Directive Speech Act among Teachers in Teaching Tamil

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Abstract
This study investigates the use of directive speech acts by Tamil language teachers in primary schools within a first language (L1) instructional context. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom audio recordings and semi-structured interviews with five teachers across five Tamil schools in Klang district, Malaysia. The findings revealed that directive speech acts are widely employed by teachers, primarily in the Imperative and Question Directive forms, with Attention Getters being the most frequently used subcategory. Less frequent were Suggestion, Prohibition, Embedded Imperative, and Hints, with the latter showing the lowest occurrence owing to its indirect and ambiguous nature. The results also demonstrate that teachers prioritise clarity in communication to prevent misunderstandings, often opting for direct and indirect forms. This study highlights the role of pragmatic competence in effective classroom communication and provides a foundation for further research on Tamil language education in L1 settings. It also underscores the need for expanded investigation at other educational levels, such as secondary schools, to broaden the understanding of directive speech act usage in vernacular language instruction.
Keywords: Directive Speech Acts, Tamil Language Teaching, Pragmatics, Classroom Discourse, Primary Education, First Language, Malaysian Vernacular Schools

Introduction

Communication is vital for daily functioning, as it enables the exchange of information through comprehensible language (Goh). Effective language, which conveys a clear meaning, has become the focus of recent research. Language performs various functions, such as requesting, questioning, criticising, that form the basis of speech acts. (Searle) views speech as participation in rule-governed interactions, emphasising its communicative nature.

Directive speech acts are among the most common and are used to influence listener behaviour (Searle; Bach and Harnish). In education, they are central to instructional communication, aiding knowledge transfer between teachers and students. Teachers guide learning and must communicate effectively (Adger et al.). The mastery of directive speech acts ensures clarity in instruction and promotes student responsiveness. As (Levine and Munsch) noted, teachers often adjust their language to support their comprehension. Thus, directive speech acts are essential for structuring lessons, maintaining classroom control, and fostering engagement.

Background of Studies

The Barnes, Fenn-Wu, Razak, and Rahman Talib reports formed the basis for Malaysia's standardized education system. Tamil education, now in its 206th year, has also been influenced by these reforms.

Initially dependent on India for teachers and materials, it gradually shifted towards localisation with teacher training, curriculum, and textbooks developed in Malaysia. This reflects the government's commitment to integrating vernacular education while preserving cultural identity.

However, Tamil education continues to face challenges in aligning itself with national standards. Teachers must adopt diverse strategies to stay relevant, with effective teacher-student communication playing a crucial role, especially in Tamil language instruction. Therefore, this study investigated the use of directive speech acts by Tamil language teachers as a key component of effective classroom communication.

Problem Statement

The instructions given by teachers during Tamil language lessons are often vague and poorly structured, leading to student confusion. This issue has been highlighted by Lavannya, an Excellent Tamil Language Teacher, observed that unclear instructions hindered students' understanding and contributed to miscommunication. Such ambiguity is also linked to disruptive behaviour among students and poses barriers to effective classroom interactions (Krish and May). Given that directive speech plays a crucial role in facilitating comprehension and classroom management, this study aimed to address these instructional challenges.

Objectives

1. To categorise the various types of directive speech acts employed by teachers in teaching Tamil.
2. To describe and explain the specific types of directive speech acts utilised by teachers in the context of Tamil language instruction.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have explored the use of directive speech acts in the educational context. (Ibrahim et al.), examining trainee teachers in Malay language classrooms, found that all directive types proposed by (Bach and Harnish) were used most commonly the command form indicating pragmatic competence in managing classroom communication. Similarly, (Wulansari and Suhartini) identified commands as the most prevalent directive form in

English language teaching and classified them into five functional categories: elicitation, instruction, advice, threat, and attention-getters. They recommend using a wider variety of directive forms to increase student engagement.

(Ulfah et al.) emphasised the use of directive speech acts at the start of lessons, particularly commands, to sustain student attention. (Oliveira), in a study involving kindergarten teachers, found that after pragmatic awareness training, teachers adopted polite and indirect directive forms, enhancing classroom management. This underscores the importance of pragmatic awareness in effective communication.

(Haryanto and Mubarok) compared directive speech act usage across two schools, and observed that questioning was the most frequently used form. Teachers in one school showed higher use of command forms, reflecting a more teacher-centred approach, consistent with Wulansari and Suhartini's findings.

