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TEACHER'S DIRECTIVE SPEECH ACT IN ONLINE TAMIL LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a rapid shift to online learning, changing the way languages are taught in primary schools. This study looks at how Tamil language teachers in Tamil National Type Primary Schools (SJKT) in the Klang district use directive speech acts during online instruction. To explore this, one hour online lessons were recorded from five randomly chosen schools and analyzed using Ervin-Tripp's categorization framework. A total of 963 directive speech acts were identified. The analysis shows that imperatives were by far the most common (74.8%), followed by question directives (24.6%), while embedded imperatives and need statements appeared only occasionally. Attention getting directives were used frequently, helping teachers maintain focus and move smoothly between activities. The study also found variation across schools, suggesting that individual teaching styles and interactional dynamics strongly shape online communication. Overall, the findings point to the importance of clear and directive communication in sustaining student engagement and managing virtual classrooms, and they offer insights for improving first-language instruction in digital settings.

Keywords:

Speech Act, Tamil Language, Online Teaching and Directive Speech Act

Introduction

A speech act can be understood as an action carried out through the use of language (Austin, 1962). Searle (1969) further explains that people perform actions by means of their words, meaning that verbal expression is itself a form of communicative action. Common examples include making promises, asking for help, pleading, or offering an apology. Over time, scholars

such as Austin, Searle, Leech, and Grice have outlined different types of speech acts, with directive speech acts being one of the most widely discussed. Searle (1969) defines directive speech as those in which the speaker attempts to persuade or compel the listener to perform a particular action. Similarly, Bach and Harnish (1979) argue that directive speech acts reflect the speaker's expectation that the listener is obliged to undertake a specific task. Moreover, such speech acts facilitate accurate interpretation of meaning between speakers and listeners, enhancing communication.

Schools, as social institutions, play an important role in shaping communication that supports both learning and broader development. Within the classroom, effective communication enables teachers and students to share ideas, knowledge, and experiences in meaningful ways. Teachers hold a central responsibility in fostering such environments, and one of the key tools they rely on is the directive speech act. Through these directive speech act, teachers guide classroom activities, assign homework, and encourage student participation, all of which contribute to a more engaging and structured learning process.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought strict mobility restrictions and control measures in Malaysia, which had a direct impact on education. With schools and other institutions forced to close, teaching and learning activity quickly shifted to online platforms. This sudden transition required teachers to adopt more creative and innovative methods to sustain instruction. Although many rose to the challenge, the success of online learning still relied heavily on the quality of teacher and student interaction. In virtual classrooms, limited interaction often makes it difficult for teachers to evaluate students' understanding or pinpoint areas where they struggle, which in turn affects the effectiveness of teaching and facilitation (Abdullah & Amran, 2021).

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates how directive speech acts are used in Tamil language instruction during online teaching and learning. The focus is on Tamil language teachers in Tamil National Type Primary Schools (SJKT), with attention to the ways in which they employ directive speech acts to manage classroom communication and sustain engagement in online environments.

Literature Review

Studies on speech acts in online teaching consistently highlight their importance in shaping instructional communication. Abdulsada and Darweesh (2023), for example, showed that webinar presenters and moderators frequently relied on expressive, commissive, assertive, and especially directive forms, with directives emerging as the most prominent. Their findings point to the pivotal role of directive language in maintaining interaction and sustaining communication in virtual classrooms. Yet, their work remains mainly descriptive, concentrating on the frequency of speech act usage rather than exploring how different types influence student engagement or comprehension. A closer look at the pedagogical impact of these speech acts would have offered stronger implications for online instructional design.

Similar issues surface in the study by Rahman et al. (2021), which investigated the teaching of Islamic education to students with special needs. Unlike Abdulsada and Darweesh (2023), who emphasized the role of directives in fostering interaction, Rahman and colleagues focused on the barriers teachers encountered, such as technological difficulties, weak student commitment, and limited teacher preparedness. While both studies highlight critical aspects of online

instruction, they share a common limitation: the absence of concrete solutions. Addressing these gaps by incorporating adaptive technologies or exploring innovative teaching approaches could provide more practical guidance, particularly for educators navigating diverse learning needs in digital environments.

