



POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN DIRECTIVE SPEECH ACTS IN TEACHER-STUDENT CLASSROOM INTERACTION IN BORDER AREAS

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ABSTRACT

Teacher-student classroom interaction functions not only to transmit knowledge but also to shape values and learning participation, making directive speech acts and politeness strategies pedagogically significant. This study investigates politeness strategies in directive speech acts within classroom interaction at a border-area elementary school. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through classroom observation, recordings, field notes, and interviews, and analyzed through speech act theory, Leech's politeness principle, and a sociopragmatic framework. The findings show that teachers predominantly employ commands and requests, typically mitigated through addressing students by name, explanations, choice-giving, and supportive nonverbal cues, while students' directives tend to be more direct due to peer familiarity. Politeness strategies are shaped by sociocultural diversity and relational dynamics. These results indicate that directive politeness functions as a pedagogical resource for fostering respectful interaction, student engagement, and culturally responsive communication in border-area classrooms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Oral interaction between teachers and students in the learning process functions not only as a medium for delivering subject matter but also as a means of transmitting values, norms, and character. Within this interaction, teachers' utterances, particularly directive speech acts, play a crucial role because they regulate classroom activities, guide student behavior, and structure learning participation. Recent research highlights that the way teachers formulate directives significantly influences the quality of classroom communication and the development of respectful relationships between teachers and students. For instance, Nopriela (2025) demonstrates that polite directive strategies in classroom discourse help create a supportive learning environment and reduce face-threatening communication, thereby enhancing student engagement [1]. Similarly, Ginting and Pasaribu (2023) show that politeness strategies in teacher-student interaction function not only to maintain harmonious social relations but also to support students' emotional comfort and participation in learning [2]. When directive utterances are delivered without sufficient attention to linguistic politeness, they may generate discomfort, resistance, or interpersonal tension, which in turn can reduce students' engagement and hinder the effectiveness of learning. For this reason, teacher-student communication has become an important subject of educational and linguistic research. At the primary level, students are particularly sensitive to forms of communication perceived as intimidating or demeaning, and studies consistently show that teachers' verbal attitudes influence students' motivation, emotional comfort, participation, and self-confidence in learning [3].

Previous research has demonstrated that politeness in representative, directive, and expressive utterances shapes classroom atmosphere, learning motivation, and teacher–student relationships across educational levels [4]. Jayusman (2025), for example, found that directive speech acts in the form of questions dominated Indonesian language instruction in a fifth-grade classroom, accounting for approximately 60.65% of all directives [5]. Other studies indicate that directive speech acts also contribute to students’ character formation, particularly in shaping their responses to authority and their communicative behavior [6]. Research on early childhood likewise shows that children’s directive speech acts gradually develop toward socially acceptable norms, highlighting the role of educational interaction in shaping linguistic politeness [7].

Despite these findings, most previous studies have been conducted in schools located in relatively typical social and educational environments, where linguistic norms, socio-cultural backgrounds, and classroom expectations tend to be more homogeneous. Such studies provide valuable insights but offer limited understanding of how directive politeness functions in contexts characterized by stronger linguistic diversity, cultural plurality, and socio-economic constraints. Research on classroom communication highlights that teacher–student interaction is strongly shaped by cultural differences, language barriers, and students’ diverse backgrounds, which influence how instructional messages are interpreted and responded to [8]. Border areas represent precisely such contexts. Schools in border regions often operate within environments marked by multilingual practices, varied cultural identities, limited educational resources, and different patterns of social interaction. These conditions may influence how teachers formulate directives, how students interpret them, and how politeness strategies function in maintaining classroom harmony. Studies on pragmatic communication in learning environments further emphasize that politeness strategies are essential for sustaining effective interaction and preventing communication breakdown, particularly in socially diverse settings [9]. Consequently, findings from studies conducted in mainstream educational contexts cannot be automatically generalized to border-area schools.

