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Speech acts in appeals for social distancing and public compliance intentions during The Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT
Government's communication messages are critical in resolving health problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision of linguistic speech acts also influences the behavior of obedient and disciplined individuals. Gender, age, and race are all predictors of social distancing compliance (Pedersen & Favero, 2020). However, only few studies have been conducted to examine the form of speech acts that can control public conduct in accordance with social distancing on each of these social variables. This study examined the intention of public compliance through the pragmatic interpretation of the government's appeal for social distancing. The study was conducted with a cross-sectional design survey involving 1339 respondents through online data collection. The findings reveal that different speech acts have varying effects on people's intentions to follow the health protocol appeal. This study is expected to make a theoretical contribution by demonstrating that gender, age, and education level influence the perlocutionary style of speech actions in critical health communication. The findings is expected to aid the government to develop effective messages on health risk reduction behavior through the selection of appropriate speech acts in the future.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; government communication; health communication; language and social distancing; speech act

INTRODUCTION

Social distancing is one of the primary strategies applied by many countries in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic (Aldila et al., 2020; Biana & Joaquin, 2020; European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020; Yezli & Khan, 2020). However, Abraham (2020) highlighted some social distancing failures because of confusing government messaging. Consequently, social distancing fell short of expectations. To obtain successful outcomes, social distancing must be widely publicized using the appropriate means and language, hence minimizing the danger of COVID-19 transmission. Vaughan and Tinker (2009) and Maneze et al. (2018) stressed that language is a critical factor in the adoption of messaging about community health concerns. This finding is consistent with Evans et al. (2017), who discovered that language choice influenced public recognition, attitudes, and behavior.

The Indonesian government distributed information, petitions, and messages throughout the pandemic to raise public awareness about handling COVID-19 (Prayoga, 2020). However, the effectiveness of the conveyed appeals in disciplining the public to exercise social distancing remains

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unknown. The appeal must be sensitive and pertinent to the audience to accomplish the objective. Psychological, social, cultural, and health-related factors all influence how an individual perceives, interprets, and responds to a health intervention (Vaughan & Tinker, 2009; Vries, 2020). Thus, the way the message is communicated through the language of the government's appeal to preserve social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic is critical in shaping obedient conduct and discipline in the community. As a persuasive tool, language has the potential to alter behavior in public communication, either directly or indirectly (Vries, 2020).

Prior research has revealed the critical importance of language and its relationship to numerous areas of health in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. Research by Sultan and Rapi (2020) shows that the Indonesian government uses a variety of discursive methods to boost public optimism and foster citizen solidarity as a moral strength amidst the pandemic. Meanwhile, Jinshuang and Rong (2020) summarized the contents of President Xi Jinping's speeches, emphasizing knowledge, strength, cooperation, and unity in the face of the pandemic. Joharry and Turiman (2020) discovered that Malaysians saw the pandemic as a challenge, as evidenced by letters to the editor. This finding is consistent with Nor and Zulcafli's (2020) research, indicating the dread, worry, and uncertainty experienced by most Malaysians during the pandemic through a corpus linguistic analysis.

Another study by Olimat (2020a) in Jordan suggests that when discussing the COVID-19 pandemic, people tend to employ euphemisms and avoid dysphemism. On the other hand, President Donald Trump of the United States employs dysphemism to frame his approach to combating the COVID-19 virus (Olimat, 2020b). Furthermore, Rajandran (2020) exposed the Malaysian and Singaporean prime ministers' use of war metaphors to frame the virus in the sphere of government communication. Numerous studies addressing the topic of language and COVID-19 that have been published illustrate that previous researchers have not examined the role of language choice in social distancing appeals and its effect on public compliance. As a result, this study is critical to determining the optimal language choice for effectively communicating social distancing messages to the public.

Previous studies that examine language and the COVID-19 pandemic have generally focused on the metaphorical aspect (Joharry & Turiman, 2020; Rajandran, 2020), euphemism and dysphemism (Olimat, 2020a, 2020b), corpus (Kasdan et al., 2020; Nor & Zulcafli, 2020), inspirational discourse (Azizan et al., 2020; Jinshuang & Rong, 2020), metadiscourse in letters of advice during the

COVID-19 pandemic (Yang, 2021), expressive act role (Ogiermann & Bella, 2021), rhetorical structure in government messages (Smith & Kabele, 2021), and recognition of social actions that violate lockdown (Márquez Reiter, 2021). No research has been undertaken to ascertain the type of language that can influence public behavior in response to a social distancing appeal during a pandemic. Therefore, the study of speech acts in social distancing appeals and their effect on public compliance behavior is important and timely.

Kim Hua et al. (2020) examined how government messages were delivered in America and Malaysia and identified three message strategies that can be used to manage an outbreak, namely, cognitive messages to increase knowledge, affective messages to manage emotions, and conative messages to elicit the desired response and its impact. However, the research has not found language choices that can influence public social distancing behaviors. In contrast to the previous study, this current study delved deeper into the type of language used in the COVID-19 appeals that can produce the desired impact on society, namely, public compliance. The government may convey the social distancing message by an order, suggestion, notification, or request. However, the key point that remains unresolved is the linguistic choice that results in increased public compliance with social distancing.

The current study aimed to determine the language choices that can influence public social distancing behavior during a pandemic based on the characteristics of the appeal's recipients. Gender, age, and race are all predictors of social distancing compliance (Pedersen & Favero, 2020). Results show that women and Asian races have a greater proclivity for social distancing, but age has a weak association with the propensity of older persons to be more compassionate. Regarding the use of language in the health sector, Jabar (2021) found that gender, educational attainment, and age all had distinct effects. The study implies that the way distinct speech acts are selected can have a variety of consequences on the behavior of listeners or readers. Ricks (2020) shows that language has a causal effect on appeals aimed at swaying public opinion. However, the effect of using speech acts in appeals on public compliance intentions to carry out social distancing in the COVID-19 pandemic based on gender, age, and education level has not been revealed. Thus, this study provides a fresh perspective to the study of language and public health behavior during an outbreak.

