

The Felicity and Discursive Structure of Warnings on Tobacco Advertisement in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

This paper draws on John R. Searle's felicity conditions within the framework of a discourse pragmatic analysis in examining the warning message inscribed on tobacco advertisements in Nigeria. Thus, the paper interrogates the thematic structure and the participants' role relationship reflected in the construction of the warning texts. The analysis reveals that tobacco warnings, by their thematic structure, mirror a 'problem-solution' schema to accentuate the communicative roles of sender as authority (government) and receiver as less-powerful (the general public). It is further revealed that as pragmatic acts, tobacco warnings are successful only when propositional, preparatory, and essential are met. The study concludes that the conflict in government's role as authority asserting the danger of smoking and revenue earner from companies trading in tobacco potentially negates the sincerity condition.

Keywords: warning, felicity conditions, tobacco, speech act, public health

Introduction

Language is a means of communication through which interlocutors can achieve certain goals by sending and receiving messages. Much of the communicative acts produced and comprehended in interactional exchanges such as requesting, apologizing, warning, thanking, greeting, advising and criticizing are a product of negotiation between speaker and hearer based entirely on both the linguistic code and the socio-cultural practice that produced it (Fairclough 1992). In other words, linguistic meaning is produced within the context of interactional negotiation and cooperation between speaker and hearer. Indeed Bourdieu (1999:503) describes a linguistic exchange as "an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital and a consumer (or market)".

The meaning-producing relationship between the speaker and the hearer is often mediated by tacitly agreed regulative conversational principles based on observable conventional linguistic practices. It is such conventional semiotic practices, particularly as encapsulated in felicity conditions (FC) (Austin 1962, Searle 1969, 1979) that form the interest of this paper. There is a need to characterize the discursive format of the warning act and test the applicability of the FC to the warnings carried by tobacco adverts in Nigeria.

This warning message on tobacco adverts in Nigeria is part of the global effort to draw attention to the dangers of exposure to tobacco smoke. Located essentially in the public domain as an awareness effort, its social significance lies in educating the public about the dangers of tobacco consumption to human health and societal wellbeing. The analytical framework adopted is hinged on the insights gleaned from pragmatics, speech acts and, particularly critical discourse analysis which pays attention to the ideological foundations of social practices. Warning against tobacco consumption is indeed a socially determined linguistic event whose communicative value depends largely on the ideological orientation of the participating public with regards to the social practice. Ideology here refers to “a shared framework of social beliefs that organize and coordinate the social interpretations and practices of groups and their members, and in particular also power and other relations between groups” (van Dijk, 1998: 8). Thus, the theoretical orientation of this paper is the socio-cognitive approach situated within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Theoretical Framework

Following Austin’s seminal work (1962) on speech acts, Searle (1969: 16) defines speech acts as “the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication”. He suggests that by speaking a language, one performs speech acts, such as giving commands or asking questions, which are performed in accordance with certain linguistic rules. In characterizing the warning act, Austin (1962: 118) classifies it under exercitives in which one exercises the power, right and influence over another. Searle (1969: 67), from an Aristotelian practical argument standpoint, suggests that most warnings are essentially hypothetical ‘if –then’ statements: “If you do not do X, then Y will happen.” This is based on the assumption that the real premise of the argument is of the form “If X then Y” where X is the negation of the propositional content of the conclusion and Y is some as yet unspecified harm to H. It should be stated though that the illocutionary force of a warning of this nature is sometimes implied, as such its interpretation would require contextual information. Warning in this category may serve as an indirect speech act. Alternatively, the perlocutionary effect of warning can be expressed by making the addressee aware of the negative consequences of his/her action (causing him/ her to be warned).

A warning can serve two functions, directive or assertive (warning the hearer to do or not to do something), depending on the presupposed interests of both hearer and speaker. Searle (1979: 28-29) maintains that warning is a speech act which belongs to either directive or assertive syntax.

The difference between assertive and directive functions is that the former tells one something that may or may not be in one's best interest while the latter tells one what to do in a certain case. Along the same lines, Allwood (1977: 55) reports that the act of warning should be identified through the intention to warn (i.e. the intention to make somebody aware of danger), some specific type of explicit behavior that the agent conducts to warn others, some specific contexts, and some persons actually being warned (i.e. taking the warning in his/her course of action). In characterizing the function of warning, Leech (1983: 208) claims that there are warnings which belong to both the assertive and the directive categories: e.g. (1) They warned us that *the food was expensive* (assertive), and (2) They warned us to *take enough money* (directive). Each of these examples has within it both the assertive and directive forces. To be warned that the food was expensive serves the purpose of (i) informing them about how expensive the food was, and (ii) directing them to take more money (implied).

