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Directives in teacher talk with primary school EFL learners: A study of five teachers in Croatia

Teachers represent important pragmatic models for their students (Barón, et al., 2020). While teacher talk has been viewed as providing learners with a limited variety of pragmatic language (e.g., Nikula, 2002), there has also been evidence that it can be pragmatically attuned to the learners' needs (Martí, Portolés, 2019). The present study is an analysis of directives in the teacher talk of five L1 Croatian teachers working with primary school EFL learners (aged 12/13). Five 45-minute EFL lessons were analysed, one for each teacher, with the aim of identifying and quantifying the occurrences of directives in instructional and regulative classroom discourse. A further qualitative analysis provides insight into how the teachers' choice of directives relates to contextual matters in respect to their realisation (i.e., degree of directness, use of modifying strategies). The results are in line with previous studies, with teachers showing an overall preference for directness (e.g., Chen, Tseng, 2015; Liu, Hong, 2009). However, all of the teachers used directives to build interaction and scaffold their students' language, while maintaining a relatively informal atmosphere, which may be linked to their choice of more direct forms. Ultimately, the highly diverse individual styles of the teachers seemed to be reflected most in their preference for particular forms.

Keywords: teacher talk, directives, pragmatics

Słowa kluczowe: język klasowy nauczyciela, akty dyrektywne, pragmatyka



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1. Introduction

In the context of learning a second or foreign language (L2), pragmatic competence is the skill of applying the knowledge of words and structures of the L2 in actual communication and adapting it to different social situations (Glaser, 2018). Language teachers represent important pragmatic models for their students, as well as a potential source of a wide range of language input, such as the basic rules of politeness, or appropriate formulaic expressions (Barón, et al., 2020; LoCastro, 2012). For these reasons, it is important to analyse teacher talk as a relevant source of pragmatic language for young language learners (YLLs), i.e. learners between the ages of 5 and 12-13 (Drew, Hasselgreen, 2008). Due to the specificities of classroom talk, especially regarding the teacher's central role in the organisation and management of discourse, teachers spend a lot of time asking the students to do (or stop doing) something, i.e., employing directive speech acts. The ubiquity of directives in L2 teacher talk means that an analysis of these forms may offer fruitful opportunities for exploring how teachers manage interaction and whether they provide pragmatically rich and varied input. Such exploration is especially important given that EFL classrooms are sometimes described as offering restricted opportunities for pragmatic development (Romero-Trillo, 2002). Existing studies of directives in teacher talk focus mostly on secondary (CLIL) and adult contexts, and studies with YLLs are very scarce. Thus, the present study focuses on the use of directives in the classroom talk of five Croatian EFL teachers working with YLLs, with the aim of shedding light on the teachers' pragmatic choices as well as their potential as pragmatic models for their students.

2. Theoretical background

Although studies on the pragmatic competence of L2 learners have mostly focused on adult or adolescent learners, interest in pragmatics in the YLL context has been on the rise (see Schauer (2022) for an overview of relevant research). LoCastro (2012) states that teachers are responsible for including work on pragmatic competence in their classrooms, as this involves presenting language as a means of communication, and not simply as an object of study. In other words, teachers should ensure that their language includes a wide variety of pragmatic forms and that they draw their students' attention to these forms in some way.

However, there is a widely held perception that teacher-managed discourse presents an impediment to pragmatic learning (Martí, Portolés,

2019). The traditional three-part classroom exchange pattern, known as initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) or initiation-response-feedback (IRF), has been prevalent in language classrooms (Hosoda, Aline, 2013), and the limited space it leaves for the development of skills necessary for real-life conversations can also be seen as detrimental to the students' pragmatic development. Furthermore, as Cohen (2018: 2) notes, "teachers may not have easy access to practical suggestions as to what to do about their own gaps in knowledge when it comes to pragmatics."

For all of these reasons, studies of how teachers use aspects of pragmatic language, such as speech acts, in the very specific context of the L2 classroom are of relevance. According to Dalton-Puffer (2005), school lessons are characterised by the clearly differentiated roles of the participants, in terms of hierarchical status, who are at the same time familiars. The teacher is the one who allocates turns in most classroom situations, which is commonly seen as teachers enacting control over the students' contribution (Fasel Lauzon, Berger, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that directives are a frequent feature of different types of classrooms (Dalton-Puffer, 2005). Directives are speech acts (requests, questions, warnings) used by a speaker when they want the hearer to do, or to stop doing, something (Ellis, 1992). This can refer to physical or mental actions which are part of either regulative or instructional discourse (Martí, Portolés, 2019). Regulative discourse refers to the teacher using the L2 to manage the social environment of the classroom, and embedded into it is instructional discourse, where language is used to talk about the 'content' being taught (Christie, 2000). The efficacy of directives is essential to optimizing learning outcomes, making them a crucial part of classroom discourse (Waring, Hruska, 2012).