Using Searle's (1976) speech act theoretical framework, the current study measured public compliance intentions based on the pragmatic meaning used in government appeals. Searle (1976) proposes five fundamental categories of speech acts, i.e., representative, directive, commissive,

expressive, and declarative, and each category has a distinct psychological effect on the recipient. Each speech act also carries a distinct pragmatic significance. The language used in the communication will influence the recipient's compliance behavior. Personal characteristics and sociocultural background will also influence the message recipient's compliance.

Specifically, the problems to be revealed in this study are stated as follows:

1. Is there a difference in the intention of public compliance to conduct social distancing based on the form of speech acts used in the social distancing appeals?
2. How do gender, level of education, and age affect public compliance with social distancing based on the form of speech acts used in the social distancing appeals?

Past Studies on Language and Covid-19

The field of COVID-19 language research is rapidly expanding. However, compared with the study in the practice of medicine, the quantity of studies performed by language scholars is still insufficient. The domains of a corpus, metaphor, positive discourse analysis, messaging in government communication, and euphemisms can all be related to language and COVID-19 research articles. According to Nor and Zulcafli (2020), the public in Malaysia was filled with fear, anxiety, and confusion, as evidenced by the confluence of news reports concerning COVID-19. Kasdan et al. (2020) conducted a corpus analysis with a different focus, which demonstrated the emergence of new COVID-19 terms in Malay, such as *penjarakan sosial*, *droplet nyahkuman*, *nyahvirus*, *kadar peningkatan kes*, and *lonjakan kes*. Joharry and Turiman's (2020) assessment of the corpus in letters to editors reveals Malaysians' perspective of the pandemic as a "challenge." These investigations indicate the public's psychological climate, which is reflected in the usage of language in the media.

Previous research has found that metaphors are frequently used to describe the COVID-19 pandemic. The Malaysian and Singaporean governments employ "war metaphors" to stir public awareness about the virus's threat (Rajandran, 2020). President Donald Trump of the United States utilizes war metaphors to support his positions, influence public opinion, and criticize others (Olimat, 2020b). On the other hand, a public survey reveals that Jordanian citizens prefer to employ euphemisms rather than dysphemism in their daily conversations regarding COVID-19.

Previous scholars have been interested in the terminology used by the government to transmit information regarding COVID-19. Sultan dan Rapi (2020) revealed that the government framed the pandemic as a battlefield through the metaphors of "winning the war," "becoming the hero," and

"becoming the winner." President Xi Jinping of China uses a positive and appreciative lexicon to show the world his country's success and experience in the aftermath of the pandemic catastrophe (Jinshuang & Rong, 2020). From the perspective of discourse contestation, Eriyanto and Ali (2020) report on the Indonesian government's efforts to control public debates to mediate opposing discourse. Meanwhile, Azizan et al. (2020) and Jinshuang and Rong (2020) look at pandemic discourse from the perspective of efforts to motivate and inspire the public, identifying a sense of togetherness and solidarity, strong national identity, patriotism, and religious values as the main themes that the Malaysian public uses to build confidence in a pandemic situation. In a pragmatic context, Basch et al. (2021) investigated the categories of positive and negative tone in relation to the death rate due to a pandemic in America. The findings reveal that messages, including the terms "award" and "uncertainty," are associated with fewer deaths per COVID-19 case, suggesting that the information selection of the message has a major impact on public behavior.

The previous studies show a gap in research on the form of language choice that can move the public to comply with social distancing. Appeals from the government and social institutions must be delivered in the appropriate language. On the other hand, past studies have not focused on this topic.

Speech Acts and Social Distancing Appeals

According to Austin and Searle, two prominent philosophers of language (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1976), speech acts are linguistic tools that correlate to interpersonal behavior. Both scientists discovered a strong correlation between the sorts of speech acts used in conversation and the actors' impressions of communication engagement. The concept of illocutionary acts (Basch et al., 2021) indicates that the language used in speech acts has a long-term impact on the recipient's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Illocutionary acts allow the sender of the message to perform an action through the utterances conveyed.

Speech acts are language tools that have the power to affect people's psychology. Austin (1975) categorizes speech acts based on performative verbs which include expositives, exercitives, verdictives, commissives, and behabitives. Table 1 presents the explanation of these speech acts.

A strong relationship was found between the types of speech acts spoken in a conversation and the perceptions of the actors involved in the interaction (D'Andrade & Wish, 1985). Searle (1976) suggests five basic categories of speech acts that have different psychological effects on the actors involved, including representative speech, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The categories of speech acts conveyed

by Searle are a criticism as well as a refinement of Austin's speech acts. Table 2 summarizes the explanation of these speech acts.

The choice of language employed by the Indonesian government in social distancing appeals in dealing with COVID-19 might have a semantic meaning of command and persuasion (Carstens, 2002). As a command, the government's appeals have the meaning of an order or encouragement. As a persuasion, an appeal carries the meaning of an invitation or inducement to take certain actions. The expected follow-up effect from the illocutionary command and persuasion is compliance with social distancing. The views of Searle (1976) were the foundation of research on speech acts in social distancing appeals in this study. Searle's framework is considered appropriate in measuring the intention

of public compliance with government appeals during a pandemic because the speech acts produced are directed to express a certain psychological mood.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, a few studies have revealed that state leaders use speech acts to manage information. Three leaders from Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa (Anyanwu, 2020) employed performative and constative measures to order, request, encourage, appeal, direct, and inform their people about the COVID-19 issue. Sari and Utomo (2020) discovered that in his remarks about the coronavirus, the president of Indonesia used directive speech acts such as asking, inviting, pleading, ordering, and banning. In Japan, directive speech acts are used in socializing COVID-19 mitigation in public areas (Aryanto, 2020).

