# Getting Students to Do or Say Something: A Pragmatic Analysis of Teachers' Directives in Classroom Discourse in a State University

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## Abstract

This qualitative study demonstrates the encoding of classroom directives and modifications by Bachelor in Secondary Education (BSED) English major student-teachers. It explores the linguistic choices and strategies used in "attemtps to get students to do something" drawn from John Searle's Speech Act theory. From transcriptions of video recordings, the turns that constitute directives were extracted and coded as regulative or instructional and direct or indirect using adapted speech acts categories and politeness structures from the Cross-Cultural Speech Acts Realization Project (CCSARP) of Blum-Kulka et al. The results reveal that regulative directives and indirect forms were predominantly used. Mitigation in "detour situations" was performed using politeness markers and tone of the voice. As ESL speakers, the student-teachers possessed a repertoire of linguistic devices used to achieve the goals of interaction. They exhibited control as a dominant teacher role by using regulative directives. It is recommended that they be given more training to enhance pragmatic awareness and improve grammatical competence.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Classroom Discourse, Linguistic Politeness

## Introduction

The school is a social institution that offers a rich resource for the study of the mechanisms of language and the construction of meanings. Halliday describes the school as a "communication network" where "sharing of experience, expression of solidarity, decision-making and planning" as well as "forms of verbal control, transmission of orders and the like" take place (230). By virtue of the nature of the interactions and the relationships or roles that are prescribed within the network, there will be "patterns of language in use peculiar to it" which may either be "relatively fixed and constant or fluid and shifting" (Doughty qtd. in Halliday 231).

Very often, the classroom is characterized by "unequal power speech exchange" in which teachers have the right to organize topics and turns. Classroom directives are naturally embedded in the teacher's implementation of instructional goals and learning tasks. Directives in classroom register are classified as instructional or "the pedagogic discourse where fields of knowledge are adapted to the classroom context" and as regulative or "the frame for the instructional talk which spells out the purpose, order and direction of the teaching/learning activities that take place and how the students and teachers are positioned in them" (Christie qtd. in Dalton-Puffer and Nikula 241–267).

However, this did not seem to be the case in the study of Victoria (17–32) on power and politeness in Philippine Higher Education classrooms. The professor-participants in the study employed linguistic strategies to minimize the effects of teacher-student power differential. Even as asymmetry was achieved, the need of the students to preserve face was also addressed. This implied that the professors were aware of the face needs of more mature learners and possessed a repertoire that enabled them to defuse power in interaction.

This seemingly unpredictable, cyclical, and dynamic interaction between teacher and students, as well as the language used by teachers in the classroom, is what thee study will look into. This study will describe the language used by

teachers in the classroom, particularly the encoding of directives by English major student-teachers in a Bachelor in Secondary Education (BSEd) program and will ask the main question: *How do student-teachers encode classroom directives?* The following sub-questions will also be answered:

1. What are the goals (regulative or instructional) of student-teachers' directives in the classroom?

2. What strategies (direct or indirect) do the student-teachers use to encode directives?

3. How are the directives modified?

4. What conditions or "detour" situations give rise to mitigating or aggravating modifications?

In order to answer the questions posed, theories on speech, implicatures, context, and face will used.

*Speech Acts.* Directives are defined as speech acts or "attempts of the teacher to get a student to do something concrete in the future" (Yates qtd. in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 72). This is derived from Austin's Speech Act Theory that started with the notion that not all sentences used in making statements are verifiable as true or false (54–65). Searle extended the theory to describe the different kinds of acts that utterances can perform. Also called *illocutionary acts,* speech acts are governed by rules (e.g., etiquette and interpersonal relationships) and carry propositions and meanings. Searle's taxonomy of speech acts include *assertives* (telling people how things are); *directives* (trying to get people to do things); *commissives* (committing to do things); *expressives* (expressing feelings and attitudes); and *declaratives* (bringing changes into the world through utterances). In actual discourse, an utterance can fit into one or more categories. For instance, in the utterance, *Would you mind turning down the volume?,* the speaker is both asking a question and hinting at a request (30–39).

