

A PRAGMATIC EXAMINATION OF TEACHERS' SPEECH ACTS IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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ABSTRAK

Pengelolaan bahasa dalam kegiatan pembelajaran memiliki peranan sentral dalam membangun interaksi yang produktif antara guru dan peserta didik. Seluruh bentuk komunikasi di kelas tampak melalui tindak tutur yang digunakan selama proses instruksional berlangsung. Mengacu pada kerangka kategorisasi Searle, tindak tutur dapat diklasifikasikan ke dalam lima bentuk utama, yakni asertif, direktif, komisif, ekspresif, dan deklaratif. Penelitian ini dimaksudkan untuk mengungkap variasi jenis tindak tutur serta fungsi komunikatifnya sebagaimana direalisasikan oleh pengajar pada kelas Speaking 3–Advanced di Program Studi Bisnis dan Humaniora Institut Teknologi Bisnis dan Bahasa Dian Cipta Cendikia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan melakukan observasi langsung terhadap interaksi kelas yang berlangsung secara alami. Berdasarkan hasil temuan, guru mendominasi produksi ujaran dibandingkan mahasiswa. Tindak tutur direktif muncul dengan persentase tertinggi dan berperan dalam mengarahkan kegiatan, menjaga alur pembelajaran, memberikan instruksi, serta memandu tanggapan mahasiswa. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa peran guru tidak terbatas pada penyampaian materi, tetapi juga sebagai pengatur interaksi dan pengendali dinamika kelas melalui penggunaan variasi tindak tutur.

Kata Kunci: *tindak tutur, kategori tindak tutur, fungsi tindak tutur*

ABSTRACT

The strategic use of language during instruction is essential for creating meaningful interaction between teachers and learners. Forms of communication occurring in the classroom are manifested through speech acts that structure the flow of teaching and learning. Drawing on Searle's typology, these speech acts may appear as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, or declarations. This study aims to explore the types and communicative functions of speech acts employed by the teacher in the Speaking 3–Advanced class of the Business and Humanities Study Program at Institut Teknologi Bisnis and Bahasa Dian Cipta Cendikia. Utilizing a qualitative research design, natural classroom interactions were observed and analyzed to capture authentic pedagogical communication. The findings reveal that the teacher produced significantly more utterances than the students, with directive speech acts occurring most frequently. These directives served multiple pedagogical purposes, such as managing classroom procedures, structuring activities, giving instructions, and prompting student responses. The results affirm the teacher's role not only as a provider of academic content but also as a key manager of classroom discourse through diverse speech act realizations.

Keywords: *speech act, speech act categories, communicative functions*

INTRODUCTION

Language has long been understood as more than a system of signs or grammatical structures; it is a social and cultural tool that enables people to perform countless forms of interaction in everyday life. Through language, speakers negotiate meanings, maintain relationships, and respond to various communicative needs such as informing, persuading,

questioning, or expressing attitudes (Hikmah, 2015). This multifunctional nature of language illustrates that communication is inseparable from human activity, as individuals rely on linguistic choices to convey intentions and interpret others' messages within specific social contexts. Furthermore, because language reflects shared norms, values, and expectations within a community, its role extends beyond exchanging information toward shaping the dynamics of interpersonal interaction. Consequently, language becomes indispensable not only in daily communication but also in institutional settings where clarity, precision, and appropriateness influence the achievement of communicative goals.

In the field of education, language is not merely a vehicle for delivering subject matter; it forms the backbone of pedagogical practice. Teachers depend on linguistic strategies to guide thinking, structure learning activities, and foster supportive environments. As noted in various studies, the verbal behavior of teachers significantly affects students' cognitive engagement and classroom climate (Susanti et al., 2020; Zayed, 2014). The language used in instructional exchanges, often termed classroom speech acts, plays a vital role in shaping the flow of interaction, especially because teachers and students continuously negotiate meaning, clarify concepts, and respond to one another's contributions (Budiasih, 2019; Suhirman, 2016). Classroom communication is therefore a dynamic process that relies heavily on pragmatic competence, both from teachers who must adapt their expressions to instructional needs and from students who must interpret those expressions accurately.

Speech act theory provides an essential analytical framework for understanding how utterances perform actions. Classical pragmatic scholars distinguish locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary layers of meaning, each representing a different dimension of communicative intention and effect (Austin, 1962; Parker, 1986). While the locutionary aspect concerns the literal expression, illocution focuses on the function intended by the speaker, and perlocution relates to the outcome experienced by the hearer. These distinctions underscore the complexity of analyzing spoken language, especially because identical utterances may yield vastly different interpretations depending on contextual cues and cultural expectations (Maruti et al., 2021). For example, a simple declarative sentence can serve as a polite request, a gentle warning, or even a subtle complaint depending on intonation, interpersonal relationships, or situational needs (Azhari et al., 2018). Thus, pragmatic analysis requires attention to both linguistic forms and the surrounding circumstances that shape meaning.