Wierzbicka (1987: 177-178) states that the versatility of the verb 'warn' finds expression in a wide range of syntactic patterns which can be used to make a warning. She goes further to propose the following formula for the illocutionary force of warning: "I say this because I want to cause you to be able to cause that bad thing not to happen to you". Maintaining her claim, she reports that "[i]n indirect speech, one can warn that, warn about, warn of, warn off, warn not to (do something) or warn to (do something)." In this study, warning refers to the different strategies used for getting the attention of the addressee and making him/her alert to a specific danger or bad consequences. It also refers to the way in which speakers use these strategies either directly or indirectly, politely or impolitely, as influenced by their cultures and ideological perceptions.

Song (1995) explores the speech acts of threatening and warning in English conversational discourse in Washington D.C. metropolitan area. He has found that differences between threatening and warning are not always very clear, but both speech acts require certain conditions to be performed successfully. He has also found that the severity of the illocutionary force of threatening and warning is related to the syntactic forms in which acts are performed. He has therefore categorized warning and threatening into two types according to their semantic content and consequences of the speech act: physical punishment and loss of privilege. Sadock (1974) claims that the act of warning can be an illocutionary and perlocutionary act at the same time because the concept of warning is not necessary to create a sense of awareness in the hearer. For example, in the sentence "The bull is about to charge", the speech act of warning is an illocutionary act of warning because the speaker can say "I warn you that the bull is about to charge", and a perlocutionary act because it creates a sense of awareness by-product of asserting that the bull is about to charge depending on the context in which it happens Al-Omari (2007) cited in Bataineh and Aljamal (2014) compared the patterns and realizations of the speech act of warning by English and Arabic native speakers in responding to a 20-item questionnaire. He has collected the data from 93 American and 200 Jordanian graduate and undergraduate students. He reported that the Jordanian and American subjects used 20 different strategies to express warning, more so for the former than the latter.

Nine of these strategies (i.e. requesting, showing surprise, alerting, threatening, suggesting, flouting, begging, advising and offering alternatives) were shared between the two groups. On the other hand, nine strategies (i.e. swearing, frightening, blaming, amplifying, apologizing, anticipating, reminding and wishing) were only used by the Jordanian subjects and two (i.e. disallowance and encouraging) by their American counterparts. This means that the former use more strategies to express warning than their American counterparts.

Felicity Conditions for Warning on Tobacco

Felicity conditions, as the general conditions for the success of speech acts, are framed with the following expectations:

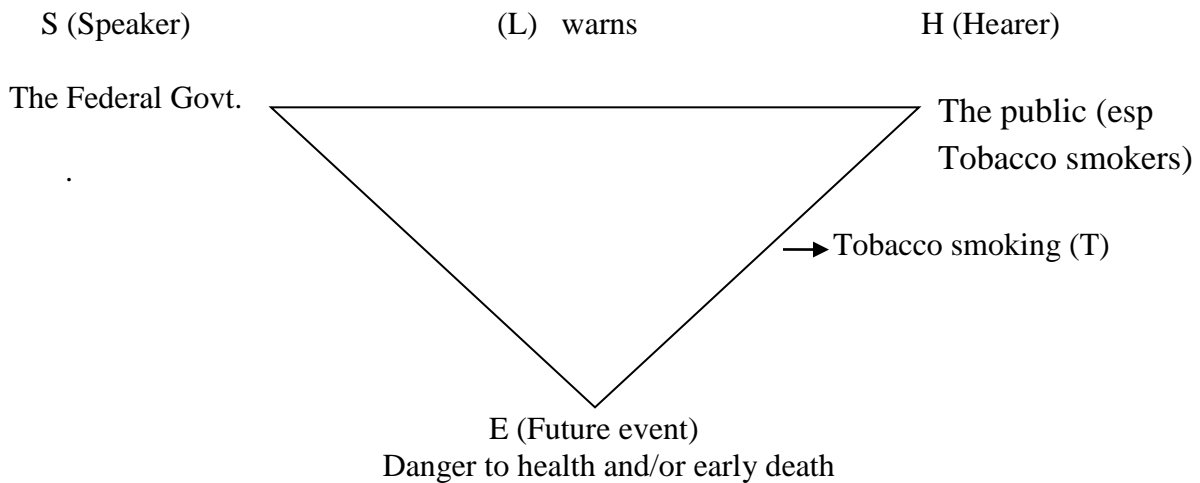
- (i) Both speaker and hearer must understand the language of communication
- (ii) Speaker and hearer roles must be clearly understood
- (iii) The intention of the speaker must be right
- (iv) The actions must be carried out completely.