Research on teacher and student interaction in online learning highlights both the opportunities and challenges of virtual classrooms. Simbolon et al. (2021), studying Indonesian language instruction through Zoom, reported that lessons were dominated by teachers' commands and requests, with students positioned mainly as passive recipients. By contrast, Abdullah and Amran (2021) pointed to the reverse problem: a lack of directive control, which resulted in reduced communication, weaker comprehension, and declining student motivation. Taken together, these studies reveal the tension between maintaining authority and fostering autonomy in digital environments. Yet both accounts stop short of addressing key issues. Simbolon et al. (2021) did not consider whether excessive reliance on directives might restrict learner independence, while Abdullah and Amran (2021) limited their analysis to teachers' views, excluding the perspectives of students. A more balanced approach that incorporates both voices could yield richer insights into how engagement is best supported online.

Additional perspectives are provided by Putri and Skolastika (2022), who observed that students themselves use interrogative forms as directives to keep interaction alive, and by Rahmawati et al. (2021), who highlighted the discomfort created when teachers' directives are perceived as impolite. Both studies reinforce the importance of directive speech acts in shaping classroom dynamics, yet each has its blind spots. Putri and Skolastika (2022) do not assess how student-initiated directives affect overall authority relations, while Rahmawati et al. (2021) focus mainly on teacher behavior, neglecting the reciprocal role of learners. A more comprehensive analysis that takes into account cultural expectations, student agency, and institutional norms would deepen our understanding of how directives influence online learning across diverse educational contexts.

Research on online learning has highlighted challenges from both student and teacher perspectives. Ishak and Talaat (2020) observed that limited two way communication weakens student motivation, reinforcing the value of face to face teaching. Husin (2021) similarly reported mixed outcomes, with many students still preferring traditional classrooms. From the teachers' side, Ahmad and Muhammad (2022) identified barriers such as limited technological skills, low student engagement, and financial constraints. While these studies shed light on key issues, they remain largely diagnostic. Greater attention to practical strategies for enhancing interaction, supporting teachers, and balancing online with face-to-face modes would strengthen their contribution to the debate on digital education.

Studies have also examined directive speech acts as a key feature of online instruction. Meidini et al. (2023) described their forms and functions in sustaining interaction, while Sudarmawan et al. (2022) focused on politeness strategies, noting the dominance of directives in virtual classrooms. Both highlight the importance of directives but leave gaps: Meidini et al. (2023) overlook how politeness shapes effectiveness, and Sudarmawan et al. (2022) do not assess their impact on engagement. An integrated perspective linking interactional forms with politeness strategies would provide a fuller picture of how directives influence online learning.

Overall, research underscores the role of directives, interaction, and engagement in digital education but has focused mainly on secondary and tertiary levels. Little is known about their function in primary schooling, especially their effect on engagement, outcomes, and balance with politeness. Exploring directives in early education is therefore essential to refine teaching practices and strengthen learning in online context.

Methodology

Research Design
This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the use of directive speech acts in online Tamil language instruction. This approach was well suited to the research aim, as it allows for a close examination of naturally occurring communication in its real classroom context (Creswell, 2014). Data were drawn from a series of recorded online lessons, which were carefully transcribed to capture the exact wording of teacher and student exchanges. The transcripts were then analyzed using Ervin-Tripp's (1976) categorization framework, providing a structured way to identify and classify the different forms of directive speech acts. Through this process, the study was able to document both the frequency and the variety of directive strategies used in virtual classrooms.

Research Participants and Sampling
The participants of this study were Tamil language teachers from five Tamil National Type Primary Schools (SJKT) in the Klang district, specifically those teaching Standard Five classes. This group was chosen because, by their fifth year of schooling, students typically possess a foundational command of the Tamil language that enables them to understand lexical aspects, construct coherent sentences, articulate ideas, and engage with a variety of texts (Mohd Helmi, 2017). The Klang district was selected as the research site because it hosts one of the largest concentrations of SJKT schools in Malaysia, making it a relevant and representative setting for examining Tamil language instruction.

The five schools were identified using purposive random sampling, which ensured diversity while keeping the dataset manageable. Within each school, the Standard Five Tamil language teachers were chosen through random sampling procedures to reduce researcher bias and maintain fairness in selection. Limiting the study to five schools provided a balance between breadth and depth, capturing variation in teaching practices across different institutions while still allowing for detailed qualitative analysis. This sampling rationale strengthens methodological transparency and enhances the validity and transferability of the findings within the broader SJKT context.

In line with the study's focus on online learning, data were collected from one-hour recorded Tamil language lessons. These lessons provided opportunities for detailed observation of teacher and student interactions in authentic instructional settings (Wilson, 2009). Ethical approval was obtained from the Educational Planning and Policy Research Division and the State Education Department, and parental consent was secured for student participation. The lessons, conducted via Google Classroom, were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to capture the exact spoken content. The transcripts were carefully reviewed for accuracy before being analyzed using Ervin-Tripp's (1976) framework for categorizing directive speech acts.

