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The Role of Words in the Program "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin"

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Abstract This study investigates the role of the speakers in the Russian program "Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным" (Direct Line with Vladimir Putin), which addresses problems and questions from the Russian nation to Putin. We utilized this program, which was broadcast for the first time in 2001 and most recently in 2018, to observe the difference between the years and the texts and words' relationships. The results of the cluster analysis and correspondence analysis showed that people use words depending on their own roles in the program, and there is no relation to the year.

Keywords Russia, media, role of conversation, president of Russia

1. Introduction

Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin was announced as Yeltsin's successor and appointed prime minister by Yeltsin in August 1999. Putin took office as the second elected Russian President in 2000. As of 2019, Putin has led Russia as president for four terms: 2000 – 2004, 2005 – 2008, 2012 – 2016, and 2018 – present. Putin served as prime minister from 2008 to 2012 while Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev took up the post as President of Russia. Medvedev's first act as president was to revise the Constitution to extend presidential terms from four years to six years. The politics of President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin were referred to as a tandem regime. Kimura (2009) points that this political dispensation was considered a "tie" until Putin entered the next presidential election in 2012.

Iijima (2009) mentions that the Putin administration set out to control the media as a fundamental policy to reconstruct a stable society after the Yeltsin administration. In the past, the authoritative oligarch had attempted to use the media to criticize the Putin administration. The Putin administration needed the government to control the media to avoid the media being used by emerging chaebols and others. For that reason, Putin paid attention to the movements of Boris Abramovich Berezovsky and Vladimir Aleksandrovich Gusinsky, two of the most powerful among them. Consequently, Gusinsky, who was praised as a symbol of a freedom of speech in Euramerican countries and called a "Russian media mogul," was arrested for embezzlement of sovereign property. The authorities, however did not give a specific explanation of the reason for his arrest. This caused criticism from the domestic wing of democracy and Western countries, and the justice

authority permitted him to be released on bail and placed under house arrest. Berezovsky was also called an "influence peddler," and he shifted to an anti-Putin position in 2000 because his own influence in the political sphere was declining. Both Berezovsky and Gusinsky were stockholders in major Russian broadcasting companies, radio stations, and others. The government began to pressure the disinvestment of stocks because of their use of the media.

Nagoshi (2012) reports that Putin does not use the Internet and social media. Nagoshi therefore describes Putin as a kind of "analogue" dictator. Instead, Putin uses a program on television. Nagoshi points out that the secret to Putin's high support rate is an ingenious image strategy through the influence of the television program. After he gained control of the main television station, Putin used censorship as a device to maintain his authority. The executives of the television station get orders every day from the department of the Kremlin regarding what parts of speeches given by Putin they can broadcast. In addition, they are occasionally sent guidance about the expressions and methods for the newscast; in the case of state-run broadcasting station, "Первый канал" (Channel One Russia), Putin calls and directs there.

1.1. "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin"

Putin introduced the custom of having a conversation with the Russian nation on this program, which has been broadcast once a year since December 24, 2001. The name of this epochal program is "Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным" (Direct Line with Vladimir Putin). This program was continued even while he was prime minister and was called "Разговор с Владимиром Путиным" (The Conversation with Vladimir Putin) from 2008 to 2011. The Russian people can submit their questions via SMS (short messaging system), MMS (multi-media message service), the program's website, the mobile phone application, social media, and phone calls to the studio. The program is broadcast on OPT (Общественное Российское Телевидение: Public Television of Russia) of "Первый канал" (Channel One Russia) and PTP (Российское телевидение и радио: Russian television and radio) of "Россию" (Russia).

As mentioned, the first program was held on December 24, 2001, and Putin responded to all 47 questions from the Russian nation for 2 hours and 20 minutes. The most recent was held on June 7, 2018, and Putin answered 73 questions for 4 hours and 20 minutes. The program time has tended to be gradually extended. Putin says in an interview with "Коммерсантъ" (Kommersant): "Прямая линия" является самым мощиным социологическим опросом, позволяющим гражданам донести свою позицию и оценку руководству страны. ("Direct Line with Vladimir Putin" is the biggest social opinion poll, which allows the nation to bring its own position and evaluation to the leader of the country).

Nagoshi (2012) insists that "Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным" (Direct Line with Vladimir Putin) is carefully worked out in advance to decide the questioners and the contents of the questions. After this preparation, the made-up program is broadcast through the three of the biggest television stations, radio and Internet. Nagoshi calls this political movement a device for dispatch to foreign countries, and Putin regards it as important.