The tobacco warning texts in Nigeria address these expectations. For instance, the English language used in these messages is the official language in Nigeria and so becomes the sole means of communication between the government and the people. In addition, it is clearly understood that the Government is the Speaker (S) in this instance and the entire citizenry the hearer (H). The effectiveness of a warning would to a large extent depend on the perception of the hearer/reader about the speakers/writer's role, motive and overall relationship (based on their previous interaction) with the hearer. If the government had, in the past, played her role of caring for the people's welfare very well and had demonstrated integrity in governance, the hearer would probably find it convenient to believe the message. The contrary would be the case if there had been no basis for the people to trust the government. However, the tobacco warning message comes as a public service announcement borne out of the good intention of the government to safeguard the health of her citizens.

This paper's operational definition of warning is that which sees it as *an advice to beware or counsel to desist from a specified undesirable course of action* (The American Heritage Dictionary) that carries potential danger to the advisee. The definition shows that a warning conveys a sense of danger (sometimes implied) that is likely to occur (in future) if a certain course of action is not prevented (now). So the role of a warning act is to stop a current action in order to avert a future danger, perhaps of which the hearer is possibly ignorant.

Understood in this context, it must be the case that the speaker (issuing the prior knowledge of a latent danger that is unknown to the hearer, and that the speaker genuinely wants to save the hearer from that danger, which he (speaker) believes will be harmful to the hearer. For example, 'Thank you for not smoking' does not carry an explicit performative verb, it can be interpreted as an implied warning act with the structure 'if x then y' issued to bring about an attitudinal change in the smoker

It could be literally rephrased as follows; ‘If you (do not) smoke, then...y’ where y represents the likely effect of the action expressed in the conditional clause. This argument can be represented diagrammatically.



The diagram could be summarized as;

“S issuing L to H is to prevent T so that E will not occur.”

(S) is the Federal Government, the authority issuing out warning (performing the locutionary act). The public, H (non-smokers and smokers) receives the information (the linguistic codes) (L). The intention of S is to dissuade H from arriving at E. S envisages that H would accurately decode/interpret L (the warning message) and consequently stop smoking (T) so that E (danger to health and/or early death) would not occur.

The speaker certainly has an idea of the effect which may or may not be known to the one being warned (hearer), hence the need for the warning. But what felicity conditions are required to make the warning happy?

First, a warning act must meet a *propositional condition* stipulating the likely possibility of a future event E that is harmful to the hearer. For instance, smoking in the premises of a petrol station could lead to a fire incident (the likely future event E) that could destroy not only the station but also lives of people around there. However, in some other public places like restaurants, bookshops, theatres etc, the future event envisaged might be death, disease or a disability caused by exposure to tobacco smoke.

Without communicating the likely ‘undesirable’ future event, a warning act may not have the force of a warning thus it may become unsuccessful. The future event, in the case of smoking includes death, disease, and disability of the consumer of tobacco products (this has been scientifically investigated and documented in the World Health Organization Framework Convention of Tobacco Control (WHOFCTC)).

For instance, as part of the efforts to stem the occurrence of the likely future event of death, disease and disability, the WHO (through Article 13,4 (b) of the WHOFCTC) recommends that governments and non-governmental organizations on Public health and consumer associations should issue warnings regarding the hazards of tobacco smoking.

Secondly, a warning act on tobacco also requires a *preparatory condition* to succeed. The condition stands on two major assumptions.

1. *Speaker (s) thinks the future event E will occur and is not in the hearer’s (H) interest*
2. *S thinks it is not obvious to H that E will occur.*

Taken that S is the encoder, the Nigerian government believes that (E) death, disease, disability which might occur in the event of exposure to tobacco through consumption of cigarette is not in the best interest of the consumers. The preparatory condition also assumes that government (S) thinks that the consuming public (H) is ignorant of the likely possible negative consequences (E) death and disease of tobacco consumption hence the need for the public announcement.