In higher education, (El-Dakhs et al.) investigated lecturer-student interactions in English language classrooms. Their study showed a preference for indirect criticism-related speech acts influenced by gender and experience. A unique aspect of their study was the integration of role-play to observe speech acts in simulated contexts. Similarly, (Kia) analysed university-level discourse and identified five main types and 27 subcategories of directive speech acts. Her findings highlight the importance of structural clarity and purposeful use in preventing misunderstandings.

(Heidari et al.) focused on instructional delivery modes. They found that students who received video-based instruction performed speech acts more accurately than those exposed to short stories, emphasising the importance of clarity in instruction for effective communication.

While these studies confirm that directive speech plays a central role in teaching across various settings, most have focused on second- or foreign-language contexts or higher education. There is a lack of research on Tamil language instruction in Malaysian vernacular primary schools. Cultural, linguistic, and contextual factors, such as teaching strategies and

classroom environments, remain under explored. This study addresses this gap by examining the types and functions of directive speech acts used by Tamil language teachers and their roles in facilitating classroom interaction.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the use of directive speech acts by Tamil language teachers instructing fifth year students. Five teachers were selected using simple random sampling to ensure equal representation. Data collection involved audio recordings of classroom sessions, which were transcribed verbatim for analysis and categorisation of directive speech acts.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were subsequently conducted with the same teachers to explore their communication strategies in-depth. The interviews, informed by observations from the recordings, were also conducted.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), followed by approval from the Selangor State Education Department. Consent was also obtained from the school principals and parents. Classroom recordings were carried out during school hours and lasted approximately one hour each.

This study adopts Ervin-Tripp's classification of directive speech as the primary framework for analysing teacher-student interactions. Ervin-Tripp's model is particularly well suited for classroom contexts, as it offers a detailed and functionally grounded categorisation of directive forms commonly used in pedagogical discourse. The framework includes five directive types: Need Statement, Imperative, Question Directive, Embedded Imperative, and Hints, each of which captures subtle pragmatic variations in classroom instruction.

However, more recent models of speech acts (e.g. Martínez-Flor) provided expanded taxonomies; Ervin-Tripp's classification remains highly relevant in first-language instructional settings. Its emphasis on naturally occurring directives and its application in language learning contexts make it a robust tool for

analysing Tamil language classrooms. Furthermore, Oliveira and Ibrahim et al. continue to effectively utilise this framework, demonstrating its lasting applicability in both early education and teacher-training environments.

In contrast to broader classifications such as Searle and Bach and Harnish, which focus more on philosophical categorisation, Ervin-Tripp's model offers more classroom-specific distinctions. Given the focus of this study on directive use in Tamil L1 instruction, Ervin-Tripp's framework provides both the granularity and pedagogical relevance required for a meaningful analysis.

Analysis
The Use of Directive Speech Acts in Tamil Schools

Directive speech acts play a vital role in daily instructional practices, especially language education. In this context, the present study investigated the use of directive speech acts by Tamil schoolteachers in classroom settings. The research was conducted in five schools in the Klang district. Analysis of the data revealed 1,169 directive speech acts employed by teachers during the Tamil language instruction. Table 1 presents the distribution of these speech acts across participating schools.

Table 1 Total Usage of Directive Speech Acts by School

No	School	Number of Utterence	Percentage
1	SJKT BA	337	28.8%
2	SJKT JM	173	14.8%
3	SJKT JA	145	12.4%
4	SJKT MK	161	13.8%
5	SJKT VB	353	30.2%
	Total	1169	100%

The analysis showed that SJKT VB recorded the highest number of directive speech acts, with 353 instances, accounting for 30.2% of the total. This was followed by SJKT BA, with 337 instances (28.8%). SJKT JM reported 173 instances (14.8%), whereas SJKT MK recorded 161 instances (13.8%). SJKT JA had the lowest frequency, with 145 instances, representing 12.4% of the overall usage.