Table 1
Categories of Austin's Speech Acts

No	Types	Description	Forms
1	Expositives	Speech acts that state or outline views, clarify, and make arguments	Declare, refuse, report
2	Exercitives	Speech acts that decide that something must happen	Order, direct, request, recommend, request
3	Verdictives	Speech acts that provide findings	Estimate, rate, evaluate, characterize
4	Commissives	Speech acts that show the speaker's commitment to action	Promise, swear, guarantee
5	Behabitives	Speech acts that involve the speaker's attitude toward someone's behavior or fate	Congratulate, thank, propose, bless, curse

Table 2
Categories of Searle's speech acts

No	Types	Description	Forms
1	Representatives	Speech acts that carry belief in the propositions spoken	Notify, suggest
2	Directives	Speech acts that direct the listener to do something	Order, beg
3	Commissives	Speech acts that show the speaker's intention to do something	Promise, offer
4	Expressives	Speech acts that show a variety of feelings and attitudes	Praise, thank
5	Declaratives	Speech acts that aim to realize the conditions stated in the propositions spoken	Convict, sentence

Source: (Searle, 1976)

Gender, Age, Level of Education, and Social Distancing Behavior
Studies indicate gender differences in the use of language in various social interactions. Women are more concerned with sensory issues, while men are more concerned with emotional issues (Strong et al., 2009). Men try to maintain power over the topic by using a more powerful way of speech, whereas women exhibit greater acceptance of the topic (Pakzadian & Tootkaboni, 2018). Girls are more enthusiastic about learning languages than boys (Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2020). Sicam and Lucas (2016) stressed that women use more positive language than men. The study also revealed that socioeconomic status was significantly related to positive attitudes, while age was significantly

related to instrumental language orientation. Protective behavior correlates with education level, with a tendency that those with higher education to show lower attention and obedience (Zhang & Kou, 2021). The findings of the past studies serve as the basis for examining the factors of gender, age, and level of education in the use of government messages for public social distancing.

METHOD
Design and Sample
The present study was conducted with a cross-sectional design survey. A cross-sectional analysis was done to reveal the response to the level of respondents' compliance with the social distancing

appeals based on gender, education level, and age. This research design is generally used to obtain information exposure related to planning, monitoring, and evaluating public policies (Setia, 2016). The findings about the respondents' level of compliance with the social distancing appeals based on the type of language used can be utilized by the government to formulate regulations addressing the transmission of information to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the research design is consistent with the anticipated outcomes.

This research included 1,339 individuals from Indonesia's major urban areas. Each respondent resides on one of eight major islands: Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Bali, Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Maluku, or Papua. The respondents reflect Indonesians from a variety of cultures, ethnic groups, faiths, and occupations, as well as residents from both developed and developing regions. All respondents are residents who have access to the Internet and are connected to information sources, most notably information about the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Table 3 summarizes the data profile of respondents in each analysis category.

Table 3
Demographic information of participants (n = 1339)

Category	Description	n	%
Gender	Male	498	37.19
	Female	841	62.81
Level of Education	Middle school	491	36.67
	Undergraduate school	341	25.47
	Postgraduate school	507	37.86
Age	≤ 20 years old	313	23.38
	21–30 years old	417	31.14
	31–40 years old	272	20.31
	41–50 years old	198	14.79
	>51 years old	139	10.38

Instrument
The data were collected using a questionnaire which was developed from Searle's speech act theory (Searle 1969 & 1976). Ten speech functions from Searle's five types of speech acts were asked, namely, assertive (telling and suggesting), directive (ordering and requesting), commissive (promising and offering), expressive (praising and thanking), and declarative (convicting and imposing punishment). Respondents did not need to write their names to maintain confidentiality and eliminate doubts. The instrument was divided into two parts, all of which were written in the Indonesian language. The first section contains demographic information, namely, gender, age, education, occupation, religion, and domicile. The second part contains questions about language choice in social distancing appeals and their effect on the respondents' social distancing compliance measured on a Likert scale with ten items. The instrument is in the form of an illustration of a social distancing appeal followed by a question, such as;

*Jika dalam suasana COVID-19 ini, pemerintah menyampaikan himbauan yang **bernada saran** seperti pernyataan berikut: Seluruh masyarakat kami **sarankan** melakukan social distancing untuk mencegah penyebaran COVID-19! Bagaiman sikap Anda terhadap himbauan tersebut? (1) Saya merasa **sangat** **penting** untuk mematuhi, (2) Saya merasa **penting** untuk mematuhi (3) **Biasa-biasa saja**, (4) Saya merasa **tidak penting** untuk mematuhi, (5) Saya merasa **sangat tidak penting** untuk mematuhi.*

(If in this COVID-19 situation, the government conveys an appeal that contains suggestions such as the following statement: "We recommend that the whole community do social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19," what is your attitude toward this appeal? (1) I feel it is very important to comply, (2) I feel it is important to comply, (3) I feel so-so, (4) I feel it is not important to comply, and (5) I feel it is very unimportant to comply).

Respondents chose one of the available answer options based on their respective perceptions. The answers were scored 1–5. The answer with the highest compliance intention was given the highest score (5) and vice versa (1).

A validity test showed that the instrument met the criteria of validity and reliability. Corrected item-total correlation indicated that all items were categorized as valid at a significant level of .05, (Pearson correlation item >.0535). Cronbach's alpha analysis indicated that the ten items were reliable (α = .865). Table 4 illustrates the validity and reliability of each instrument item in further detail.