Analysis

The Use of Directive Speech Acts in Tamil Schools During Online Teaching
Directive speech acts are crucial in daily teaching and learning activities, particularly in online education, where precise instructions are essential for effective communication. This study examined directive speech acts among Tamil school teachers during online teaching. The research was carried out in five schools within the Klang district.

The study's findings indicate that a total of 963 directive speech acts were used by teachers during Tamil language online lessons. Table 1 presents the frequency of directive speech act usage across the five selected schools.

Table 1: Total Number of Directive Speech Acts Used by Schools During Online Teaching.

School	Number of Utterances	percentage
SJKT BA	253	26.3%
SJKT JM	142	14.7%
SJKT JA	166	17.2%
SJKT MK	82	8.6%
SJKT VB	320	33.2%
Total	**963**	**100%**

The study results indicate that Tamil language teachers from SJKT VB used the highest number of directive speech acts, totalling 320 instances (33.2%). SJKT BA ranked second, with 253 instances (26.3%). This was followed by SJKT JA, where teachers used 166 directive speech acts (17.2%). Tamil language teachers from SJKT JM employed 142 directive speech acts (14.7%), while SJKT MK recorded the lowest usage, with 82 instances (8.6%). The findings suggest that the frequency of directive speech acts varies across schools, with SJKT VB demonstrating the highest usage. This may be attributed to differences in teaching strategies, student engagement levels, or school-specific online teaching practices.

Table 2: Types of Directive Speech Act Used by School During Online Teaching

Types of Directives	BA	%	JM	%	JA	%	MK	%	VB	%
Need Statement	0	0	1	0.7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Imperative	187	74.0	105	74.0	71	42.7	56	68.4	301	94.0
Embedded Imperative	0	0	1	0.7	2	1.2	1	1.2	1	0.3
Question Directive	66	26.0	35	24.6	93	56.1	25	30.4	18	5.7
Total	**253**	**100**	**142**	**100**	**166**	**100**	**82**	**100**	**320**	**100**

Table 2 shows SJKT VB recorded the highest usage of directive speech acts, totalling 320 utterances. However, the teacher at this school employed only two types of directive speech acts. The most frequently used type was the Imperative speech act, accounting for 301 utterances (94%). The Question Directive speech act was the second most common, with 18 utterances (5.7%). The Embedded Imperative speech act was used only once (0.3%) during online Tamil language teaching. No other types of directive speech acts were observed in this school.

SJKT BA ranked second in the use of directive speech acts, with 253 utterances. The teacher in this school primarily used the Imperative type, with 187 utterances (74.0%). The Question Directive speech act was used 66 times (26.0%). Like SJKT VB, the teacher in this school used only two types of directive speech acts.

SJKT JA was the third-highest school using directive speech acts, with 166 utterances. In contrast to the previous two schools, the question Directive was the most frequently used speech act here, with 93 utterances (56.1%). The Imperative speech act was used 71 times (42.7%), while the Embedded Imperative speech act was rarely used, appearing only twice (1.2%).

SJKT JM followed with a total of 142 directive speech act utterances. Teachers in this school most frequently used the Imperative speech act, with 105 utterances (74.0%). The Question Directive speech act was used 35 times (24.6%). The Embedded Imperative speech act was used once (0.7%).

SJKT MK recorded the lowest use of directive speech acts, with 82 utterances. The most frequently used type was the Imperative speech act, with 56 utterances (68.4%). The second most common was the Question Directive speech act, with 25 utterances (30.4%). The Embedded Imperative speech act was used only once (1.2%).

The findings highlight that the Imperative Speech Act was the most commonly used across all schools, followed by the Question Directive Speech Act. The Embedded Imperative Speech Act was the least used, indicating that Tamil language teachers primarily rely on direct commands and questions to facilitate online teaching.

Table 3: Total Number Of Directive Speech Acts By Types

Types of Directives	Number of Utterances	Percentage
Need Statement	1	0.1%
Imperative	720	74.8%
Embedded Imperative	5	0.5%
Question Directive	237	24.6%
Total 963		**100%**

The findings indicate that the imperative speech act is the most frequently used directive speech act by Tamil language teachers during online teaching, accounting for 74.8% (720 utterances). The question directive speech act is the second most common, with 237 utterances (24.6%).

The embedded imperative (5 utterances, 0.5%) and hints (1 utterance, 0.1%) are the least utilized.

