

Sentences types and pragmatic function of directive speech acts in motivational text of *Atomic Habits*

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ABSTRACT

Directive speech acts are commonly used to influence behavior, but they are not always expressed through direct commands. In many contexts, directive meanings are conveyed indirectly through declarative or interrogative structures, requiring interpretation based on context. This indirectness is particularly characteristic of motivational discourse, where authors seek to encourage behavioral change while maintaining a persuasive and non-authoritative tone. Rather than issuing explicit instructions, motivational texts often guide readers through explanations, evaluative statements, and reflective questions. This study investigates the realization of directive speech acts in *Atomic Habits* by James Clear. Drawing on John Searle's speech act theory, the analysis focuses on sentence types, modes of realization (explicit and implicit), and pragmatic functions. The data consist of 525 sentences or clauses identified as conveying directive meaning, analyzed using qualitative pragmatic interpretation and descriptive quantitative methods. The findings show that directive speech acts are predominantly realized through declarative forms, followed by imperative and interrogative structures. Indirect (implicit) directives occur more frequently than direct (explicit) ones, indicating the importance of subtle persuasive strategies in motivational writing. Pragmatically, these directives mainly function to advise, instruct, and invite reader reflection. This study contributes to pragmatic and discourse studies by demonstrating how motivational texts systematically employ indirect directive strategies to promote voluntary behavioral change. It also provides a more nuanced understanding of how directive force operates beyond imperative forms, particularly in persuasive self-improvement discourse.



I. INTRODUCTION

Language does not merely convey information but also performs actions. Within speech act theory, utterances can function to influence the behavior, thoughts, or attitudes of others. Austin (1962) introduced the idea that language operates through locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, which was later refined by Searle (1969) through a classification of speech acts, including directives. Directive speech acts are utterances intended to make the hearer or reader perform an action, such as requesting, advising, instructing, or inviting. Although directives are often associated with imperative forms, they may also be realized indirectly through declarative or interrogative structures whose directive force depends on contextual interpretation.

Indirect directives are particularly common in persuasive and advisory discourse, where direct commands may be perceived as overly authoritative or face-threatening. Studies in pragmatics suggest that indirectness allows speakers and writers to reduce imposition and encourage voluntary compliance, making it especially effective in contexts that aim to influence attitudes and behavior (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Leech, 2014; Pranowo & Rahmawati, 2020; Burhanuddin, 2020). In written discourse, directive meanings are therefore often embedded in statements expressing evaluation, necessity, or general principles rather than in explicit commands.

Previous research has examined directive speech acts across various communicative contexts. For instance, studies of digital discourse show how directive expressions are used to influence public behavior while maintaining politeness and mitigating imposition (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Leech, 2014; John et.al, 2018; Burnette & Calude, 2022; Abdalhadi et.al, 2022; Triana et.al, 2022; Lu, 2024; Norewec, 2024; Fitriani et al., 2023; Mubarok and Budiono, 2025). Other research in professional and educational settings demonstrates that directives play a crucial role in coordinating actions, managing interaction, and guiding participation. These studies consistently highlight the functional importance of directive speech acts in shaping behavior across contexts (Fitria, 2019; Burnette & Calude, 2022; Hamzah et al., 2025; Aini et al., 2023; Kurniawati & Setyawan, 2022; Anggraini & Afriana, 2023; 2022; Oo et.al, 2023; Bella & Ogiermann, 2024; Hendar et al., 2025; 2024; Dynel, 2024)

However, most existing studies focus on interactive communication, such as spoken interaction, social media discourse, or institutional settings. Relatively limited attention has been given to directive speech acts in motivational self-help literature. This represents a significant gap, as motivational discourse differs from institutional communication in its primary goal: rather than requiring immediate compliance, it seeks to influence readers' long-term attitudes and behavioral change. As a result, directive meanings in such texts are more likely to be realized through indirect, persuasive, and reflective linguistic strategies.

