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# DIRECTIVE SPEECH ACTS IN CLASSROOM INTERACTION AT AN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

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***Abstract***
*This study aimed to identify the types and functions of directive speech acts used by lecturers in English speaking classes at an Islamic university. Grounded in Searle's theory of directive speech acts, this study employed a qualitative descriptive case study. The data were obtained from four lecturers of the English Education Study Program through their responses to a Written Discourse Completion Task consisting of ten classroom-based scenarios. The responses were analyzed using Searle's classification of directive speech acts. The findings revealed four types of directive speech acts: commanding (16 utterances), ordering (13 utterances), requesting (9 utterances), and suggesting (2 utterances), while inviting was not identified. Three functions were identified: ordering someone to do something (16 utterances), requesting someone to do something (14 utterances), and commanding someone to do something (10 utterances). Commanding and ordering were the most dominant types, indicating that lecturers primarily employed direct directives to manage classroom activities, maintain discipline, and achieve instructional objectives. These findings contribute to pragmatics by expanding the understanding of directive speech acts in classroom interaction and provide practical insights for lecturers to employ more balanced directive strategies in English speaking classes.*

**Keywords**: *classroom interaction; directive speech acts; English speaking classes*

## Introduction

Speaking is one of the most important skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, express opinions, and participate in social interaction. According to Nunan (1999), speaking is a productive oral skill that requires learners to use language appropriately in different communicative situations. Similarly, Brown (2004) states that speaking involves not only linguistic competence but also the ability to use language effectively in interaction. In higher education, speaking classes are designed to develop students' communicative competence through classroom interaction between lecturers and students.

In classroom interaction, lecturers play an important role in managing learning activities and guiding students toward instructional goals. To achieve these goals, lecturers frequently use language to direct students' actions, organize classroom activities, maintain discipline, and encourage participation. However, EFL learners often encounter difficulties in using and interpreting language appropriately in context. These difficulties are related not only to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation but also to pragmatic competence, namely the ability to understand and produce language

according to social and situational contexts. In Indonesian EFL classrooms, speech acts play an important role in managing classroom interaction, facilitating learning activities, and maintaining communication between lecturers and students (Rachmawati et al., 2022; Siregar & Pulungan, 2022; Wirawan et al., 2022; Thoyyibah et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding how lecturers use language in classroom interaction is essential to support effective teaching and learning processes.

One of the theories that can be used to analyze language use in classroom interaction is Speech Act Theory. Austin (1962) proposes that when people produce utterances, they perform actions through language. He classifies speech acts into locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Further, Searle (1979) categorizes illocutionary acts into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Among these categories, directive speech acts are particularly relevant to classroom interaction because they are used by speakers to make hearers perform certain actions. Through directive speech acts, lecturers can request, command, order, suggest, or invite students to carry out particular activities during the learning process.

Previous studies have examined directive speech acts in various educational contexts. Nisa and Abduh (2022) investigated directive speech acts in elementary school classrooms and found that directive utterances were frequently used in teacher–student interaction. Nuraeni et al. (2025) analyzed directive speech acts in vocational high school classrooms and reported that requests and commands were dominant. Thoyyibah et al. (2024) examined speech acts in an Islamic senior high school speaking class and found that directive speech acts appeared frequently during classroom interaction. At the higher education level, Wirawan et al. (2022) focused on directive speech acts represented in lecturer feedback. Although these studies have contributed to the understanding of directive speech acts in educational settings, studies focusing on lecturers' directive speech acts in speaking classes at Islamic higher education institutions remain limited. In addition, most previous studies employed classroom observation, whereas the present study utilizes a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT), which allows directive speech acts to be examined through predetermined classroom scenarios based on sociopragmatic considerations.

Therefore, this study focuses on directive speech acts used by lecturers in speaking classes at the English Education Study Program of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. Specifically, this study aims to identify the types of directive speech acts used by lecturers and to analyze their functions in classroom interaction. The findings are expected to contribute to the field of pragmatics, particularly studies on directive speech acts in EFL classroom interaction, and to provide practical insights for lecturers in managing classroom communication effectively.

