

Directive Speech Acts in The King's Speech (2010) Movie

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of directive speech acts in The King's Speech (2010) movie and explores their potential application in the EFL context, particularly in speaking classes. The film reflects power dynamics, collaboration, and motivational strategies that provide examples of authentic language use. The study employs the Content Analysis (CA) approach and finds 37 utterances from the main characters' interaction, which were categorized into five types of directive speech acts. The analysis revealed that the most frequently appearing in the dialogue was requesting (37.84%), followed by commanding (24.32%), inviting and suggesting (13.51% for each category), and forbidding (10.82%). These findings highlight the relevance of directive speech acts in EFL classrooms, where teacher can be used to design effective communication, foster interactive learning, and enhance students' pragmatic competence. Integrating directive speech acts from The King's Speech into teaching strategies can help to develop learners' communication skills, build confidence, and support the principles of Communicative Language Teaching.

Keywords: directive speech acts, EFL classroom, speaking classes, The King's Speech

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui penggunaan directive speech act dalam film The King's Speech (2010) dan menelusuri potensi pengaplikasiannya dalam bidang EFL, khususnya dalam kelas berbicara. Film ini merefleksikan dinamika kekuasaan, kolaborasi, dan strategi motivasi sebagai contoh penggunaan bahasa secara autentik. Penelitian ini menggunakan jenis penelitian Content Analysis (CA). Hasil temuan menunjukkan terdapat 37 ujaran yang diucapkan dalam interaksi antarkarakter utama yang dapat dikategorikan dalam lima jenis directive speech acts. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa requesting (37.84%) adalah kategori yang sering digunakan, diikuti dengan commanding (24.32%), inviting dan suggesting (13.51% pada tiap kategori), dan forbidding (10.82%). Hal ini menunjukkan relevansi directive speech acts dalam kelas EFL, tempat para guru dapat mendesain pembelajaran yang efektif, interaktif, dan mendorong kemampuan pragmatic siswa. Integrasi penggunaan directive speech acts dari film The King's Speech dalam strategi pembelajaran dapat membantu dalam pengembangan kemampuan komunikasi siswa, membangun kepercayaan diri, serta mendukung prinsip Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Kata Kunci: directive speech acts, EFL classroom, speaking classes, The King's Speech

I. INTRODUCTION

Speech act is a part of pragmatic study which provides a prosperous framework for analyzing how language is used to convey information and perform actions. The framework was discussed by J.L. Austin and later developed by John Searle. Speech act is categorized into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. A locutionary act refers to the literal meaning of an utterance to represent the basic act of producing sounds or words. An illocutionary act conveys the speaker's intention, such as making a promise, giving a command, or expressing gratitude. Lastly, a perlocutionary act involves the effect or response elicited from the listener, such as persuading, frightening, or inspiring them (Rismayanti, 2021).

Searle (1979) further categorized illocutionary acts into five types, including representatives, which commit the speaker to the truth of an expressed proposition (e.g., asserting, claiming); directives, which aim to influence the actions of others (e.g., requests, commands); commissives, which commit the speaker to future actions (e.g., promising, offering); expressive, which reveal the speaker's psychological state (e.g., thanking, apologizing); and declarations, which change the reality of a situation through the utterance itself (e.g., pronouncing someone married or firing an employee) (Anggraeni & Ramdhani, 2023).

Recent growth in speech acts has highlighted its adaptability and applicability across diverse fields, from discourse analysis to language education. For instance, its integration into the study of pragmatics has demonstrated its potential in improving language teaching methodologies, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Leilei & Chunfang, 2023). Moreover, among the five types of speech acts developed by Searle (1979),

directive speech acts play an important role in the educational context, particularly in facilitating effective communication between teachers and students. As a fundamental component of classroom interaction, directives such as commands, requests, and suggestions enable teachers to manage class dynamics, guide learning processes, and encourage student participation. In EFL classrooms, directive speech acts are essential for fostering students' linguistic and pragmatic competence by modeling authentic language use and encouraging interactive learning activities (Suryandani & Budasi, 2021). Beyond classroom management, directive speech acts contribute to shaping a positive and interactive learning environment. It reinforces knowledge acquisition and strengthens students' communicative confidence (Widiarti & Astuti, 2023). Teachers' use of directives such as questions, instructions, and advice creates opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative discussions. This framework's relevance offers profound insights into both theoretical and applied linguistics such as classroom discourse analysis (Christianto, 2020; Stevani et al., 2023).