A prominent example of this type of discourse is *Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results* (2018) by James Clear. As a widely read motivational book, *Atomic Habits* aims to guide readers toward behavioral change through small, consistent actions. Its discourse is characterized by explanations, evaluative statements, and reflective prompts that implicitly encourage readers to act. This makes the text a particularly relevant site for examining how directive speech acts are realized in motivational writing. Despite the growing body of research on directive speech acts, there is still a lack of systematic analysis of how directives are linguistically realized in motivational written discourse. In particular, few studies have examined how sentence types, syntactic patterns, and modes of realization interact to produce directive meanings in self-help texts. Addressing this gap is important for understanding how persuasive language operates in non-institutional contexts where reader engagement and voluntary action are central.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze directive speech acts in *Atomic Habits* by focusing on four main aspects: (1) sentence types used to realize directives (declarative, imperative, and interrogative), (2) syntactic patterns in which these directives occur, (3) modes of realization (explicit and implicit), and (4) their pragmatic functions based on Searle's framework. Theoretically, this study contributes to pragmatic research by extending the analysis of directive speech acts to motivational discourse, a genre that has received relatively limited attention. Methodologically, it offers an integrated analytical framework that combines sentence type, syntactic pattern, mode of realization, and pragmatic function. Practically, it provides insights into how motivational texts employ linguistic strategies to influence readers' behavior while maintaining a persuasive and non-authoritative tone.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative pragmatic approach supported by descriptive quantitative analysis to examine directive speech acts in *Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results* (2018) by James Clear. The book was selected as the data source due to its strong focus on behavioral guidance and its relevance as a widely read motivational text that aims to influence readers' attitudes and practices through persuasive language. The data consist of sentences or clauses identified as containing directive speech acts (Radford, 2009). Following Searle (1969), directives are defined as utterances intended to make the reader perform an action. Sentences were included if they (1) explicitly instructed or requested action, (2) implicitly encouraged action through declarative or interrogative forms, or (3) functioned pragmatically as advice, instruction, or invitation related to habit formation (Chomsky, 1965). Purely descriptive or narrative sentences without directive intention were excluded. A total of 525 instances were identified. Data were collected through systematic close reading. Relevant sentences were extracted and examined in context to confirm their directive function, then organized into a coding table including the sentence, page reference, and analytical categories.

The analysis focuses on four aspects: sentence type, syntactic pattern, mode of realization, and pragmatic function. Sentence types were categorized as declarative, imperative, or interrogative based on syntactic structure (Radford, 2004; Dinamika & Hanafiah, 2019). Syntactic patterns include declarative constructions (S+V), modality (e.g., *should, must, need to*), passive forms, conditional clauses, and comparative structures (Vincent et al., 2023; Abdalhadi et al., 2022). Modes of realization were classified as explicit or implicit. Explicit directives are directly expressed, typically through imperative forms, while implicit directives are conveyed through declarative or interrogative structures whose directive force is inferred from context. Utterances were categorized as implicit when directive meaning arose from evaluative statements, general principles, causal explanations, or reflective questions. Pragmatic functions were identified based on Searle's framework, with a focus on functions most relevant to motivational discourse: advising, instructing, and inviting. Advising refers to recommending beneficial actions, instructing to provide procedural guidance, and inviting to encouraging reflection or cognitive engagement.

To ensure reliability, coding was conducted in two stages. The primary researcher first identified and categorized all data, followed by a second researcher with expertise in pragmatics. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion to achieve agreement. The final dataset was analyzed descriptively to determine the distribution of sentence types, syntactic patterns, realization modes, and pragmatic functions. Quantitative results are presented through frequency counts and percentages, while selected examples are analyzed qualitatively to illustrate how directive meanings are constructed in motivational discourse.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified 525 instances of directive speech acts in *Atomic Habits*. These directives are realized through three primary sentence types: declarative, imperative, and interrogative sentences.

Types and Forms of Directive Speech Acts (DSAs).

Sentences can be categorized into three main types: declarative, imperative, and interrogative. The findings of this study show that the sentences used by the author to deliver motivational messages to readers fall within these categories. The types and the forms or linguistic features of directive speech acts are reflected in the table 1.

Table 1. Types and forms of directive speech acts (DSAs).