Thirdly, there is an *essential condition*. The essential condition stipulates that *S’s warning counts as an undertaking that the future event (E) is not in H’s best interest*. The locutionary act of issuing the warning in itself is indicative of the acceptance by S of responsibility for the veracity of the proposition communicated to H. S’s silence about the danger (E) to H would have made him/her an accessory to adverse effect of smoking. Issuing this warning could be seen as the government fulfilling its social responsibility to preserve lives.

Fourthly, a warning act on tobacco requires a *sincerity condition*. Generally, the sincerity condition for warning stipulates that: *S believes the future event (E) is not in H’s best interest*. The belief expressed by S derives from the knowledge of the world (information) at the disposal of S which is unknown to H. Put simply, the federal government believes that death, disease or disability (that may occur upon consumption of tobacco) is not in the interest of the citizenry. It is assumed that it is government’s belief that informs the placement of the warning message.

Requirement for the Success of Any Speech Act

A fundamental requirement for the success of any speech act is interactional cooperation among participants in a linguistic event. This collaboration among rational participants in directing talk towards a common goal is captured in the cooperative principle (Grice 1975) and its maxims, *be informative, be truthful, be relevant, and be clear* which when followed help hearers to accurately identify the intended meaning of the Speaker's utterance in an "unambiguous, direct way" (Jaworski and Coupland 1999:17) and to respond to it appropriately. In response to Grice's suggestion that violating or flouting the cooperative principle may hinder communication, Sperber and Wilson (1986) propose the relevance theory arguing that understanding conversational implication is a function of the selection of the relevant features of context (context being ongoingly evolving), and recognition of whatever speakers say as relevant to the conversation.

For hearers and speakers to recognize the illocutionary force of a speech act, they would need to interpret the connections between utterances as meaningful, making inferences by drawing on their own background knowledge of the world, and textual clues supplied in an ongoing interaction.

In other words, to understand an utterance is to prove its relevance, and this in turn is determined by the accessibility of its relevance to the addressee. This cognitively oriented approach assumes that linguistic communication is based on extension and inference which can be said to be governed by *contextual effects* and *processing effort*. Sperber and Wilson (1986:153) summarized their view of relevance by saying that a phenomenon is relevant to an individual, to the extent that the contextual effects achieved when it is optimally processed are large ... to the extent that the effort required to process it optimally is small.

The occurrence of contextual effects such as adding new information, strengthening or contradicting an existing assumption, or weakening old information is a necessary condition for relevance. For instance, a new fact unconnected to anything already known is not worth processing. Put simply, relevance can be summarized as 'the greater contextual effects, the greater the relevance' (Sperber and Wilson 1986:119). Similarly, the processing effort necessary for the achievement of contextual effects determines the degree of relevance. The less effort it takes to recover a fact the greater the relevance. Cutting (2002:43) summarizes what happens in conversation in the following words:

The speaker assumes which facts are accessible for the hearer and speaks in such a way that the hearer can make the correct inferences without too much effort.

Trask (1991:58) describes the hearer's effort as that of finding an accessible context that produces 'the maximum amount of new information with the minimum amount of processing effort'.

The relevance of an utterance and the degree to which the linguistic acts it represents are carried out depend, to a large extent, on how much of the felicity conditions (FC) required are met by the utterance that constitutes the act.

Notwithstanding the degree to which these conditions are satisfied, the reality of human communication shows that utterances usually come as a mixture of both direct and indirect speech acts. While a direct speech act communicates the literal meaning that words conventionally express, in most cases where explicit performances are used, an indirect speech act communicates a different meaning from the apparent surface meaning. There is an underlying pragmatic meaning, and one speech act is performed through another speech act. Such indirection is so much associated with politeness. For instance, Cutting (2002:20) remarks that the sign to the general public, 'Thank you for not smoking' conveys an expressive thanking speech act, rather than the impersonal directive prohibiting 'No Smoking'. Though both signs, usually found in restaurants, book shops and petrol stations have the force of a 'warning', 'Thank you for not smoking' certainly sounds more polite and friendly to all the strangers who read the sign.

