, including comparison with other nations.

Data 7

消費税の円滑・適正な転嫁も大変重要な課題です。政府一体となって、強力に転嫁対策を実行していきます。世界に冠たる我が国の皆年金・皆保険制度、これを次世代にしっかりと引き渡してまいります。少子化対策、そして女性が輝くための対策は、我が国の未来のため、喫緊の課題です。待機児童の解消をしっかりと実行してまいります。そのための一体改革です。消費税で安定した財源を確保し、社会保障を維持・強化してまいります。

(Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe - October 1, 2013)

In data 7, a sentence *ekai ni kantaru wa ga kuni no kainenkin, kaihokenseido, kore o jisedai ni shikari to hikiwatashitemairimasu* (We will ensure that the world-renowned Japanese universal pension and health insurance systems are passed onto future generations) implied that the social security system in Japan was better than other states and it must be preserved. Japanese people must pay the consumption tax at a higher rate to allow their future generation to get the same benefit of social security system.

Citizens at the working age resigned from their job to care for elderly family members; it was an important matter which must be paid attention by the government. Data from 2007 to 2012 showed that approximately 440,000 people resigned from the place where they worked to care for their parent or family members who could no longer look after themselves independently. The reason was that company did not have any system to support their employees for balancing work and activities for caring for elderly family members.

The aging population encouraged the Japanese government to adjust its policies in several matters. These adjustments were made to make people function properly. A challenge for the leaders was the way to communicate the required changes to be acceptable by society. Therefore, a legitimation strategy through the use of language was required. Analysis section explains types of the legitimation strategies used by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and linguistic aspects expressing these strategies.

In this section, the writer explains a social context as the background of speech texts and ideologies. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe revealed one of the facts faced by Japan as the aging society, namely less number of citizens at productive age, compared with elderly people. Many citizens at a productive age had difficulty because they must balance work and other activities to care for their parent. Many of them had to resign from their work and chose to focus on caring for their parent. This phenomenon brought about a concern because fewer people moved the wheels of Japan's economy. Japan has the Law concerning a three-month leave to care for children and elderly family members, but only few people know about that. Only about 1.6% of employees used the rights of leave. Government needs to inform people about the Law.

Company definitely requires the manpower to run its business properly. Therefore, it needs to consult with employees more frequently when they have difficulty in balancing work and another obligation to care for their parent. For that purpose, they can hire experts who can give advice to their employees. Consultation is required because a burden borne by people caring for their elderly people can be diverse, such as the availability of other family members who might cooperate with them, physical and mental conditions of people taken care of, and so forth.

Another urgent issue in Japan was a large number of elderly people reaching the age of 100 years. For this reason, the pension fund must be given in the long term and it becomes a burden for the government. Therefore, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe established an assembly or council with a task to design "The 100-Year Life" This assembly discussed how to change education, labor system, and social security to adjust to the aging society. Its main focus was "the working style at an old age" because the current social security system was incapable of prospering the life of elderly people who live longer. Therefore, elderly people had to work for as long as they can.

A discourse of "The 100-Year Life" was designed because of the increasing number of people living for 100 years. It is predicted that there will be more people aged 100 years every year. Many people do not want to live long for several reasons. For example, they do not want to be a burden on their family member and they have another concern on their physical condition which is increasingly weaker and financial condition. Besides, many people lived alone even before passing an old age. They worry about the difficulty faced in the future because nobody can help when they get sick. This fact was discovered from a survey conducted by The Japan Hospice Palliative Care Foundation in 2022.

Another matter observed by the writer was a cultural value shift from the Confucianism teaching, to respect the elderly. It is proven with the business practices targeting elderly people as the victims, which means they are considered a group which can be tricked.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been known as a follower of nationalism and neoliberalism ideologies. These two ideologies were reflected in his speeches concerning the aging society. Nationalism ideology was reflected in efforts to establish safety and comfort for all people. Meanwhile, neoliberalism ideology was reflected from his efforts to get elderly people back to the work. This fact showed that the state was not fully capable of prospering elderly people and they must think about their own prosperity for as long as they can.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe applied the legitimation strategy in speeches delivered when in power. Through the lingual markers used, political communication pattern in Japan can be identified, as characterized in the non-straightforwardness and a consideration on effects inflicted upon his audiences.

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