Table 4: Types Of Imperative Speech act

Imperative Speech Act	Number Of Utterances	Percentage
Attention getters	347	48.2%
You+Imperative	25	3.5%
Command	330	45.8%
Suggestion	10	1.4%
Prohibition	3	0.4%
Command Without Verb	5	0.7%
Total	**720**	**100%**

The findings indicate that Tamil language teachers' most frequently used imperative speech act is attention getters, accounting for 48.2% (347 utterances). This is followed by command, which makes up 45.8% (330 utterances). The you + imperative type is used 25 times (3.5%), while the suggestion type appears in 10 utterances (1.4%). Command without a verb is used only 5 times (0.7%), and prohibition is the least used imperative speech act, with only three utterances (0.4%).

These results suggest that Tamil language teachers rely heavily on attention-getters and commands to maintain engagement and direct student activities during online teaching.

The Use of Directive Speech Acts in Online Tamil Language Teaching

Imperative
According to Ervin-Tripp (1976), an imperative is a type of speech act that includes verbs and is used in situations where the action to be taken by the listener is explicitly stated. This type of speech act is the most frequently used by Tamil language teachers during online teaching.

Attention Getters
Speakers use attention-getters to capture the listener's attention before delivering instructions or information.. In this study, two commonly used words by teachers to attract students' attention were identified: ஓகே (Ōkē) [Okey] and சரி (Sari) [Fine].

The word ஓகே (Ōkē) [Okey] is borrowed from English and frequently used in Tamil conversations, while சரி (Sari) [Fine] is a native Tamil word. These attention-getting expressions help teachers engage students and ensure they are focused during online lessons.

Table 5: Number of uses of the words ஓகே (*Ōkē*) [Okey] and சரி (*sari*) [Fine]

Attention Getters	Number of utterances	Percentage
ஓகே (*Ōkē*) [Okey]	215	62.0%
சரி (*sari*) [Fine]	132	38.0%
Total	347	100%

According to the table above, teachers use the word ஓகே (*Ōkē*) [Okey] more frequently than சரி (Sari) [Fine] during online Tamil language teaching. The total number of utterances for ஓகே (*Ōkē*) [Okey] is 215 (62.0%), whereas சரி (Sari) [Fine] is used 93 (38.0%) times. Furthermore, teachers use these words in three specific situations: before giving a command, asking a question, and explaining. Before giving a command, these words help prepare students to follow instructions. Before asking a question, they ensure students are attentive and ready to respond. Before explaining, they signal that important information is about to be conveyed. These attention-getting words are crucial in maintaining student engagement and ensuring effective communication during online Tamil language lessons.

OVB 3 Teacher : ஓகே இப்ப A வந்து நமக்கு முதல்ல ஒரு பத்திய வாசிங்க.

       Ōkē ippa A vantu namakku mutalla oru pattiya vāciṅka.

       Okay, now A will read us the paragraph.

OJA 112 Teacher : சரி முதல்ல பாருங்க இந்த உரைக்குமில் எல்லாம் பேசுறாங்க

இல்லையா

    sari mutalla pāruṅka inta uraikkumil ellām pēcuṟāṅkaillaiyā

    Fine, first of all look at this dialog textbox. They have right.

The examples of utterances above demonstrate that teachers use the words ஓகே (*Ōkē*) [Okey] and சரி (Sari) [Fine] before giving a command. In utterance OVB3, the teacher used the word ஓகே (*Ōkē*) [Okey] before instructing the student named 'A' to read the paragraph. Similarly, in utterance OJA 112, the teacher used the word சரி (Sari) [Fine] before directing all students to look at the dialogue textbox. In both situations, the teachers used these words as a preparatory signal before giving a command, ensuring that students were attentive and ready to follow instructions.

OBA 3 Teacher : ஓகே எல்லாரு பசியாறிட்டீங்களா?

      Ōkē ellāru paciyāṟiṭīṅkaḷā?

      Have all of you eaten breakfast?

OBA 9 Teacher : சரி இந்த முதல் படத்தில் என்ன பாக்கரீங்க?

      sari inta mutal paṭattil eṉṉa pākkarīṅka?

      Fine, What do you see in the first picture?

In the example of OBA3, the teacher asked the students whether they had their breakfast or not, using the word ஓகே (Ōkē) [Okey] before posing the question. Similarly, in OBA9, the teacher asked the students about their observations in the given picture, using the word சரி (Sari) [Fine] before asking. From this discussion, it is evident that the words ஓகே (Ōkē) [Okey] and சரி (Sari) [Fine] are used as pre-questioning markers, helping to engage students and signal an upcoming question.