The present study addresses this gap by examining classroom interaction in SDN 01 Bengkayang, a primary school located in a border region characterized by ethnic and linguistic diversity. Students come from Malay, Dayak, and Chinese cultural backgrounds, and while Indonesian serves as the language of instruction, local languages remain widely used in daily communication. This multilingual environment enriches the school’s sociocultural landscape but simultaneously creates communicative challenges for teachers, who must ensure that their directives remain clear, respectful, and pedagogically effective across diverse cultural sensitivities. Recent studies on multilingual classroom communication indicate that linguistic diversity requires teachers to adopt adaptive interactional strategies in order to maintain clarity and inclusivity in instruction. Pawapootanon, Poopatwiboon, and Ambele (2025), for example, demonstrate that pedagogical translanguaging reshapes classroom interaction by encouraging teachers to adjust their communicative practices to students’ linguistic backgrounds [10]. Similarly, Antony, Ramnath, and Ellikkal (2024) show that multilingual classroom discourse strongly influences students’ participation, identity, and sense of belonging, emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive communication in educational settings [11]. Such conditions make the study of directive politeness particularly relevant, as inappropriate language use may not only disrupt classroom interaction but also affect students’ sense of identity, belonging, and respect.

To date, empirical research specifically investigating the politeness of directive speech acts in teacher–student interaction in border-area primary schools remains extremely limited. This lack of research is significant because communication practices in such settings are closely linked to broader educational outcomes, including classroom participation, emotional safety, and character development. Understanding how politeness strategies function in directive speech acts may therefore contribute not only to linguistic scholarship but also to practical improvements in educational communication. The findings of this study are expected to provide insights into how culturally sensitive directive strategies can foster respectful classroom relationships, strengthen students’ confidence, and support character education in multilingual and socially diverse contexts.

Beyond classroom practice, this study also has broader implications for educational policy and teacher training in border regions. By identifying sociopragmatic factors that shape directive politeness, the research may inform the development of communication guidelines, teacher professional development programs, and culturally responsive pedagogical approaches tailored to border-area schools. In this sense, the study contributes to efforts to improve educational quality in peripheral regions, where linguistic diversity and socio-cultural complexity require more adaptive communicative competence from teachers.

Grounded in a sociopragmatic framework that examines meaning as shaped by social, cultural, and relational contexts, this study aims to describe the linguistic forms of politeness in directive speech acts in teacher–student interaction at SDN 01 Bengkayang and to explain the sociopragmatic factors that influence their use. Through this analysis, the research seeks to enrich pragmatic studies in education while also offering practical insights for improving communication practices and character development in border-area schools.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in a sociopragmatic perspective. This approach was selected to enable an in-depth examination of language use within its social and cultural context, particularly in relation to how directive speech acts and politeness strategies are shaped by classroom interaction in a border-area setting. The research was conducted at SDN 01 Bengkayang, a primary school located in a culturally and linguistically diverse border region. The participants consisted of classroom teachers as primary speakers and students as interlocutors; however, in peer interaction sequences, students also functioned as both speakers and addressees.

Data were collected through several techniques. First, non-participant classroom observation was conducted during teaching and learning activities in order to capture naturally occurring interaction. These observations were supported by audio recordings of classroom discourse and detailed field notes documenting contextual elements such as classroom atmosphere, participants' responses, and relevant nonverbal behavior. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with three classroom teachers and six students selected purposively to represent different participation levels, gender backgrounds, and linguistic profiles. The interviews were intended to obtain participants' perspectives on classroom communication, directive expressions, and perceived politeness. In addition, the researcher applied the non-participant observation technique known as *simak bebas libat cakap* (SBLC), in which the researcher observes speech events without taking part in the interaction, allowing the data to reflect authentic communicative practices [20].