## 1. Literature Review

### 2.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning in relation to context. According to Levinson (1983), pragmatics examines the relationship between language and context that is necessary for understanding language use. Similarly, Yule (1996) defines pragmatics as the study of speaker meaning, contextual meaning, and how more is

communicated than what is explicitly said. Pragmatics emphasizes that the interpretation of an utterance depends not only on its linguistic form but also on the social and situational context in which it is produced.

In educational settings, pragmatics plays an important role because classroom communication involves interactions between lecturers and students with specific communicative purposes. Through pragmatic competence, language users are able to interpret and produce utterances appropriately according to contextual factors such as social roles, relationships, and communicative intentions.

**2.2 Speech Act Theory**

Speech Act Theory was first proposed by Austin (1962), who argues that language is not only used to convey information but also to perform actions. According to Austin, every utterance may involve three related acts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act refers to the literal meaning of an utterance, an illocutionary act refers to the speaker's intended meaning or communicative force, and a perlocutionary act refers to the effect of the utterance on the hearer.

Building on Austin's theory, Searle (1979) classifies illocutionary acts into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Assertives commit speakers to the truth of a proposition, directives attempt to make hearers perform an action, commissives commit speakers to future actions, expressives convey psychological states, and declarations bring about changes in institutional or social situations through language. Among these categories, directive speech acts are particularly relevant to classroom interaction because they are frequently used by lecturers to guide students' behavior and participation during learning activities.

**2.3 Directive Speech Acts**

Directive speech acts are utterances produced by speakers with the intention of making hearers perform certain actions (Searle, 1979). In classroom interaction, directive speech acts enable lecturers to organize learning activities, manage classroom behavior, and facilitate communication.

The present study adopts five categories of directive speech acts: commanding, ordering, requesting, suggesting, and inviting. Commanding refers to direct instructions that reflect the speaker's authority. Ordering refers to firm directives that require compliance from the hearer. Requesting is generally expressed through polite forms that ask the hearer to perform an action voluntarily. Suggesting involves proposing an action for the hearer's consideration without imposing an obligation. Inviting refers to encouraging participation in a particular activity.

Directive speech acts may also serve different communicative functions in classroom interaction. In this study, the functions analyzed include ordering someone to do something, requesting someone to do something, and commanding someone to do something. These functions reflect how lecturers employ directives to achieve instructional objectives and manage classroom interaction.

**2.4 Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT)**

The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is a widely used instrument in pragmatic research for eliciting participants' responses to specific communicative situations (Blum-Kulka

& Olshtain, 1984). A Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) requires participants to provide written responses to predetermined scenarios.

The WDCT allows researchers to collect structured and comparable data because all participants respond to the same situations. Furthermore, WDCT scenarios can be designed based on sociopragmatic variables such as power, social distance, and rank of imposition, which are important factors influencing language use (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, the WDCT is considered appropriate for investigating directive speech acts in classroom contexts.

### 2.5 Previous Studies

Several studies have investigated directive speech acts in educational contexts. Nisa and Abduh (2022) examined directive speech acts in elementary school classrooms and found that directive utterances were frequently used to manage learning activities. Rachmawati et al. (2022) reported that teachers commonly employed commands and requests during speaking class interaction. Thoyyibah et al. (2024) found that directive speech acts were dominant in an Islamic senior high school speaking class. Nuraeni et al. (2025) revealed that requests and commands were among the most frequently used directive forms in vocational high school classrooms. At the university level, Wirawan et al. (2022) analyzed directive speech acts represented in lecturer feedback.

Although previous studies have contributed to the understanding of directive speech acts in educational settings, research focusing on speaking classes at Islamic higher education institutions remains limited. In addition, most previous studies relied on classroom observation, whereas the present study employs a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) to examine directive speech acts through controlled classroom scenarios. Therefore, this study offers contextual and methodological contributions to the investigation of directive speech acts in EFL classroom interaction.

## 3. Research Method

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design. Qualitative research is used to explore and understand social phenomena through participants' perspectives (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), while a case study focuses on investigating a phenomenon within a specific context (Yin, 2018). This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to analyze the types and functions of directive speech acts used by lecturers in speaking classroom interaction at the English Education Study Program of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang.

### 3.2 Data Source

The data were obtained from four lecturers of the English Education Study Program at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang who taught speaking courses during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were selected through homogeneous purposive sampling because they shared similar professional backgrounds and teaching responsibilities in speaking classes (Creswell, 2013). They were chosen as the data source because speaking classes frequently involve directive speech acts used to organize learning activities, manage classroom interaction, and maintain classroom discipline.