Table 4
Validity and reliability of each questionnaire item

Item (Speech Acts/Pragmatic Meaning)	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Item_1 (assertive/informing)	38.1792	24.603	.593	.851
Item_2 (assertive/suggesting)	38.3137	24.036	.656	.846
Item_3 (directive/ordering)	38.1120	25.112	.539	.855
Item_4 (directive/requesting)	38.1426	24.563	.626	.849
Item_5 (commissive/promising)	38.1479	24.705	.619	.850
Item_6 (commissive/offering)	38.7431	22.375	.648	.846
Item_7 (expressive/praising)	38.6102	23.166	.624	.848
Item_8 (expressive/thanking)	38.4055	24.117	.588	.851
Item_9 (declarative/convicting)	38.5728	23.557	.505	.860
Item_10 (declarative/punishing)	38.1972	25.055	.449	.862

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted online between May 19 and June 7, 2020. At the time, Indonesia's COVID-19 pandemic was at its apex, with thousands of new cases reported daily. During the period, fear of COVID-19 infection dominated the community psychological climate. We distributed the survey randomly via social media, and respondents submitted their responses via the provided link. The questionnaire takes between 7 and 10 min to complete by selecting one of the response options provided. To ensure a quality response from the respondent, the first inquiry is consent/willingness to participate as a respondent. Each respondent was encouraged to provide correct and complete data in response to the questionnaire's items.

The data were converted to an excel file. Verification was used to ensure that numerous responses from respondents were accurate. T-test and one-way ANOVA using IBM SPSS 23 were used to analyze the differences in the effect of the speech acts on respondents in each variable. A P-value of .05 was considered statistically significant. A Kolmogorov–Smirnov test revealed that assertive had a significance value of .227, directive had a significance value of .254, expressive had a significance value of .160, and declarative had a significance value of .178. As a result, we concluded that the data were normally distributed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Speech Acts in Social Distancing Appeals and Their Effect on Public Compliance

The findings indicated that the pragmatic meanings of speech acts had a different impact on people's social distancing behavior. Appeals containing speech acts with the pragmatic meaning of "command" have the most considerable influence on people's obedience behavior. On the other hand, speech acts containing the pragmatic meaning "offer" have a negligible effect on public compliance. Table 5 summarizes the differences in the effects of speech acts on public compliance behavior.

Table 5
Differences in the speech act effect on the level of public compliance (n = 1339)

Speech Acts	Pragmatic Meaning	M	SD	SE	F	p
Assertive	Informing	4.42	.719	.020		
	Suggesting	4.29	.740	.020		
Directive	Ordering	4.49	.695	.019		
	Requesting	4.46	.693	.019		
Commissive	Promising	4.45	.680	.019	107.087	.000
	Offering	3.86	.981	.027		
Expressive	Praising	3.99	.896	.024		
	Thanking	4.20	.796	.022		
Declarative	Convicting	4.03	.984	.027		
	Punishing	4.41	.810	.022		

As presented in Table 5, there are differences in the effect of speech act choices on the level of public compliance in responding to social distancing appeals issued by the government (F = 107.087; p = .000). Directive speech acts with the pragmatic meaning "ordering" had the greatest influence on public compliance (M = 4.49). Furthermore, the directive speech act with the pragmatic meaning "requesting" (M=4.46), the commissive speech act with the pragmatic meaning "promising" (M=4.45), the assertive speech act with the pragmatic meaning "informing", the declarative speech act with the pragmatic meaning "punishing" (M=4.41), the assertive speech act with the pragmatic meaning "suggesting" (M=4.29), the expressive speech act with the pragmatic meaning "thanking" (M=4.20), the declarative speech act with the pragmatic meaning "convicting" (M=4.03), the expressive speech act with the pragmatic meaning "praising" (M=3.99), and the commissive speech act with the pragmatic meaning "offering" (M=3.86). The findings of this study confirm that appeals using directive speech actions have the greatest impact on public compliance with social distancing measures in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tukey post hoc test revealed significant differences in the pragmatic meaning of each speech act choice. Table 6 presents that the impacts of speech act on public compliance can be classified into four distinct groups based on their overall pragmatic meaning. The speech acts of ordering, requesting, promising, informing, and punishing are in one category (group 4) significantly different from other speech acts. These five speech acts have the greatest impact on public compliance with social distancing measures during the COVID-19 epidemic. The second highest categories are suggesting and thanking (group 3), which influence public social distancing behavior. The third category is praising and convicting (group 2). The least effective communication act is offering (group 1).

Table 6
Homogenous subset

Pragmatic Meaning	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05			
		1	2	3	4
Offering	1339	3.86			
Praising	1339		3.99		
Convicting	1339		4.03		
Thanking	1339			4.20	
Suggesting	1339			4.29	
Punishing	1339				4.41
Informing	1339				4.42
Promising	1339				4.45
Requesting	1339				4.46
Ordering	1339				4.49
Sig.		1.000	.973	.093	.162

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.
a. Uses harmonic mean sample size = 1339,000.

Gender and Its Effect on Public Compliance with Social Distancing Appeals During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The analysis revealed that gender is a differentiating variable in the effect of speech acts on public social distancing behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, women feel that they will show more deferential behavior than males in all forms of speech act meanings. The mean score of women was higher than that of men in the overall illustration of the appeal. These data imply that the level of compliance of women is higher than men.

Table 7 presents a significant difference in the effect of speech acts on social distancing behavior by gender. Males and females were significantly different in adherence to the appeal using the pragmatic meaning of "informing" (p = .002), "ordering" (p = .001), "requesting" (p = .000), "promising" (p = .000), "praising" (p = .011), "convicting" (p = .001), and "punishing" (p = .000). No difference was observed in the effect of appeal with the pragmatic meaning of "suggesting" (p = 287), "offering" (p = .354), and "thanking" (p = .100) on public compliance based on gender.