Because of the very specific role teachers play in the classroom, even when they do not utter an explicit directive, students are required to pay attention by the very fact that they are in an educational setting, so, many types of utterances can acquire the force of directives (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, 2006). Classroom directives can be realized as requests, but also as questions or warnings (Martí, Portolés, 2019), and we can differentiate between requests for information and requests for action (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, 2006). Requests for information, mostly display (knowledge-testing) and referential (genuine information-seeking) questions, dominate the instructional discourse. The realization of directives can vary in degree of directness, depending on the linguistic choices made by the speaker. These choices, in turn, are influenced by factors such as the degree of familiarity, or distribution of social power, given the potential of directives to be face-threatening (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, 2006). However, transfer of information is the socially sanctioned purpose of classroom settings, which means that

directives in support of this goal are low imposition by definition. Therefore, direct strategies, with minimal internal or external modification, are expected in this context (Dalton-Puffer, 2005).

Studies in various L2 contexts (CLIL, adult, young learner) have confirmed the ubiquity of directives in classroom discourse, as well as teachers' preference for direct strategies, especially when it comes to requests for information (Basra, Thoyyibah, 2017; Chen, Tseng, 2015; Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, 2006; Liu, Hong, 2009; Martí, Portolés, 2019). In CLIL secondary school contexts, regulative discourse features more variety when it comes to how directives are performed, which seems to be dependent on a number of contextual factors, such as the teachers' language proficiency, the interactive style of their L1, or the students' age (Dalton-Puffer, 2005; Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, 2006). In the primary English classroom, studies of teacher directives are scarce. In this context, directness seems to be the norm in regulative discourse, such as in the study conducted by Liu and Hong (2009), who found that imperatives accounted for a majority (62.69%) of teacher directives. However, it is necessary to go beyond qualitative data in order to gain more insight into the potential appropriateness, or usefulness of teachers' directive behaviour, which few studies do. In a rare study with very young language learners, Martí and Portolés (2019) studied the pedagogic functions of two teachers' directives, by analysing two 45-minute lessons with pre-schoolers between the ages of 4 and 5. The predominance of display questions and imperatives in the study was in line with previous studies across different ages and instructional settings; however, a deeper analysis showed that pragmatic skilfulness should not be measured only according to the level of directness, or the use of peripheral modification devices, or the teachers' proficiency. The authors' analysis reveals a range of contextual factors that counterbalance the teachers' directness, for example, their avoidance of threats, co-occurrence of praise in their feedback and so on. The authors conclude that the degree to which the teachers strive to establish good rapport with their students, and demonstrate their awareness of students' needs, linked to contextual factors, are key variables

Studies of how teachers use pragmatic language in the YLL classroom can be of great use to practitioners and of interest to researchers, especially if they provide both quantitative and qualitative data, thus providing a more detailed picture of teachers' language use. However, such studies are still few and far between, especially within the Croatian context. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to fill this gap, by providing insight into the extent to which Croatian EFL teachers use their directive language in a pragmatically attuned way, and examining the contextual factors influencing this use.

4. The present study

4.1. Research questions

Given the importance of pragmatic competence as an essential part of communicative competence and the relevance of teacher talk as a key source of pragmatic input (LoCastro, 2012), the present study uses both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the young learner classroom as a pragmatic environment, through an analysis of teacher directives. The study is focused on the following research questions:

1. What types of directives are used by the five Croatian teachers of YLLs in their L2 English classes as part of regulatory and instructional classroom discourse?
2. How does the teachers' choice of directives relate to contextual matters with respect to how directives are realized?

4.2. Data and methodology

This study was conducted on data from authentic classroom settings – five EFL lessons given by five English language teachers, L1 Croatian speakers (T1 - T5). The teachers were specialist EFL teachers with a university degree in English language teaching from different Croatian universities, with 5 or more years of experience working with primary-age students. They were a convenience sample and volunteered to participate in the study. The five recorded lessons were conducted with students in the 7th grade of primary school (aged 12/13), who were predominantly in their 7th year of learning English. A foreign language, typically English, is a compulsory subject in Croatian primary schools from year 1 (age 6/7), taught in two 45-minute lessons per week in the first four years (70 lessons per year), and three lessons per week in grades 5-8 (105 lessons per year). In addition to English language lessons at school, Croatian children sometimes attend additional lessons at private foreign language schools which offer courses that complement the regular school programme. Two of the lessons in our sample were recorded at public primary schools (T1, T2), with approximately 20 students per class, and three at private language schools (T3, T4, T5), with 10 students per class, on average.