2. The aim of this study

The program requires that its structure is prepared in advance. The people involved include: two main chairmen, computer staff who treats the questions, the chairman who reports the questions, announcers in each region in Russia, the Russian people, and Putin. The two main chairmen and Putin sit in the studio. Our research question asks whether there are any groups of speakers with used words, and if there are speaker groups that depend on their roles in the program, what words are used to run the program smoothly. We compared the words used by the persons between the first program in 2001 and the latest one in 2018 as a pilot study to observe the relationship between words and years, as well as the roles of the speakers.

3. Method and data

This study applied text mining approaches to investigate the relationship between words and texts. We used correspondence analysis to observe the relationships between the role of speakers such as chairman, people of the nation, the president, and other politicians. We made a corpus of the “Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным” (Direct Line with Vladimir Putin) programs that were broadcast in 2001 and 2018. The scripts are posted on the official presidential site. However, these conversation scripts do not reflect repetitions, suprasegmentals, falters, silences, and other factors. In this study we used the posted scripts to observe the used words in the context of the speaker’s role in the program, not as a conversational dialogue.

We utilized the software CasualConc [1] for analysis. In this study, we used word cloud and correspondence analysis as text mining approaches. Tables 1 and 2 contain the corpus information. Tables 1 and 2 show the lemmatized and non-lemmatized text, respectively, from 2001. Tables 3 and 4 show the lemmatized and non-lemmatized text, respectively, from 2018. The STTR (standardized type/token ratio) shows lexical richness in appropriate texts. Since STTR calculates every 1000 words, it is possible to compare the richness of the vocabulary without being affected by the size of the text file (e.g., Imao 2018, Scott 2010).

	Types	Tokens	STTR
Putin	2,006	11,218	43.48
Chairmen	799	3,371	40.75
Nation	787	2,222	51.59

Table 1: Basic lexical statistics in 2001 (lemmatized)

	Types	Tokens	STTR
Putin	3,410	11,312	55.90
Chairmen	1,200	3,386	35.44
Nation	1,094	2,240	63.68

Table 2: Basic lexical statistics in 2001 (non-lemmatized)

As shown in tables 1 and 3, the STTR of the Nation’s text indicates the highest numerical value for both years. The numerical value of the STTR tells us that the Russian nation appealed to Putin using various words.

[1] Professor Y. Imao developed this free software for text analysis. I would like to express appreciation for this development.

	Types	Tokens	STTR
Putin	2,338	15,215	41.99
Bureaucrats	913	2,872	42.04
Chairmen	1,584	6,584	44.44
Nation	1,459	5,116	47.25

Table 3: Basic lexical statistics in 2018 (lemmatized)

	Types	Tokens	STTR
Putin	4,232	15,277	55.14
Bureaucrats	1,335	7,472	56.26
Chairperson	2,485	6,590	58.66
Nation	2,232	5,135	60.40

Table 4: Basic lexical statistics in 2018 (non-lemmatized)

4. The characteristics of speakers' roles

This study aims to investigate the next two points as a pilot study: i) the difference in word usage between the roles in the program, and ii) the difference in word usage between years. We applied a word cloud to visualize the first research question with the high-frequency words in the texts. We also we applied a cluster analysis and correspondence analysis to observe the relationship between texts and words.

4.1. Word frequency in the texts

We utilized the word cloud to create a visualization that shows the frequency of words in the lemmatized texts. Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 show the result of the word cloud, and the word size reflects the frequency of use; in other words, large words are high-frequency, while small words are low-frequency. The chairman uses words such as вопрос (question), the name of the program прямой эфир (Direct Line), and Putin's name, Владимир Владимирович (Vladimir Vladimirovich). As the means to present the questions to Putin, the chairperson also uses звонок (call) and телефон (telephone). The high-frequency words in Putin's texts are говорить (speak), вопрос (question), знать (know), проблема (problem), and сфера (sphere), as figure 2 shows. The Russian nation pays particular attention to Putin by using his name Владимир Владимирович (Vladimir Vladimirovich); they ask him questions using the word вопрос (question), as in figure 3. Bureaucrats also pay attention to Putin by using his name, as the nation does. The difference in high-frequency words between the nation's texts and those of the bureaucrats' is the usage of more specific words such as правительство (government), цена (price), and язык (language). This means that bureaucrats try to explain or answer questions from Putin more than the questions from the Russian nation.

