

Directive Speech Acts in Cigarette Health Warning Labels: A Pragmatic Study

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Abstrak: This study examines the use of directive speech acts in cigarette health warning labels circulated in Serang Regency, Banten, Indonesia. Drawing on pragmatic theory and Searle's speech act classification, this research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the types and functions of directive speech acts found in the warning texts. Data were collected from various cigarette brands available in local markets, minimarkets, and traditional shops. The analysis identifies five potential directive types—command, request, advice, warning, and prohibition—and investigates how these are linguistically realized. Findings reveal that all five analyzed warning texts are classified as warning (*peringatan*), realized through two primary strategies: (1) medical-fact-based warnings using direct causal statements linking smoking to specific diseases, and (2) personal-testimony-based warnings using first-person perspective to create an emotional and authentic effect. No other directive types were found in the data. These results indicate that cigarette health warning labels in the study area consistently employ a threat-based communication strategy designed to generate fear, vigilance, and health awareness among readers. The study contributes to the understanding of pragmatic functions in public health discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that explores the meaning of language in relation to the situations in which it is used. In pragmatic studies, understanding is not only obtained from the literal meaning of a statement, but also from the speaker's intention, the situational context, the social interaction between the speaker and the interlocutor, as well as how an utterance is interpreted in a particular situation. Therefore, pragmatics views language not only as a tool for conveying information, but also as a medium for social actions aimed at achieving effective communication. The use of language in the pragmatic perspective is always connected to the goals, functions, and effects intended for the message recipient, so the meaning of language cannot be separated from the context of its use (Huang, 2017).

A key concept within pragmatics is the theory of speech acts, which posits that when individuals communicate, either through spoken words or written text, they are engaging in an

action. Language serves not just to convey messages, but also to execute various actions through expressions, such as informing, advising, cautioning, inviting, prohibiting, or impacting the behavior of others. In this framework, a spoken or written statement serves a communicative purpose that can elicit a particular reaction from the recipient of the message. Thus, speech acts represent a vital base for grasping how language operates practically within social interactions and public discourse (Ekoro & Gunn, 2021).

Among the variations of types of speech acts, directive speech acts are the type that specifically aim to encourage the interlocutor to perform, consider, or avoid certain actions according to the speaker's intent. Directive speech acts can be expressed through forms of commands, prohibitions, requests, advice, suggestions, or warnings. In the context of institutional communication, especially in health communication, directive speech acts are often applied because they serve the function of raising awareness, providing guidance, and influencing public behavior toward certain issues (Tang & Ogiermann, 2026).

One type of public communication that frequently uses directive speech acts is health warnings on cigarette packs. Health warnings printed on cigarette packaging serve as a medium to convey information about the dangers of smoking and are designed as a form of persuasive communication to raise awareness, create caution, and influence public attitudes regarding smoking habits. The messages contained in health warnings on cigarette packs are constructed by combining highly persuasive verbal and visual elements as part of a strategy in public health communication (Negoro, 2016; Sadallah & Halawachy, 2025). In addition, various studies show that health warnings on cigarette packs affect risk perception, health awareness, and public behavioral responses related to cigarette consumption (Haines-saah et al., 2015; Thrasher et al., 2016).

Linguistically, the health warning text found on cigarette packs includes word choice, sentence structure, as well as methods of delivering messages that may contain directive speech acts. Warnings such as those about cancer, respiratory problems, risks for pregnant women, and dangers to passive smokers contain a communicative intent that not only summarizes information but also invites readers to be aware of the threats of smoking and to avoid such behavior. In this way, statements related to health on cigarette packaging can be understood as a form of health discourse rich in the use of directive speech acts in its delivery (Permatasari, 2019).

In the Serang Regency, Banten region, various national cigarette brands are widely available through stores, minimarkets, and other local distribution channels. Each cigarette package displays a health warning statement with diverse language variations, word choices, and communication strategies. However, studies that specifically explore the types of directive speech acts and how they are used in cigarette health warning statements in Serang Regency, Banten, are still relatively few (Negoro, 2016; Permatasari, 2019). Therefore, this study was conducted to provide deeper insight into the application of directive speech acts in public health communication through health warning statements on cigarette packages in Serang Regency, Banten.