Before the recording took place, approval was obtained from the school principals and informed consent was sought from the parents and the students. The classes were recorded by the teachers using audio recorders placed on their desks to minimise intrusion and ensure authenticity. In total,

approximately 225 minutes of classroom time was recorded, and the recordings were transcribed.

The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data with contextual examples, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the use of directives in our corpus. In the first step of the analysis, teacher directives, defined as any instance of a teacher's utterance aimed at getting the hearer to do, or stop doing, something (Ellis, 1992), whether to perform an action or provide information, were identified in the corpus. The QualCoder software (Curtain, 2023) was used to code the occurrences of directives in the transcripts in line with a pre-determined coding scheme, based on previous studies (Liu, Hong, 2009; Martí, Portolés, 2019). The coding categories included:

- a) directives performed within the instructional vs. regulative register;
- b) requests for information vs. requests for action;
- c) type of request head act (Table 1); and
- d) presence of internal and external modifying devices (Table 2).

The coding was performed by the author of the study and repeated a month later, yielding an intra-rater reliability score of 95%. The QualCoder software was then used to calculate the frequencies of the relevant categories, both overall and for individual teachers. Finally, specific examples were selected to illustrate the use of particular directives as well as related contextual issues.

Table 1. Typology of request head acts in teacher directives with examples from the corpus (adapted from Liu & Hong, 2009; Martí & Portolés, 2019) (own study)

Imperatives	Elliptical	Full sentence. (T2)
	Bold	Do this in your notebooks. (T4)
	Prefaced	Ok so do it together as a group. (T5)
	Inclusive	Let's do exercise six. (T3)
Declaratives speaker-based	Hedged performative	I will ask you please X to sit here with Y. (T1)
	Want/need	I want you to do your workbook page forty-five. (T4)
Declaratives hearer-oriented	Obligation	You have to describe it. (T5)
	Permission	You can take another one. (T1)
	Inclusive	We'll read all of the sentences. (T1)
	Hint	Everybody is listening in this row. (T1)
Interrogative	Ability	Can you talk to me in English? (T5)
	Willingness	Will you please read the first sentence in this plan of action? (T4)
	Permission	May I get the other one please? (T1)

Table 2. Examples of internal and external modification from the corpus (own study)

Internal modification		External modification	
Type	Example	Type	Example
Attention-getters	Come on , figure out something, just one. (T1)	Grounders Reasons/ conditions	Now um since we're talking about adjectives in this unit um I want you to choose a person um who you admire (T5)
Fillers (appealers)	Try to find those that are a little bit more difficult, ok? (T5)	Disarmers Cost-minimizers/ sweeteners	If it's easier for you you can also do exercise one, complete the table with the words in blue (T4)
Softeners	Two ok well one more and that's enough just cut cut um um those pieces of paper. (T5)	Expanders	What happened Vicky in English what happened? (T2)
		Appreciation	Going out with, so this is a? three-part phrasal verb, thank you , the next one, Martin, will you please?

5. Results and discussion

A total of 891 directives were identified in our corpus, 372 of which were used in the instructional and 507 in the regulative register (Table 3). This confirms that directives are ubiquitous in primary school teacher talk, with the individual teachers using between 132 (T2) and 248 (T5) instances of this speech act in their lessons. However, in comparison to pre-primary teacher talk explored in Martí and Portolés's (2019) study, where the two teachers used a total of 826 directive speech acts, directives are less widely employed. We can presume that this is because of the age of the students who are already very familiar with the classroom setting and thus may need less direction than pre-primary students.

Table 3. Individual teachers' use of directives in the regulative and instructional register (own study)

Teacher	Regulative (RA/RI)	Instructional (DIS/REF)	Total
T1	184 (133/51)	38 (4/34)	222
T2	67 (59/8)	65 (30/35)	132
T3	57 (44/13)	80 (61/19)	137

Table 3 – cont.

Teacher	Regulative (RA/RI)	Instructional (DIS/REF)	Total
T4	82 (61/21)	70 (32/38)	152
T5	117 (85/32)	117 (45/72)	248
Total	507 (382/125)	370 (198/172)	891

Note: RA – requests for action; RI – requests for information; DIS – display questions; REF – referential questions.