Table 2 Types of Directive Speech Acts by School

Types of directives	BA	%	JM	%	JA	%	MK	%	VB	%
Imperative	202	60.0%	142	82.1%	90	62.1%	103	64.1%	304	86.1%
Embedded Imperative	1	0.30%	0	0	0	0	1	0.6%	0	0
Question Directive	133	39.4%	31	17.9%	55	37.9%	55	34.1%	49	13.9%
Hints	1	0.30%	0	0	0	0	2	1.2%	0	0
Total	337	100%	173	100%	145	100%	161	100%	353	100%

A closer examination of the data revealed notable variations in the use of directive speech acts across the five schools. SJKT VB recorded the highest number of utterances (353), but only employed two types: Imperative 304 utterances (86.1%) and Question Directive 49 utterances (13.9%). SJKT BA followed with 337 utterances, showing greater diversity with Imperative 202 (60.0%), Question Directive 133 (39.4%), and minimal use of embedded imperatives and hints in onen 1 instance each (0.3%).

SJKT JM, with 173 utterances, also used only Imperative 142 (82.1%) and Question Directive 31 (17.9%), indicating a limited range. At SJKT MK, 161 utterances were recorded, comprising Imperative 103 (64.1%), Question Directive 55 (34.1%), minor usage of Hints 2 (1.2%), and Embedded Imperative 1 (0.6%). SJKT JA, with the lowest count 145, mirrored the narrow usage pattern of SJKT VB and SJKT JM, using only Imperative 90, (62.1%) and Question Directive 55 (37.9%).

In summary, although SJKT VB recorded the highest number of directive speech acts, its usage was limited to two types. In contrast, SJKT MK and SJKT BA demonstrated broader usage by incorporating all four directive speech act types, suggesting that a higher frequency does not necessarily indicate greater strategic variation.

Types of Directive Speech Acts Used by Tamil Language Teachers

Table 3 Number of Directive Speech Acts by type

Types of Directives	Number of utterance	Percentage
Imperative	841	71.9%
Embedded Imperative	2	0.2 %
Question Directive	323	27.6%
Hints	3	0.3%
Total	1169	100%

Table 3 summarizes the overall distribution of directive speech acts used by Tamil language teachers in Klang district. The Imperative type was the most dominant, with 841 utterances (71.9%), followed by the Question Directive with 323 utterances (27.6%). By contrast, embedded imperatives and hints were rarely used, with only two (0.2%) and three (0.3%) occurrences, respectively. A detailed analysis of the Imperative category revealed six subcategories: You + Imperative, Attention Getters, Command, Suggestion, Prohibition, and Directives without verbs, indicating varied and context-specific uses of directive forms in Tamil language instruction.

Table 4 Number of Directive Speech Acts of the Imperative Type

No	Types of Imperatives	Number of Utterance	Percentage
1	Attention getters	387	46.0%
2	You+Imperative	19	2.3%
3	Command	368	43.8%
4	Suggestion	24	2.9%
5	Prohibition	13	1.5%

Table 4 presents the distribution of imperative-type directive speech acts and their subcategories among Tamil language teachers. Attention Getters were the most frequently used, with 387 utterances (46.0%), followed by command with 368 utterances (43.8%). Nonverbal Commands accounted for 30 instances (3.5%), suggestions for 24 (2.9%), and You + Imperative for 19 (2.3%). Prohibition was the least frequently used, with only 13 utterances (1.5%). These results indicate a clear preference for initiating interactions and giving explicit instructions, while less emphasis was placed on restrictive or advisory directives.

The Use of Speech Acts in the Teaching of Tamil Language
Imperative

According to Ervin-Tripp, the imperative is a speech act that typically includes a verb, and is used in situations where the listener can easily infer the intended action. In the context of Tamil language instruction, this form was the most frequently used directive by teachers. A detailed analysis identified six subcategories within the imperative form, with Attention Getters most commonly employed to attract and sustain student attention during classroom interactions.

Attention Getters

This subcategory refers to utterances used by speakers to draw the listener's attention before delivering an instruction or message. In this study, Tamil language teachers were observed using specific lexical items to capture students' focus. Two words were most frequently employed: ஓகே ōkē (okay), borrowed from English, and சரி sari (right), a Tamil word. These expressions function as attention signals, preparing students to receive subsequent directives in the classroom discourse.

Table 5 Number of Word Usages

Attention Getters	Number of Utterance	Percentage
ஓகே	294	76.0%
சரி	93	24.0%
Total	387	100%

The researcher found that teachers used the word ஓகே ōkē (okay) more frequently than சரி sari (right). The number of utterances used by teachers in Tamil language teaching was 294 utterances (76.0%) and 93 utterances (24.0%), respectively.

