

**Teachers' Attitudes Towards Authority
and Their use of Directives in IEP Classrooms**

Elnaz Kia

Northern Arizona University

Abstract

Directives, defined as “attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle, 1976, p. 11), are frequently found in the classroom discourse of IEPs (intensive English programs) and teachers may use certain directive structures for different purposes in the classroom. This study aimed at examining the factors contributing to the choice of directives by native-speaking teachers at IEPs, as well as investigating the relationship between teachers' authority in the classroom and their choice of directives. Participants of the current study were 4 native-speaking instructors at an IEP in the United States. Data were drawn from a total of 4 hours of audio-recorded classroom interactions, a survey on attitudes towards authority, and interviews. Methodologically, this study drew upon pragmatic theory, and conventional content analysis. Results showed that factors such as teachers' educational background, power difference, level of proficiency, time, and student population contributed to teachers' choice of directives. In addition, it was found that despite teachers' self-perceived style (egalitarian), many commanding directive structures were used. However, they were mostly accompanied by hedging devices.

Background

Directives, as a type of speech act (Searle, 1976, p. 11) refer to “attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something”. Directives perform various functions such as asking, ordering, requesting, advising (Searle, 1976), which may occur in numerous situations, such as classroom context. These functions highlight the importance of appropriate use of directives by the teachers, since ineffective use of directives can bring about misunderstanding and hindrance in learning and might consequently affect students' academic performance (Waring and Hruska, 2012). In addition to their pedagogical value, what makes directives as the topic of interest in research is their face-threatening nature (Brown and Levinson, 1987). They are expected to accompany mitigation devices in certain situations in order to reduce the level of imposition and save face.

Regarding classroom language, Falsgraf and Majors (1995) examined teachers' directives in foreign language classrooms, based on language socialization framework. They reported that higher directness is associated with higher status differential between students and teachers. In a corpus-based study, Liu and Hong (2009) explored the regulative discourse in Singapore primary English classrooms. Findings of this study shows that imperatives account for 62.69% of teacher directives, which signals the unequal power relationship between the teachers and the students.

Despite the fact that many previous studies have investigated directives in the context of classroom (Falsgraf & Majors, 1995; Liu & Hong, 2009), there is a dearth of studies investigating directives in IEPs. More importantly, only a few studies have addressed this issue by using a mixed-methods approach. To this end, the proposed study aimed at examining the factors contributing to the choice of directives by native-speaking teachers at IEPs using retrospective interviews.

Research Questions

1. What is the teachers' self-perception of their teaching style (authoritarian to egalitarian) and its advantages and disadvantages?
2. Based on the teacher's previous training, what are some practices that they apply in giving directions in the classroom?
3. What factors are affecting teachers' choice of directive structures?

Methods

The participants in this study were 4 native-speaking instructors teaching 2 different courses at the program in intensive English (PIE). All teachers were teaching level 5 students, which is equivalent to scoring 57-69 on the TOEFL exam. Table 1 provides pseudonyms, gender, age, course name, and teaching experience of each participant.

Table 1

Pseudonyms and Demographic Information of the Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Course Name	Teaching experience
Chandler	M	35-44	ESP-Business (5)	5-10 years
Ross	M	35-44	ESP-Engineering (5)	5-10 years
Rachel	F	25-34	LNS (5)	5-10 years
Joey	M	25-34	LNS (5)	5-10 years

The instruments in this study included a 14-item questionnaire, recordings of classroom discourse, an interview protocol, and a 7-item demographic questionnaire. At first, the attitude questionnaire was administered on paper. The questionnaire constituted of 2 multi-item scales on attitudes towards teacher authority in classroom, and attitudes towards the class and its students,

each comprising of 8 and 6 items respectively. After calculating the reliability estimates and reviewing the problematic items, one item was deleted on each scale and the reliability was improved for both scales (.43 for scale 1 and .74 for scale 2).