In line with previous studies (e.g., Dalton-Puffer, 2005; Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, 2006; Martí, Portolés, 2019), directives were generally more frequent in the regulative register, with notable differences between individual teachers. While teachers T2 and T5 used an (almost) equal number of directives in both registers, teacher T3 employed fewer directives in the regulative register, and T4 used more. Teacher T1 stands out, with 38 instances of this speech act employed in the instructional, and almost five times more, 184, in the regulative register. According to Dalton-Puffer and Nikula (2006), teachers' regulative talk tends to be more monologic than instructional talk, so a high ratio of directives in the regulative register could be taken as an indication of more authoritative, or teacher-centred, classroom talk. However, as noted by Martí and Portolés (2019), there are many other contextual factors at play. The classrooms in this study are what Dalton-Puffer (2005: 1282) calls "a prototypical one-vs.-many participant situation, combining a clear hierarchical differential between participants with an uneven distribution of speaking rights." This means that teachers do most of the speaking. However, although teacher-fronted activities are predominant in the corpus, there are also instances of pairwork and groupwork. In other words, there is variation in classroom activities depending on the material taught by teachers, as well as their personal teaching styles.

For example, while all the lessons included activities related to grammar, most of the teachers relied on the students completing and reading activities in the coursebook, while teacher T1's lesson included several activities where students worked on the topic in pairs and groups using an inductive approach. This type of classroom organisation is more demanding when it comes to classroom management and calls for more use of directives in regulative discourse (Martí, Portolés, 2019). Example 1 illustrates a section of T1's talk in which she first asks several students to change places to be able to work in pairs, followed by an explanation of the activity. The teacher used a variety of realizations of directives to organize the activity, such as direct infinitives and hedged performatives modified by "please" (line 1) and the interrogative (line 3) and declarative (lines 4 and 5) modal

+ 2nd person (ps.) pronoun forms, also modifying her directive in line 3 with a grounder explaining the reason for her request. In lines 6 and 7, the teacher asks a rhetorical question about the purpose of the task and answers it, which acts as another grounder explaining the reason for the directives she employs (lines 6 and 7). Despite the less direct forms and modifying devices used by this teacher, it is clear from the way she nominates students that they are expected to comply, highlighting the teacher's authority. This excerpt also illustrates T1's very verbose personal discourse style.

Example 1

1 T1: Don't open it please, it's a sentence and in your pairs I will ask you please Paul to sit
 2 over there with Dean and Daisy you come here to Pete so that the two of you can
 3 can also participate in the activities (2) Lilly can you come next to Phil please, ok
 4 you can go next to Ken. If you finish earlier, you have four more sentences, you can
 5 take them and work on them as well, they are the sentences with words, and please
 6 make sentences out of these words. Why, to see what we are going to talk about
 7 today, right?

As shown in Table 3, only requests for information, i.e., questions, were found in the instructional register, with a total of 370 instances. Requests for information were also found in the regulative register (a total of 125). The fact that questions feature so frequently in the teachers' speech is not surprising, as transfer of information is one of the key tasks of the school as an institution, with teachers offering curricular content and demanding information about their student's state of mind about this content (Dalton-Puffer, 2005). In other words, requests for information are sanctioned by the teacher's institutional role. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that questions are usually asked very directly, without any modification. In the regulative register, requests for information are generally questions related to issues such as attendance, turn-taking and classroom organisation. In Example 2, the teacher asked a question about the student's absence as part of the regulative register, i.e., the attendance-taking portion of the lesson (line 1). In the lines that follow, the teacher showed interest in the student's personal life by asking two referential questions (lines 3 and 5). While the teacher used English during the exchange, the student kept responding in Croatian, with the teacher recasting her responses in English. This was a regular feature of some of the lessons, with the teacher presumably using these opportunities to present new language to students, blurring the lines between the regulative and instructional register. However, the fact that the teacher in this example did not ask the student to respond in English also indicates that English might not be the usual norm in this portion of the class,

with the teacher potentially insisting on English because the recording was taking place, as in the later sections of the class it becomes obvious that the student in question did indeed have the linguistic ability to respond to the teacher in English.

Example 2

- 1 T4: Mary, where were you last time?
 2 S: *Bila sam na pregledu* /I had a check-up/
 3 T4: Oh you- so you were at the doctor's, are you okay?
 4 S: *Ma nešto mi je bilo s uhom* /it was something with my ear/
 5 T4: Okay mhm have you got earache?
 6 S: A?
 7 T4: Earache? *Uhobolja?*
 8 S: *Baš za sluh* /for my hearing/
 9 T4: Ah okay.

Looking at the type of questions asked by the teachers in the instructional register, the results indicate that, overall, the teachers asked slightly more display (198) than referential (172) questions (Table 3). This difference is much less emphasised than in some other studies, e.g., Martí and Portolés (2019), where 86% of the questions were display questions. Once again, the results differ for individual teachers (Figure 1). Teachers T2 and T4 asked only slightly more display than referential questions, while T1 employed only 4 referential questions in contrast with 34 display questions. Teacher T3 asked the second highest number of questions in instructional discourse, after T5, and the highest number of referential questions overall.