Table 7
Speech acts and public compliance with COVID-19 social distancing appeals based on gender (n = 1339)

Speech Acts	Pragmatic Meaning	Gender	N	M	SD	SE	T	p
Assertive	Informing	Male	498	4.34	.803	.036	3.148	.002
		Female	841	4.47	.660	.023		
	Suggesting	Male	498	4.26	.769	.034	1.064	.287
		Female	841	4.31	.722	.025		
Directive	Ordering	Male	498	4.41	.775	.035	3.376	.001
		Female	841	4.54	.639	.022		
	Requesting	Male	498	4.33	.793	.036	5.282	.000
		Female	841	4.54	.614	.021		
Commissive	Promising	Male	498	4.35	.736	.033	4.313	.000
		Female	841	4.52	.636	.022		
	Offering	Male	498	3.83	.994	.045	.927	.354
		Female	841	3.88	.973	.034		
Expressive	Praising	Male	498	3.91	.906	.041	2.547	.011
		Female	841	4.04	.887	.031		
	Thanking	Male	498	4.15	.782	.035	1.648	.100
		Female	841	4.22	.804	.028		
Declarative	Convicting	Male	498	3.91	1.014	.045	3.339	.001
		Female	841	4.10	.959	.033		
	Punishing	Male	498	4.26	.965	.043	5.216	.000
		Female	841	4.49	.687	.024		

Figure 1.
The level of public compliance with social distancing appeals based on gender
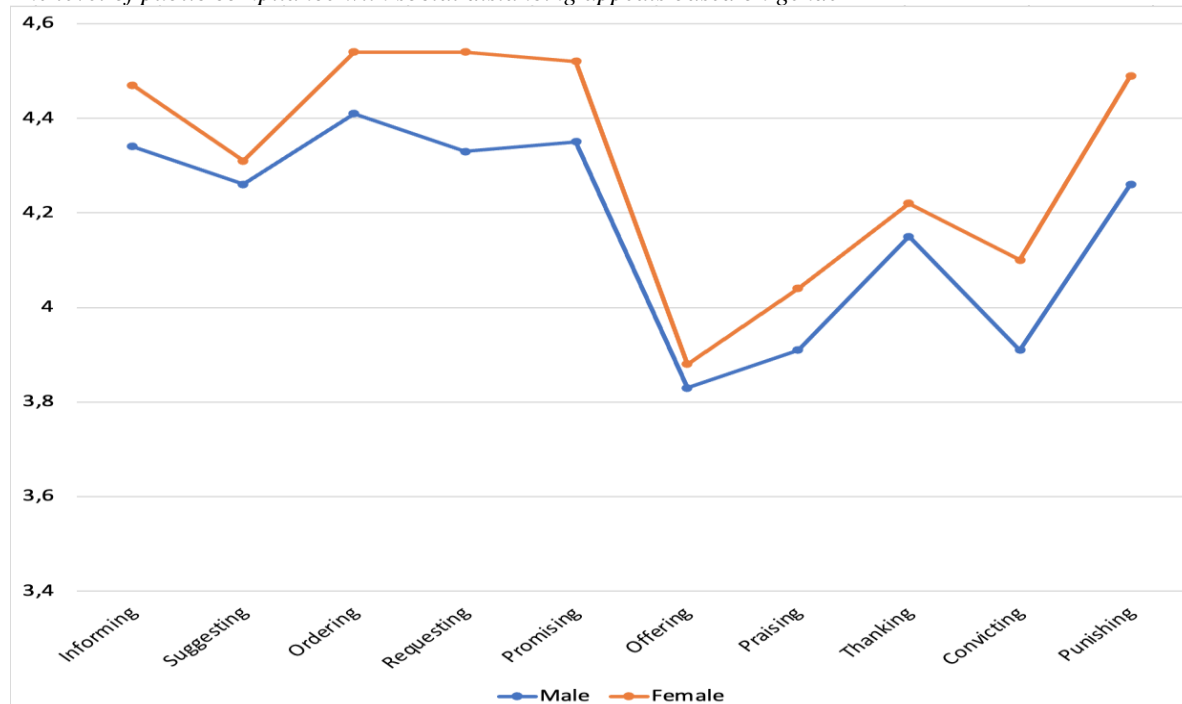
Age and Its Effect on Public Compliance with Social Distancing Appeals During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The extent of public compliance with social distancing appeals varied significantly by age.

Descriptive analysis indicated that younger respondents had a higher mean score than older respondents. Respondents under the age of 20 had the greatest mean for pragmatic appeals of suggesting, offering, praising, thanking, convicting,

and punishing. In comparison, respondents over the age of 50 had the lowest mean for pragmatic appeals such as commanding, appealing, promising, praising, thanking, convicting, and punishing. These findings indicate that respondents under the age of 20 have the highest degree of compliance intention, while respondents above the age of 50 years have the lowest level of compliance with a variety of speech acts.

Appendix 1 presents a significant difference in the level of respondents' compliance with social distancing appeals based on age group in speech acts, which means to inform (F = 3.734, p = .005), suggest (F = 2.509, p = .040), order (F = 2,980, p = .018), request (F = 2.822, p = .024), offer (F = 3.521, p = .007), praise (F = 7.030, p = .000), thank (F = 3.692, p = .005), convict (F = 7.030, p = .000), and punish (F = 3.692, p = .005). No significant difference was found in the level of respondents' compliance with social distancing advice based on age group in speech acts with the pragmatic meaning "promising" (F = 1.900, p = .108). The Tukey post hoc test results showed significant differences between the sample groups by age group. In the appeal with the pragmatic meaning "informing," respondents aged <20 years old differed significantly from those aged 31–40 years old (p = .026), and respondents aged 31–40 years old differed from respondents aged 41–50 years old (p = .020). In the appeal with the pragmatic meaning

of "ordering," respondents aged <20 years old differed significantly from those aged 31–40 years old (p = .035). In the appeal with the pragmatic meaning "requesting," respondents aged <20 years old differed significantly from those aged >50 years old (p = .026). In the appeal with the pragmatic meaning of "offering," respondents aged <20 years old differed significantly from those aged more than 31–40 years old (p = .010).

In the appeal with the pragmatic meaning "praising," respondents aged >50 years old differed significantly from respondents aged <20 years old (p = .000), respondents aged 21–30 years old (p = .005), and respondents aged 31–40 years old (p = .021). Respondents aged <20 also differed significantly from those aged 41–50 years old (p = .006). In the appeal with the pragmatic meaning "thanking," respondents <20 years old differed significantly from respondents aged 41–50 years old (p = .039) and respondents aged >50 years old (p = .006). In the appeal with the pragmatic meaning "convicting," respondents aged more than 50 years old differed significantly from respondents aged less than 20 years old (p = .007) and respondents aged 21–30 years (p = .007). In the appeal with the pragmatic meaning "punishing," respondents aged more than 50 years differed significantly from respondents aged less than 20 years (p = .000), respondents aged 21–30 years (p = .000), and respondents aged 31–40 years (p = .004).