No	Types and Forms of Clause	Data	Percentage
1	Declarative	312	59.4%
	S+V	(158)	(30.1%)
	Modality (can, need to, should, must, have to)	(138)	(26.3%)
	Passive Clause	(10)	(1.9%)
	If clause	(4)	(0.7%)
	Comparison Clause (the less. the more)	(2)	(0.4%)
	2	Imperative	177
	Positive Imperative (make, consider, imagine, try, etc.)	(165)	(31.4%)
	Negative Imperative (don't blame/praise/ /ask/break/put/unplug, etc.)	(12)	(2.3%)
3	Interrogative (5W+1H, to-be, do/does, modal)	36	6.9%
TOTAL		525	100%

As shown in Table 1, declarative sentences constitute the largest proportion (59.4%), followed by imperative (33.7%) and interrogative forms (6.9%). This distribution indicates that directive meanings are predominantly conveyed through non-imperative structures. The predominance of declarative forms highlights a key feature of motivational discourse: directives are commonly embedded in statements rather than expressed as direct commands. This allows the writer to guide readers while maintaining a non-authoritative and persuasive tone. Such findings support pragmatic theories that indirect directives reduce imposition and promote voluntary compliance (Blum-Kulka 1987; Leech, 2014).

Within declarative directives, two dominant patterns emerge: S+V constructions and modal expressions. S+V structures typically encode evaluative or general statements, as in *"The only way to actually win is to get better each day."* Although grammatically declarative, the evaluative phrase *"the only way"* restricts alternatives and functions pragmatically as advice. Modal constructions (e.g., *can, should, need to*) further soften directive force by framing actions as possible or advisable rather than obligatory. This suggests that the author systematically avoids strong imposition, instead encouraging readers through possibility and recommendation. Less frequent patterns, such as conditional and comparative clauses, reinforce directive meaning through logical reasoning (cause-effect and general principles), rather than explicit instruction. Overall, these patterns indicate that directive force in motivational discourse is often realized semantically and rhetorically, rather than through grammatical mood alone (Lyons, 1977).

DSA's Declarative Clause/Sentences

Declarative Clause/Sentences with S+V Form

The directive speech acts (DSAs) declarative sentences with S+V form occur in 158 data of 525 findings (30.1%). Examples of declarative S+V sentences are presented below.

“Making a choice that is 1 percent better or 1 percent worse seems insignificant in the moment, but over the span of moments that make up a lifetime these choices determine the difference between who you are and who you could be.”

The sentence is a declarative with an S+V structure (the gerund phrase “*Making a choice...*” functions as the subject and “*seem*” and “*determine*” as the verb). The author advises readers to choose small positive actions consistently, and to reflect on small choices so that they are motivated to change their behavior.

“The only way to actually win is to get better each day”

The sentence is a DSAs declarative with an S+V structure (“*The only way...*” as the subject and “*is*” as the verb). The DSAs delivered indirectly to encourage the reader to engage in continuous self-improvement. The clause “*the only way*” limits the reader’s perceived options and subtly urges compliance, while the verbal phrase “*get better each day*” encodes the desired behavioral action. Pragmatically, the sentence is delivered to influence the reader’s attitudes and actions without threatening their negative face, constructing persuasion through motivational reasoning rather than overt instruction.

Declarative Clause/Sentences with Modality

“Similarly, a slight change in your daily habits can guide your life to a very different destination.”

The example represents a directive speech act expressed through a declarative sentence that employs the modality *can*. Although the sentence appears to function as an informational or assertive statement, it implicitly constitutes a directive speech act in which the author attempts to advise the reader to modify their habits by conveying those small changes are capable of producing substantial results, even in the absence of an imperative form.

“Anything wise in these pages you should credit to the many experts who preceded me. Anything foolish, assume it is my error.”

The example represents a directive speech act expressed through a declarative sentence containing the modality *should*. Although structurally functioning as an informational statement typical of an assertive speech act, it implicitly performs a directive function by encouraging the reader to attribute credit to the experts whose ideas informed the author’s writing. The use of the modal verb *should* serve to soften the recommendation, framing it as a polite suggestion rather than force instruction.

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"The entrepreneur and investor Naval Ravikant have said, "To write a great book, you must first become the book."

The example represents a directive speech act through a declarative sentence containing the modal *must*. By citing the words of an authoritative figure, the modal expresses a strong sense of obligation or necessity, however, the authoritative framing allows the directive force to be conveyed without adopting an overtly commanding tone, thereby the directive is implicit rather than explicit. Consequently, readers are more inclined to interpret it as reputable advice rather than a command that must be immediately obeyed.

"You can't repeat the same things blindly and expect to become exceptional."