*Implicatures and the Cooperative Principle* (*CP*). In addition, Grice posited that an utterance may not explicitly encode the speaker's communicative

intent and laid down the concept of *implicature*. Implicatures cover "a variety of non-explicit meanings", such as suggestions and implications. The implicature is *conventional* when meaning is attached to the linguistic forms (*Pass your assignments*), and *conversational* when meaning is managed in linguistic interaction such as in conversations (the teacher saying, *Do we have volunteers to go to the board?*) (Verschueren 30–36). The problem of indirectness surfaces in conversational implicatures through speakers' and hearers' willingness to enter into the conversation, an issue that Grice addressed in the *Cooperative Principle* (*CP*) of conversation. The CP embodies the general principle: *Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which speakers are engaged.* It consists of four general maxims that will lead to cooperation between participants in conversation: *Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner.* However, cooperation cannot be assumed nor predicted. In classroom discourse, meanings evolve and modifications are likely to be made out of the teacher's intention to bring the interaction into a mutually fulfilling activity.

*Context.* The relationship between language and context—the *ethnography of communication*—is described in Hymes's framework in linguistic anthropology. Ethnography aims to collect, analyze, and describe data about "the ways in which social meaning is conveyed, constructed, and negotiated." An ethnographic framework takes into account the components of the communicative event: participants, channels and modes of use, codes shared by the participants, settings, forms of messages and their genres, topics and comments, and events and their kinds and characteristics. In a communicative event, participants must have knowledge of the *when*, *where*, *between whom*, *in what manner*, and *in what particular circumstances* the communication act is taking place. Hymes would later refer to this ability as *communicative* competence or that aspect of competence that enables the speaker "to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts," a paradigm that was explored in language teaching by Canale and Swain (qtd. in Brown 206) to produce speakers and users who can

exhibit competence in the grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic dimensions of language use.

Van Dijk built on his earlier theories of context and delimited the definitions by proposing a *sociocognitive* approach to context as "not the social situation that influences (or is influenced) by discourse, but the way the participants *define* such a situation" and update the interaction. A *mental model* of context underlies the participants' mental constructs and interpretation of the communication situation. Context is *subjective.* Participants co-create context according to what they bring into the communication in terms of *schema* or prior knowledge. In this model, van Dijk laid out possible categories in the context of interaction similar in many respects to Hymes' framework: setting, participants, and communicative and other actions/events.

*The Concept of "Face" and Linguistic Politeness.* The concept of polite social behavior or etiquette was derived from the notion of "face" attributed to Goffman. Interaction is believed to be a form of social *ritual* where participants act out a *line* or a "pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts." The social value that a participant projects, either willfully or consequently as a result of taking a line, is her/his "face." A person does not only work to save or preserve face, but also makes an effort to be considerate of the face of others by way of verbal and nonverbal messages. This linguistic dimension formed the *universal politeness theory* that Brown and Levinson, and later Watts worked on as *linguistic politeness. Politeness* is defined as "the means employed to show awareness of another person's face." *Positive politeness* is oriented to the positive face of the hearer. *Negative politeness* is oriented toward the boundaries that the hearer has established for herself/himself. Hence, the speaker attempts to *redress* (satisfy) the claim to territory by using hedges, questions, formal devices, and the like.

## Method

The *qualitative research* design was used for the study since this kind of research investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or

materials with greater emphasis on holistic descriptions (Fraenkel and Wallen 423–426). To measure data, the processes of contextualization, understanding, and interpretation were employed with minor use of numerical indices. *Linguistic ethnography,* a framework that conjoins the two fields of ethnography and linguistics (Baxter 117–137) was also used as an approach to analyze the data for this study. There were twelve (12) participants: BSED student-teachers majoring in English at the West Visayas State University College of Education in Iloilo City, of which nine (9) were females and three (3) were males. The data were collected through audio-video recording in order to capture the language, gestures, facial expressions, and movements in the classroom. The data collection covered four months of school days or one semester. The most number of class observations for a participant was eleven (11) and the least was four (4). These sessions depended on the distribution of teaching assignments by the critic-teachers. Field notes were taken to document the details pertaining to each class period, i.e., the date of observation, topic or subject matter, activities conducted by the student teachers, and other remarks or comments on student-teachers' and students' behavior.