Previous research shows that health messages on cigarette packaging are a type of persuasive communication that has a significant impact on public understanding and behavior. Health warning messages are created by combining verbal and visual elements to create an effective communication impact (Negoro, 2016; Sadallah & Halawachy, 2025). Other studies reveal that these warnings influence the way people assess risks and their behavioral reactions to smoking habits (Haines-saah et al., 2015; Thrasher et al., 2016). Pragmatic analysis of health messages also shows that the text is not only informative but also has pragmatic power that can influence how readers interpret and respond to it (Permatasari, 2019). However, research that

specifically discusses directive speech acts in the context of cigarette warnings in Serang Regency, Banten is still very limited, so this study aims to address that deficiency.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

A. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a field in linguistic science that studies the meaning of language based on the conditions of its use. In pragmatic research, understanding the meaning of an utterance does not only depend on its literal meaning, but is also influenced by the speaker's intention, the conversational context, the interaction between the speaker and the listener, as well as the social background that supports the occurrence of communication. Therefore, pragmatics views language as a social action whose meaning is formed through the context of use, not just through the language structure itself (Ekoro & Gunn, 2021; Huang, 2017).

In its journey, pragmatics not only discusses the relationship between meaning and context, but also highlights that language has power in communication which can have certain impacts on the recipient of the message. Language can be used to convey information, influence perspectives, build understanding, instill awareness, and even encourage certain actions. In the realm of public communication, a pragmatic approach becomes important to analyze how public messages are linguistically constructed so that they can have appeal and influence on society (Permatasari, 2019).

B. Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory is one of the important ideas in pragmatic research that sees language use basically as a form of communication activity. When individuals speak or write, they are not merely conveying statements, but are also performing an action through those statements, such as giving information, issuing a warning, offering advice, inviting, or prohibiting (Ekoro & Gunn, 2021).

In contemporary language studies, speech acts are understood as communication activities driven by social context, communication channels, and the accompanying multimodal elements. Recent approaches indicate that the meaning of an utterance does not solely come from the verbal statement, but also from how the utterance is produced, received, and interpreted in a particular situation (Jucker, 2026). Based on speech act theory, every utterance consists of three dimensions of action, namely: (1) locutionary acts, which means creating a statement linguistically with specific structure and meaning; (2) illocutionary acts, which refer to the intention or goal the speaker aims to achieve through the utterance, such as instructing, requesting, forbidding, or giving advice; and (3) perlocutionary acts, which are the effects or influences perceived by the listener after receiving the utterance (Mubadir & Jabbar, 2025). In this study, the main focus is directed at illocutionary acts, because the health warning text on cigarette packaging aims to influence the reader's response.

C. Speech Act Classification

Searle divides illocutionary speech acts into five main categories, namely: (1) assertives, which convey facts or information; (2) directives, which influence the behavior of the listener; (3) commissives, which convey commitments from the speaker; (4) expressives, which show emotions; and (5) declarations, which directly change status or condition (Searle et al., 1980). Of these five categories, this study focuses on directive speech acts because they are most relevant to the purpose of health warning texts on cigarette packaging.

D. Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts are a type of speech act aimed at encouraging the interlocutor to

perform, consider, or refrain from performing a certain activity according to the speaker's intention. This type of speech act has a high pragmatic force because it is designed to guide behavior, create awareness, and elicit specific responses from listeners or readers (Tang & Ogiermann, 2026).

In this study, directive speech acts are categorized into five main types as the basis for analysis:

1. Commands

This is a form of directive speech act that contains instructions requiring the addressee to take specific action in a firm manner. This form typically carries significant illocutionary force and is usually conveyed in a direct manner.

2. Request

This is a type of directive speech act aimed at asking the addressee to perform an action with a gentler tone than a command, yet still intended to influence the addressee's behavior through a more persuasive approach.

3. Advice

This is a type of speech act that is instructive in nature, providing recommendations or advice to the message recipient to perform or avoid certain actions for their own good. In the context of health communication, this type is often used to raise awareness and promote healthier behaviors.

4. Warning

This is a type of instructive speech act intended to warn the message recipient about potential dangers, risks, or negative consequences of certain actions. This type is frequently used in health communication because it serves a strong preventive function.

5. Prohibition

This is a form of instructive speech act designed to prevent or prohibit the recipient from performing a specific action. This type is generally expressed through restrictive and preventive language to emphasize actions that should be avoided to maintain health and safety.

E. Health Warnings on Cigarette Packaging as Persuasive Communication

Health warnings on cigarette packaging are a form of public health communication used to disseminate information about the dangers of smoking and how it affects public behavior and attitudes. In this context, health warnings serve not only as a source of information but also as a persuasive tool to raise awareness, increase vigilance, and encourage behavioral change. This communication strategy is built through a combination of verbal and visual elements designed to have a strong psychological and communicative impact (Negoro, 2016; Sadallah & Halawachy, 2025).