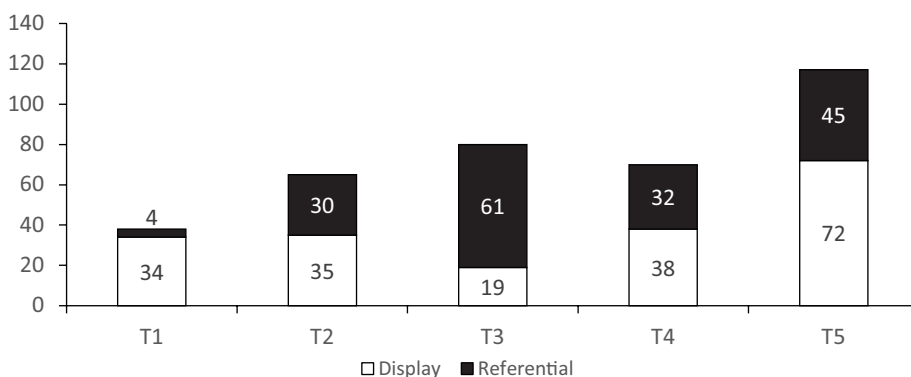


Figure 1. Individual teachers' use of display and referential questions in the instructional register

Source: own study.

Referential questions have often been seen as providing more opportunities for extended student responses, while display questions elicit shorter, more mechanical responses (Ho, 2005). Referential questions could thus be seen as proof that the teachers move beyond the IRF/IRE patterns of questioning typical of display questions to engage students in instances of real, information-seeking conversation (Martí, Portolés, 2019); however, this type of questioning may sometimes not be conducive to more extended interaction, with many instances of referential questions in our corpus yielding limited responses. Moreover, as Lee (2006: 691) noted, “display questions are central resources whereby language teachers and students organize their lessons and produce language pedagogy”. For this reason, the differences between the teachers’ use of display vs. referential questions cannot be directly attributed to the quality of the discourse in their classes. Overall, a high ratio of directives in instructional discourse may be seen as a reflection of more typical IRE/IRF sequences, with students spending most of their time responding to teacher questions. For example, the high number of questions in T3’s class was a result of her constant effort to get the students engaged with the topic of the class and the difficulties she had in eliciting extended answers from them. Despite the small size of the class (10 students) and a topic which may be regarded as something that could be of interest to that age group (celebrities as role models), her efforts were made more difficult by two disruptive students who spent a lot of the class talking in Croatian and commenting on the other students’ answers. In other words, the general unwillingness of the students to produce longer responses might be caused by the atmosphere in the classroom. Example 3 illustrates the many referential questions this teacher asked throughout the lesson to elicit extended responses, or to encourage students to engage in conversation. In the process she often repeated questions (line 4, line 6/7) or expanded them (line 2). She received short responses (line 3), at times quite direct or even rude (line 8). S3’s answer in line 10 seemed almost like the student was doing the teacher a favour in answering the question, after several attempts by the teacher to get the conversation going.

Example 3

- 1 T3: Ok what about David Beckham they mentioned David Beckham could he be a
- 2 role model to someone to a little boy little child I don’t know.
- 3 S1: Well maybe.
- 4 T3: Maybe ok in which ways in which ways?
- 5 (laughter)
- 6 T3: There’s always this maybe ok (3) what could be the reasons to look up to him
- 7 what could be the reasons? (3) Toni you can help.
- 8 S2: I have no clue

- 9 (laughter)
 10 S3: He was a great footballer.
 11 T3: Ok so he's a great footballer footballer ok.

The next example (Example 4) shows how the disruptive student (S2 in this example) speaks out of turn (line 4, 8 and 12), with the teacher largely ignoring her comments. In line 4, she comments on S1's question sarcastically, and in line 8, she laughs at his response. Finally, in line 12, she even gives a rude comment that pertains to the teacher's question, which is once again ignored by the teacher. The teacher's lack of reaction in these situations indicates that this type of behaviour is not unusual but may also be further cause for discouragement for the other students in the group.

Example 4

- 1 T3: Leo what about you?
 2 S1: *Um jel sa slika il?* /From the pictures or?/
 3 T3: Yes yes among these.
 4 S2: *A ne s poda.* /No from the floor/
 5 S1: Shakira.
 6 T3: Aha why?
 7 S1: Um she's good.
 8 S2: Good (laughter)
 9 T3: She's good she's a good singer or she's a good person?
 10 S1: Um singer.
 11 T3: Ah singer ok.
 12 S2: We don't know her in person.
 13 T3: Yes ok.
 14 S1: She have good songs.
 15 T3: Has good songs ok.