Immediately after the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview was administered. The interview protocol started with the purpose of the project, a definition of directives, and several examples of directives. Subsequently, it involved five questions addressing three constructs: teaching styles, instructors' prior training, and the factors affecting teachers' choice of directives. Regarding the last construct, four participants in the study were asked to record one hour of their classroom. The recordings were partially transcribed to elicit different types of directives from teachers' talk and finally these directives were added to each teacher's interview protocol.

After finishing the interview, the participants were asked to answer some demographic questions orally. The background questionnaire involved 7 items regarding age, gender, nationality, first language (L1), course name and section, teaching experience, and number of teacher training courses taken by the instructors.

For analyzing transcriptions of the interviews, conventional content analysis was used. In this method, coding categories emerge from the text and researchers avoid using preconceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). In order to assure objectivity of the coding performed by the researcher, a non-researcher second coder was recruited. The inter-coder reliability for identifying important words was very high at 91.89% and the reliability for applying the initial themes for coding the identified words was also good at 80.76%. After checking the reliability, initial themes were reviewed and some of them were combined to create final themes. The coding process, including labeling and thematizing, was repeated for each research question.

Results

RQ 1: What is the teachers' self-perception of their teaching style (authoritarian to egalitarian) and its advantages and disadvantages?

Based on descriptive statistics, the current participants tended to be more egalitarian ($M = 4.71$) on a scale from 1 to 5. They also had a positive attitude towards the class they were teaching and its students ($M = 3.70$).

Based on the analysis of interview data, seven different categories emerged in the participants' responses about advantages and disadvantages of egalitarian and authoritarian style. These categories were students' educational background, target language use goal, classroom management, level of proficiency, clarity, power difference/fear/respect, and student ownership/involvement/input.

With regards to advantages, 5 and 4 factors were mentioned for authoritarian and egalitarian style respectively. Level of proficiency and target language use goal were mentioned as an advantage for both styles. In terms of target language use, only Ross thought that authoritative style could help addressing some student learning objectives (SLOs), but Chandler and Rachel thought conversely. They mentioned that in level 5 since the students are very close to their goal (attending university), we need to follow the style that is practiced in American universities, which is an egalitarian style in American universities.

In terms of the level of proficiency, instructors mentioned that an authoritarian style can be used for lower levels since the instructions can be clear and easy to understand, whereas egalitarian styles can be used for higher levels, since they would feel comfortable participating in the classroom and therefore bring a lot to the classroom. Other advantages of authoritarian style were with regards to students' educational background, classroom management and clarity. Participants believed that, students from certain backgrounds might feel more comfortable with

an authoritarian teacher, since they are used to this style. Almost all the participants mentioned that for classroom management purposes they would use an authoritarian style. Finally, as for the clarity, it was mentioned that instructions can be clearer in an authoritarian classroom. In terms of advantages of an egalitarian style, instructors pointed out factors such as feeling an equal position as the teacher in class, and being interested in involving in the classroom.

As for the disadvantages of authoritarian, two factors were mentioned: there will be no room for involvement and participation; students will not feel responsible to do anything in class. As for the egalitarian style's drawbacks, three factors were mentioned. First, egalitarian approaches will not work well for classroom management. Second, following the instructions in an egalitarian style is difficult. Third, students won't follow the instructions, since they do not have the fear present in the authoritarian approach.

RQ 2: Based on the teacher's previous training, what are some practices they apply in giving directions in the classroom?

Ross and Joey reported that they have taken more than 10 teacher-training courses. Rachel reported 5-10 courses and Chandler reported 3-5 courses. However, it should be noted that Ross and Joey were recent graduates of MA-TESL program and therefore, counted all those courses at university, whereas, Rachel and Chandler graduated in MA-TESL years ago and they explicitly mentioned that it is hard to remember the exact number. Some other important points that were mentioned by the instructors while answering the question about teaching training were as follows. All the comments mentioned by Rachel were based on her teacher training courses as a high-school teacher. Ross pointed out that "I didn't get a lot in that I think I learn more probably in my own interests of looking at the pragmatics of direct and indirect strategies". He

mentioned that teacher training for him had mostly happened through self-training. And Chandler mentioned that he learned a lot by observing himself.