### 3.3 Data Collection Technique and Research Instrument

The data were collected using a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT). According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), a WDCT is a data collection technique that elicits participants' written responses to predetermined communicative situations. The instrument used in this study consisted of ten classroom-based scenarios adapted from Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Afriani (2018). The scenarios were designed based on sociopragmatic variables proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), namely power, social distance, and rank of imposition. Before being administered, the WDCT was validated through expert judgment. The data collection process began with preliminary observation and informal interviews to ensure that directive speech acts naturally occurred in speaking classes. Afterward, the validated WDCT was distributed to the participants, who were asked to provide written responses representing the utterances they would naturally use in each classroom situation.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis began by organizing all responses obtained from the WDCT. The researcher then identified utterances containing directive speech acts and classified them based on Searle's (1979) categories, namely commanding, ordering, requesting, suggesting, and inviting. Subsequently, the functions of the directive speech acts were analyzed and interpreted in relation to the research objectives. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the patterns identified from the analyzed data.

### 3.5 Technique of Presenting Results

The findings were presented descriptively through tables and narrative explanations. The tables were used to show the distribution of directive speech act types and functions, while the narrative descriptions were used to explain and interpret the findings in relation to classroom interaction and the theoretical framework adopted in this study.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

#### 4.1.1 Types of Directive Speech Acts

The analysis of the Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) responses revealed four types of directive speech acts used by the lecturers: commanding, ordering, requesting, and suggesting. Inviting was not identified in the data. A total of 40 directive utterances were obtained from the four participants..

**Tabel 1.** Distribution of Directive Speech Act Types

| Type | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Commanding | 16 |
| Ordering | 13 |
| Requesting | 9 |
| Suggesting | 2 |
| Inviting | 0 |
| Total | 40 |

**1. Commanding**

Commanding was the most dominant type with 16 utterances. Lecturers used commands to give direct and clear instructions. For example, in Scenario 8, a lecturer stated, “Please come to the front of the class and present your group discussion” (P1, Scenario 8). Another example appeared in Scenario 4: “Please break up into groups and discuss the topic in your own groups” (P3, Scenario 4). These utterances function as commands because the lecturer directly controls classroom activities.

**2. Ordering**

Ordering appeared 13 times as the second most frequent type. Ordering speech acts were used to firmly instruct students regarding discipline, assignments, or behavior. In Scenario 3, a lecturer said, "Please revise the assignment carefully and submit the corrected version again by next week" (P1, Scenario 3). Another lecturer stated, "Now I ask you to keep your handphone in your bag and listen to me" (P3, Scenario 5), demonstrating how ordering maintains classroom control.

**3. Requesting**

Requesting occurred 9 times and was expressed politely and indirectly. For instance, in Scenario 2, a lecturer asked, "Would you read the text aloud, so your friends can grasp the meaning of the text?" (P3, Scenario 2). In Scenario 5, another lecturer said, "Could you please keep your phone away and pay attention to my explanation" (P1, Scenario 5). The use of modal verbs such as would you and could you reflects politeness strategies.

**4. Suggesting**

Suggesting was the least frequent with only 2 utterances. In Scenario 3, a lecturer offered, "If you want a better score, you can revise the assignment and submit it again" (P3, Scenario 3). Another suggestion appeared in Scenario 7: "Please review the material again at home so you can understand it better" (P1, Scenario 7). These utterances provide options rather than obligations.

**5. Inviting**

Inviting speech acts were completely absent, indicating that lecturers prioritized direct instructional control over collaborative invitations.

**4.1.2 Functions of Directive Speech Acts**

Besides identifying the types of directive speech acts, this study also analyzed their functions. Three functions were identified in the data: ordering someone to do something, requesting someone to do something, and commanding someone to do something.

**Tabel 2.** Distribution of Directive Speech Act Functions

| Function | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Ordering Someone to Do Something | 16 |
| Requesting Someone to Do Something | 14 |
| Commanding Someone to Do Something | 10 |
| Total | 40 |

**1. Ordering Someone to Do Something**

The most dominant function was ordering someone to do something (16 utterances). This function appeared when lecturers firmly instructed students to complete tasks or obey rules. For example, in Scenario 6, a lecturer warned, "Do not forget to submit the assignment on time. Unless, you'll get 22 points deduction" (P2, Scenario 6).

