

Revealing Teachers' Power through Speech Acts in EFL Classroom Interaction

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Abstract. Speech act is the verbal language behavior showing the interplay between utterance and action. It also depicts language use by teachers to achieve instructional goals in English as Foreign Language classroom context (henceforth, EFL). This research mainly unveils speech act typically addressing the teachers' power. Descriptive qualitative research method was utilized to account for speech acts and the teacher's power. Non-participant direct observation with recording technique was employed to gather the natural data. The data were analyzed through qualitative model and *padan* method with pragmatic unit analysis. The results demonstrated that *directive* and *expressive* speech acts were mostly employed by the teachers in the interaction with the students for specific instructional ends. The speech acts represented different powers maintained by the EFL teachers during classroom interaction such as *legitimate*, *referent*, *expert*, and *reward*. The findings showcase that the use of speech acts enacted and reinforced four prominent powers of EFL teachers in classroom interaction. Accordingly, the current study has the implication to the reflective use of speech acts for the engaging classroom interaction and sheds lights for future research on teacher-student dynamics in EFL setting.

Keywords: classroom interaction, EFL, speech acts, teacher's power

1. Introduction

Communicatively, language use in classroom context has its own form, pattern, and function. It is apparently different from language exchange between other people in other interactional settings. Generally, language employed in the classroom serves several functions such as promoting teacher- student interaction, facilitating learning, and maintaining relationship in a specific educational context. Primarily, language is utilized as an interactional tool between teacher-student and among students for mediating and assisting learning [1]. Moreover, language realized in classroom context refers to how teachers perform various powers to learners.

Speech acts is employed by speakers to convey meanings and intended purposes in particular contexts of interaction. In classroom setting, speech acts has been identified and classified as the teachers' language that is applied for a range of instructional goals. For instance, teachers and learners may employ kinds of speech acts in classroom contexts for

such purposes as ordering, requesting, asserting, praising, managing, and promising. These functions of speech acts embrace what the so-called illocutionary force [2]. Moreover, in genuine contexts of interaction, including classroom, illocutionary force or often called “pragmatic force” of speech acts can be shown through the explicit use of illocutionary force indicating device (IFIDs) such as performative verbs and the implicit way of applying word order, stress, and intonation.

Speech acts has been a prominent topic and focus in pragmatic inquiry. The study of speech acts unveils forms, functions, and contexts. In terms of forms, speech acts are classified into several types. [3] and [2] have categorized speech acts into five main types; those are representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Briefly, representative is related to utterances that convey information, describe, or assert something as true, while directive is concerned with utterances that is intended to ask someone to perform something for the speaker. Further, commissive emphasizes utterances about the speaker’s commitment for future action, and expressives are utterances expressing speaker’s feeling and emotions. Declaratives are dealt with utterances bringing about change in an external situation and reality. This categorization was made on the basis of illocutionary force and referred to the concept of speech acts by [4]. This theory has been widely applied in a number of pragmatic investigations with regard to different issues of speech acts in various interaction contexts. [5] maintained that speech acts serve four main functions, namely competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive. In many previous studies, types and functions of speech acts were examined in the studies by [6]–[8].

The employment of speech acts manifested in interaction showcases particular nuance and interplay with teacher’s power. A teacher’s power in the classroom is closely tied to their ability to use speech acts effectively to manage, instruct, and engage students. Through speech acts, teachers establish authority, convey expectations, and create an interactional atmosphere conducive to learning. In this case, teacher’s power is exercised through language use such as production of various speech acts [9], [10]. Likewise, [11] applied theory of power drawing upon French and Raven to uncover teacher’s power performed through language use in EFL classroom interaction. The findings reveal five types of teacher’s power such as legitimate, referent, expert, coercive, and reward. Among these powers, legitimate power was excessively performed by teacher. The research finding significantly proved the relation of power and teacher’s language in classroom discourse. Particularly, teachers’ power in language classroom contexts facilitates the students’ active engagement beyond merely a matter of dominance and authority revealed by [12]. Additionally, such finding is also insightful for the current research in uncovering speech acts and teacher’s power.