Among the various types of speech acts, directives hold a particularly central position in classroom discourse. Teachers routinely employ directives, whether in the form of commands, suggestions, requests, questions, or hints, to manage classroom activities and facilitate students' understanding (Suryandani & Budasi, 2022; Darong, 2024). Research shows that the selection of directive forms is influenced by factors such as institutional hierarchy, cultural norms, learners' proficiency, and instructional objectives (Handayani, 2016; Apriastuti, 2019). In some contexts, teachers may prefer more authoritative imperatives, whereas in others they may choose polite suggestions or indirect hints to maintain rapport or encourage autonomy. Studies on classroom pragmatics in different cultural settings also reveal significant variation in how teachers structure their interactions, reflecting differing assumptions about authority and communication (Rafli, 2018; Bahing et al., 2018). These variations make directive speech acts a productive area for examining how language functions within educational environments.

Despite the extensive body of research addressing speech acts across multiple communicative contexts, certain gaps remain in the analysis of speech acts in instructional settings. A considerable number of previous studies have focused on specific forms such as apologies (Hikmah, 2015), promises (Ariff & Mugableh, 2013), or directives in general

classroom interactions. However, comprehensive investigations that integrate cultural pragmatics, pedagogical aims, teacher, student power relations, and the interactional organization of classroom discourse are still relatively limited (Christison, 2018). In particular, there is a lack of studies that simultaneously address how various categories of illocutionary acts, assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, co-exist and interact within the same instructional event. This creates an important gap in understanding how pragmatic functions are distributed and enacted in real learning situations where instructional goals, social relationships, and communicative intentions intersect.

In response to these gaps, the present study seeks to conduct a detailed analysis of speech acts found in selected instructional interactions, emphasizing how teachers and students employ various types of illocutionary acts to achieve specific communicative purposes. By examining authentic utterances and situating them within their pedagogical contexts, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how linguistic choices reflect broader dynamics of classroom communication. The findings are expected to shed light on the pragmatic mechanisms underlying instructional exchanges and to offer insights into how effective communication strategies can support learning and engagement. Furthermore, by incorporating a wide range of speech act functions and highlighting their interplay within educational settings, this study aspires to enrich the literature on classroom pragmatics and offer practical implications for teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study examined the dynamics of classroom interaction during the teaching and learning process in the Speaking 3–Advanced class of the Business and Humanities study program at Institut Teknologi Bisnis dan Bahasa Dian Cipta Cendikia. The research specifically aimed to identify two aspects of teacher talk: (1) the types of speech acts produced by the teachers, and (2) the functions served by those speech acts. Given that the focus of the study was on naturally occurring communication within the classroom, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate. The data source consisted of real-time verbal interaction exchanged during instructional activities, allowing the researcher to capture authentic pedagogical discourse as it unfolded. This type of investigation aligns with classroom ethnography, in which researchers observe linguistic behavior in its natural instructional setting. Accordingly, the study concentrated on teachers' utterances, particularly those produced by instructors teaching at the tenth-grade level.

Data were primarily obtained through direct classroom observation supported by audio recording to ensure accuracy and completeness. The raw data consisted of spoken sentences produced by the teachers throughout the instructional process. Once collected, the data were processed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of analysis, which involves three cyclical and interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Prior to reducing the data, all recorded utterances were carefully transcribed to ensure that each instance of teacher talk was documented in its full linguistic form. After transcription, the researcher selected relevant utterances and entered them into an analytical profile that outlined essential characteristics of each speech act. The data set was then systematically classified and categorized based on predetermined analytical criteria, enabling the researcher to identify recurring patterns, categorize specific speech act types, and interpret their communicative functions within the classroom context.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Table 1. Distribution of Speech Act Types in Classroom Interaction

| Speech Act Type (Searle) | Percentage / Frequency | Examples of Realizations | Primary Functions in Classroom |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Directives | 45% (dominant) | Questions (wh-questions, yes/no questions), commands, requests | Directing students' actions, organizing lesson flow, checking comprehension |
| Assertives | 40% | Stating, reporting, suggesting, complaining | Providing information, clarifying concepts, giving feedback and evaluation |
| Expressives | 1.3% | Praise, emotional expressions, supportive remarks | Building interpersonal rapport; maintaining a positive classroom climate |
| Commissives | 0.64% | Promises ("See you..."), commitments | Sustaining social relations and conversational continuity |
| Declarations | 0% | None found in the data | , |