The example represents a directive speech act expressed through a declarative sentence containing the negative modality "can't". The author implicitly advises the reader to avoid a particular pattern of behavior, specifically, to stop repeating the same actions without reflection while still expecting exceptional outcomes. Although the structure resembles a prohibition ("do not do X and expect Y"), the illocutionary force is not to forbid but to guide the reader toward behavioral change.

Declarative Sentence Passive Clause

"This method, which was created by BJ Fogg as part of his Tiny Habits program, can be used to design an obvious cue for nearly any habit."

The example conveys motivation through an implicit directive speech act functioning as advice. The author does not directly instruct the reader to apply the method "*Use this method to design a cue*", but instead presents in the form of a declarative statement that emphasizes possibility and usefulness. The clause "can be used to design an obvious cue for nearly any habit" is a modal passive construction functions as a softening strategy in an implicit directive speech act. By avoiding an active imperative such as "*You can use this method*" or "*Use this method*," This reduces the sense of obligation or authority and allows readers to perceive the advice as optional and self-motivated.

Declarative with If-Clause

"If you show up at the gym five days in a row—even if it's just for two minutes—you are casting votes for your new identity."

The example conveys motivation through an implicit directive speech act functioning as advice. The conditional subordinate clause "*If you show up at the gym five days in a row—even if it's just for two minutes*" serves as the dominant clause reflecting the directive speech act, as it provides a concrete example of the action the reader is encouraged to follow. Meanwhile, the main clause "*you are casting votes for your new identity*" functions evaluatively, explaining the consequence of the action and reinforcing the implicit motivation. Pragmatically, this directive

serves to prompt the reader to act through reflection and understanding of cause-and-effect, making the guidance persuasive and personal without using an explicit imperative.

Declarative Comparative Clause

"The less energy you spend on trivial choices, the more you can spend it on what really matters."

The sentence employs a comparative correlative construction (*the less..., the more...*). This structure presents the causal link as natural and logical rather than imposed, thereby reducing the force of direct instruction. The sentence expressed implicitly, which pragmatically as an indirect directive to advise the reader to minimize unnecessary decisions through logical consequence rather than obligation, making the motivational message more persuasive and less face-threatening.

DSA's Imperative Sentences

Based on the result, directive speech acts in the motivational text of *Atomic Habits* that employ imperative sentences amount to 177 data out of a total of 525 data points, or 33.7%. The imperative sentences identified fall into two categories: positive and negative imperatives. Positive imperatives account for 165 occurrences (31.4%), while negative imperatives occur in 12 data (2.3%).

Imperative Positive Sentence

"To create your own, make a list of your daily habits: wake up, check my phone, take a shower, etc."

The example represents a directive speech act realized through a positive imperative sentence containing the verb *make*. Although structurally imperative, the sentence functions as advice rather than an authoritative order, as it occurs within a writer-reader motivational context rather than a hierarchical command situation. The directive is conveyed explicitly through the imperative form *make*, which omits the subject, and the inclusion of sequential action expressions (e.g., *wake up, check my phone, take a shower*) reinforces its instructive force, guiding the reader to carry out the suggested steps.

"The impact created by a change in your habits is similar to the effect of shifting the route of an airplane by just a few degrees. Imagine you are flying from Los Angeles to New York City. If a pilot leaving from LAX adjusts the heading just 3.5 degrees south, you will land in Washington, D.C., instead of New York."

The example illustrates a directive speech act expressed through a positive imperative sentence employing the verb *imagine*. The sentence "*Imagine you are flying...*" is used by the author to prompt the reader to visualize a particular situation, thereby functioning as a command inviting the reader to engage with and accept the author's line of reasoning. The subsequent conditional clause (*If ... then ...*) reinforces a cause-and-effect rationale that

encourages behavioral change and conveys a sense of urgency without issuing an overt command. This combination of linguistic features enhances the persuasive force of the statement while maintaining a non-force tone.

Imperative Negative Sentence

“Don’t blame yourself for your faults.”

The example is a directive speech act with a negative imperative sentence. The speech act functions as advice that is delivered explicitly with the intention that the reader takes certain actions (not blaming themselves). Although it is an imperative sentence, the tone used is not authoritative like an order or command, but gives directions that have a supportive and guiding tone. Structurally, the subject “you” does not appear, but contextually, this statement is delivered from the writer/motivator to the reader. The imperative sentence “Don’t blame” is delivered as soft instruction to perform a certain action in the form of a prohibition (not blaming yourself).