The data were transcribed using conventions adapted from Tannen (qtd. in Schiffrin). In adapting the transcription symbols from these two sources, the criteria of *accessibility* (notations are familiar to the target readers of teachers and student-teachers) and *economy* (space is used up meaningfully) were considered (Clark 42–44 or 89–90). To identify the directives, a criterion was adapted from the study of Dalton-Puffer and Nikula. If what follows interactionally suggests that students interpreted them as directives, they were taken into account regardless of whether or not the hearer acknowledged this obligation. In classroom interaction, directives are realized in orders, requests, questions, instructions and directions, and nomination of students (Yates 67–97; Dalton-Puffer and Nikula 241–267). The directives were placed into matrices. The goals of the directives were identified and the strategies were categorized based on Blum-Kulka et al.'s Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). Internal or external modifications and forms of linguistic encoding were identified based on Brown and Levinson's model of politeness

and Watts' categories of linguistic politeness. Stress and emphasis and intonation patterns were likewise coded and analyzed. Data from naturalistic and oral language use may yield forms that occur and recur (Gass and Mackey). The matrices provided a general picture of the occurrences and recurrences of the directives and modifications. Frequency count and percentage were used to establish the predominant goals of teacher directives. The strategies and other moves, on the other hand, were described and analyzed. Conclusions were then drawn from the linguistic data.

## Results and Discussion

The major findings of the study are the following:

1) The student-teachers achieved both goals of classroom directives which were encoded as requests for information or *instructional* and requests for action, services, or goods or *regulative*. It was found that the regulative directives were used more frequently than the instructional directives in facilitating, guiding, directing, and leading the class. In long turns made by the student-teachers for difficult or unfamiliar topics, the instructional and regulative directives co-occurred or overlapped. *Co-occurrences* mean that learning content is not only taught but also managed and directed by the student-teachers. As shown in the frequency count in Appendix 1, the student-teachers were inclined to use more regulative directives, in a sense "regulating" the behavior of students. There were frequent calls to put the class in order, to ask the students to obey instructions and perform tasks, to assign them into groups, and other similar tasks.

2) In terms of strategies used, the indirect strategies were prevalent over direct ones. *Indirectness* rendered the directives more polite and less imposing. It was achieved through the use of questions, suggestive formula, query preparatory, strong hints, and mild hints. The direct forms used, on the other hand, were imperatives, performatives, hedged performatives, obligation statements, and want statements. *Directness* enabled the student teachers to

explicitly express what they wanted done or accomplished in the class but were also used with devices that mitigated the imposition of the directives. Both direct and indirect forms were used across instructional and regulative directives. The summary of indirect and direct strategies from the transcribed data is shown in Appendices 3 and 4.

In the Philippine context, indirectness in making requests is often employed. Tayab-Repe observed that the socio-cultural factors of *hiya* and the preponderance of polite forms of address such as *po* and *opo* account for the indirectness among Filipino interlocutors. Even insults are delivered by using hints or jokes. Victoria's study on power and politeness in higher education classrooms in the Philippines likewise revealed that professors are able to achieve the goal of classroom instruction by trying to be more relational with students. These dimensions of culture serve to contradict the findings of Dalton-Puffer and Nikula that directness is the "normal case" in classroom settings.

3) Modifications or changes in the encoding of directives were made through the use of internal or external devices. Internal devices are used within the utterance itself and do not alter the meaning of the head act. The most common mitigating lexical choices were the politeness markers *please* and *kindly*. The student-teachers also mitigated using hedges, understaters, minimizers, consultative devices, subjectivizers, modals (*may*, *can*), deictic markers, colloquialisms (guys, people), appealers, transitional devices, cajolers and diminutive terms. External devices, on the other hand, are supportive moves that follow through the head act. These were shown in the data as follow-up questions, repetitions, or restatements.