BA71 Guru:

ஓகே, ஒரு கைதட்டு கொடுங்க

Ōkē, oru kaitaṭṭu koṭuṅka.

Okay, give a clap.

The word ஓகே (OK) [Okey] in the above utterance is used by the teacher to attract the students' attention. In this utterance, the teacher says ஓகே (OK) [Okey] before instructing the students to give a clap.

JM3 Guru:

ஓகே தமிழ்மொழி பாடம் பக்கம் 10 எடுங்க

Ōkē tamiḻmoḻi pāṭam pakkam 10 eṭuṅka

Okay Tamil Subject, p. 10.

Similarly, in utterance JM3, the teacher says the word ஓகே (OK) [Okey] before instructing the students to open page 10. Therefore, the word சரி (sari) (right) is also used in Tamil language teaching. This can be seen in the following utterances.

BA1 Guru:

சரி மாணவர்களே.

cari māṇavarkaḷē.

Al (right) students.

In the utterance BA1, the teacher uses the word சரி (sari) (right) before addressing the students. By doing so, the teacher captures students' attention and indirectly informs them that the lesson is about to begin.

BA5 Guru:

சரி ஒரு ஆளு நோக்கத்த வாசிங்க பார்க்கலா.

sari oru āḷu nōkkatta vāciṅka pārkkalā.

Al(right): One student read the objective.

Whereas in utterance BA5, the teacher uses the word சரி (sari) (right) before instructing the student to read the objective.

The analysis shows that Tamil language teachers frequently use the expressions ஓகே (OK) [Okey] and sari (baik) as part of their classroom discourse to capture students' attention. These expressions serve as verbal cues within the Attention Getters subcategory of directive speech acts, helping to signal the start of instructional communication. A deeper examination reveals that ஓகே (OK) [Okey], though a loanword from English, is widely adopted by teachers to enhance clarity and maintain engagement. Its multifunctional role as a prelude to instruction, explanation, and question demonstrates its effectiveness as a flexible discourse marker in classroom interactions.

In Tamil, the word சரி (sari) (right) traditionally means "correct" or "right." However, in classroom interactions, it is often used not for its literal meaning but as an Attention Getter, functioning as a discourse marker to capture students' focus before instruction is given. This usage aligns with Suhartini and Wulansari and Suhartini's findings, which also reported the use of Attention Getters in English

classrooms. A key difference, however, lies in the instructional context: while their study was situated in a foreign language environment, the present research focused on first language (L1) Tamil instruction. Notably, both studies observed the use of the word சரி (OK) [Okey] as a common attention marker, indicating its cross-contextual relevance. Additionally, while Attention Getters were the least used directive in Suhartini and Wulansari's study, they emerged as the most frequently used in this research, suggesting their greater prominence in L1 teaching contexts than in second or foreign language settings.

Command

The following utterances were used by teachers in Tamil language teaching to teach students. The teacher directs students with the intention of taking action based on the teacher's instructions.
BA71 Guru:

ஓகே, ஒரு கைதட்டு கொடுங்க.

Ōkē, oru kaitaṭṭu koṭuṅka.

Ok gives a round of applauses.

For example, in utterance BA71, the teacher asks the students to give a round of applauses after a student provides an answer. The utterance clearly shows that the teacher expected the students to clap after hearing the instruction.
JA173 Guru:

உங்க இடத்த விட்டு திரும்புங்க.

Uṅka iṭatta viṭṭu tirumpuṅka

Turn around from your respective place.

Meanwhile, in JA173, the teacher asked all students to turn around from their places. The teacher expects students to take action by facing backward when this utterance is made.
MK487 Guru:

ஆர்த்தி ஒக்காருங்க

sri Ārtti okkāruṅka

Sri Arthy sit

In utterance MK487, the teacher instructs a student named Sri Arthy to sit. Upon hearing this statement, the student acted according to the teacher's instructions.

This study found that teachers primarily used direct commands to ensure clarity and prompt student response, making command the second most frequently used directive speech act in Tamil language instruction. This aligns with findings by (Ibrahim et al., Wulansari and Suhartini; Oliveira), who also reported frequent use of directive forms. However, while (Oliveira) noted a preference for indirect commands, this study mostly observed direct commands. The difference may stem from context: this research and that of (Ibrahim et al.; Oliveira) were conducted in first-language settings, whereas Wulansari and Suhartini focused on second- or foreign-language instruction.