Most recent studies have focused the analysis on speech acts while a little attention was directed to teachers’ power. The main analysis of speech acts in classroom interaction explored types of speech acts, occurrences, and functions. Apparently, the scope was limited. However, the current research delves into the case of speech acts and its relation to teacher’s power in EFL classroom contexts.

This research seeks to explore and uncover the conveyance of speech acts and EFL teachers’ power in classroom context. Hence, it addresses two research questions, namely (1) what speech acts are produced by EFL teachers during teaching-learning process, and (2) how are speech acts realized to reveal teachers’ power in classroom context.

2. Method and Materials

A descriptive qualitative research method was designed and employed to explore the realization of speech acts and teachers' power in EFL classroom interaction. The primary data was naturally obtained through non-participant direct observation method in EFL classrooms. The data demonstrates the use of speech acts in teacher-student interaction. Recording and note-taking techniques were applied to gather thick data from twenty classroom observations at three selected high schools in Langke Rembong district. The recorded data were then proceeded to the transcription. The data was analyzed with qualitative model proposed by [13] embracing three related procedures: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation is the procedure where the data was not reduced to know the whole context, while display of the data was organized in table and bar chart for the occurrences and in matrices and descriptive-inductive model for qualitative data (utterances). Part of the data was analyzed with *padan* method focusing on pragmatic unit analysis. By this method, the pragmatic units of analysis on speech acts and context of use were identified. The last procedure is conclusion drawing/verification in which the findings were confirmed and verified by comparing the recorded data from interview and field-note.

3. Results and Discussion

This study is concerned with speech acts and teacher's power in EFL classroom interaction. 250 data were identified and analyzed to explore two research questions. This section yields the results related to the employment of speech acts and teachers' power in the EFL teachers' utterances. The following part presents the occurrences of speech acts found in the data

3.1. Results

3.1.1 Types of Speech Acts Used in the EFL Teachers' Utterances

Speech acts is a verbal language behavior stressing and driving an action. The force conveyed by the speakers in speech acts should be well understood by the hearers. It is very crucial to fulfill the speakers' intention and message. Based on the data analysis, several types of speech acts were differently realized by the EFL teachers as displayed in the table below

Table 1. Use of Speech Acts in the EFL teachers' utterances

Types of Speech Acts	Number of utterances	Percentages
Representatives	30	10%
Directives	175	58.3%
Commissives	15	5%
Expressives	60	20%
Declaratives	20	6.7%

The data in table (1) demonstrate that the occurrences of speech acts in the EFL teachers' utterances highly vary in terms of types. The speech acts found were categorized into five main types; those are representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives.

declaratives. As shown in the data, directive speech acts were the most data followed by the other speech acts, namely expressive, representative, and declaratives. Contrastively, commissive speech acts were the least data of all. However, it does not mean that directive speech acts were more qualified and preferable than the other ones. The realization of speech acts is depended upon the context of interaction in the EFL observed classrooms. More importantly, the results reveal that the use of speech acts still represent a portrait of teachers' dominant position and power. As such, the EFL teachers' power were enacted through the application of the given speech acts. The similar finding highlights the relation between the utilization of speech acts and teachers' power dynamics in the previous studies [6], [9], [12], [14].

The gradation of five types of speech acts employed can be clearly figured in the chart below.