Teacher T3 used a request for information as an attempt to control the situation in her classroom, which is something Dalton-Puffer and Nikula (2006) also found in their study, noting that directives in the instructional register tend to be more prevalent in classrooms that have more teacher-fronted activities. The opposite pattern could be seen in teacher T1, who stands out with the lowest number of questions asked in the instructional discourse (38). As already mentioned, this teacher favoured a less teacher-centred approach, requiring students to work on tasks in pairs and groups. However, outside these activities, teacher T1 relied mostly on the typical IRE/IRF pattern in her communication with the students, largely focusing on checking their answers and providing feedback. Example 5 illustrates a portion of the lesson where the teacher guided students in inducing rules about phrasal verbs through a series of full and short questions. After the students'

responses, she usually repeated the answer and provided brief feedback (e.g., lines 3, 5, 7, 17, 21).

Example 5

- 1 T1: Ok, give give me one of the phrasal verbs.
 2 S1: Um take off.
 3 T1: Take off, right, ok, take off.
 4 S1: Verb.
 5 T1: Ok verb so here is a verb, and?
 6 S2: On off out.
 7 T1: Yes on off out, in, from, what are they?
 8 S2: Prepositions.
 9 T1: Prepositions, they're prepositions, ok,
 ((4 lines omitted))
 14 T1 And so um how many parts (3) can you, how many parts does your phrasal verb have,
 15 two, yours? Tony?
 16 S3: Two.
 17 T1: Two, anybody else's? How many parts did your phrasal verb have?
 18 S4: Two.
 19 T1: Two, do they always have two parts?
 20 S5: No.
 21 T1: No, sometimes they have?
 22 S5: Three.
 23 T1: Three parts, so let's draw a chart and write down two-part (4) phrasal verbs and (5)
 24 three-part phrasal verbs. Ok? two and three part phrasal verbs.

On the other end of the question frequency spectrum is teacher T5, who asked the highest number of questions overall (117), but also the highest number of display questions (72). As opposed to T3's lesson, this one was characterised by several instances of "real" conversations with students; for example, teacher T5 began the class by asking students about their weekends, and in instances when students had a story to tell, she asked many follow-up questions which seemed to stem out of actual interest. Teacher T5 also stood out with the second highest number of directives in regulative discourse, after T1, which stems from the fact that, like T1, she used different types of classroom organisation in her activities. Example 6 shows an introductory part of the lesson where teacher T5 used a range of referential questions (e.g., lines 1, 3, 5, 9). However, she only occasionally got the student to give more extended responses in English (e.g., line 12).

Example 6

- 1 T5: What did you do for the weekend?
 2 S: I went to play paintball.
 3 T5: Really? Where?

- 4 S: In Mravince.
 5 T5: Aha and how was it did you win?
 6 S: Um I lost but I didn't lost.
 7 T5: You didn't?
 8 S: No lost like lost in the woods actually.
 9 T: What, you mean got lost?
 10 S: *Ima šuma to vam je poligon xx.* /There's a forest, it's a polygon xx/ I got-
 11 T5: You got lost
 12 S: I didn't got lost but everybody was looking for me and I didn't heard them.
 ((5 lines omitted))
 17 T5: Well how many of you how many of you were there?
 18 S: Eleven. Or ten.
 19 T5: Ten or eleven mhm from your class or?

In the following part of the analysis, the focus is on the different types of requests for action within the regulative discourse, which provided a much richer source of directive behaviour than the instructional register, with activity type also being a key factor, which is also seen in previous studies (Dalton-Puffer, 2005; Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, 2006). Overall, the requests for action in our corpus were realized as imperative, declarative and interrogative forms (Figure 2); however, imperatives prevail in the regulative register overall, with 243 (63.6%) directives realized as imperative, 82 (21.5%) as declarative and 57 (14.9%) as interrogative forms. All teachers resorted to imperatives most often to realize their directives, which is a pattern also prevalent in previous studies (Chen, Tseng, 2015; Liu, Hong, 2009; Martí, Portolés, 2019; Nikula, 2002). Once again, there are emphasised differences in the distribution of these forms in different classrooms, which is in line with Dalton-Puffer and Nikula (2006). For example, teachers T2, T3 and T4 stand

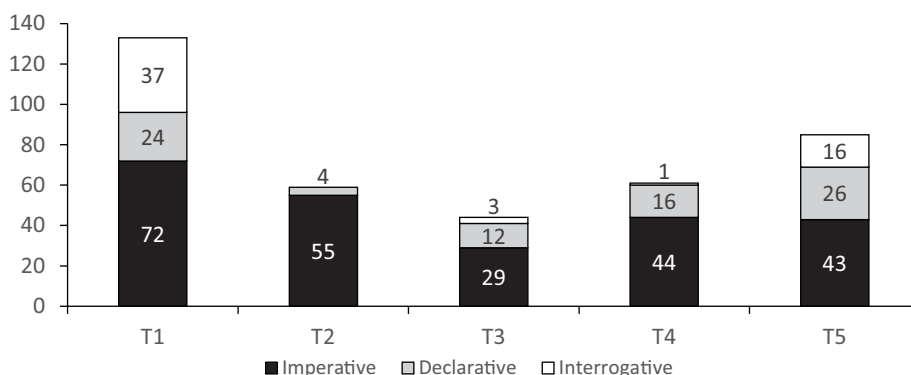


Figure 2. Individual teacher's use of different request head acts in the requests for action