OVB183 Teacher : ஓகே, மல்லிகை செடியில் உள்ள மொட்டு மாலை வேளையில்

> மலரும்.
> *Ōkē, mallikai ceṭiyil uḷḷa moṭṭu mālai vēḷaiyil malarum*
> Okay, the bud of the jasmine plant blooms in the evening.

In the utterances above, the teacher explains about the jasmine flower and uses the word ஓகே (Ōkē) [Okey] before beginning the explanation. From this discussion, it is evident that teachers use the words ஓகே (Ōkē) [Okey] and சரி (Sari) [Fine] before giving orders, asking questions, and explaining concepts. Additionally, it has been proven that teachers use these words in online Tamil language teaching to attract students' attention.

The word ஓகே (Ōkē) [Okey] is an English loanword. Despite being borrowed, teachers still use it as an attention-getter in Tamil language teaching, indicating that loanwords can be effective tools for engaging students. In contrast, the Tamil word சரி (Sari) [Fine], in the context of teacher-student communication, does not carry a specific meaning but functions solely as an attention-getter.

This finding aligns with a study by Suhartini and Wulansari (2015), which found that teachers use attention-getters in English language teaching. However, their study differs from this research because it was conducted in a foreign language setting, whereas this study focuses on first-language teaching. Interestingly, both studies highlight the use of the word ஓகே (Ōkē) [Okey] as an attention-getter. Furthermore, while attention-getters were the most frequently used speech act in this study, they were the least used in Suhartini and Wulansari's (2015) research. This suggests that attention-getters are more commonly employed in first-language teaching than second- or foreign-language instruction.

Command
The command below are used by the teacher in Tamil teaching to give instruction to the student.

> OVB 29 Teacher: B மைக்க ஆன் பண்ணி சொல்லு.
> *B maikka āṉ paṇṇi collu..*
> B put the microphone on and give me the answer.

In utterance OVB29, the teacher asks student B to turn on the microphone and speak. Previously, the student had spoken without turning on the microphone, making it difficult for others to hear. In response, the teacher gives a direct command to turn on the microphone and speak, ensuring the student's response is audible to the entire class.

OBA 45 Teacher: யாரு Jவா சொல்லுமா.

Yāru Jvā collumā.

Is that you J, Please provide the answer

In utterance OBA 45, the teacher commands a student named J to provide the answers. Before giving the command, the teacher first confirms the student's name. Since this is an online class, confirming the student's identity ensures that the teacher addresses the correct person before instructing them to respond.

OJA 116 Teacher : அவங்க என்ன வேலை செய்றாங்க என்று பாருங்க.

A vaṅka eṉṉa vēlai ceyṟāṅka eṉṟu pāruṅka.
Look, what are they doing

In the above utterance, the teacher asks the students to look at the picture and observe what the people in the picture are doing. Once the teacher shares the picture with the students, they command the entire class to observe it.

Moreover, in the utterances discussed above, the commands are given directly. The teacher provides direct commands to make it easier for students to understand and act according to the teacher's intentions. The command form is the second most frequently used speech act in Tamil language teaching, indicating that teachers regularly use commands when instructing students.

Studies by Ibrahim et al.(2017), Suhartini and Wulansari (2015), and Oliveira (2009) support the conclusion that teachers frequently use commands. Although Suhartini and Wulansari (2015) stated that teachers often use commands in teaching, they also identified five types of functions not found in their study. Additionally, in Oliveira's (2009) study, most commands identified by teachers were indirect, whereas in this study, most commands were direct. Furthermore, this study was conducted in the first language, similar to the studies by Ibrahim et al. (2017) and Oliveira (2009). In contrast, Suhartini and Wulansari's (2015) study was conducted in English, a second language.

Suggestion
Teachers make these kinds of speech acts to give suggestions to their students. The teachers want them to take action on the suggestions that they give. Utterances like this help students make decisions.

OVB 319 Teacher : K ஒரு சுலபமான சின்ன வாக்கியம் சொல்லலா

K oru culapamāṉa ciṉṉa vākkiyam collalā
K can you tell me a simple short sentence

In the above utterance, the teacher suggests that a student named K provide a simple and short sentence. The teacher indirectly instructs the student to construct a concise sentence through this utterance. This indirect approach allows the teacher to guide the student while maintaining a supportive and encouraging learning environment.

OBA 140 Teacher: இருங்கமா L கொஞ்ச நேரம் M முதல்ல வாய்ப்பு கொடுப்போம்.