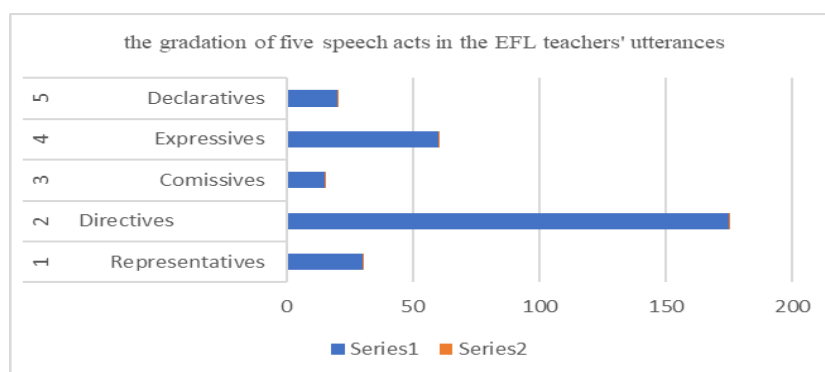


Fig. 1. Speech acts Gradation

The five types of speech acts illustrated in the chart above were chosen by the EFL teachers during classroom interaction with different gradation. Seemingly, directive speech acts were at the higher level. In this case, it was mostly used when the EFL teachers negotiated and exchanged ideas with the students, such as giving an instruction, managing classroom activities, requesting, and other functions. Conversely, expressives, representatives, declaratives, and commissive speech acts were at the lower level. In this context, the speech acts were not resorted as often as directive speech acts. The results stress the different exercise of the EFL teachers' power in classroom settings for achieving particular goals. In addition to the EFL teachers' power dynamics by speech acts in classroom, the data significantly proved the teacher-student relation and pattern of classroom discourse[15].

3.1.2 The Relation of Speech Acts to Teachers' Power

Essentially, language use has connection with other dimensions like power. Power in classroom interaction is related to the teacher's ability to influence students' behavior, engagement, and learning. This power is enacted and maintained through speech acts, which allow teachers to direct, control, and manage the classroom environment. The following data presents the EFL teachers' power conveyed through speech acts in the observed classroom interactions.

Table 2. Realization of Speech Acts and Teachers' Power in EFL Classroom

No	Speech Acts	Exercise of Power	Occurrences
1	Directives	Legitimate	175
2	Expressives	Reward	60
3	Representatives	Referent	30
4	Declaratives	Expert	20
5	Commissives	Reward	15

The results of the data analysis in table (2) show that the EFL teachers' power were reflected in line with the employment of speech acts. Evidently, there is a close line between speech acts and power practised by the EFL teachers in classroom interaction. Directive speech acts address legitimate power of teacher in giving commands, controlling, and managing classroom activities. In this case, authority and control were imposed on the students. Expressive and commissive speech acts manifest reward power in facilitating the students' engagement and encouragement. Representative speech acts enacts referent power, while declaratives strengthens expert power. With these results, it is evident that the EFL teachers served multi-powers, regardless of legitimate power as the dominant one. Further, the exercise of the teachers' power flew dynamically and relatively [9], [12], [16]. The data underscore the interconnection between the manifestation of speech acts and exercise of teachers' power in classroom interaction.

3.2 Discussion

With regard to the results of data analysis described above, the findings show that the types of speech acts which were utilized represent teachers' particular power. Those are respectively directive speech acts and legitimate, expressives and reward, representatives and referent, declaratives and expert, commissives and reward. However, in this section the focus of discussion is mainly concerned with two key findings.

3.2.1 Directive Speech and Legitimate Power

Directive speech acts contains utterances employed to give a command, make a request, warning, prohibition, and suggestion [4], [17], [18]. This type of speech acts mainly functions to direct someone (hearer) to do something for the speaker. In the data displayed below, the EFL teachers used directive speech acts for command, request, and suggestion. The following utterances are the selected examples of directive speech acts produced by the EFL teachers.

Data (1)

- (a) make simple sentences.
- (b) Make one short sentence and explanation.
- (c) Use smart phone and find out how to pronounce the word "luggage" correctly.

In the instances of data (1), the EFL teachers performed directive speech acts in terms of command. The command was delivered to the students in order to build simple sentences accurately. The directive speech acts has a strong imposition and force to be fulfilled by the students. It can be obviously seen in the verbs "make, use, and find" as the implicit performative verbs of directive speech acts. The verbs were functioned as Illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) to understand by the speakers' intention in the directive speech

acts[2]. In terms of sentence structure, directive speech acts are constructed in imperative sentence mode. The use of directive speech acts tend to be higher in EFL classroom interaction for guiding and controlling the students to the task required to be accomplished. It is related to the higher use of directive speech acts in the study by[15], [19]. In directive speech acts, the EFL teachers utilized legitimate power to manage and control the students in classroom activities.

Directive speech acts was also applied to make a request. It is stated in interrogative sentence mode. The imposition of the directive speech act was not directly and explicitly conveyed. The case in point is shown below.

Data (2)

- (a) Could you try to make an example using that expression?
- (b) Could you present your work in front?
- (c) Can you give your opinion about it?
- (d) Could you explain it, please?