Table 1 illustrates the overall distribution of speech act categories identified in the classroom interaction. The data clearly show that directive speech acts dominate the discourse, accounting for nearly half of all utterances. This dominance reflects the central instructional role of teachers, who frequently employ questions, commands, and requests to direct student activities and maintain lesson continuity. Assertives constitute the second-largest portion, indicating the teacher's frequent role in presenting information, restating concepts, and providing evaluative comments. Expressives and commissives appear only marginally, suggesting that emotional expressions or commitments are not primary features of interaction in this instructional context. Notably, declaratives were not identified at all, reaffirming that classroom discourse tends to focus more on instructional communication rather than institutional acts that alter social reality.

Tabel 2. Bentuk Realisasi Tindak Tutur Direksi oleh Guru

| Jenis Directive | Contoh dalam Data | Fungsi Pedagogis |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Question Directives | "What is the synonym of 'rarely'?", "How many...?" | Mengaktifkan kognisi, mengecek pemahaman, mengelola alur pelajaran |
| Requirement / Command | "Please stop working", "Please stop writing" | Menjaga ketertiban, transisi antar kegiatan |
| Hint Directives | Petunjuk tidak langsung untuk mengarahkan siswa | Mengontrol kelas secara sopan dan tidak mengancam muka siswa |
| Requestive Questions | Pertanyaan untuk mendapatkan informasi | Membangun interaksi, menjaga keterlibatan siswa |

Table 2 presents a more detailed categorization of directive speech acts produced by the teacher. Question directives were the most frequently used and served multiple pedagogical purposes such as activating students' cognitive processes, verifying comprehension, and

maintaining engagement. Requirement or command forms appeared when the teacher needed to regulate classroom conduct or transition between activities. Hint directives, though less direct, were used strategically to guide student behavior politely, demonstrating awareness of face-saving strategies. Requestive questions also emerged as tools to elicit specific information and sustain interaction, indicating that questioning serves both instructional and interpersonal functions.

Discussion

Overall Findings on Speech Act Distribution

The examination of classroom interaction patterns shows that the speech acts used by teachers and students fall into Searle's five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. The quantitative distribution demonstrates that directive speech acts were the most prevalent, reaching 45% of the data, followed by assertives at 40%, expressives at 1.3%, and commissives at only 0.64%. This imbalance indicates an instructional environment in which teachers play a central regulatory role. Such dominance of directive forms in EFL classroom discourse is consistent with earlier findings reported in several studies, including Zayed (2014), Rafli (2018), Suryandani and Budasi (2022), and Darong (2024), who argue that language classrooms, especially those in EFL settings, tend to prioritize teacher-led instructions to maintain clarity and efficiency in learning. The tendency for teachers to dominate the turn-taking system is also reflected in the numerical imbalance of utterances in the current study, where teachers produced 155 utterances (78.7% of the total), far exceeding students' contributions. Similar patterns of teacher-driven discourse have been widely documented by Susanti et al. (2020), Azhari et al. (2018), and Bahing, Emzir, and Rafli (2018), who note that learners often rely heavily on teacher prompts, resulting in asymmetrical participation.

Types of Teachers' and Students' Speech Acts

A deeper analysis reveals that teachers relied heavily on directive speech acts, largely because such acts serve instructional aims. Classroom discourse typically requires teachers to manage activities, regulate attention, and elicit student responses, patterns also highlighted in Suhirman's (2016) research on postgraduate classroom pragmatics. In the present study, directives appeared in several forms, including information-seeking questions and commands. These forms closely align with the range described by ethnopragmatic research such as Maruti, Suharto, and Samsiyah (2021), which emphasizes that directive strategies differ depending on cultural expectations and communicative norms.

Teachers employed a wide variety of interrogative constructions, such as *wh*-questions and *yes/no* questions using auxiliary verbs (e.g., *do*, *are*, *is*). Pedagogically, these strategies serve multiple instructional purposes: monitoring students' comprehension, guiding them toward desired responses, and sustaining engagement. Previous studies by Handayani (2016) and Hikmah (2015) further support this finding, noting that questions serve not only as cognitive prompts but also as tools for social regulation, enabling teachers to maintain classroom order while encouraging student involvement.

Assertive speech acts, which accounted for a substantial portion of the data, were realized through statements, explanations, suggestions, and corrective actions. This aligns with the observation by Budiasih (2019) and Apriastuti (2019) that assertive acts reflect the institutionalized authority of teachers as knowledge providers. Corrective feedback, such as rejecting an incorrect answer, is often expressed through emphatic statements that fall under

Searle's (1979) subcategory of complaining or criticizing. These assertive forms serve to clarify misconceptions and reinforce accurate information, thus enhancing instructional clarity.