Figure 2
The level of public compliance with social distancing appeals based on age
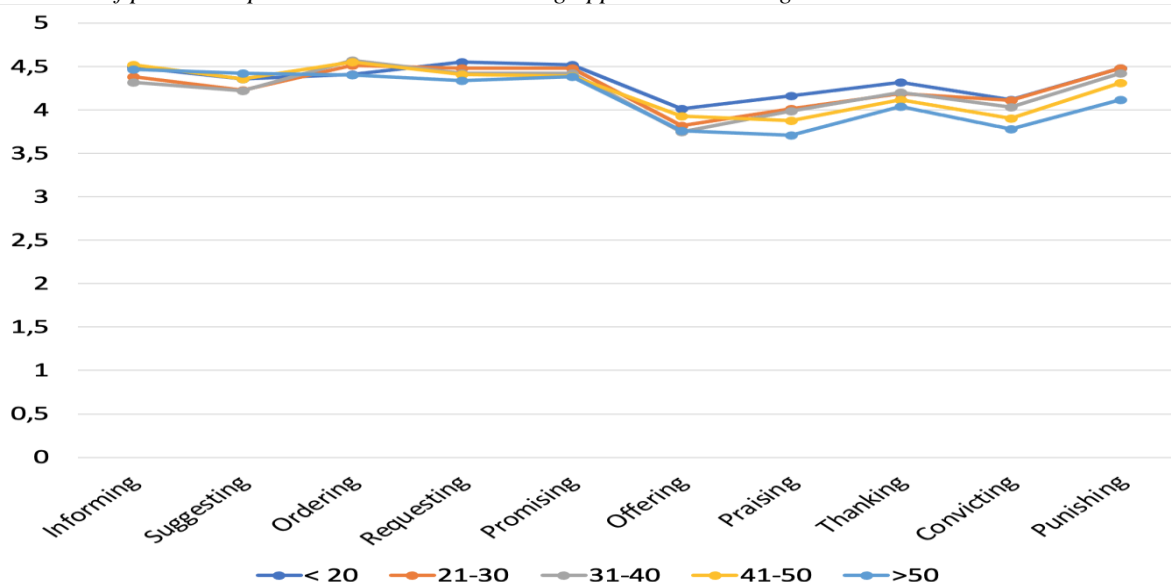
Level of Education and Its Effect on Public Compliance with Social Distancing Appeals During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A substantial difference was observed in the level of compliance with social distancing appeals based on the respondents' level of education. In general, descriptive analysis has revealed that respondents who have completed secondary school have a higher

mean than undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Respondents with a secondary school education scored highest on prompts with pragmatic connotations such as informing, proposing, pleading, promising, offering, praising, thanking, and punishing. In comparison, respondents with postgraduate education had the lowest mean on appeals with pragmatic meanings of informing,

suggesting, ordering, promising, offering, praising, thanking, and punishing. According to these data, respondents with a high school degree have the highest compliance intents, while respondents with a postgraduate education have the lowest levels of compliance with various forms of speech acts.

Appendix 2 presents a significant difference in public compliance based on respondents' level of education, on speech acts with the pragmatic meaning "ordering" (F = 4.901, p = .008), "requesting" (F = 4.904, p = .008), "offering" (F = 4.350, p = .013), "praising" (F = 8,648, p = .000), and "punishing" (F = 3.626, p = .027). No significant difference was found in public

compliance based on the respondents' level of education, in speech acts with the pragmatic meaning "informing" (F = .343, p = .710), "suggesting" (F = .1070, p = .343), "promising" (F = .1851, p = .157), "thanking" (F = 2.121, p = .120), and "punishing" (F = 1.023, p = .360). The results of the Tukey post hoc test showed that high school graduates differed significantly from respondents with postgraduate degrees in terms of adherence to social distancing appeals, in speech acts with the pragmatic meaning "ordering" (p = .006), "requesting" (p = .005), "offering" (p = .013), "praising" (p = .000), and "punishing" (p = .048).

Figure 3.
The level of public compliance with social distancing appeals based on the level of education
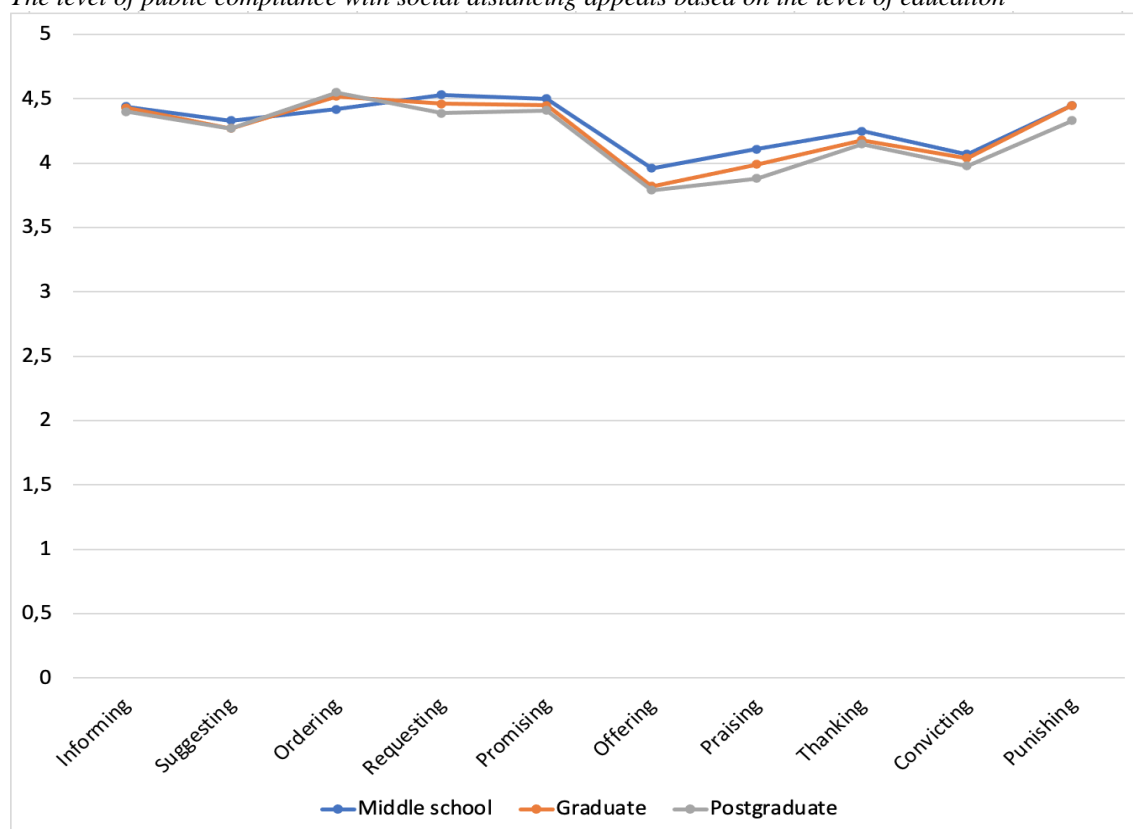
Discussion