Suggestion

Teachers produce this type of utterance to offer suggestions to the students. They wanted students to take action based on these suggestions. Such utterances help students to make decisions.
BA227 Guru:

குறிப்பு சொல்லா மொத எழுதிக்கலாம்

Kuṟippu collā mota eḻutikalām

Keywords can be written first.

In the BA227 example above, the teacher suggested to the students that they could write the keywords before presenting them in front of the class. In this situation, the teacher allows students to write keywords before presenting them. This will help to smoothen their presentations.

In some cases, teachers used the suggested form of directive speech acts to offer guidance, requiring students to infer the intended meaning. However, this form was rarely used in this study. Martínez-Flor identified three types of suggestions within a foreign language context: direct, indirect, and conventional, emphasising their value in enhancing students' pragmatic competence. While his study focused on second language instruction, similar strategies may also benefit first language classrooms, including Tamil language teaching.

Prohibition

This type of prohibition utterance is produced by the teacher to prevent the students from performing certain actions. Such utterances reflect the teacher's intention to stop the students from doing something.
BA225 Guru:

ஆங்கிலச் சொல் பயன்படுத்தக்கூடாது

Āṅkilac col payaṉpaṭuttakkūṭātu

You cannot use English words.

In utterance BA225, the teacher indirectly prohibited students from using English during Tamil lessons, reinforcing the use of the target language. This directive subtly guides student behaviour without explicit commands.

JM157 Guru:

யாரும் எடத்த விட்டு எழுந்திரிக்க வேண்டா.

Yārum eṭatta viṭṭu eḻuntirikka vēṇṭā.

No one should get up from the seat.

For instance, in utterance JM157, the teacher explicitly prohibited students from standing. This illustrates the clear use of prohibition to control classroom behaviour and maintain order during instruction.

VB159 Guru:

யாரோ யாருக்கும் சொல்லிக் கொடுக்ககூடாது

yārō yārukkum collik koṭukkakkakūṭātu.

No one should teach others.

Prohibition directives were used to restrict specific student behaviours. For example, in utterance JM157, the teacher forbade students from standing, whereas in VB159, students were prohibited from giving answers to others. These utterances reflect the teachers' use of direct control to manage classroom conduct.

The analysis revealed that Tamil language teachers rarely use prohibition directives, although when applied, they effectively discouraged specific student actions. This finding aligns with (Ibrahim et al.), who defined prohibition as preventing actions through verbal instruction and similarly reported its limited use among trainee teachers in an L1 context, suggesting that prohibition is generally less emphasized in first-language teaching.

You+Imperative

The You+Imperative Speech Act is a directive used to provide instructions to students. This type of speech act always includes the word "you", which mean நீங்க (nīṅka) or நீ (nī) Examples of such utterances can be seen below.

BA227 Guru:

நீங்க அத வந்து விரிவுபடுத்தி ஆசிரியர்கிட்ட சொல்லலா

nīṅka ata vantu virivupaṭutti āciriyarkiṭṭa collalā.

You can expand content and inform the teacher.

In utterance BA277, the teacher suggested that students expand their content. In this utterance, the teacher uses the word நீங்க (nīṅka) [Anda] to refer to all students.

VB159 Guru:

நாகராஜ்.. நீ சொல்லுயா.

nākarāj.. nī colluyā.

Nagaraj.. You answer me.

The aforementioned speech examples are somewhat different. This is because in this utterance, the word "you" is expressed as நீ (nī) [You]. Although both words had the same meaning, they functioned differently. Through this utterance, the teacher asked Nagaraj to provide an answer. However, the teacher uses the word நீ (nī) [You] to refer to the student named Nagaraj.

The word நீ (nī) [You] is a singular second-person pronoun, whereas நீங்க (nīṅka) [You] is a plural second-person pronoun. The word நீங்க (nīṅka) [You] usually refers to more than one person and can also be used to address someone with higher authority or someone older. However, in this study, teachers use the word நீங்க (nīṅka) [You] more frequently than நீ (nī) [You]. Additionally, teachers sometimes use நீங்க (nīṅka) [You] to refer to all students or just one student. This shows that words become more polite when used to address children.