In the instances of utterances in data (2), directive speech acts is formed in interrogative sentence mood in order to deliver a request to the students. This directive speech acts is an indirect way of ordering the students to do the learning activities such as making an example, explaining, presenting the work, and giving an opinion about the given topic. Through the act of questioning, the EFL teachers held legitimate power to get the students' feedback. Additionally, direct speech acts in question form moderates the teachers' imposition while calling for the students' engagement in interaction[19].

Directive speech acts embraces suggestion. The sentence mode is a declarative form. The IFIDs employed includes the explicit performative verb "suggest and need" and the implicit expression of making suggestion by the auxiliaries "should" and "had better". The data (3) exemplifies directive speech acts conveying suggestions.

Data (3)

- (a) You *had better* discuss your problems with your teachers.
- (b) I *suggest* you to read some books at the library.
- (c) You *need* to evaluate your learning
- (d) You *need* to write notes quickly.
- (e) To be fluent, you *should* practice speaking regularly.

The nature of directive speech acts expressing suggestion has lower imposition upon the hearers. Therefore, regarding the cases (a,c,d,e) the EFL teachers could not impose upon the students whether to respond or leave it. Yet, the utterance (b) implies strong suggestion to be considered by the student. Implicitly, the EFL teachers performed legitimate power in mentoring and guiding the students for the better learning achievement.

3.2.2 Expressive Speech Acts and Reward Power

Expressive speech acts is, by its nature, different from directive speech acts in that it emphasizes feeling and emotion of the speakers toward the hearers. It is not directed to perform an action. Expressive speech acts in a classroom setting are utterances used to express the speaker's emotions, attitudes, or psychological states about a situation or event. These acts are essential for building rapport, fostering a positive classroom environment, and creating meaningful teacher-student interactions. The characteristics of expressive speech acts, namely

(1) it does not directly perform an action but express feelings or attitudes, and (2) it can convey gratitude, apology, praise, regret, or encouragement. In the data (4), the EFL teachers made expressive speech acts by using the performative verbs “thank, apologize and congratulate”. Besides, expressive speech acts were featured by the adjectives containing positive semantic loads.

Data (4)

- (a) I am very *proud* of your class for the best scores of mid test.
- (b) *Thank* you for the group presentation and the active participation in this meeting.
- (c) *Congratulate* to one of your classmates for the first winner on English speech contest.
- (d) I *apologize* for my rude words to the whole class.

As seen in the data (4), the expressive speech acts were delivered to express gratitude, apology, praise and encouragement. The utterances (a) and (c) particularly address praise and encouragement. The utterance (b) states gratitude, while the other one (d) is for apology. In this context, the EFL teachers took reward power by giving praise, apology, gratitude, and encouragement. The words *proud* and *congratulate* were expressed by the EFL teachers to the students for their excellent achievement. By the speech acts, the EFL teachers indirectly attempted to drive the students’ motivation in learning English. The expression *thank you* was conveyed to the students who did the presentation well. In this case, the EFL teachers highly respected the students’ effort in the class presentation[20], whereas the utterance *apologize* was expressed to improve and nurture the rapport with the students. The reward power has positive impact to the students’ psychological state, learning motivation, self-confidence, interactive classroom, and engagement[9],[12].

4. Conclusion

Language practised in EFL classroom interaction was found to be particularly distinguished in forms, functions, and context from other contexts. Speech acts characterize the teacher-student exchange and negotiation of meaning which is central to the exercise of power in classroom talk such as legitimate, expert, reward, and referent. By the strategic use of speech acts can represent the performance of teachers’ power in creating classroom dynamics, guiding behavior, and affecting learning. Yet, the dominance of legitimate and referent power discourages the students’ active involvement since it is an authoritative style, while it requires for the teachers to exercise reward and expert power as a facilitative style beneficial for interactive EFL classroom. Hence, understanding the relationship between speech acts and teacher’s power provides insights into the application of effective teaching strategies. It is noted that the findings are still limited in exploring the complexity of speech acts and teachers’ power in classroom discourse. Future research needs to be conducted addressing a correlation between the representation of speech acts, their prevalence, and the exercise of teacher power in teaching-learning enterprises.

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