The coding and categorization of data were conducted systematically in several stages. First, recorded interactions were transcribed verbatim. Second, each utterance containing a directive function was identified and coded according to its speech act type (e.g., command, request, suggestion, prohibition, or offering). Third, politeness strategies were coded based on established sociopragmatic indicators, including mitigation devices (e.g., hedges, addressing terms, justification, choice-offering), linguistic markers of politeness, and supportive nonverbal cues. These categories were derived both deductively from politeness theory and inductively from recurring patterns observed in the data. During analysis, codes were continuously refined as new patterns emerged, allowing themes to develop iteratively from the interactional data.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification [21]. Reduction involved selecting relevant directive utterances and contextual information; display involved organizing coded data into matrices showing types of directives, politeness strategies, and sociopragmatic contexts; and verification involved interpreting patterns in relation to theoretical frameworks. Within the sociopragmatic perspective, politeness was analyzed as a form of communicative action shaped by power relations, cultural norms, and interpersonal distance between participants [22].

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. Data triangulation was achieved by combining observations, recordings, field notes, and interview data. Methodological triangulation was also applied by comparing interactional analysis with participants' explanations obtained through interviews. Member checking was conducted by discussing selected interpretations with teachers to confirm that the analysis reflected classroom realities. In addition, the researcher maintained an analytic audit trail documenting coding decisions and category development in order to enhance transparency and consistency of interpretation.

Through these procedures, the study seeks to provide a reliable and contextually grounded account of directive speech acts and politeness strategies in classroom interaction within a border-area educational setting.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Directive Speech Act: "Direct Commands"

From a sociopragmatic perspective, the teacher's institutional authority legitimizes the use of direct imperative commands in classroom interaction. Such directives function to organize learning activities efficiently, particularly during task distribution or classroom management. However, the acceptability of direct commands is not determined solely by institutional power but also by interpersonal relations, tone, and cultural expectations. In the border-area context of this study, where classroom relationships often reflect close-knit community dynamics, a direct command may be perceived as less face-threatening when accompanied by supportive nonverbal cues such as a warm tone, eye contact, or a smile. This observation aligns with classroom pragmatics research emphasizing that both power and solidarity shape directive forms.

Nevertheless, individual differences among students influence how such commands are interpreted. Students from linguistic or cultural backgrounds that emphasize respect for authority may accept direct imperatives more readily, while those from more egalitarian interactional traditions may perceive them as abrupt or intimidating. Socio-economic background and self-confidence also affect students' reactions; students with higher linguistic confidence tend to interpret directives as routine classroom regulation, whereas less confident

students may interpret the same utterance as pressure. These variations highlight the importance of culturally responsive communication in multilingual border settings, as students' interpretation of classroom language is shaped by their sociocultural background and pragmatic awareness [23].

From Leech's politeness perspective, direct commands potentially violate the Tact Maxim because they impose an action without mitigation. However, the threat may be compensated by strategies consistent with the Generosity or Approbation Maxims, such as praise, explanation, or expressions of appreciation. For instance, adding "Thank you for helping" after a command can transform the directive into a cooperative act rather than a unilateral imposition. Thus, in border-area classrooms, the effectiveness of direct commands depends not only on linguistic form but also on relational context and culturally sensitive delivery.

Directive Speech Act: "Requesting"

Requests marked by mitigation devices, such as the use of please, demonstrate teachers' awareness of students' emotional needs and their effort to minimize face threats. In noisy classroom situations, such mitigation serves a dual function: it maintains classroom control while preserving students' dignity. This strategy is particularly relevant in linguistically diverse classrooms, where students may interpret tone and intention differently depending on their cultural communication norms.

Individual differences also shape how requests are received. Students accustomed to hierarchical communication structures may respond quickly to mitigated requests because they interpret politeness as a sign of care. Conversely, students from peer-oriented communication environments may respond more positively when requests include explanations or reasons, as this signals respect and inclusion. Therefore, effective requests in border-area classrooms often combine linguistic mitigation with contextual justification, such as: "Please be quiet for a moment so I can explain this part." Similar findings have been reported by Wardani (2025), who shows that learners' interpretations of polite or impolite expressions are shaped by social status, gendered communication patterns, and cultural expectations in classroom interaction [24].