The results of the word cloud show which words are high-frequency in each text and describe the rough relationships between the roles of the speakers. We will observe more detailed relationships between texts and words by applying the cluster analysis and correspondence analysis.

4.2. The classification of texts and words

We utilized a correspondence analysis to observe the relationship between each text and word. We used non-lemmatized texts to see the classification and behavior of the speakers' texts and

Figure 1: Word frequency in chairperson’s texts in 2001 and 2018

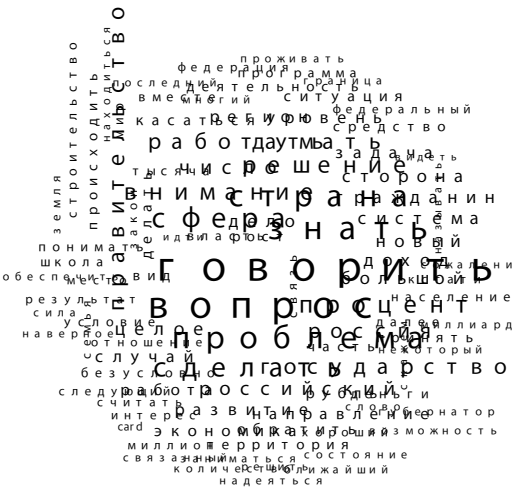

Figure 2: Word frequency in Putin’s texts in 2001 and 2018

Figure 3: Word frequency in nation’s texts in 2001 and 2018

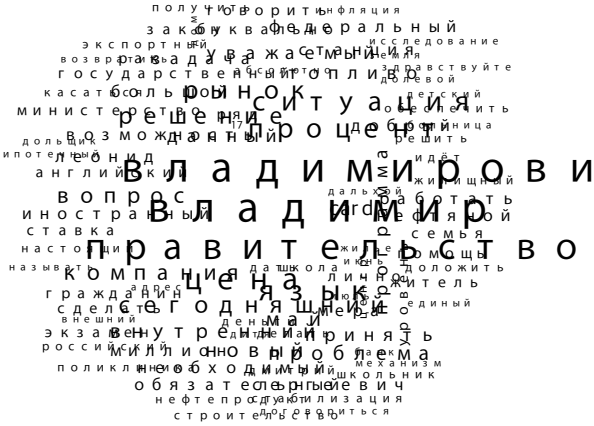

Figure 4: Word frequency in bureaucrats’ text in 2018

words. Figure 5 shows the result of the cluster analysis; the distance measure used is the Euclidean distance. The texts are divided into two clusters: the right cluster is the texts of the chairperson; the left cluster is those of Putin, the nation, and the bureaucrats. The next stratified texts are also divided into two clusters: the right side is Putin’s texts, and the left side is those of the nation and bureaucrats. The results of the cluster analysis show that the chairperson uses words to move the program along, and Putin, the nation, and the bureaucrats speak as one group under the progress by the chairperson. At the same time, Putin shows his position as the one who is questioned by the Russian nation. The interesting point is that the bureaucrats’ text is classified with the texts of the nation. Note that there is no system to determine the bureaucrats’ points of view in 2001.