Iruṅkamā L koñca nēram M mutalla vāyppu koṭuppōm.
Wait for a while L, Let's give chance to M first.

In this utterance, the teacher suggests to student L that student M be given a chance to answer the question. Indirectly, the teacher conveys to all students the importance of allowing others to participate, promoting fairness and inclusivity in the learning environment.

OBA 142 Teacher: இல்ல உங்களுக்கு என்ன வெளங்கச்சோ அத வந்து சொல்லலாம்.

Illa uṅkaḷukku eṉṉa veḷaṅkaccō ata vantu collalām.
No, you can say what you understand.

In OBA 142, the teacher suggests that all students share what they have understood. Through this utterance, the teacher encourages students and builds their confidence, reassuring them that they can freely express their understanding of the day's lesson.

However, to advise students, teachers use suggestions. In this way, students know what to do next, as the teacher provides guidance on the appropriate course of action. In these situations, students must understand the teacher's intentions before acting. However, Tamil language teachers use suggestions the least during teaching. Martinez Flor (2005) stated that the suggestion speech act has been studied in various aspects and identified three types: direct, indirect, and conventional. This finding differs from the present study because the researchers did not conduct as in-depth an analysis as Martinez Flor (2005). Additionally, he found that to improve students' pragmatic competence in foreign language classes, teachers should use the suggestion speech act more frequently. This perspective should also be applied to first-language teaching.

Prohibition
Prohibition is a statement a teacher gives to prevent a student from doing something. This shows the teacher's desire to prevent the student from taking undesired action.

OMK 72 Teacher: சொல்லக்கூடாது N

Sollakkūṭātu N
N don't say it

In the utterance above, the teacher prohibits the student from answering further to ensure that other students can participate. This approach helps maintain fairness in classroom interactions and encourages equal engagement among students.

OJA 51 Teacher: சொன்னவங்கலே கை தூக்க வேண்டாம்

soṉṉavaṅkalē kai tūkki vēṇṭām
Those who have answered. Don't raise your hand.

OJA 51, the teacher directs the students not to raise their hands if they have already had a chance to answer. Through this utterance, the teacher ensures that all students can participate, promoting fairness and inclusivity in the classroom discussion.

The analysis found that teachers were less likely to use the prohibition type of speech act. However, this speech act prevents students from performing specific actions when used. By employing prohibitive utterances, teachers guide students toward appropriate classroom behaviour.

According to Ibrahim et al. (2017), prohibition is preventing a person from acting in response to a speaker's utterance. Their study showed that trainee teachers used prohibition forms in their teaching. This finding aligns with the current study, as both indicate that teachers use prohibition minimally. Additionally, their study was conducted in a first-language context, suggesting that first-language teachers tend to use prohibited speech acts less frequently during instruction.

You+Imperative

You+Imperative is a way of giving instructions to students. This kind of speech act always comes with the word 'you'. Examples of the speeches can be seen below.

OVB 65 Teacher: இப்ப நீங்க சொல்லுங்க மொதல்ல.

> *Ippa nīṅka colluṅka motalla.*
> Now, you tell me first.

In the above utterance, the teacher is asking a student to provide an answer while using the word 'you' before giving a command. In Tamil, the teacher uses the word 'நீங்க' (nīṅka) [you] to refer to a single student. This usage helps direct the instruction more specifically to an individual rather than addressing the whole class.

OBA 252 Teacher: குரல் பதிவுனா ரெக்கார்ட் பண்ணி நீங்க டீச்சருக்கு அனுப்பனும்.

> *Kural pativuṉā rekkārṭ paṇṇi nīṅka ṭīccarukku aṉuppaṉum.*
> Recording means record your voice and send to me.

In the above utterance, the teacher informs all the students that they have to send their voice recordings. Here, the teacher uses the word 'நீங்க' (nīṅka) [you] to refer to all the students collectively, indicating that the instruction applies to the entire class rather than just an individual.

OJM 176 Teacher: O அடுத்தது நீங்கதான் கருத்து சொல்ல போறீங்க.

> *O aṭuttatu nīṅkatāṉ karuttu colla pōṟīṅka.*
> Next O, you will give your opinion.

In OJM 176, the teacher is addressing the student named O and asking for their opinion. In this utterance, the teacher uses the word 'நீங்க' (nīṅka) [you] to refer to the student O, which is a respectful way to address an individual in Tamil, even though it can also be used to address a group.