The same can be observed in Oliviera's study, where the teacher used indirect directive speech acts, making their speech more polite. This can also be seen in this study, where teachers use the word நீங்க (nīṅka) [You] when conversing with students. This indicates that teachers use more polite speech when conducting Tamil language lessons.

Directive Without Verb

Commands without verbs were a new finding of this study. Commands usually appear with verbs, allowing them to act on instruction. However, in this case, the teacher gives commands without verbs and the students respond based on the given instructions.

BA5 Guru:

விறுவிறுன்னு சண், சுறுசுறுப்பா

viṟuviṟuṉṉu Saṇ, uṟusuṟuppā

Hurry up, Shanmugam, Hurry up.

In the above utterance, the teacher uses the word விறுவிறுன்னு (viṟuviṟuṉṉu) [hurry up] to urge the

student to answer the question. Although the teacher did not explicitly use the verb answer, the students still responded to the question.

BA152 Guru:

மீண்டும் ஒரு முறை.

Mīṇṭum oru muṟai

Once again.

In utterance BA152, the teacher says "once again", in other words, the teacher is asking the student to repeat the answer that has been given. When the student hears the teacher's utterance, they will repeat their previous answer, even though the teacher does not use the verb "repeat."

In conclusion, the teacher used six types of imperative speech acts in Tamil language teaching. From the explanation above, it is clear that teachers should use imperative speech acts to ensure that students respond according to their intent.

Question Directive

This type of directive speech act takes the form of a question used by teachers to prompt students to take specific action. It serves a facilitative role by encouraging verbal responses, idea sharing, and active classroom participation. In this study, 323 instances were recorded, making it the second-most frequently used directive speech act in Tamil language teaching.

BA37 Guru:

கேஸ் வந்து தமிழ் சொல்லாயா?

Kēs vantu tamiḻ collāyā?

Is "gas" a Tamil word?

JA117 Guru:

யார் சொல்ல முடியும்?

Yār colla muṭiyum?

Who can tell?

MK216 Guru:

ஓகே, வாசிப்போமா?

Okkē, Vācippōmā?

Okay. Can we start reading?

In example BA37, the teacher asks whether the word 'gas' is Tamil, but the underlying intention is to prompt students to provide the correct Tamil equivalent. In JA117, instead of selecting a volunteer, the teacher implicitly encouraged all students to respond, promoting collective participation. Similarly, in MK 216, the teacher asks if students

are ready to read, signalling preparation for the next activity. Although these utterances appear as questions, they function as indirect directives. BA37 seeks to correct a linguistic error, while JA117 and MK 216 guide students toward the next task, illustrating how Question Directives directly direct classroom behaviour.

This practice is supported by Haryanto and Mubarok, who found that question-based speech acts were most frequently used in English language teaching. In contrast, the present study and that of (Ibrahim et al.) identified question directives as the second most commonly used type. The difference may be attributed to instructional context, as both the current study and Ibrahim et al. were conducted in first-language (L1) settings, while Haryanto and Mubarok's research focused on second-language instruction.

Hints

Hint speech acts are typically expressed indirectly, requiring listeners to infer the speaker's intended meaning. Their implicit and often ambiguous nature allows for multiple interpretations, which makes them more difficult to understand. In this study, such speech acts were rarely used by Tamil language teachers, with only three instances recorded during the teaching sessions

MK290 Guru:

வெளங்கல...

Veḷaṅkala...

Not clear...

In this utterance, the teacher signals that the student's response is unclear, prompting the student to infer the intended meaning and take corrective action such as repeating or clarifying their answer. The teacher's objective is not stated explicitly; instead, the student must interpret the implicit intent, making this a form of indirect prompting that shifts communicative responsibility to the listener.

BA5 Guru:

சண்முகம் மட்டோ

saṇmukam maṭṭō

Only Shanmugam.

In the above utterances, there are keywords that allow students to take appropriate action. In example BA5, the teacher says "Only Shanmugam." In this

utterance, the word 'மட்டோ' (maṭṭō) [Only] serves as a keyword, informing the other students to remain silent because only the student named Shanmugam needs to read.

MK4: Guru:

> சுக்கான்? சுக்கான்? தமிழ் தமிழ்
>
> Cukkāṉ?.. Cukkāṉ?.. Tamil tami̲l
>
> Sports.. Sports.. Tamil.. Tamil

In the second example, MK4, the word தமிழ் தமிழ் (Tamil, Tamil) serves as a keyword, instructing students to say the word "sports" in Tamil.