According to Leech's politeness theory, such forms align with the Tact and Sympathy Maxims because they reduce imposition and acknowledge students' needs. Beyond linguistic theory, the practical implication is that mitigated requests foster emotional safety, which contributes to participation and engagement. For teacher training in border regions, this finding suggests that developing awareness of mitigation strategies can improve classroom climate while maintaining instructional authority.

Directive Speech Act: "Offering and Choice-Giving"

Offering assistance or giving students choices represents one of the most effective politeness strategies observed in the data. From a sociopragmatic perspective, such utterances reduce the threat of authority and frame teacher directives as collaborative support rather than control. This strategy is particularly important in border-area classrooms, where students' confidence levels may be shaped by linguistic diversity, social identity, or prior educational experiences.

Individual responses to offering strategies also vary. Students with strong self-confidence may interpret choice-giving as encouragement for autonomy, while more hesitant students may perceive it as reassurance that their difficulties are acknowledged. Cultural background also plays a role, since offering choices and autonomy-supportive practices can influence students' motivation, engagement, and sense of competence in culturally specific ways, as highlighted in recent educational research [25].

From the perspective of Leech's politeness theory, offering fulfills the Tact, Generosity, and Sympathy Maxims simultaneously. It minimizes burden, demonstrates willingness to support, and acknowledges students' emotional needs. In educational practice, such strategies enhance participation, foster mutual respect, and support character development by modeling cooperative communication. Consequently, offering strategies can serve as a practical communication model for teachers working in culturally diverse and socially sensitive environments.

Integrative Discussion and Educational Implications

Across the three directive types examined (commands, requests, and offerings) a clear pattern emerges: the effectiveness of directive speech acts in border-area classrooms depends not only on linguistic form but also on sociocultural sensitivity, relational dynamics, and students' individual backgrounds. Direct commands prioritize efficiency but require relational support; requests balance authority with respect; and offering strategies promote collaboration and emotional security. Together, these patterns demonstrate that politeness in directive speech acts functions as a pedagogical tool rather than merely a linguistic choice.

The practical implications of these findings extend beyond classroom interaction. First, they highlight the need for teacher training programs in border regions to include modules on culturally responsive communication, sociopragmatic awareness, and strategic use of directive language. Second, the findings suggest that educational policies in border areas should recognize language use as part of character education, since respectful directive practices contribute to students' confidence, empathy, and participation. Third, these insights may inform

curriculum development by emphasizing communicative competence as a core component of effective teaching in linguistically diverse settings.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that directive politeness is not only a matter of linguistic form but also a central element in improving educational communication and fostering inclusive classroom environments in border regions.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that linguistic diversity in border-area classrooms requires teachers to use directive speech acts that are not only instructional but also culturally responsive. At SDN 01 Bengkayang, teachers employed a range of directive forms (commands, requests, and offerings) combined with politeness strategies such as mitigation markers, explanations, choice-giving, and supportive nonverbal cues. These strategies function not merely as linguistic adjustments but as pedagogical tools that help create emotional comfort, strengthen classroom relationships, and increase students' motivation to participate in learning.

Practically, the study suggests that teachers in border regions can improve classroom communication by integrating simple mitigation strategies into everyday instruction. For example, adding brief explanations to directives, addressing students by name, offering choices when possible, and using supportive tone or gestures can reduce face-threatening effects while maintaining instructional authority. Such practices may help students feel respected, confident, and more willing to engage in classroom interaction. Consequently, directive politeness should be viewed as part of effective teaching practice rather than merely a matter of language form.

Beyond classroom application, these findings contribute to sociopragmatic research by highlighting how politeness operates within culturally diverse educational contexts. They also suggest implications for teacher training and educational policy in border areas, particularly in promoting culturally sensitive communication as part of character education and inclusive pedagogy. Future research may expand this inquiry to other border schools or compare different sociolinguistic contexts in order to further examine how linguistic background shapes classroom interaction and learning experience.

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