In the Tamil language, two distinct words are used to denote the pronoun "you", 'நீ' (nī) and 'நீங்க' (nīṅka). While both terms convey the same meaning, their usage varies depending on the context. The term 'நீ' (nī) is typically employed when addressing someone younger than the speaker. In contrast, 'நீங்க' (nīṅka) is used in three specific contexts: (1) when referring to someone older than the speaker, (2) when addressing a group of individuals, and (3) as a form of politeness. Notably, the term 'நீங்க' (nīṅka) may be used to address a younger individual to convey politeness.

In the present study, teachers use 'நீங்க' (nīṅka) when addressing individual students as a mark of politeness. Additionally, the term is employed to refer to an entire class in the context of online Tamil instruction. Despite the students being younger than the teachers, the latter do not use 'நீ' (nī) when addressing them in online Tamil classes.

Command without Verb

In this study, commands without verbs represent a novel linguistic phenomenon. Traditionally, commands include verbs that direct an individual to perform a specific action. However, the teacher issues commands without verbs in this context, yet the students still respond and act accordingly. This deviation from conventional command structures highlights a unique aspect of communication in the classroom setting.

OJM 58 Teacher: அடுத்து N
Aṭuttu. N
Next is N

In the given example, the teacher states, "Student N is next," without using a verb to instruct the student to take action explicitly. The student has no directive verb to act upon; however, the intended meaning is clear. In this instance, the teacher expects Student N to read a passage, yet the instruction is conveyed without explicitly stating the action. Despite the absence of a verb, the student understands the implied directive and proceeds to read the passage. This illustrates how commands can be effectively communicated without using verbs, relying instead on contextual and pragmatic cues.

OJM 155 Teacher: அடுத்த வாக்கியம்.
Aṭutta vākkiyam.
Next sentence.

In the example, the teacher states, "next sentence," without including a verb. Despite lacking an explicit directive, the intended meaning is clear: the teacher instructs the students to create another sentence. This demonstrates that even without a verb, students can interpret and act

upon the instruction based on contextual and pragmatic cues. This further supports the idea that commands without verbs can still be effective in instructional settings.

> OMK 130   Teacher : இரண்டாவது P.
> *Iraṇṭāvatu P*
> Second is P

When the teacher says, "Second is P," the statement implies that Student P is expected to respond to the second question. Although the sentence lacks a verb, Student P understands the intended instruction and proceeds to answer. This demonstrates that the context enables students to interpret and act upon the teacher's intended meaning even without an explicit directive.

Consequently, the teacher has adopted a specific imperative structure in Tamil language instruction. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the guru-guru approach necessitates using imperative forms to ensure that students follow their teacher's guidance effectively.

Question Directive

This kind of directive speech is a speech in the form of questions. In this connection, the speaker will ask questions so the listener can take action. In this scenario, the teacher motivates students to engage in speaking, generate ideas, and more.

> OBA 77 Teacher : யார் சொல்லமுடியும்?
> *Yār colla muṭiyum?*
> Who can answer?

In the given utterance, the teacher poses a question to the class, asking whether anyone knows how to respond. Although the statement is a question, it functions as an indirect instruction, prompting students who can answer. Despite lacking an explicit directive, the students recognize the teacher's intent and respond accordingly. This demonstrates how interrogative structures can also serve as instructional tools, guiding student participation without direct commands.

> OJA 40 Teacher : கேமரா ஆன் பண்ணிட்டீங்களா எல்லாரும் ?
> *Kēmarā āṉ paṇṇiṭṭīṅkaḷā ellārum?*
> Are you all on your cameras?

In OJA 40, the instructor asks each student whether they have turned on their camera. Although phrased as a question, this is an implicit directive for students to activate their cameras. The students understand the teacher's intent and comply with the instruction.

> OJM 4 Teacher : உங்களுடைய கட்டுரை புத்தகம் தயார் நிலையில் இருக்கா?
> *Uṅkaḷuṭaiya kaṭṭurai puttakam tayār nilaiyil irukka*
> Are you all ready with your essay book?

Based on the aforementioned statement, the instructor can assess whether the students have their essay books ready. Although the instructor frames the inquiry as a question, it implicitly conveys an expectation that students should come prepared with their essay books. This indirect instruction signals to students that they will be engaging in tasks that require using their essay books.

As demonstrated in the examples above, even when statements are phrased as questions, the teacher uses them to issue instructions. Furthermore, teachers frequently employ such speech acts to guide student behaviour and classroom activities.