Research has shown that health warning messages on cigarette packaging have an effect on risk perception, health awareness levels, and behavioral responses among the public. In addition to conveying medical information about the effects of smoking, these messages are also linguistically designed to enable readers to make specific interpretations and encourage the desired response (Haines-saah et al., 2015; Thrasher et al., 2016). These messages not only convey medical information about the effects of smoking but are also linguistically designed to allow readers to make specific interpretations and encourage anticipated responses (Haines-saah et al., 2015; Thrasher et al., 2016). Therefore, the health warning texts found on cigarette packaging can be considered a type of health communication that offers pragmatic benefits through the use of engaging and preventive linguistic strategies (Permatasari, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the use of directive speech acts in health warnings on cigarette packaging circulating in Serang Regency, Banten, Indonesia. This approach was chosen because the study aims to identify, describe, and analyze linguistic phenomena comprehensively based on data collected in the field, without making statistical generalizations.

The data collected from various cigarette brands available on the market—including those sold in stores, convenience stores, and other local distribution networks—consists of the text of health warning statements found on cigarette packaging sold in Serang Regency, Banten. The instructional speech act classification sheet served as an analytical tool, while the researcher served as the primary instrument of the study.

Data analysis was conducted in several stages: (1) collecting health warning texts on cigarette packaging from various brands available in the study area; (2) identifying utterances containing directive speech acts using the theoretical framework employed; and (3) classifying the types of directive speech acts into five predefined categories—commands, requests, suggestions, warnings, and refusals—and then analyzing the functions of each category.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Tabulation of Data on Directive Speech Acts

The following table presents data on health warnings on cigarette packaging currently in circulation in Serang Regency, Banten, along with the classification of directive speech acts and their pragmatic functions.

Tabel 1. Tabulation of Data on Directive Speech Acts in Cigarette Health Warnings

No	Warning Text	Types of cigarettes	Types of Directives					Pragmatic Functions
			Com mand	Request	Advice	Warning	Prohi bition	
1.	Rokok merenggut kebahagiaan saya satu per satu	Dji Sam Soe 234, Marlboro Vista, Sampoerna A Mild, Twizz Prime, Clas Mild.	-	-	-	✓	-	Building empathy and a sense of fear to encourage readers to quit smoking
2.	Merokok sebabkan kanker mulut	Magnum Mild 234, Sampoerna A Prima, Djava D Traditional, Surya Pro, Surya Gudang Garam Filter.	-	-	-	✓	-	Providing health hazard information to scare readers
3.	Merokok sebabkan kanker tenggorok	Surya Exclusive, C;imax Click, Djarum Super Espresso Gold,	-	-	-	✓	-	To remind readers of the risks of serious

	an	Djarum Coklat Elite, Bentoel SJT.						illness so they will avoid smoking
4.	Merokok sebabkan kanker paru-paru	Gudang Garam Merah, Djarum 76 Mangga, L.A Ice, 117, Juara.	-	-	-	✓	-	Highlighting the deadly consequences of smoking to encourage behavioral change
5.	Karena merokok, saya terkena kanker tenggorokan	Lucky Strike, Mierah Royal, Sampoerna A Avolution, Djarum Black, Esse Blue Change.	-	-	-	✓	-	Sharing victims' testimonies to raise awareness and instill fear

B. Discussion

Based on an analysis of five health warning texts on cigarette packaging circulating in Serang Regency, Banten, it was found that all of the data contained directive speech acts of the “warning” type. This finding indicates that health warning texts on cigarette packaging are predominantly realized through warning-oriented linguistic strategies, namely conveying threats, risks, or negative consequences of smoking to the reader.

1. The Dominance of "Warning" as a Directive Speech Act

Based on the five datasets analyzed, all health warning texts on cigarette packaging were classified as directive speech acts of the “warning” type. This aligns with the primary function of health warning texts, which are designed to warn the public about the dangers of smoking, rather than merely conveying medical information in a neutral manner. Pragmatically, warnings possess strong illocutionary force as they aim to instill a sense of vigilance, fear, and awareness in the message recipient, thereby motivating them to avoid behaviors harmful to their health (Sadallah & Halawachy, 2025; Tang & Ogiermann, 2026).

The predominant use of warnings in these cigarette health warnings is also consistent with the findings of previous studies, which show that health communication strategies on cigarette packaging tend to employ a threat-based approach to elicit psychological effects such as fear and vigilance in readers (Haines-saah et al., 2015; Tang & Ogiermann, 2026).

2. Data Analysis



Gambar 1. "Rokok merenggut kebahagiaan saya satu per satu"

This text appears on the packaging of Sampoerna A Mild, Dji Sam Soe 234, Marlboro Vista, Twizz Prime, and Clas Mild. From a locutionary perspective, this sentence is a first-person statement acknowledging the impact of smoking on quality of life. In terms of illocution, this utterance functions as a warning because it intends to alert readers to the emotional and social consequences of smoking, not just the medical ones. Its pragmatic function is to build empathy while instilling fear in readers, encouraging them to quit or not start smoking. The use of the first-person perspective ("I") strengthens the perlocutionary effect because it creates a personal closeness and the impression of a real testimony, making the message feel more authentic and emotionally touching (Permatasari, 2019).