“You can’t repeat the same things blindly and expect to become exceptional.”

The example represents a directive speech act realized through a declarative sentence containing the negative modality *can’t*. The author implicitly directs or advises the reader to avoid certain behaviors, specifically not repeating the same actions while expecting extraordinary outcomes. Although structurally resembling a prohibition (“do not do X and expect Y”), the sentence functions as advice, aiming to encourage behavioral change rather than issue a strict command.

DSA’s Interrogative Sentence

The interrogative sentences were found in 36 data or 6.9% of the total 525 data. The interrogative sentences primarily function as rhetorical devices, encouraging readers to engage in self-evaluation and serving as guidance to help them determine appropriate changes in their behavior.

Interrogative Sentence “What”

“My yearly Integrity Report answers three questions: What are the core values that drive my life and work?”

The example represents a directive speech act realized through an interrogative sentence beginning with *what*. The sentence functions as an implicit directive, prompting the reader to pose a similar question to themselves as a form of self-reflection. Linguistically, the directive force is conveyed through reflective question structures and the use of moral concept nouns, such as *core values*, introduced by the clause “*My yearly Integrity Report answers...*”, which serves as a behavioral model for readers to emulate. Although no imperative verbs are used, the

directive effect emerges through the rhetorical question, implicitly encouraging personal evaluation and introspection.

Interrogative Sentence "Who"

"For example, "Who is the type of person who could write a book?" It's probably someone who is consistent and reliable."

The example represents a directive speech act realized through a question sentence beginning with *who*. The sentence functions as an implicit directive, using a rhetorical question to guide the reader in evaluating necessary qualities, such as consistency and reliability, and, where relevant, to adopt or emulate those traits. Linguistically, the directive force is conveyed through: 1) a rhetorical question (*Who is the type of person...?*) that prompts evaluation without requiring an explicit answer; 2) an illustrative phrase (*For example*) that models the desired behavior; and 3) the modal verb *could*, which softens the obligation by framing it as a possibility rather than a requirement. This combination renders the directive implicit, encouraging attitudinal or behavioral change through reflection rather than explicit instruction

Interrogative Sentence "Where and How"

"If your beliefs and worldview play such an important role in your behavior, where do they come from in the first place? How, exactly, is your identity formed? And how can you emphasize new aspects of your identity that serve you and gradually erase the pieces that hinder you?"

The examples represent directive speech acts realized through question sentences beginning with *where* and *how*. These sentences function as implicit directives, using reflective questions to prompt readers to self-evaluate, examine the origins of their beliefs, consider the gradual process of identity formation, and determine how to enhance positive aspects of identity while discarding inhibiting ones. Linguistically, the directive force is conveyed through sequential questioning, which structures and guides the reader's thought process, and through psychological lexicon such as *beliefs*, *worldview*, and *identity*. The sequence of questions produces an implicit directive effect by encouraging self-reflection and conscious identity development without explicit commands.

Realization Mode: Implicit vs Explicit

Based on the analysis, how the author expresses the motivational messages to the readers is implicit and explicit. Implicitly is implied, requiring deeper interpretation, meanwhile explicitly is clear and visible that the statement or the information is a motivation by such illocutionary force. Both categories are presented in table 2 as follows.

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Table 2. Directive speech acts (DSAS) expression

No	The Expression	Data	Percentage
1	Implicit	348	66.3%
	Declarative	312	59.43%
	Interrogative	36	6.86%
	Imperative	0	0
2	Explicit	177	33.7%
	Imperative	177	34.30%
	Declarative	0	0
	Interrogative	0	0
	Total	525	100%

The findings show that implicit directives dominate (66.3%), while explicit directives account for 33.7%. This confirms that indirectness is the primary strategy in motivational discourse. Implicit directives are typically realized through declarative and interrogative forms, where directive meaning emerges from evaluation, reasoning, or reflection. Explicit directives, by contrast, are realized exclusively through imperative forms. These are used selectively to provide clear procedural guidance.

Implicit Declarative Expression

“The most effective way to change your habits is to focus not on what you want to achieve, but on who you wish to become.”