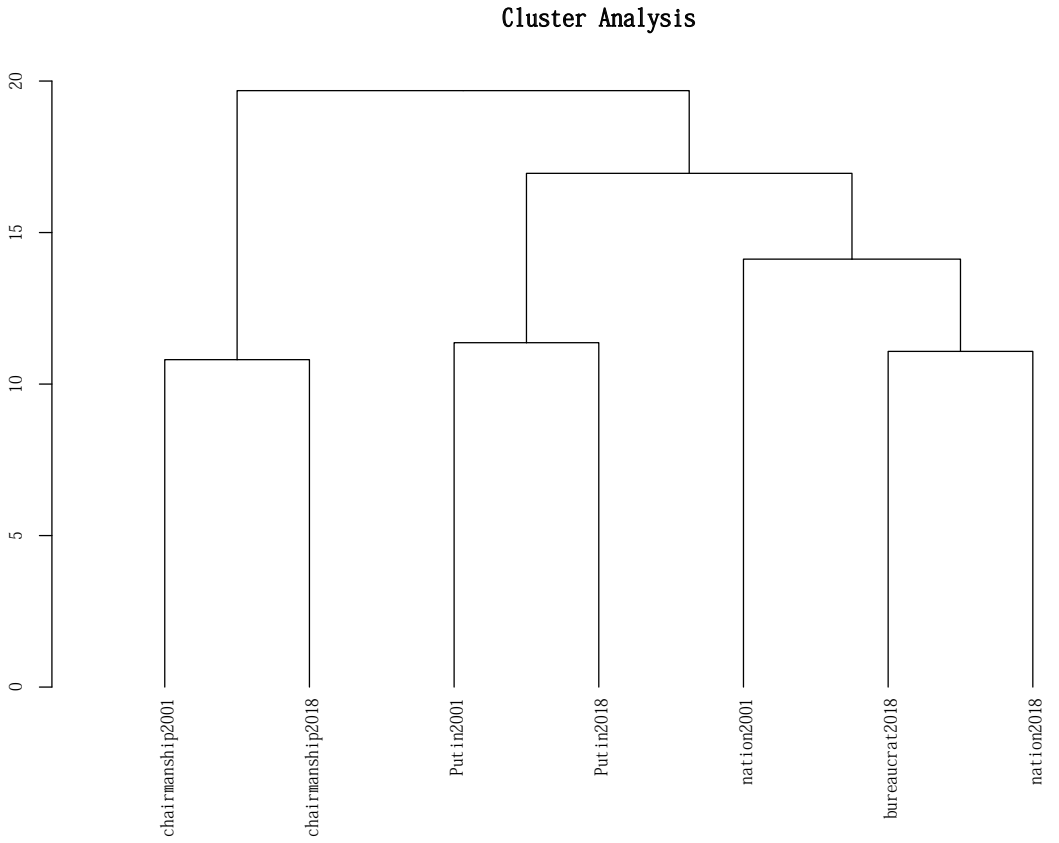

Figure 5: Classification of the texts in the program “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin” in 2001 and 2018

Figures 6 and 7 show the results of the correspondence analysis of each text’s relationship between texts and words. We used non-lemmatized texts to observe the behavior of the words in each speaker’ s corpus. Figure 6 shows the location of each text. It is possible to consider the results of the cluster in two ways: one is to divide the x-coordinate axis into two groups—the right group is Putin and the bureaucrats, and the left group is the chairperson and the nation; on the other hand, when we divided the y-coordinate axis into two groups, the upper side is Putin and the chairperson, and the lower side is the bureaucrats and the nation. These points of view cause the consideration that the bureaucrats answer the questions to Putin by paying attention to Putin; at the same time, these answers are related to the questions from the Russian nation. The chairperson leads the event as the MC of the program, relaying the questions or problems from the Russian nation to Putin. For these reasons, the relationships of the texts are considered as mentioned above.

Words located far from the center indicate the specific words in the texts, and words located in the center are more common used words in the texts. Putin’s typical words are государство (state), сфера (sphere), страны (countries), and далее (further), while his frequently common words are думаю (I think), знаете (you know), рост (growth) and русиской (Russian). The