On the other hand, encouraging interactive learning activities can also be done through the use of engaging learning media such as songs, films, podcasts, and storytelling. Among these, films have emerged as a beneficial medium for language learning by offering a unique combination of entertainment and educational value. Films provide students with exposure to authentic language usage, which helps in improving listening, speaking, and comprehension skills by presenting language in natural and context-rich settings. Previous research highlights that movies help students understand idiomatic expressions, pronunciation, and cultural references that are often absent in traditional textbooks (Ismail, 2013). Furthermore, films can foster motivation and engagement by presenting language in a visually, which attracts modern learners who are familiar with multimedia content (Hameed, 2015). Movies also support the development of critical thinking and cultural awareness, which enables students to analyze characters' interactions and contexts, also encourages deeper language understanding (Lv, 2023). Lastly, films serve as an effective tool for introducing learners to diverse accents, dialects, and cultural practices to enhance their adaptability in real-world communication settings (Rana, 2023).

Diverse from the other previous studies which only focus on the use of directive speech acts in movies (Rakaj, 2023; Trihanto, 2022; Wijaya & Helmie, 2019), this study investigates the use of directive speech acts in the film *The King's Speech* (2010) and connects the findings to explores its relevance to EFL classrooms, particularly in speaking classes. *The King's Speech* is a historical drama that illustrates the power of language and communication. Directed by Tom Hooper, the movie portrays the struggles of Prince Albert (later King George VI) as he battles a debilitating speech impediment among the expectations and responsibilities of royal life. Set in the middle of political turbulence in the 1930s, the film examines the transformative relationship between Bertie and his unorthodox speech therapist, Lionel Logue. The story follows Bertie's journey to overcome his stammer, culminating in his successful wartime speech to unite the nation, and providing rich material for analyzing language use in situations of personal and social contexts.

In the context of *The King's Speech*, directive speech acts are the main feature of character interactions. The use of directives reflects the complex power dynamics between the main characters, such as the authoritative tone of royal figures, the assertive guidance of Lionel, and Bertie's attempts to assert himself as a leader despite his struggles. Meanwhile, for EFL learners, these interactions offer valuable examples of how directives are used in real-life scenarios to influence, guide, and negotiate. While for EFL teachers, the film illustrates how directive speech acts can enhance classroom engagement by fostering clear and purposeful communication that supports learning goals. It makes the film a practical resource for understanding the role of pragmatics in communication. Additionally, the movie's exploration of themes like struggle, resilience, and transformation resonates with learners' efforts to master a new language and reinforces motivation and perseverance.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of directive speech acts present in *The King's Speech* movie, analyze how directive speech acts are expressed through characters' utterances, and explore the application of directive speech acts from *The King's Speech* movie as a pedagogical tool to enhance language learning in EFL classrooms.

II. METHOD

This study employed content analysis to analyze directive speech acts in *The King's Speech* movie and explore its relevance to EFL classrooms. The qualitative approach is chosen in this study because of its effectiveness in interpreting textual or spoken communication within its context to uncover patterns, themes, and deeper meanings (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Additionally, Creswell (2014) highlights that qualitative method enable researchers to explore how language functions in specific settings, offering insights into its practical applications. In this study, the use of qualitative analysis facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how directive speech reflects communicative strategies that can be adapted to EFL classrooms to enhance learners' pragmatic competence. This aligns with the goals of pragmatic instruction, which seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge of language and its practical use in real-world scenarios (Taguchi, 2011).