Source: own study.

out for using no, or hardly any, directives in the interrogative form, while T2 also used only 4 declaratives as directives. However, the unequal distribution of the three types of directives must be further examined by looking into the sub-types of the request head acts.

A closer look at the most direct sub-type, the imperative (Table 4), shows that bold and elliptical infinitives are favoured by the majority of the teachers, followed by the inclusive form “let’s” and prefaced infinitives. The most direct form, the elliptical infinitive, was often used to allocate turns and assign, for example, sentences to be read by the students, as in Example 7 (lines 1, 3 and 6). These types of very “dry” IRE/IRF sequences could be found in each of the five lessons. They offer no opportunities for interaction or extended responses from the students, while the input from the teachers was also minimal in these situations.

Example 7

- 1 T3: Okay, let’s continue Lucy three.
 2 S1: (in Croatian)
 3 T3: No no you you.
 4 S2: Because she helps poor- pure.
 5 S1: Pure (laughter)
 6 T3: Poor people okay poor people okay Lydia four.

Table 4. Types and frequencies of infinitive forms used by the teachers (own study)

Teacher	Bold	Elliptical	Inclusive	Prefaced	Please
T1	18	22	15	7	10
T2	27	10	12	6	0
T3	8	10	6	5	0
T4	13	14	7	4	6
T5	15	14	6	8	0
Total	81	70	46	30	16

Bold infinitives were used largely when teachers instructed students on what they needed to do to complete a task, like in Examples 8 and 9. In both excerpts, the teachers used the inclusive form “let’s” to introduce the task. In example 8, teacher T2 followed this form with two bold infinitives (prefaced by the discourse marker “so”), concluding with the appeal “ok?” in line 3, which softens the directness of the previous lines. In Example 9, teacher T1 used a declarative form to give the turn to a specific group (line 2), finishing her utterance with a bold infinitive which also served as a warning, as the students were not paying attention. When the students continued talking, she interrupted the reading and issued a warning directed

to a group of students using the inclusive “shall”, finishing with a bold infinitive instructing learners to continue. In both of these examples, the orders are issued in ways that construct the teachers’ roles of authority

Example 8

- 1 T2: Let’s match the text the names here with the questions from task two, so read
2 the text again who who doesn’t eat meat, so write the names of the people next to
3 these questions, ok?

Example 9

- 1 T1: You’ve finished? Good, let’s read um short um letter to Jack, what do you think,
2 this group I believe is the first, listen.
3 ((students talking unintelligibly while another student starts to read))
4 T1: Um just a second, Frank and the others, shall we listen to them? Go on.

As opposed to the imperative forms, there was more variety in how often and whether the teachers used the other, less direct subtypes. For example, while T2 used only 4 instances of directives in the declarative form, teachers T1 and T5 used 24 and 26 instances, respectively, mostly to express permission with the modal “can”. Example 10 shows the teacher giving instructions for a task by using indirect forms using an initial “please” followed by two expressions of permission (lines 2 and 3), modified by a cost-minimizer and a final appealer “right?”, which further emphasises the feeling that she was seeking agreement with the students, instead of telling them what to do. Despite the teacher’s indirectness in this excerpt, the students proceeded with the task without any comments or disturbance.

Example 10

- 1 T1: Frank Alice, have you understood it? Have you got any unknown words to ask me?
2 (4) Hm? No, then please um in- you can do it in your books together in pairs if it’s
3 easier for you, you can underline all the phrasal verbs you can find here, right?

Similarly, a variety of conventionally indirect forms were used by teacher T5 in Example 11 while explaining a task to a student who completed the previous activity. Speaking directly to a student, the teacher used a conventionally indirect, interrogative “can” + 2nd ps. pronoun form to present the task, together with a modifier (grounders) explaining why the task was set (line 2). After a less direct introduction, the teacher used a bold infinitive to conclude the explanation, going from less to more direct forms, which is a pattern also commonly employed by the teachers in Dalton-Puffer and Nikula’s (2006) study. In line 7, in response to the student’s query about the task, the teacher used an expression of permission to

provide an example, while in line 10 she continued with an expression of obligation (declarative form) using the modal “well”. Once again, while it is obvious from the excerpt that the teacher is in a position of authority in this conversation, she used a variety of directive forms and modifiers in the excerpt, varying her level of directness while maintaining a relatively informal tone when providing instructions for the task. This is in line with the relaxed atmosphere the teacher maintained throughout the class, which was not abused by the students, who readily complied with the teacher’s requests.