The results of the study indicate that various speech acts have different influences on people's intentions to comply with the health protocol appeal. Directive utterance has the strongest influence on public compliance. Based on the results of this study, appeals for compliance with health protocols related to COVID-19 with the pragmatic meanings "ordering," "requesting," and "promising" have been obeyed by the public more than appeals with the pragmatic meanings "offering" and "praising." The strong influence of directive actions on public perlocutionary activities in response to social distancing appeals is motivated by the significance of speech that directly addresses attention and

behavior. A command-style appeal creates the idea that it must be obeyed. The findings of this study corroborate those of Huang and Liu (2022), who discovered that directive quality had a greater capacity to draw attention. Directive utterances comprising orders psychologically direct the people to act with a greater aim to be obeyed. The study hypothesizes that the more authoritative the tone of the demand or order contained in the call for social distancing, the greater the desire of the public to comply with it.

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the effect of speech acts on public compliance intentions during a pandemic. The findings of this study will contribute to the growing

body of knowledge regarding the use of speech acts for health communication that needs public compliance with social distancing advice. This study will contribute to a more effective and influential style of public health communication. Given the effectiveness of message delivery in responding to health crises such as a pandemic, this study proposes that the government emphasize the use of compliance appeals in the form of ordering, pleading, promising, informing, and punishing.

Additionally, this study hypothesizes that the effectiveness of speech acts in persuading the public to comply with health protocol appeals is related to social background. The types of speech acts that have significance in public compliance with social distancing depend on the variables of gender, age, and level of education. The findings from this study suggest that the use of various speech acts can have a variety of consequences on the behavior of listeners or readers. Similarly, a study by Ukonu and Mbamalu (2021) discovered that social factors had a greater predictive effect on message adherence. The findings of this study also corroborate those of (Zhang & Kou, 2021), who found that gender, education level, and age all have distinct effects on language use in the health sector. The results of this study can provide benefits for the government in health crisis communication.

This study discovered that women exhibited higher compliance intentions in all sorts of speech acts and pragmatic meanings when adhering to the COVID-19 health protocol. This consistency implies that the message in the COVID-19 appeal has a greater impact on women. This finding is congruent with that of Zhang and Kou (2021), who discovered that women exhibited a greater proclivity for health-protective activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women are more likely to obey orders and requests. On the other hand, males demonstrate a powerful desire to obey directives with a pragmatic, commanding, and promising function. Thus, for the sake of message efficacy and impact, this study advocates the employment of directive speech acts while providing counsel to a female audience during a health crisis and both directive and commissive speech acts when appealing to a male audience.

This study demonstrates a substantial difference in the intention of women and men to comply with the appeal for compliance with health regulations when using pragmatic meanings such as informing, ordering, pleading, promising, praising, convicting, and punishing. The utterance conveys the concept of information continuity and is coercive. This finding can be explained by the cultural factor influencing the intention to follow health advice (Vries, 2020). Indonesian society's strong patriarchal culture inspires the high intention of women's devotion to direct speaking. The fundamental qualities of Indonesian women are that

they are obedient to direct and commanding messages.

According to age groups, younger respondents expressed a greater willingness to comply with social distancing appeals using various forms of speech acts. One intriguing finding from this study is that the adolescent public expresses concern and gratitude for suggestions, offers, praises, suggestions, and thanks, indicating that young people are more concerned with persuasive messages. While the pragmatic meaning of these messages is powerful, they lack compelling informational content. Thus, it can be inferred that at a time of crisis, an effective appeal to young people and what is critical for the government to consider is the use of persuasion and offers, not commands. The findings of this study corroborate those of Caplan and Samter (1999), who discovered that messages with a low command tone combined with positive politeness strategies were more likely to be obeyed by adolescents.

Based on education level, the findings of this study indicate that respondents with secondary school education have a higher intention of compliance than respondents with undergraduate and postgraduate education. The utterances of commanding, pleading, offering, praising, and punishing have higher intentions to be obeyed by the public with a high school education background. These findings are associated with protective behavior and an understanding of the importance of adhering to health protocol compliance. Those with a higher level of education are less likely to engage in health-protective behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, those with a lower level of education are more receptive to coercive messages (Zhang & Kou, 2021). Thus, we recommend using directive speech as a substitute language for appealing to the public with a lower level of education to comply with health regulations. Ricks (2020) argues that language has a causal effect on how appeals shape public opinion.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the effect of language choice on public compliance with government appeals for social distancing during times of crisis. According to the speech act theory, this paper claims that the degree to which the public intends to comply with the call for compliance with health standards during the COVID-19 pandemic changes according to the degree of speech act continuity. Compared to other speech acts, the directive speech act with the highest degree of speech continuity intends to be obeyed by the public. As a result, this study proposes that the government select speech acts with high intention to be obeyed when making appeals for social distancing. It aims to ensure that the message is

communicated and influences significant health concerns.