The example conveys motivation that functions as an implicit directive speech act (advise). The author does not directly order the reader to perform certain actions through imperative forms such as “Focus on who you want to become”, but directs the reader through prescriptive declarative statements. The linguistic feature that reflects implicit directives can be seen in the use of the evaluative-superlative structure “*the most effective way*” which assesses and recommends one option as the best, thus pragmatically encouraging readers to follow the advice. The use of the second-person pronominal “you” in the phrase “you want / you wish” personalizes the message and strengthens its directive power.

“Putting this all together, you can see that habits are the path to changing your identity. The most practical way to change who you are is to change what you do.”

In the example, the author encourages readers to act, namely changing habits to change identity. The language element that shows the implicit nature (implied directive) is the use of the pronominal “you” (“*you can see...*”) as the author's message with a declarative sentence. The writer implicitly delivers motivational statements or information implicitly; the pragmatic function is to advise persuasively and suggestively without force intention.

Implicit Interrogative Expression

Implicit interrogatives account for 36 occurrences or 6.85%, functioning mainly as reflective or rhetorical questions that prompt self-evaluation, awareness, and cognitive engagement rather than requesting direct answers. Notably, there are no implicit imperatives, suggesting that imperative forms are consistently used only when the writer intends to be explicit. The examples of implicit interrogative expression presented as follows.

“During the ten-year span from 2007 to 2017, British cyclists won 178 world championships and sixty-six Olympic or Paralympic gold medals and captured five Tour de France victories in what is widely regarded as the most successful run in cycling history. How does this happen?”

The second sentence, “*How does this happen?*” is an interrogative form with implicit directive speech acts. Although grammatically it is a question, pragmatically it does more than ask for an answer. It invites the reader to reflect, think critically, and follow the upcoming explanation. In this way, the writer is indirectly guiding the reader’s attention toward the underlying process behind success.

How does this happen? How does a team of previously ordinary athletes transform into world champions with tiny changes that, at first glance, would seem to make a modest difference at best? Why do small improvements accumulate into such remarkable results, and how can you replicate this approach in your own life?

The directive force is realized through the repeated use of *wh-questions* (*how, why*), especially in “*how can you replicate this approach in your own life?*”. This clause most clearly reflects the directive function because it implicitly encourages the reader to apply the strategy personally, even though no imperative form is used. The pragmatic function of these directives is to invite reflection and to motivate self-application. The writer guides readers to think about causality (how change happens), accumulation (why small improvements matter), and action (how to replicate the approach), without issuing direct commands. Therefore, the directive speech acts are implicit, persuasive, and cognitively engaging, rather than explicit or authoritative.

Explicit Imperative Expression

“Imagine you are flying from Los Angeles to New York City.”

The sentence “*Imagine you are flying from Los Angeles to New York City.*” is an explicit directive because it is expressed in the imperative mood, using the base verb *imagine* without a subject. Linguistically, this imperative structure directly instructs the reader to perform a mental action. The pragmatic function of this directive is to invite visualization, guiding the reader to actively engage with the example. The following sentence, “*If a pilot leaving from LAX adjusts the heading*

just 3.5 degrees south, you will land in Washington, D.C., instead of New York," is declarative and functions implicitly to support the directive by explaining the consequence of a small change.

"Forget about goals, focus on the system instead."

The expression is a clearly explicit directive speech act, it is realized through imperative clauses using base-form verbs (*forget, focus*) with the subject implicitly omitted, which is a defining feature of imperatives in English. The first clause, "*Forget about goals,*" is a negative directive that instructs the reader to abandon a particular way of thinking, while the second clause, "*Focus on systems instead,*" is a positive directive that redirects the reader toward an alternative action. Pragmatically, the dominant function of this directive is to instruct as the writer directly tells the reader what to stop doing and what to do instead, without mitigation through modals (*should, need to*) or conditional clauses, the directive force is explicit, authoritative, and action-oriented.