Data Analysis

The data for this paper consist of the warning message carried by every tobacco advertisement in Nigeria. These messages are caused to be inserted by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Text A: The Federal government warns that tobacco smoking is dangerous to health.

Text B: The Federal government warns that tobacco smokers are liable to die young.

Thematic Structure

When conceived as speech act with a communicative function, the warning text has an underlying 'Problem-solution' structure (van Dijk 1998: 207). Thus the texts consist of at least two parts, the 'problem' part, occurring at the beginning, followed by the 'solution' part. Both the 'problem' and the 'solution' parts can be followed by 'elaboration' parts, serving various functions. In some texts the problem is not explicitly stated, but implied.

Given	New	
The Federal Government	warns	A. that tobacco smoking is dangerous to health
		B. that tobacco smokers are liable to die young.

The thematic structure of both Texts A and B above shows that the new information consists of two elements of structure, namely, a process element expounded by an explicit performative verb ‘warns’ (common to A & B), and an circumstantial element filled by a nominal clause containing the proposition of the likely future event that is harmful to the hearer; viz, danger to health (A) and death at a young age (B).

There is a thematic focus on ‘tobacco smoking’ (in A) where the proposition points to a general consequence of smoking tobacco- ‘dangerous to health’. It is dangerous to the health of both the individual and the community at large. However, there is a shift in the thematic focus of B to ‘tobacco smokers’ who are still young and who are being warned of a specific future consequence - ‘die young’. The implication here is that it is only the young (in terms of age and smoking experience) that perhaps may still be persuaded to drop the habit. Making this population of young smokers the target of this warning is not misplaced; it is widely accepted that the youth are the future of any nation. This realization makes it imperative for government to fulfill its social security roles by trying to sensitize the youth population to the dangers inherent in smoking.

The warning therefore counts as government’s undertaking that the future event (E) is not in the citizens’ best interest. Issuing a warning presupposes that government is providing knowledge which the people do not have, that there is a need for the warning and therefore that she has the authority to issue the warning.

This is quite similar to the felicity conditions provided by Searle specifically for the speech act of advice (1969: 67), in short, that advising refers to future actions of H (the Hearer, or, in this case, the reader), that there is reason to believe that the advice will benefit H, and that it is not obvious that H will do what is advised anyway (i.e. the Speaker (S) provides knowledge H does not already have).

The texts also clearly show that very often the felicity conditions of the warning may be indeed presupposed, or surface only minimally, with no attempt at a lengthy explanation. For instance, the information structure of the texts being analyzed does not reflect the practical argument ‘problem-solution’ structure which ordinarily would have reflected how smoking should be a concern and the consequent ‘danger to health’ and ‘untimely death’.

While the problems are clearly stated as; (i) tobacco smoking is dangerous to health', and (ii) tobacco smokers are liable to die young', there is no obvious attempt to state the solution. So it can only be suggested that the solution envisaged by the warning is for smokers to abandon the habit, hoping that this will translate to a healthier living and longevity.

As is often the case with warning texts, there is an assumption of a mutual contextual belief needed for the success of the warning between the speaker and hearer. Though it has been argued by van Dijk, (1998: 39) that shared knowledge or 'common sense' is presupposed and thus does not need to be asserted, however, to persuade and cause a change of attitude may require more than a claim: it sometimes requires grounds, warrants, and rebuttals. (Toulmin) The non-availability of these extra textual factors (which cannot be accounted for by textual analysis) would however not render the warning infelicitous.

Participant Roles and Style

For every interaction involving warning, the prototypical roles are the person providing the warning (in this case the Nigerian government) and the person in need of warning (the entire citizenry). The underlying role relationship of the two participants is reflected in the style of the warning texts as a mixture of authority and solidarity. A presentation of the authority (presumed to have such power) issuing the warning usually has to precede the warning. As used in this context, the appeal to authority is used to indicate that the warning indeed comes from a source entitled to give advice- the federal government. Indeed, the power to control the discourse lies with the person providing the warning who is presumed to have more knowledge and therefore the authority to tell the 'warned' what to do. The social importance of public service announcement text-types and situations lies in the correspondence of these conventional social messages to (relatively stable) power relations in any given social situation. (Fairclough 1992; Wodak 2001). The issue to raise here might be whether there exist appropriate circumstances warranting the issuance of a warning and whether the government constitutes the appropriate persons to issue the warning.