**2. Requesting someone to do something**

The second function was requesting someone to do something (14 utterances), expressed politely to encourage cooperation, such as "excuse me everyone. I need your attention, please" (P1, Scenario 1).

**3. Commanding someone to do something**

The least frequent function was commanding someone to do something (10 utterances), used for direct classroom task organization, for example "Please discuss today's lesson with your groups" (P1, Scenario 4).

**4.2 Discussion**

Dominance of Commanding and Ordering Speech Acts. The finding that commanding was the most dominant

type aligns with Searle's theory that directive speech acts function to make hearers perform actions requested by the speaker (Yulian & Mandarani, 2023). This result is consistent with Nuraeni et al. (2025), who found that commanding directives frequently appear in classroom interaction because lecturers need to control classroom activities and ensure students follow instructions. Similarly, Siregar et al. (2025) argue that commands are commonly used to maintain classroom organization and instructional effectiveness. The high frequency of ordering speech acts reflects the lecturers' institutional authority and the need to maintain discipline, which supports Rosyidah and Entusiastik (2025), who state that ordering directives are often used in educational contexts to ensure compliance with academic rules

Use of Requesting as a Politeness Strategy. The presence of requesting speech acts, though less frequent than commands and orders, indicates that lecturers also employ politeness strategies to maintain positive relationships with students. The use of modal expressions such as could you and would you reflects Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which suggests that speakers use indirect forms to minimize threats to the hearer's face. This finding is consistent with Thoyyibah et al. (2024), who found that requesting speech acts are common in EFL classrooms because they encourage student participation without creating excessive pressure.

Low Frequency of Suggesting and Absence of Inviting. The low frequency of suggesting speech acts suggests that lecturers prioritize direct instructional control over optional recommendations. Hidayah et al. (2025) explain that suggesting directives are generally used to support students' learning development rather than to control classroom behavior, which may explain their limited use in classroom management contexts. The complete absence of inviting speech acts indicates that the classroom interaction represented in the WDCT responses was more teacher-centered, where lecturers controlled communication and students mainly responded to instructions. This finding differs from Nuraeni et al. (2025) and Harmiyanti and Yuliarsi (2026), who found invitations in their classroom data, possibly because their studies involved different educational levels or interaction patterns.

Functions of Directive Speech Acts. The dominance of ordering someone to do something as the primary function reflects the lecturers' responsibility to maintain classroom discipline and ensure academic tasks are completed. The requesting function, though less dominant, plays an important role in creating a respectful and cooperative classroom atmosphere. The commanding function, while least frequent, remains essential for organizing immediate classroom activities. These findings support Arbain et al. (2024) and Febriany and Afriana (2025), who argue that directive speech acts serve multiple pedagogical functions in managing classroom interaction and facilitating effective teaching and learning.

In summary, the results demonstrate that directive speech acts are essential tools for lecturers to regulate student behavior, organize learning activities, maintain discipline, and support student development. The dominance of commanding and ordering reflects the lecturers' institutional authority and the teacher-centered nature of the classroom interaction in this context.

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated the types and functions of directive speech acts used by lecturers in speaking classes. The findings indicate that lecturers predominantly employed directive speech acts to manage classroom interaction, regulate student behavior, and facilitate instructional activities. The use of commanding, ordering, requesting, and suggesting demonstrates that directive speech acts serve important pedagogical functions in supporting the teaching and learning process. The dominance of commanding and ordering further reflects the lecturers' institutional role in maintaining classroom organization and achieving learning objectives.

The findings contribute to the field of pragmatics, particularly the study of directive speech acts in EFL classroom interaction. They also provide practical insights for lecturers to reflect on their language use and consider employing a wider range of directive strategies to create a more balanced and supportive classroom environment. The use of polite requests and suggestions, for example, may encourage greater student participation and interaction during learning activities.

For future research, it is recommended that researchers investigate directive speech acts in different educational contexts and with larger participant groups. Future studies may also employ classroom observation, audio recordings, or video recordings to obtain more authentic interactional data. In addition, comparative studies involving different educational institutions may provide a broader understanding of how contextual factors influence the use of directive speech acts in classroom communication.

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