Modifications were observed in "detour situations" or junctures when a directive was not complied with or was ignored by the students. In these encounters, the student-teachers had to employ other linguistic means to implement the goal of the directive until they arrived at "shared knowledge" or "common ground" (Noveck and Sperber 59–62). The reformulation of speech in detour situations arose from various factors that interplayed to create a dynamic context which could be managed through language use.

4) Modifications had mitigating or aggravating effects, or both, as inferred from the linguistic and situational contexts and force of the utterance. The mitigating external modifications or supportive moves found in the linguistic data were rephrasing or restatement, pre- or post- grounder, follow-up questions, preparator or preface, disarmer, and promise of a reward. These moves softened the impact of directives. The student-teachers used them to establish rapport with the students and to engage them in discussions and activities. Aggravating external moves, on the other hand, were bald-on-record strategies aimed at explicitly calling attention to behaviour such as noise, inattentiveness, uncooperativeness, and the like. These were delivered through sarcasm or insult, warning, moralizing, and mild punishment. Aggravating internal modifiers were also used such as modals (*must*, *should*), adverbs of intensity, and the use of the formal '*Mr.*' or '*Ms.*" as alerters.

5) The expression *OK*, the conjuctions *and*, *so*, and *or*, and deictic *now* appeared to be favorite expressions. They were used as signals or cues for the next turn or move in the discourse and are inferred from the context through stress or emphasis. Their occurrences in context, position in the utterance, and the tone in which they were delivered were found to have mitigating or intensifying effects. Here are some examples from the transcripts:

1. Uhum ... a festival. **And** what do you think is the place or setting?
2. Ok, are you done? **Ok**, I'll give you five minutes to read the story "The Trout", and after that we will have a game.
3. I will just read the lines *twice*. **So** listen carefully and be creative.
4. Could be! **Ok**. What is the tone or the mood of the poem?
5. **And** what do you think? What kind of ancient buildings are they?
6. **Now, ok!** You have seen here a ... or pictures here or images. Who can tell me something about these images.

6) The mitigating or intensifying effects of the tone of the voice were easily discernible. A rising intonation or continuing intonation, non-linguistic prompts, and hesitators downplayed the force of directives. On the other hand,

an emphatic word stress, a lengthened syllable, an animated or heightened tone, and a falling intonation for questions were coded to be aggravating.

7) At the level of syntax, internal modifications were made. The student teacher seemed to favor the use of *noun clauses* in the position of the NP (noun phrase) in the sentence. Wordiness, however, carried a mitigating effect as preparatory for the head act or directive. Errors in syntax were not considered as linguistic choices or strategies but they were found to affect the force of the directives; hence, they had bearing on pragmatic meaning as the student could infer incorrectly from the utterance of the student-teacher, or the student-teacher may deliver the wrong intent for the directives. Verbose constructions resulted in run-on sentences and unparallel structures that confused the meaning of the directives.

## Conclusion

The traditional hierarchical relationship between teacher and students prevails in the classroom setting, as reflected in the use of more regulative than instructional directives. The immediate goal of the teacher was to direct and guide learning habits and behavior and provide opportunities for the students to experience or accomplish these. On the other hand, most of the instructional directives consisted of questions on content of the lesson and students' ideas or opinions. Despite a fairly wide repertoire of lexical phrases used for internal modification, the student-teachers' supportive moves were verbose and open to many errors. Hence, they would need more instruction on parallel structures, discourse coherence, and appropriate use of discourse markers to avoid the unnecessary and oftentimes empty use of *and*, *so*, and *OK*. In general, through language use, the student-teachers were also able to position themselves as impositive or non-impositive, an indication of *sociolinguistic* and *strategic competence*.