The primary data source of this study is *The King's Speech* (2010) movie, directed by Tom Hooper. The data is a form of utterance between the main characters, Bertie (King George VI) and Lionel Logue, which contains examples of directive speech acts. The data collection process involves watching the whole movie and reading the movie transcription, then identifying dialogues from the movie and/or the transcription that contains directive speech acts. The directive speech acts are categorized based on Searle's (1979) classification, which includes directives of commanding, requesting, inviting, forbidding, and suggesting. For the data analysis, a combination of pragmatic and pedagogical techniques is employed to determine the speech acts categorization. The pragmatic analysis examines the context of each directive speech act to understand its function, including the speaker's intention and the listener's response. The frequency of each type of directive speech act was also calculated to provide a quantitative summary of the findings. Additionally, the identified speech acts are pedagogically mapped to communicative teaching strategies that are applicable in EFL classrooms to demonstrate how these speech acts could be adapted to classroom practices.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of directive speech acts in *The King's Speech* movie found 37 utterances that indicate directive speech acts in the movie. The utterances were categorized into five types of directive speech acts, following the classification proposed by Searle (1979). The classification includes commanding, requesting, inviting, forbidding, and suggesting. The details categorization of identified utterances can be seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Directive Speech Acts Categorization

| No | Category | Amount | Percentage |
|----|------------|--------|------------|
| 1. | Commanding | 9 | 24.32% |
| 2. | Requesting | 14 | 37.84% |
| 3. | Inviting | 5 | 13.51% |
| 4. | Forbidding | 4 | 10.82% |
| 5. | Suggesting | 5 | 13.51% |

Five types of directive speech acts found in *The King's Speech* movie and their relevance in EFL classrooms, particularly in speaking classes are explained below.

A. Commanding

Directive speech acts of command are types of speech acts in which the speaker attempts to force the listener to perform a specific action. Commands are characterized by imperative structure and are often delivered with authority or urgency. It is used to ensure compliance and is often accompanied by an expectation of immediate action. In *The King's Speech*, commands play a significant role in shaping interactions, particularly in moments where characters assert influence or provide guidance. For example, as seen in the data below.

Data 1

Lionel: "Say it out loud!"
(01:02:15 - 01:02:18)

In this scene, Lionel Logue and Bertie are in the middle of a speech therapy session. Lionel is trying to help Bertie overcome his speech impediment by encouraging him to articulate words clearly and confidently. During the session, Bertie struggles with speaking certain words, and Lionel strongly instructs him to say them out loud as part of the exercise. This moment highlights Lionel's role as an authority figure in the therapeutic context, guiding and challenging Bertie to push his limits.

The utterance "Say it out loud!" is a directive speech act and indicates commands as Lionel uses an imperative form to instruct Bertie to perform a specific action. The tone and structure of the command reflect Lionel's position of authority in this scenario, despite the social status difference between the two characters. Bertie complies with the command, demonstrating the effectiveness of Lionel's directive.

In the context of EFL classrooms, particularly in speaking classes, directive speech acts serve as powerful tools for fostering engagement, guiding activities, and encouraging student participation. Teachers often use commands to manage classroom activities such as directing students to repeat phrases, engage in role-plays, or participate in group discussions. The use of commanding speech acts in a classroom setting shows real-world interactions. By exposing students to commanding speech acts, teachers help them develop listening comprehension and speaking fluency in authentic contexts. Principally, the strategic use of commanding speech acts in speaking classes enhances both students' linguistic competence and communicative confidence.

B. Requesting

Directive speech acts of requesting involve the speaker attempting to get the listener to perform a specific action in a way that is typically polite or less authoritative than commands. Requests are often framed with modal verbs like *can*, *could*, or *would*, emphasizing the speaker's dependence on the listener's willingness to comply. Unlike commands, requests usually assume a more equal or respectful relationship between the speaker and the listener. In *The King's Speech*, requesting speech acts are commonly used to foster cooperation and build rapport, particularly in interactions where encouragement or support is needed rather than direct authority.