Although less common, commissive speech acts also emerged, usually in the form of teachers expressing commitments or promises, such as closing statements (“*See you...*”). These findings echo those reported by Ariff and Mugableh (2013), who observed that commissives function relationally, helping maintain interpersonal continuity and rapport between interlocutors. In this context, commissives support classroom solidarity and help establish a supportive learning environment.

Expressive speech acts appeared only occasionally, yet their presence is pedagogically meaningful. Even brief expressions of approval, encouragement, or empathy can contribute to a positive classroom atmosphere. Christison (2018) notes that expressives contribute significantly to affective engagement, even if they are not the dominant form in instructional discourse. These subtle forms help create an environment where students feel acknowledged and motivated.

Functions of Teachers' Speech Acts

From a functional perspective, directive speech acts played the most decisive role in shaping classroom interaction. Question directives, in particular, were used to control the flow of discussion, transition between activities, and maintain student focus. Asking questions such as “*What is the synonym of 'rarely'?*” served not only to elicit information but also to activate students' cognitive engagement. These findings support the claims of Darong (2024), who argues that sequences of teacher questions are central mechanisms for maintaining conversational coherence in EFL classrooms. Similar conclusions were drawn by Bahing, Emzir, and Rafli (2018), who emphasized that questions serve as important transitional devices between instructional stages and regulate classroom rhythm.

Teachers also frequently used embedded imperatives, indirect or softened command structures such as “*Please stop writing*”, which function as a politeness strategy. Such strategies reflect Indonesian and Javanese cultural norms that prefer non-confrontational directives (Maruti et al., 2021; Hikmah, 2015). Indirect command forms help teachers maintain authority while avoiding overly harsh tones. This linguistic politeness allows for firm classroom control without threatening students' positive face.

Hint directives emerged as another important strategy, particularly in contexts requiring subtle behavioral regulation. Instead of issuing direct commands, teachers sometimes used indirect cues to prompt students toward desired actions. This pattern is also visible in the works of Zayed (2014) and Azhari et al. (2018), both of whom note that teachers often rely on implicit language to maintain smoother classroom interaction and reduce disruptive tension.

Overall, the present study confirms the complex and multifunctional nature of speech acts in instructional settings. Beyond conveying information, teachers' utterances serve as instruments for classroom management, establishing social relationships, organizing participation, and reinforcing teacher authority. These findings align with observations made by Budiasih (2019), Susanti et al. (2020), and Handayani (2016), all of whom argue that effective classroom communication depends heavily on teachers' ability to use varied speech act types strategically.

CONCLUSION

Hasil analisis terhadap interaksi kelas menunjukkan bahwa pola tuturan yang muncul didominasi oleh tindak tutur direktif, diikuti assertif, sementara ekspresif dan komisif hanya

muncul dalam jumlah terbatas dan deklaratif tidak ditemukan sama sekali. Dominasi direktif menegaskan bahwa peran guru sebagai pengarah jalannya pembelajaran sangat kuat, terutama melalui pertanyaan, perintah, dan permintaan yang digunakan untuk mengelola kegiatan, menjaga fokus, serta memantau pemahaman siswa. Sementara itu, tindak tutur asertif yang banyak muncul memperlihatkan fungsi guru sebagai pemberi informasi, penjelas konsep, dan pemberi umpan balik selama proses belajar berlangsung.

Meskipun frekuensi komisif dan ekspresif relatif rendah, kemunculannya tetap berkontribusi pada pembentukan iklim kelas yang hangat dan mendukung, terutama ketika guru memberikan pujian, menunjukkan empati, atau menyampaikan komitmen sosial yang memperkuat hubungan interpersonal. Tidak ditemukannya tindak tutur deklaratif menunjukkan bahwa interaksi yang terjadi lebih berfokus pada proses instruksional dan bukan pada tindakan institusional yang secara langsung mengubah status atau kondisi sosial kelas.

Secara keseluruhan, temuan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa komunikasi dalam kelas EFL sangat bergantung pada strategi linguistik yang dipilih guru untuk mengatur dinamika pembelajaran. Variasi tindak tutur yang digunakan tidak hanya berfungsi untuk menyampaikan materi, tetapi juga untuk mengelola alur kegiatan, menjaga keterlibatan siswa, dan membangun relasi sosial yang kondusif. Dengan demikian, kemampuan guru dalam memanfaatkan ragam tindak tutur secara tepat menjadi faktor penting dalam menciptakan interaksi pembelajaran yang efektif dan terarah.

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