Classroom directives are generally directed toward students. As hearers, they infer the meaning of the directives and perform or respond accordingly and appropriately. However, in encountering detour situations where

modifications have to made, it is the speaker—the student-teacher—who works out the linguistic and situational contexts and chooses strategies and devices to express procedural meaning and "get the students to do something."

The results of the study contradict the assertion in the work of Dalton-Puffer and Nikula that the classroom as an institutional context limits the use of directives into directness. This will hold true if the teachers were limited to the instructional goal of delivering content or subject matter. However, the transcripts on classroom discourse would show that the interpersonal function of language enabled the student-teachers to perform different roles, manage different tasks, and express themselves using various linguistic forms and strategies.

The results of the study imply that the methodology and content courses for Bachelor in Secondary Education (English) should be reviewed. In terms of methodology, student-teachers need to be reoriented about what constitutes communicative tasks. Teachers should be able to guide students in the processes of creating meaning and choosing appropriate language forms that tasks require.

The sub-branches of linguistics can be introduced early in the undergraduate level to include pragmatics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and an introduction to discourse studies. These do not have to wait until graduate school. If students are exposed only to the rules of the language and discrete grammar exercises, the tendency is for the type of English informally referred to as "book English" to be predominantly used. The study also bears implications for the teaching of English along the interlanguage pragmatics paradigm. As users of English as a second language, Filipino learners find themselves in a continuum of transitioning from a first language (L1), i.e., a regional language or the mother tongue, into the learning of a second language (L2), e.g., English. They attempt to approximate the L2 or become native-like speakers, which according to Selinker is not likely to be successful (15–21). Renandya posited that if native-like competence or proficiency cannot be fully achieved, a realistic perspective is to be taken in teaching English as L2

by focusing as well on differences in the varieties of English used rather than on learner errors alone.

Overall, the study has valuable implications for the training, updating, and broadening of perspectives of language teachers in the Philippines and should be in the hub of tertiary and postgraduate programs, teacher training institutions, and accredited language organizations and societies in the country.

It is recommended that future studies on directive speech acts in the classroom be expanded to include the discourse of students. Looking into turn-taking, particularly, could provide further insight into context in dynamic situations and how teachers and students arrive at a common ground and accomplish goals in the classroom. Language teachers and those involved in language planning for teacher education programs may use the results as a basis to provide enhancement for the grammatical competence and pragmatic awareness of student teachers. In-service training for pre-service teachers can be conducted before the fourth year of the BS program. In teaching pragmatics, authentic materials from the natural and everyday discourse of language speakers can be used. Examples of these in the oral modality are transcriptions, recordings, interviews, and broadcasts. In the written modality, advertisements, office memoranda, school communication, announcements, and the like can be used as language resource. Further studies on the speech acts performance of English users in the Philippines and in institutional settings would be valuable. Researchers who are interested in corpora or discourse studies could take this research direction and compare the speech acts production of English users in the Philippines with those of other Asian speakers/users of English. It is further recommended that the research methodology include interviewing the respondents to triangulate the transcribed data.

## Appendices

*Appendix 1.Frequency Count (Number of Directives, Number of Instructional and Regulatory Directives and Co-occurrences)*

| Student Teacher (ST) | Number of Class Observations | Number of Directives (N) | Instructional | Regulatory | Co-occurrences |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ST 1 | 8 | 104 | 27 (26%) | 57 (55%) | 20 (19%) |
| ST 2 | 9 | 100 | 36 (36%) | 48 (48%) | 16 (16%) |
| ST 3 | 10 | 142 | 37 (26%) | 82 (57%) | 24 (17%) |
| ST 4 | 6 | 112 | 9 ( 8%) | 94 (84%) | 9 (8%) |
| ST 5 | 9 | 101 | 38 (38%) | 48 (47%) | 15 (15%) |
| ST 6 | 7 | 192 | 130 (68%) | 40 (21%) | 22 (11%) |
| ST 7 | 10 | 114 | 17 (15%) | 82 (72%) | 15 (13%) |
| ST 8 | 10 | 203 | 49 (24%) | 123 (61%) | 31 (15%) |
| ST 9 | 7 | 109 | 34 (31%) | 70 (64%) | 5 (5%) |
| ST 10 | 11 | 244 | 88 (36%) | 128 (52%) | 28 (11%) |
| ST 11 | 4 | 57 | 27 (47%) | 19 (34%) | 11 (19%) |
| ST 12 | 8 | 123 | 44 (36%) | 63 (51%) | 16 (13%) |
| Total | 99 | 1,601 | 536 (34%) | 854 (53%) | 212 (13%) |