Data 2

Lionel: "Now Ma'am, while you are here, you could again be of great assistance."
(00:52:45 - 00:52:50)

In this scene, Lionel Logue addresses Queen Elizabeth (Bertie's wife) during one of Bertie's speech therapy sessions. Lionel recognizes that Queen Elizabeth's presence could help create a supportive and motivating environment for Bertie, who struggles with his confidence and stammer. Lionel indirectly requests the Queen to participate by engaging in her willingness to assist, showing the request politely and respectfully to reflect the power dynamics and social status differences.

The utterance "Now Ma'am, while you are here, you could again be of great assistance." is a directive speech act and indicates a request, as Lionel uses polite language and the modal verb "could" to suggest without imposing authority. This approach reflects Lionel's acknowledgment of the Queen's higher social status while still encouraging her cooperation. The polite phrasing allows Lionel to frame his request in a way that is socially appropriate and likely to elicit a positive response.

In speaking classes, requesting speech acts serve multiple pedagogical purposes, but their effectiveness can be significantly enhanced when parents or students' families actively support their language development at home. Teachers can use it to model polite language and teach students how to express needs or seek help effectively in real-world situations in the classroom. For example, asking students to role-play scenarios like ordering food ("Could I have the menu, please?") or asking for directions ("Can you tell me how to get to the station?") helps develop their ability to use English for functional communication. Requests are also an effective tool for interactive classroom activities. Pair or group activity can require students to use requests when seeking information or negotiating roles, such as in collaborative problem-solving exercises. Additionally, parents' role in interactive activities at home such as collaborative problem-solving games or conversational role-plays, they help build their children's confidence in making requests and responding appropriately. This dual system helps students understand that communication is not limited to academic settings but is a vital social process. By working in partnership with teachers, parents can significantly contribute to their children's ability to speak English fluently and confidently.

C. Inviting

Directive speech acts of inviting involve the speaker encouraging the listener to participate in an activity or event that is cooperative and inclusive. Invitations typically emphasize mutual engagement and often use polite or friendly language to motivate compliance. These speech acts aim to create a sense of collaboration, reducing the authoritative tone often associated with directives. In *The King's Speech*, inviting speech acts play an important role in fostering trust and cooperation, particularly in the interactions between Lionel and Bertie during their speech therapy sessions.

Data 3

Lionel: "Let's take it from the top."
(00:43:12 - 00:43:15)

In this scene, Lionel Logue and Bertie are engaged in a speech therapy exercise. Bertie has been practicing a passage but struggles with certain parts, leading Lionel to suggest restarting the exercise to improve Bertie's confidence and performance. By using the phrase "Let's take it from the top," Lionel invites Bertie to begin again in a collaborative and supportive manner, emphasizing mutual effort rather than imposing authority.

The utterance "Let's take it from the top." is a directive speech act and indicates inviting, as Lionel frames his instruction inclusively and encouragingly through the use of the first-person plural "Let's." This utterance reduces the sense of command and creates a cooperative dynamic between Lionel and Bertie. By inviting Bertie to restart the exercise, Lionel motivates him to engage actively in the therapeutic process while maintaining a respectful and supportive tone.

Directive speech acts of inviting are relevant in EFL speaking classes as they promote active participation, foster a collaborative environment, and encourage students to engage in classroom activities. Invitations are often framed with inclusive languages, such as "Let's," "Why don't we," or "Would you like to". In the classroom, a teacher

might say, *"Let's practice this dialogue together,"* or *"Why don't we try a new speaking game?"* Such directives help students feel included and reduce the anxiety often associated with speaking in a foreign language. By integrating inviting speech acts into classroom activities, teachers can create an engaging atmosphere where students feel motivated to contribute to the classroom activities.

D. Forbidding

Directive speech acts of forbidding involve the speaker explicitly instructing the listener not to perform a specific action. These acts are typically marked by strong language, often using imperatives like *"Stop,"* *"Don't,"* or *"You must not."* Forbidding is characterized by a clear intention to prohibit or prevent certain behaviors, reflecting the speaker's authority or emotional response to the situation. In *The King's Speech*, forbidding speech acts often arise in moments of tension or conflict, highlighting the dynamics of power and control between characters and their efforts to set boundaries.