Gambar 2. "Merokok sebabkan kanker mulut"

This text appears on the packaging of Magnum Mild 234, Sampoerna A Prima, Djava D Traditional, Surya Pro, and Surya Gudang Garam Filter. In terms of locution, this sentence is a causal statement linking smoking behavior to oral cancer. In terms of illocution, this utterance functions as a warning, as it aims to alert readers to the risk of serious illness caused by smoking. Its pragmatic function is to provide health-based information designed to scare readers into reconsidering their smoking habits. The use of short and direct sentence structures reinforces the illocutionary force of this utterance because it leaves no room for interpretation other than a real threat to health (Cunningham, 2022; Negoro, 2016).



Gambar 3. "Merokok sebabkan kanker tenggorokan"

This text appears on the packaging of Djarum Super Espresso Gold, Surya Exclusive, Climax Click, Djarum Coklat Elite, and Bentoel SJT. In terms of locution, this sentence follows the same pattern as Data 2, namely a causal statement regarding the health effects of smoking. In terms of illocution, this utterance is classified as a warning because it is intended to alert readers to the risk of throat cancer. The repetition of the same sentence pattern in Data 2 and Data 3 indicates a consistent linguistic strategy in constructing health warning messages through repetition to reinforce the cumulative effect of the warning on readers (Sadallah & Halawachy, 2025) (Sadallah et al., 2025).



Gambar 4. "Merokok sebabkan kanker paru-paru"

This text appears on the packaging of Gudang Garam Merah, Djarum 76 Mangga, L.A. Ice, 117, and Juara. In terms of locution, this sentence again uses the same causal pattern as Data 2 and Data 3. In terms of illocution, this utterance functions as a warning that highlights one of the most fatal consequences of smoking: lung cancer. From a pragmatic perspective, lung cancer is a disease generally recognized by the public as a life-threatening condition; therefore, its explicit mention has a strong perlocutionary effect in shaping readers' risk perceptions (Haines-saah et al., 2015; Owopetu et al., 2023).



Gambar 5. "Karena merokok, saya terkena kanker tenggorokan"

This text appears on the packaging of Lucky Strike, Mierah Royal, Sampoerna A Avolution, Djarum Black, and Esse Blue Change. From a locutionary perspective, this sentence is a causal

statement from a first-person perspective, asserting that the speaker has contracted an illness due to smoking. In terms of illocution, this utterance functions as a warning through a personal testimonial approach. The first-person approach ("I have been affected") shares a similar strategy with Data 1, namely creating a sense of personal closeness that strengthens the message's emotional impact. The difference is that while Data 1 emphasizes emotional and social consequences, Data 5 emphasizes direct medical consequences through the acknowledgment of suffering caused by the disease (Permatasari, 2019; Putra et al., 2024).

3. The Pragmatic Function of Warnings in the Context of Health Communication

Overall, the use of warnings as the only type of directive speech act found in all five data sets indicates that the health warning texts on cigarette packaging in Serang Regency, Banten, are designed using a communication strategy based on threats and risks. This strategy aims to produce perlocutionary effects such as fear, vigilance, and awareness among readers regarding the dangers of smoking. Two patterns of warning strategies were identified in the data: (1) medical fact-based warnings, manifested through direct causal statements (Data 2, 3, and 4); and (2) personal testimonial-based warnings, manifested through the use of the first-person perspective (Data 1 and 5). Together, these two strategies form a health warning communication system aimed at influencing public perceptions and behaviors regarding cigarette consumption (Cunningham, 2022; Negoro, 2016; Thrasher et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of health warning texts on cigarette packaging circulating in Serang Regency, Banten, this study reached two main conclusions. First, the type of directive speech act found in all five sets of cigarette health warning data is "warning." No other types of directive speech acts, such as command, request, advice, or prohibition, were found in the analyzed data. This indicates that health warning texts on cigarette packaging consistently use "warning" as the primary strategy for conveying health messages to the public.

Second, directive speech acts of the warning type in this study's data are realized through two linguistic strategies: warnings based on medical facts and warnings based on personal testimonials. Medical fact-based warnings are realized through direct causal statements linking smoking behavior to specific diseases, while personal testimonial-based warnings are realized through the use of the first-person perspective, which creates the impression of a real testimony. Pragmatically, these two strategies aim to instill fear, caution, and awareness in readers regarding the dangers of smoking.

Based on the results of this study, several recommendations can be made. For future researchers, this study could be expanded by broadening the scope of the data and the variety of cigarette brands to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the types of directive speech acts used in cigarette health warnings in Indonesia. Further research could also examine multimodal aspects, namely the relationship between verbal text and health warning images. For policymakers, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for designing health warning texts that are more linguistically varied, for example by integrating other directive types such as advice or prohibition to make health communication strategies more diverse and effective.

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