As discussed, hints were the least used directive speech acts by teachers in this study, likely due to the high level of inference they require. Their implicit nature makes it harder for students to interpret, which reduces their practicality in classroom settings. This finding aligns with (Suryanovika and Julhijah), who also reported the minimal use of hints in their analysis of Jane Austen's literary characters. Despite differing contexts, both literary and educational studies reveal a shared pattern, suggesting that such indirect forms are generally avoided due to their complexity and the cognitive effort they impose on listeners.

Embedded Imperative

The Embedded Imperative Speech Act is used in all situations, particularly in formal contexts. In addition, listeners can easily understand these utterances. Most of these utterances take the form of questions and requests, as they often include words such as "can?" and "is?".

In this study, the researcher found that this type of speech act was the least used by teachers in Tamil language teaching and occurred only twice.

BA197 Guru:

> யோசிக்க முடியுமா?
>
> Yōsikka muṭiyumā?
>
> Can you think?

MK403 Guru:

> கீர்த்திகா.. வாசிக்க முடியுமா?
>
> Kīrttikā. Vācikka muṭiyumā?
>
> Keetika, can you read?

The above example is an Embedded Imperative. The word முடியுமா? (muṭiyumā) means "can you?" Although this word appears in the form of a question, the speaker's intention to use it is to instruct the student to do something.

In MK403, the teacher asks the student whether they can perform a particular action. Although this utterance takes the form of a question, its underlying intent is to prompt students to begin reading. This reflects the teacher's use of polite and indirect directives, demonstrating that educators often employ embedded imperatives to maintain respectful classroom communication.

Ibrahim et al. also noted that phrases like "can" or "is it" function as polite, indirect requests, consistent with the present study's interpretation based on Bach and Harnish's speech act theory. Although the terminologies differ, both studies share a similar structural and functional intent. In this study, however, Embedded Imperatives were the least used directive type, in contrast to Ibrahim et al.'s findings, where they ranked third. This suggests that the use of directive speech acts is context-dependent and is influenced by teachers' individual communicative approaches.

Conclusion

This study examined the use of directive speech acts among Tamil language teachers in a first language (L1) primary school context. The findings revealed that Imperative and Question Directive forms were most frequently employed, with Attention Getters dominating the classroom discourse. The results suggest that Tamil language teachers rely heavily on clear and direct forms of communication to maintain student engagement and instructional clarity.

Theoretical Implications

This study reinforces the relevance of Ervin-Tripp's framework for analysing pedagogical discourse, particularly in L1 settings. This demonstrates that the five categories of directive speech acts, especially the nuanced use of Imperative subtypes, remain applicable in modern classroom contexts. This contributes to the ongoing discourse in pragmatics by supporting the model's practical utility in L1 instruction in contrast to frameworks primarily developed for second-language teaching.

Practical Applications

Teachers and curriculum designers can benefit from understanding how different types of directives

affect student comprehension and behaviour. These findings suggest a need for teacher training programs to include pragmatic strategies that emphasise clarity, politeness, and instructional variety. Recognising when to use indirect forms (e.g. Hints or Embedded Imperatives) could enhance students' autonomy and classroom participation.

Recommendations

Future research should explore directive speech acts at the secondary level across different regions and among diverse student demographics. Comparative studies of L1 and L2 Tamil instruction could offer deeper insights into context-specific speech act usage. Additionally, integrating quantitative analysis or student response data could further validate and enrich the current findings.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable insights into the use of directive speech acts in Tamil language instruction, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in only five Tamil primary schools within Klang district, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other regions or school types. The use of a small, regionally confined sample may not fully capture the diversity of directive speech act usage across Malaysia's vernacular educational system.

Second, the study focused exclusively on fifth year teachers, which restricts the applicability of the findings to other grade levels. Language strategies and directive forms may vary significantly at lower or higher primary levels as well as in secondary education.

Third, the qualitative case study design emphasises depth over breadth. Although rich in detail, the findings are not intended to be statistically representative. Furthermore, the data were derived solely from teacher utterances; student perspectives and responses were not included, limits the ability to assess how directives are interpreted by learners.

Future research should consider expanding the sample size, including diverse educational levels, and incorporating student feedback to strengthen the interpretation and applicability of the findings across broader contexts.

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