Data 4

Bertie: *"Stop calling me that!"*
(00:35:20 - 00:35:25)

In this scene, Bertie and Lionel Logue are in the middle of a heated conversation during a speech therapy session. Lionel calls Bertie by a nickname or title that Bertie finds uncomfortable or disrespectful. Frustrated, Bertie responds with the utterance *"Stop calling me that!"* to express his disapproval and assert his boundaries. The command reflects Bertie's desire to pause Lionel's behavior immediately.

The utterance *"Stop calling me that!"* is a directive speech act and indicates forbidding, as Bertie explicitly instructs Lionel to stop a specific action. The imperative structure of the command, with the word *"stop,"* emphasizes urgency and authority. This directive highlights Bertie's attempt to assert control in a situation where he often feels vulnerable due to his speech impediment. Although Bertie is of higher social status than Lionel, the power dynamic within the therapy session allows Lionel to challenge Bertie, making this forbidding act significant as it reasserts Bertie's authority in their interaction.

In an EFL context, teaching forbidding expressions helps students understand and practice both the linguistic structures and social contexts in which prohibitions are used. Forbidding speech acts can be integrated into role-playing or dialogue exercises. For instance, students might practice scenarios such as setting rules (*"Don't touch that!"*) or expressing disapproval in polite or assertive ways. This allows learners to navigate different levels of formality and appropriateness depending on the context, such as speaking to peers versus authority figures. Forbidding speech acts also align with communicative language teaching by emphasizing the importance of pragmatic competence. Understanding how to forbid effectively enables learners to handle real-life situations, such as giving warnings, setting boundaries, or addressing safety concerns.

E. Suggesting

Directive speech acts of suggesting involve the speaker proposing an idea or action to the listener that is intended to influence their decision or behavior. Suggestions are less forceful and often rely on the listener's willingness to consider and act upon the advice. They are typically marked by polite or encouraging language and are used in contexts where the speaker seeks to offer guidance or support rather than impose authority.

Data 5

Lionel: *"You need to be governed by fear."*
(01:12:18,030 - 01:12:20,282)

In this scene, Lionel is helping Bertie overcome his fear of public speaking by guiding him through exercises to build his confidence and fluency. Bertie struggles with a stammer that is worsened by his anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. Lionel encourages him to face his fear and not let it dictate his actions, as part of their ongoing speech therapy sessions.

The utterance *"You need not be governed by fear"* is directive and indicates suggesting. This is because Lionel proposes an idea or advice to Bertie, which is not a command or order but an encouragement to adopt a new mindset. By saying this, Lionel aims to motivate Bertie to recognize that fear does not have to control him and to instill self-belief during their therapy session.

In EFL classrooms, especially in speaking classes, suggesting is often used by teachers to guide students in improving their speaking skills while maintaining a supportive and collaborative environment. For example, teachers may use suggestions like, *"You might want to try pronouncing it this way,"* or *"How about using a stronger verb in your sentence?"* to help students enhance their fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Practicing suggestions in speaking classes can improve students' ability to make recommendations, offer advice, and engage in discussions.

IV. CONCLUSION

The distribution of directive speech acts in *The King's Speech* can provide valuable insights into EFL classroom context. The film highlights the balance between authority and emotional support. Effective EFL instruction relies on combining structured guidance with cooperative and respectful interactions. The prominence of requesting over commanding and forbidding reflects a teaching approach that encourages collaboration and mutual trust, essential for creating a supportive learning environment. In an EFL classroom, teachers can follow this balance by using requests to engage students in meaningful communication, such as asking them to participate in role-plays or group discussions rather than relying on commands or prohibitions. This fosters a sense of agency and mutual respect, helping students feel more comfortable in the language-learning process. The film's emphasis on overcoming personal obstacles through partnership and perseverance mirrors the dynamics between teachers and students in language learning. By using directive speech acts to encourage rather than dictate, teachers can build trust and motivate students to persist in their efforts to improve, even when faced with challenges such as fear of making mistakes or speaking publicly. This approach aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, where the focus is on interaction and meaningful use of language rather than rigid authority.

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