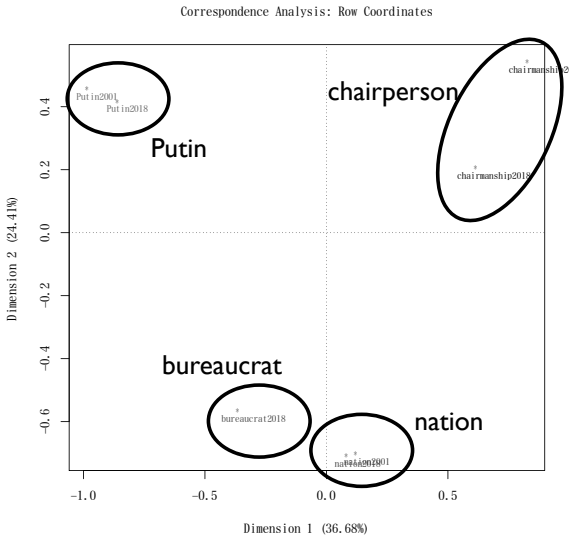

Figure 6: The relationship of texts in the program in 2001 and 2018

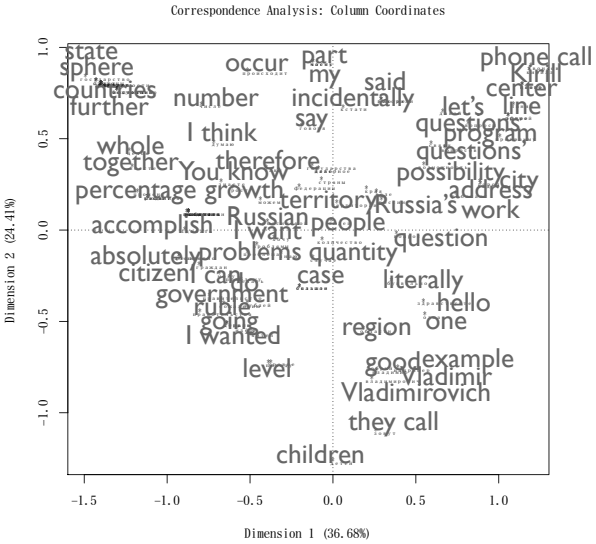

Figure 7: The relationship of words in the program in 2001 and 2018

chairperson’s typical words are звонок (phone call), Кирилл (Kirill), центр (center), линия (line), and давайте (let’s). The bureaucrats’ specific words include уровень (level), хочу (I want), and идет (going). The typical words in the nation’s texts are дети (children), зовут (they call), and Putin’s name Владимир Владимирович (Vladimir Vladimirovich). It is not surprising that all people in this program use the words “problem” and “question.” In addition, it is natural that the Putin and the bureaucrats use political words. In the case of the chairpersons, they use words related to the program, such as the means to relay questions, the name of the person, and the name of program.

Now, we focus on the typical words in each text that show the position or role of the speakers in the program. Putin uses думаю (I think) and знаете (you know). Chairpersons use the word давайте (let’s), and bureaucrats use идет (going). The words that show the role of the Russian nation are зовут (they call), добрый (good), and здравствуйте (hello).

они имеют право на все. Я думаю, что такой период времени,	Putin2001.txt
чи, учителя, пенсионеры. Я думаю, что это максимум того, что	Putin2001.txt
емый Николай Михайлович, я думаю, что Вы согласитесь с тем,	Putin2001.txt
му, в том числе школам. Я думаю, что эта проблема может и	Putin2001.txt
, конечно, недостаточно. Я думаю, что Леонид абсолютно прав,	Putin2001.txt
то ночевал на даче Буша. Я думаю, что он должен был сам	Putin2001.txt
лива. Для нашей страны, я думаю, что, кстати говоря, и для	Putin2018.txt
этому мы должны идти, и я думаю, что это состоится. И	Putin2018.txt
постарше меня, и поэтому я думаю, что я поступаю правильно,	Putin2018.txt

Figure 8: Usage of the word думаю (I think) in Putin’s texts

Putin shows own opinions and thoughts to the nation using думаю (I think), as figure 8 shows. In addition, Putin uses the phrase “вы знаете” (you know), as shown in figure 9. Putin effectively

Figure 9: Usage of the word думаю (you know) in Putin's texts

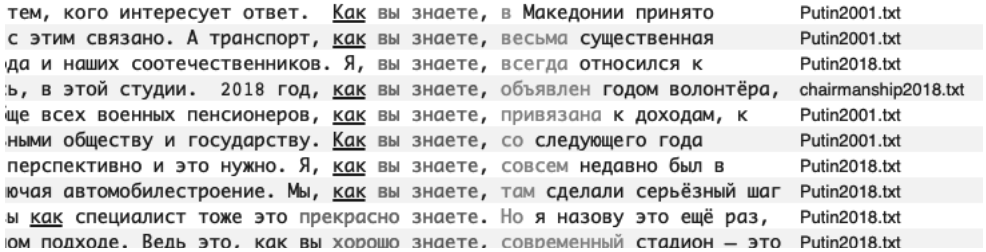

Figure 10: Usage of the phrase "как вы знаете" (as you know) in Putin's texts

uses this phrase to open a new level of knowledge for the people who asked him questions. Putin also uses the phrase "как вы знаете" (as you know) to promote the nation's understanding of Russia's current situation, as shown in figure 10.

As the masters of ceremony, the chairpersons use the word давайте (let's) to move the program along uneventfully, as in the phrases "Давайте послушаем" (let's listen), "Давайте посмотрим" (let's watch), and so on. These phrases work as a segue to the next action or screen, as shown in figure 11.