Directive Speech Acts Function

Theoretically, Searle classifies directive speech acts into several functions, which focus on the pragmatic function of an utterance or sentence, such as to *ask, order, command, request, beg, plead, entreat, invite, permit, advise*, Searle (2002). However, the results of the analysis of the motivational text *Atomic Habits* indicate that the directive speech acts identified are limited to *ask, invite, and advise*. In addition, the analysis reveals the presence of another function, namely instruction (*to instruct*), which is not explicitly included in Searle's original classification. These categories of directive speech acts are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. DSAs function of *Atomic Habits*

No	Pragmatical Function	Data	Percentage
1	Advise	291	55.43%
2	Instruct	177	33.71%
3	Invite	57	10.86%
	Total	525	100%

The analysis identifies three primary directive functions: advising (55.43%), instructing (33.71%), and inviting (10.86%). Advising is the most dominant function and is typically realized through declarative forms that present evaluative statements or general principles. These utterances recommend actions while preserving reader autonomy. Instruction occurs when the author provides concrete, procedural guidance, often through imperative forms. Unlike advice, instruction is more action-oriented and specific. Invitation functions to engage readers cognitively, often through imagination or reflection. This function is frequently realized through interrogative or modal constructions, encouraging readers to interpret and internalize ideas rather than simply act on them.

DSAs Function of Advise

"The entrepreneur and investor Naval Ravikant has said, "To write a great book, you must first become the book."

The example is a citing sentence from Naval Ravikant delivered by the author which pragmatically the function of this directive speech act is *to advise*. The sentence is in declarative sentence with modal verb "*must*" introduce a strong sense of necessity or obligation, thereby the directive is implicit rather than explicit, due to readers are more inclined to interpret it as reputable advice rather than a command that must be immediately obeyed. The author guides and encourages the reader to adopt a particular course of action, namely, to develop the identity, mindset, and habits of a great writer before expecting to produce a great book.

If a pilot leaving from LAX adjusts the heading just 3.5 degrees south, you will land in Washington, D.C., instead of New York.

The statement realizes a directive speech act implicitly. Its primary pragmatic function is to advise. By illustrating how a very small adjustment leads to a drastically different outcome, the author indirectly encourages the reader to pay attention to small changes in behavior. The advice is not given directly but conveyed through an analogy, prompting reflection and behavioral adjustment.

DSAs Function of Instruct

"Start there and work backward from the results you want to the type of person who could get those results."

In terms of pragmatic function, the sentence functions primarily to instruct, not merely to advise or invite. The author provides a procedural guideline—a concrete method for approaching change by reasoning backward from desired results to identity. Unlike advice, which typically allows more discretion and is often softened with modals (*should, might*), this instruction is direct and method-oriented, indicating how the reader ought to proceed step by step.

DSAs Function of Invite

"You can imagine them like the layers of an onion."

The action of *imagining* which pragmatically more closely with the function of invitation (*to invite*) than with evaluative advice (*to advise*). The sentence functions as an implicit directive speech act, realized through modality clause, with the dominant pragmatic function to invite.

“What progress is really like. Imagine that you have an ice cube sitting on the table in front of you. the ice begins to melt. a one-degree shift, seemingly no different from the temperature increases before it, has unlocked a huge change.”

The imperative “*Imagine ...*” directs the reader to perform a specific cognitive action (visualizing a scenario) in order to understand a concept. This aligns with instruction, because the author is guiding the reader step by step toward a particular interpretation of progress. The instruction is implicit, since it teaches a principle rather than commanding real-world behavior.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the realization and pragmatic functions of directive speech acts in *Atomic Habits* by James Clear focusing on sentence types, syntactic patterns, modes of realization, and pragmatic functions within Searle’s framework. The findings show that directive meanings are predominantly realized through declarative constructions, particularly simple subject-verb structures, modal expressions, and conditional clauses. These forms enable the author to convey behavioral guidance indirectly, framing directives as general principles rather than explicit commands.

In terms of pragmatic function, advising is the most dominant category, followed by instructing and inviting. This distribution indicates that motivational discourse tends to prioritize supportive and persuasive guidance over authoritative direction. The preference for implicit directives suggests that maintaining the reader’s autonomy is a key rhetorical strategy, allowing recommendations to be internalized rather than imposed.

Beyond describing linguistic patterns, this study contributes to pragmatics and discourse analysis by demonstrating how directive speech acts operate systematically in motivational writing through indirectness, modality, and evaluative framing. It highlights that directive force is not solely dependent on grammatical mood but can emerge from semantic and rhetorical structures, reinforcing the importance of context in interpreting illocutionary meaning.

However, this study is limited to a motivational text, which may not fully represent the broader genre. Future research could expand the dataset by examining multiple motivational or self-help books, or by comparing directive strategies across different genres or cultural contexts. Further studies might also explore reader reception to better understand how implicit directives influence interpretation and behavioral change.

DECLARATION

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