The findings from this study demonstrate linguistics' contribution in resolving the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis. Compliance with health protocol is determined by the type of speech act employed in an appeal for social distancing and differs by gender, age group, and degree of education. These social characteristics predictthe public's intention to heed the government's requests for social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The public background is a critical factor to consider. This presents a pragmatic perspective on how to employ speech act choices that affect the public and how health problems are managed during a pandemic.

This study, however, has limitations. It collected data from a subset of the population that lives in metropolitan areas and has access to technology. Additional study with a diverse range of respondents, including those with limited access due to their location in distant places, is necessary to ensure that the findings are comprehensive. This study employed a cross-sectional survey to merely elicit an intention to comply with the demand for social distancing. Future study can employ an experimental design to evaluate the direct effect of speech acts on public behavior.

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APPENDICES
Appendix 1
Speech acts and public compliance with COVID-19 social distancing appeals based on age (n = 1339)

Speech Acts	Pragmatic Meaning	Age	N	M	SD	SE	F	p
Assertive	Informing	<20	313	4.49	.661	.037		
		21–30	417	4.38	.750	.037		
		31–40	272	4.32	.789	.048	3.734	.005
		41–50	198	4.52	.658	.047		
		>50	139	4.47	.652	.055		
	Suggesting	<20	313	4.36	.680	.038		
		21–30	417	4.23	.784	.038		
		31–40	272	4.22	.762	.046	2.509	.040
		41–50	198	4.36	.705	.050		
		>50	139	4.32	.724	.061		
Directive	Ordering	<20	313	4.41	.724	.041		
		21–30	417	4.51	.676	.033		
		31–40	272	4.57	.656	.040	2.980	.018
		41–50	198	4.55	.695	.049		
		>50	139	4.40	.739	.063		
	Requesting	<20	313	4.55	.593	.033		
		21–30	417	4.48	.714	.035		
		31–40	272	4.42	.694	.042	2.822	.024
		41–50	198	4.41	.734	.052		
		>50	139	4.34	.757	.064		
Commissive	Promising	<20	313	4.52	.594	.034		
		21–30	417	4.48	.694	.034		
		31–40	272	4.42	.693	.042	1.900	.108
		41–50	198	4.39	.717	.051		
		>50	139	4.38	.726	.062		
	Offering	<20	313	4.01	.911	.051		
		21–30	417	3.82	1.002	.049		
		31–40	272	3.75	.956	.058	3.521	.007
		41–50	198	3.93	1.010	.072		
		>50	139	3.76	1.040	.088		
Expressive	Praising	<20	313	4.16	.840	.047		
		21–30	417	4.01	.876	.043		
		31–40	272	3.99	.889	.054	7.030	.000
		41–50	198	3.88	.924	.066		
		>50	139	3.71	.972	.082		
	Thanking	<20	313	4.32	.755	.043		
		21–30	417	4.19	.825	.040		
		31–40	272	4.20	.752	.046	3.692	.005
		41–50	198	4.12	.856	.061		
		>50	139	4.04	.760	.064		
Declarative	Convicting	<20	313	4.12	.968	.055		
		21–30	417	4.11	.927	.045		
		31–40	272	4.03	.968	.059	7.030	.000
		41–50	198	3.90	1.035	.074		
		>50	139	3.78	1.089	.092		
	Punishing	<20	313	4.48	.734	.041		
		21–30	417	4.48	.772	.038		
		31–40	272	4.42	.792	.048	3.692	.005
		41–50	198	4.31	.867	.062		
		>50	139	4.12	.951	.081		

Appendix 2

Speech acts and public compliance with COVID-19 social distancing appeals based on the level of education (n = 1339)

Speech Acts	Pragmatic Meaning	Level of Education	N	M	SD	SE	F	p
Assertive	Informing	Middle school	491	4.44	.693	.031		
		Graduate	341	4.43	.710	.038	.343	.710
		Postgraduate	507	4.40	.749	.033		
	Suggesting	Middle school	491	4.33	.688	.031		
		Graduate	341	4.27	.749	.041	1.070	.343
		Postgraduate	507	4.27	.782	.035		
Directive	Ordering	Middle school	491	4.42	.707	.032		
		Graduate	341	4.51	.701	.038	4.901	.008
		Postgraduate	507	4.55	.673	.030		
	Requesting	Middle school	491	4.53	.607	.027		
		Graduate	341	4.46	.700	.038	4.904	.008
		Postgraduate	507	4.39	.758	.034		
Commissive	Promising	Middle school	491	4.50	.630	.028		
		Graduate	341	4.45	.687	.037	1.851	.157
		Postgraduate	507	4.41	.718	.032		
	Offering	Middle school	491	3.96	.922	.042		
		Graduate	341	3.82	1.028	.056	4.350	.013
		Postgraduate	507	3.79	.998	.044		
Expressive	Praising	Middle school	491	4.11	.810	.037		
		Graduate	341	3.99	.925	.050	8.648	.000
		Postgraduate	507	3.88	.941	.042		
	Thanking	Middle school	491	4.25	.766	.035		
		Graduate	341	4.18	.823	.045	2.121	.120
		Postgraduate	507	4.15	.805	.036		
Declarative	Convicting	Middle school	491	4.07	.969	.044		
		Graduate	341	4.04	.949	.051	1.023	.360
		Postgraduate	507	3.98	1.020	.045		
	Punishing	Middle school	491	4.45	.779	.035		
		Graduate	341	4.45	.764	.042	3.626	.027
		Postgraduate	507	4.33	.862	.038		

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