Figure 11: Usage of the word давайте (let's) in chairperson's texts

Figure 12 shows that bureaucrats use the word идет (going) to explain a situation or to marshal the points in the current discussion using the phrase "реть идет" (the contents of speaking are). The word идет (going) can show that the speaking bureaucrat is getting the picture of how and what is going on in the situation that he or she was asked about. Also the phrase "реть идет" (the contents of speaking are) makes the listener to focus on the point that the speaker mentions.

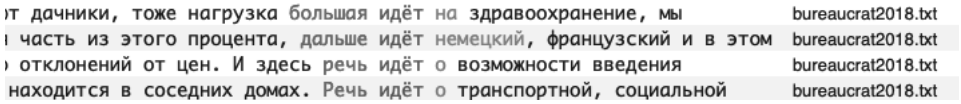

Figure 12: Usage of the word идет (going) in bureaucrats’ texts

Figure 13 shows the usage of the typical words зовут (they call), добрый (good), and здравствуйте (hello) in the Russian nation’s texts. These words are used in a line of phrase for: greeting, compellation, and self-introduction. It is the sing to start to open the turn of nation. It is obvious to whom the Russian nation speaks, but they appeal to Putin by calling his name. In addition, the Russian people present themselves by stating their name, who they are, and their job or social position in Russia. This one-line speech style gives the nation a consciousness that the questioner is not anonymous but is a private individual and representative of his or her region. As well, the Russian nation speaks responsibly to ask their questions of Putin.

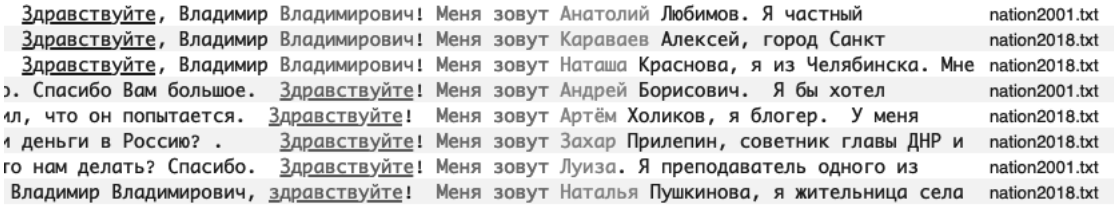

Figure 13: Word usage in self-introduction in the nations’ texts

The results of the correspondence analysis indicate not only the relationship between texts and words but also the role of words among speakers. The typically used words show the points that the speakers make when they are mentioned. When we focus on the specific words, then they tell us the speakers’ roles in the program “Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным” (Direct Line with Vladimir Putin).

5. Conclusion and future work

In this study, we made a simple conversation corpus to investigate the difference in word usage between the first year and the latest and to observe the role of speakers in the program “Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным” (Direct Line with Vladimir Putin).

The result of the cluster analysis showed two clusters: that of the chairpersons, and that of Putin, the nation, and the bureaucrats. This means that the chairpersons use their words to lead the program smoothly, and other participants speak on the base that the chairperson made. Correspondence analysis gave us following understanding: one is divided on the x-coordinate axis—the right group is Putin and the bureaucrats, and the left group is the chairpersons and the nation; the other one is divided on the y-coordinate axis—the upper side is Putin and the chairpersons, and the lower side is the bureaucrats and the nation. These two interpretations were led from the relationship among the speakers. The high-frequency words indicate the role of the people in the program.

Putin uses думаю (I think) and знаете (you know) to express his thoughts and to obtain consent from the Russian nation. The chairpersons use давайте (let's) to move the program smoothly and segue to the next action of the speakers. The bureaucrats appeal to the listeners, especially to Putin, to grasp the current situation of the problems about which the Russian nation asked questions. The Russian nation makes self-introductions after the greeting and appeals to Putin to make him focus on their voices. This introduction system is important to have the consciousness that the questioner is not anonymous but is a representative of the region. This study shows that used words in this program are not related to the year but to the role of the speakers.

In future work, we would like to make more concrete conversation corpus that includes repeated phrases, laughter, falters, silence, applause, and so on. In making this conversation corpus of the program "Прямая линия с Владимиром Путиным" (Direct Line with Vladimir Putin), the factors tell us about the relationship among the speakers, linguistic reactions, and Putin's answers, as well as the structure of this program, through the behaviors of used words.

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