After analyzing the participants' responses, four themes were explored regarding the instructors' teaching practices in class. Medium and level were mentioned by Ross and Rachel. They mentioned that they would write the instructions in lower-levels of proficiency, while speak them in higher-levels. The second theme was regarding length and clarity, which was mentioned by all the interviewees. They all mentioned that they would use shorter instructions for lower-level classes to assure more clarity. Hedging and Scaffolding were the next two themes that were pointed out by the interviewees. Hedging was referred to by both Chandler and Joey and Scaffolding was mentioned by Ross and Rachel.

RQ 3: What factors are affecting teachers' choice of directive structures?

Six factors were identified by the interviewees as contributors to their choice of directives: purpose, teacher's background, teacher/student relationship, level, time, student population. The first factor (purpose), which was prompted by the interviewer, discussed two main purposes for the use of directives: disciplinary and educational. Overall, it was discussed that more direct structures, such as commands would be used for disciplinary purposes to make the instructions clearer, easier to understand, and effective.

As for teacher's background, Rachel referred to the idea of "motherese" in her educational background. She said that she tends to use more requests and questions, instead of commands due to the educational system she grew up in. Chandler also mentioned a similar idea and added to that by saying that he would use structures that he would prefer to hear himself as a student.

With regards to teacher/student relationship, two ideas were discussed: 1. making a balance with regards to the power difference in class; 2. using direct structures after getting to know the students. Joey pointed out that he would always start with softer directives and after making sure that students feel comfortable in class, he would use more direct structures to accelerate the pace of class and to get things done.

As explained before, level was also a determining factor in choosing appropriate directive structures. Interviewees frequently mentioned that while they would use shorter, more direct structures (e.g. commands) for lower-level classes, in higher-level classes what they say is more natural and no adjustments would be made to their choice of directives. The factor of time was also frequently mentioned regarding the use of shorter, more direct constructions, such as directives. The last factor, student population was only mentioned by Joey. He stated that he would use simpler structures with lower listening ability.

With regards to certain types of directives, there were definitely more commanding structures than requests or suggestions in the instructors' talk. Although the instructors considered themselves as egalitarians, majority of their directives were forceful. They mentioned that they would usually add hedging markers to their directives to make a balance. One of the main factors that was mentioned for the use of commands was the clarity and quickness of them. The instructors reported using commands to get through activities fast. However, it should be remembered that most of the commanding structures involved politeness markers. About requests, the instructors reported using them mostly with individual hearers, such as calling on a student to do something. Another important factor regarding requests was about using them for educational purposes in order to encourage involvement. Suggestions were minimal in the

current data. This might be because of the power difference between the instructors and the students.

Relevance to PIE and Second Language Learning

Results of this study can be used for training ITAs on their use of directives. The factors emerged in this study could be presented in teacher training materials. ITAs should be informed about the variety of construction types, as well as their functions within a certain context. Learning about the factors affecting their directive choice may help the instructors choose different directive constructions based on the urgency of their directions, the level of the students, the relationship between the teacher and the students and so many other factor. These findings also will inform the instructors about making a balance in their teaching style and teach them how to take on certain styles for certain situations.

References

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge University Press.
- Falsgraf, C., & Majors, D. (1995). Implicit culture in Japanese immersion classroom discourse. *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, 1-21.
- Kondracki, N. L., Wellman, N. S., & Amundson, D. R. (2002). Content analysis: review of methods and their applications in nutrition education. *Journal of nutrition education and behavior*, 34(4), 224-230.
- Liu, Y., & Hong, H. (2009). Regulative discourse in Singapore primary English classrooms: teachers' choices of directives. *Language and Education*, 23(1), 1-13.
- Reinhardt, J. (2010). Directives in office hour consultations: A corpus-informed investigation of learner and expert usage. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29(2), 94-107.
- Searle, J. R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in society*, 5(01), 1-23.
- Waring, H. Z., & Hruska, B. L. (2012). Problematic directives in pedagogical interaction. *Linguistics and Education*, 23(3), 289-300.