Embedded Imperative

An embedded imperative is a question-based speech act in which the speaker conveys instructions through specific linguistic structures. In this type of speech act, particular words are used to express directives indirectly. For instance, in Tamil, the words முடியுமா (*muṭiyumā*) [can] and தயவுசெய்து (*Tayavuceytu*) [please] serve as implicit commands, guiding the listener's actions while maintaining a polite or indirect tone. This strategy allows speakers to issue instructions in a way that appears less authoritative while still ensuring compliance.

OJA 302 Teacher: தயவுசெய்து பாடத்த செஞ்சி அனுப்ப முடியுமா?

> Tayavuceytu pāṭatta ceñci aṉuppa muṭiyumā?..
> Could you finish and send me your homework please?

In OJA 302, the teacher asks the students whether they can complete and submit their work. In this utterance, the teacher uses the words தயவுசெய்து (*Tayavuceytu*) [please] and முடியுமா (*muṭiyumā*) [can], framing the statement as a question. However, despite its interrogative form, the teacher's intent is not merely to inquire whether the students can submit their assignments but rather to instruct them to do so.

Additionally, the use of முடியுமா (*muṭiyumā*) and தயவுசெய்து (*Tayavuceytu*) softens the directive, making it sound more polite and less authoritative. This illustrates how embedded imperatives function as indirect speech acts, allowing the speaker to issue instructions in a more socially acceptable manner.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Tamil language teachers in Tamil National Type Primary Schools (SJKT) rely heavily on directive speech acts, with imperatives and question directives used most frequently in online instruction. This pattern reflects teachers' attempts to preserve clarity and maintain control in a virtual classroom environment where non-verbal cues are limited and sustaining student engagement is more challenging. Imperative forms particularly attention getters and direct commands were especially dominant. These results are consistent with earlier studies by Simbolon et al. (2021) and Oliveira (2009), who similarly observed that teachers often guide online instructional discourse through direct forms of communication to ensure order and facilitate learning.

These results also align with Searle's (1969) view of directive speech acts as utterances intended to prompt the listener to carry out a specific action. Notably, the frequent use of culturally adapted attention getters such as ஓகே (ōkē) [Okay] and சரி (sari) [fine] demonstrates how Tamil teachers actively sustain student engagement and manage smooth transitions between tasks. This contrasts with the findings of Suhartini and Wulansari (2015), where such expressions received less emphasis in the context of English as a second language instruction.

The study also highlights the limited use of indirect directive speech acts, such as suggestions or embedded imperatives. This strong preference for direct forms may be shaped by the cognitive and linguistic levels of primary school students, as well as the need for clarity and precision in online teaching. While directness ensures instructions are easily understood, the lack of indirect strategies could limit opportunities for students to exercise autonomy and develop higher order thinking skills, as noted by Putri and Skolastika (2022). Incorporating a more balanced mix of directive types could therefore encourage greater student participation and foster self expression in the classroom.

Moreover, the study did not record any cases of explicit impoliteness in teacher and student interactions. However, the absence of politeness markers, as described by Rahmawati et al. (2021), suggests that teachers could benefit from incorporating more polite forms into their directives. As Sudarmawan et al. (2022) point out, politeness strategies in directive speech acts help create a respectful and supportive learning atmosphere something especially important in virtual classrooms where interpersonal cues are limited.

Variation in the use of directives across the five schools also points to the role of individual teaching styles, teachers' confidence with technology, and differences in institutional practice. Abdullah and Amran (2021) emphasize that teacher and student interaction is crucial for sustaining engagement, making it important to understand how directive strategies shape students' responsiveness and, ultimately, their learning outcomes.

This study also helps to fill a gap in the literature on primary education. While much of the existing research has concentrated on secondary and tertiary learners, relatively little attention has been given to how speech acts are used in online classrooms for younger students. By focusing on directive speech acts in first language instruction at the primary level, this study offers important insights into how communication strategies can be adapted to support early learning. Looking ahead, future research could extend this work by including secondary school contexts and exploring directive speech acts among kindergarten children. Examining strategies appropriate for pre primary learners would be especially valuable for developing age-sensitive communication practices that strengthen both online and face to face early childhood education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of directive speech acts, particularly imperative forms, in facilitating effective online Tamil language instruction at the primary school level. The frequent use of direct commands and attention-getters reflects teachers' efforts to maintain student engagement and instructional clarity in virtual settings. However, the limited use of indirect and polite directive forms suggests opportunities for enhancing interaction and student autonomy. These findings provide a foundation for further exploration

into age-appropriate directive strategies, with future research encouraged to investigate their application in early childhood education, particularly among kindergarten learners.

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