Example 11

- 1 T5: One more minute and then we’ll check. (3) Anna um since you’ve finished, can you
 2 find um some words in the book from unit three and four, and write them on a
 3 piece of paper ok? So for example I don’t know cheerful you write it on a piece of
 4 paper and then um you know the others will have to um paraphrase um the words in
 5 order to guess, ok? So um um choose I don’t know six or seven words.
 6 S1: Okay, from any-
 7 T5: From units three or four (2) or you can choose a phrase like that thing that we did a
 8 big break um those words ok?
 9 S1: So I can just write them
 10 T5: Yes and then you will cut them ok? So one word on each um a little piece of paper
 11 and then we will see how good you are with vocabulary.

Interrogatives were the least-used subtype of directives within the regulative discourse in our sample, with T1 using 37 interrogative forms, T5 using 16, while T2, T3 and T4 employed 0, 3 and 1 instances, respectively. This further confirms that conventionally indirect, hearer-based strategies were not popular with some of the teachers in our study. For example, two of the teachers (T4 and T2) did not use the modal verb + 2nd ps. pronoun frame (e.g., “can you”) at all. This is in contrast with Dalton-Puffer (2005), where an overwhelming majority of teacher requests used indirectness strategies of one kind or another, mostly conventionally indirect, hearer-based strategies, with a clear preference for the construction frame modal verb + 2nd ps. pronoun “would you”, “could you”, “can you”. The overall impression of directness in the majority of the analysed classes was further supported by the fact that only two of the teachers used the modifier “please” in their directive speech, which is unusual as it is probably the most ubiquitous expression of politeness in English (Sato, 2008). Directives are one of the most face-threatening acts in the politeness system of English, and some of the teachers did little to mitigate this, employing mostly direct forms and not using polite forms such as “please” or “thank you”.

To sum up, although the teachers in our study showed a preference for direct forms, the differences between the individual teachers’

personal styles and choices of activities seem to have a greater influence on their directive speech in the classroom. Two of the teachers (T1 and T5) used the greatest range of directive forms of varying directness and showed a higher degree of pragmatic sophistication in their directive speech. Although these two teachers worked in different contexts, with T1's lesson recorded in a larger public-school class and T5's in a small private language school, they both employed activities which included pair and group work and provided classroom talk which featured greater pragmatic diversity.

6. Conclusions and implications

Our analysis confirmed the necessity of going beyond quantitative analysis of directive speech acts and accompanying features, emphasising the importance of context in attempting to shed light on the YLL classroom as a pragmatic environment. The individual styles of the teachers, their choices of activities and the behaviour of the students were all contextual factors which seemed to influence the range and directness of directive speech acts used by the teachers. Our findings showed that this did not necessarily mean that the teachers who relied on more direct forms had a more authoritative style, as all of the teachers seemed to nurture informal relationships with the students, at least to some extent. In fact, this may have also contributed to their directness, as the teachers were all familiar with their students and had taught them for a number of years. Directness was also linked to the prevalence of the IRE/IRF pattern, with very little elaborate explanation or instruction-giving present in some of the lessons, which seemed to stem from the fact that the tasks and the procedures for their fulfilment were so expected and familiar to the students. Generally, a task from the coursebook is set, the students do it individually, the answers are checked. This is usually interspersed with referential questions related to the topic of the lessons (celebrities, healthy food), where the teacher still holds the floor and has to nominate students. This is reflected in how teachers T2, T3 and T4 use directives, with less variety and more reliance on the imperative form. Thus, taken together with a serious lack of politeness expressions, these teachers' use of directives does not seem to provide opportunities for varied pragmatic input for students, nor does it seem to encourage the students' responses. On the other hand, teachers T1 and T5 demonstrated more pragmatic sophistication, employing a wider range of directive forms. Both teachers provided richer pragmatic input, despite the differences in their quantitative data. While teacher T1 focused on giving instructions for pair and groupwork

tasks, T5 engaged students in “real” conversation, showing genuine interest in their responses.

In summary, although the directive speech of all of the teachers was pragmatically attuned to their students’ needs, at least partially, the analysed classes differed in the extent to which the teachers’ directive language offered varied pragmatic input, especially related to basic politeness and conventionally indirect forms, which are ubiquitous in the English language. Teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their use of directives to maximise opportunities for providing pragmatic input for their students and to become more aware of the language they use in class.

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