The appropriate circumstances here are the existence of a danger/threat to tobacco smokers (this has been scientifically investigated and documented in the World Health Organization Framework Convention of Tobacco Control). On the other hand, the appropriate person here is the Nigerian government (standing as the advisor). She is not only in possession of expert opinion available to her which a large percentage of the citizenry lacks, she is at the same time being concerned about the welfare of the people. The power of the Nigerian government to issue such a warning in this regard is therefore beyond questioning. Indeed, it is assumed that the Nigerian government issues this warning from the standpoint of an agent who cares about and wants to help the entire populace, but more importantly that segment of the Nigerian population who come under the immediate threat of tobacco consumption.

The characteristics of the dominant style of authority used in Texts A and B are listed in Table 1.

1	Categorical modality, ‘absolute truths’	Tobacco smoking <i>is dangerous to health</i>
2	Scientific or quasi-scientific jargon	Tobacco smokers are <i>liable to die young</i> Tobacco smoking is <i>dangerous to health</i>
3	Reference to 3rd person	<i>The Federal government</i> <i>Tobacco smokers</i> <i>Tobacco smoking</i>
4	Authority quoted	<i>The Federal government warns</i>

Table 1 – Authority Style in warning texts

The impersonal nominalized act of ‘tobacco smoking’ and the indeterminate ‘tobacco smokers’ will no doubt create a distance between the presumed writer and the reader thereby lessening the impact of the warning on the readers. In other words, the impersonal third person, “tobacco smokers” and “tobacco smoking” stance of the warning which reflects in an indirect address, rather than a second person address style, somehow creates a distance between the sender and receiver making it read more as an advice. The avoidance of the use of a direct ‘you’ may be interpreted as a means of mitigation in order to reinforce positive politeness. As already mentioned above, the actual part of the text where the speech act of warning takes place is the second part, which ordinarily should be couched as the ‘solution’ part but which in reality is the problem associated with tobacco smoking. These expressions (in A and B) impliedly encourage the reader to abstain/refrain from smoking to avoid its fatal consequences.

The elements of the impersonal style adopted in the texts in question contribute to fulfilling the preparatory and essential conditions that the warning should be in the interest and to the benefit of the ‘warned’; and that the Federal government, whose constitutional responsibility it is to protect her citizens, is acting as a friend and consequently a friend, she would surely offer helpful advice.

Lexis

The thematic structure of our warning texts is the determining factor in the lexical choices made by the writer. For example, at the beginning of both Texts A and B, there is a thematic fronting of ‘The Federal Government’ as the ‘sayer’ (in the grammatical subject position) who initiates the verbal process of warning.

The explicit performative verb ‘warns’ (what is said) carries an unmistakable illocutionary force of ‘warning’ thereby setting the context for the proposition contained in the complement. Text A contains only the Verbiage (tobacco smoking is dangerous to health) without a receiver.

On the contrary, Text B has the receiver (tobacco smokers) embedded within the verbiage; ‘that tobacco smokers are liable to die young’ The choice of ‘dangerous’ to collocate with ‘smoking’ is to drive home the undesirable consequence associated with tobacco smoking which constitutes the import of the warning act. Similarly, ‘liable’, ‘die young’ are lexical choices that reinforce the consequences of smoking which the warning is meant to check.

The impersonal stance of the warning further resonates in the choice of the word ‘health’ or ‘your health’ which however may create the room for inferences other than that intended by the Federal Government, (the speaker/encoder). Viewed in this context, the population to which the warning applies may have become inadvertently narrowed down. While it is obvious that ‘tobacco smokers’ is specific in its reference, ‘your’ in ‘your health’ is not limited in its reference to only tobacco smokers; non-smokers alike are included in the scope of the warning which is to discourage them from picking up a smoking habit. In addition, the choice of ‘young’ in ‘tobacco smokers are liable to die young’ may detract from the poignancy of the warning and thus may have little effect on smokers who are already old and who may probably think that the message is not for them.

How then should we treat truth of the proposition that tobacco kills? The weight of statistical evidence regarding the effect of tobacco smoking and the degree of respect accorded the speaker could easily be the basis for establishing the truth. For instance, the gap between government intentions and the seeming positive value of tobacco being advertised casts a serious doubt on the sincerity of government. Article 13e of the WHO FCTC states that, as a minimum, and in accordance with its constitution principles, each party shall,

Prohibit all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship that promote a tobacco product by any means that are false, misleading or deceptive or likely to create an erroneous impression about its characteristics, health effects, hazards or emission.