## *Appendix 2.1Examples of Regulative Directives*

ST7-E1

17  Are you in your groups now? *Each group will choose their secretary. If you have

18  chosen your secretary, stand up. Stand up.

ST7-E1

23  Students, keep quiet. *So here is the criteria for the game. *I will give a word then

24  your group will add words or group of words out of the word that I will give

25  create a different idea or shade or meaning. For example I will give a word ho:t.?

26  (Writes the word on the board.)

## *Appendix 2.2 Examples of Instructional Directives*

ST9-E1

75  Because caress has passion. Passionate. Ok. What else? Caress? When you just

76  touch?

ST11-E1

97   How then do you relate this line to be idle is to become a stranger to
      the seasons.

98   How can you relate this line to your life as a *student*? For to be idle is
      to become a

99   stranger to the seasons ... Any idea? ... Yes?

## Appendix 2.3 Examples of Co-occurrences

ST3-E4

279  *Ok, please open your book on page two hundred six. Ok, but before
      we proceed

280  to our lesson, as a review, ahm how is characterization done? Hmm?
      How is

281  characterization done. Hmm? Yes, Mary Rose? Ok, Kim? How is
      characterization

282  done. Hmm? Yes?

ST7-E2

264  See, you're not listening. Again, please repeat what is present tense.
      What is the

265  function of present tense? Page one hundred fifty seven.

## Appendix 3.Summary of Indirect Strategies in the Encoding of Directives

| Indirect Strategy | Examples |
|---|---|
| Questions | What books have you read lately?<br>Do you need time to reformulate your answer? |
| Suggestory formulae (conventionally indirect) | How about Maphet? Go ahead. What can you say about the pictures?<br>How about from this group? Very silent. |
| Query preparatory (conventionally indirect) | So now. May I ask you. What meaning of poetry do you like most here.<br>If I gave you a chance to give me a song that triggers your emotions, what would that be? And why? |
| Strong hint (non-conventionally indirect) | Hmm. You are not reading your books? It's the Zenith that you are reading.<br>Ok. Somebody is talking here in front, |
| Mild hint (non-conventionally indirect) | That girl who is holding a magazine. *Is that a comics or a magazine? Excuse me.<br>I can see that you are already munching your lollipops. |
| *Inclusive perspective (speaker-hearer) | What do we mean here. Glamour of feast nights. When we say glamour of feast nights are we talking about gatherings?<br>Let's take letter c. May we have … volunteer? May we have Precious? |
| * Inclusive perspective is an additional category. | |

## Appendix 4. Summary of Direct Strategies in the Encoding of Directives

| Strategy | Examples |
|---|---|
| Imperative | Return to you seats first,<br>Choose someone to *speak* for the group. |
| Performative | Please stand. I am asking you.<br>*We will tap the desk on words with stress. |
| Hedged performative | I would like to hear from Aila.<br>So this time, I like you to open your textbook on page … (writes on the board) two hundred forty six. |
| Obligation statement | You need to answer. It's only a song.<br>Next time, Andrew, when your classmates are reading you have to read also. |
| Want statement | I *don't* want to see any exact words or phrases from the text.<br>I want you to get any piece of paper … Any piece. |
| *Hearer perspective | Class, where do you usually see these words?<br>Yes, you Charina. You want to speak here in front? |
| *Declarative | You are free to write anything.<br>Your scores are not progressing! |
| * Additional categories | |

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