In this regard, government cannot exonerate itself from the charge of being an accomplice. For instance, some of the adverts of the British – American Tobacco Company located in Ibadan, South West Nigeria appear like a calculated attempt to deceive the public. They project their acclaimed contribution to the economy and manpower development of the nation exhibiting the phenomenal growth.

An unsuspecting public would probably applaud the activities of the company thereby encouraging the cultivation, processing and marketing of tobacco products. Nothing, except the Federal Government’s warning indicates the danger that tobacco represents to public health. So is it true that tobacco-smoking kills? Yes it does. On the grounds of relevance, the question may be asked; in what way has this warning strengthen, contradict or weaken existing assumptions (among the people) about the effects of tobacco?

Are the people even aware of these effects? Have there been deliberate efforts to educate and enlighten the people? It does appear that the people would require greater effort, due to lack of information and awareness to process and interpret the warning in a way that will be beneficial to them. Except for the fact that government is invested with power and authority, the warning coming from her could not have been more than mere expressive information. In other words, the relevance of the warning is at best imagined. It certainly comes across to the critical public as mere half-hearted information ‘forced’ on the tobacco companies for transmission to the public. The government did not place the adverts. On the contrary, the tobacco companies that did so were merely complying with a directive they probably do not respect.

The Sincerity Condition Revisited

The sincerity condition raises a fundamental issue of solidarity that lies at the heart of government’s responsibility for the protection and preservation of the lives of her citizens. It should therefore be reasonable to assume that government effort in the control of tobacco smoking is sincere. In its application to the tobacco warning, the sincerity condition could be expressed as; *The Federal government(S) believes that danger to health or untimely/early death (E) is not in best interest of tobacco smokers.* This explains the basis for promoting and investing in the public health sector by the government. But is the government’s pronouncement in consonance with her actions? A close scrutiny of government’s belief as shown in her actions with regard to the control of the tobacco trade and consumption clearly suggests a contradiction that puts a lie to the sincerity of government in her claims about protecting the interest of her citizens. However, since beliefs are not easily verifiable, the only yardstick therefore for their verification would be actions taken to give expression to them. To pursue this argument, let us set up the following hypotheses.

1. Government is sincere about protecting the health of her citizens.
2. Government receives revenue from the trade in and consumption of tobacco products.

While Hypothesis 1 accentuates the propositional, preparatory, and essential conditions for the warning, Hypothesis 2, when pursued by government becomes a negation of the implied interest in safeguarding public health. This raises a germane question; “Is government’s expectation of revenue from tobacco products (and its resultant consumption) not in conflict with the intention to stop smoking?” Would the desire for revenue not outweigh the need to be socially responsible? Against this background, translating into action the intention of the sincerity condition may actually constitute one of the greatest challenges to any government in the communication on tobacco control. The proof of government’s concern for the interest and welfare of her people will be in the action it takes or does not take.

Statistics from the WHO shows that prohibiting tobacco smoking seems a very rational act of saving the people from avoidable danger. Consequently, the belief that the consequence of smoking is not in the best interest of their populace should make governments to deploy their 'energy and political commitment' to the campaign against smoking. Sincerity will require that various governments take concrete steps not only to educate the people, but also to prevent the spread of tobacco consumption by enforcing legislation against its further cultivation. Governments are invested with the power to regulate the lifestyles of their citizens through legislation and affirmative actions. However, when words are not matched with actions, misrepresentation of governments' intention and outright disregard become inevitable and this will cast doubts on the sincerity of government. As long as the sincerity condition for the warning act is not met, it would be difficult to sustain its illocutionary force. To the same extent to which the maxim of relevance is flouted, to the same degree will the perlocutionary effect be out of tune with the encoder's (in this case, the government) expectations.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to examine specifically warnings placed on tobacco advertisements and products by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Adopting the discourse analytic framework of speech acts and pragmatics, it reveals a relationship between the thematic structure and the linguistic form of warnings. It also reveals the speaker's authoritative style often associated with the warning act. It is concluded that the warning act contained on tobacco advertisements in Nigeria, to a large extent appears to violate the sincerity condition, and this could render the warning unhappy. This perhaps may be the reason why tobacco consumption still persists, and the activities of tobacco companies in Nigeria continue unabated.

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