

Politeness Strategies in Directive Speech Acts: A Pragmatic Analysis of the Main Characters in the Movie *Ghosbusters ; Frozen Empire (2024)*

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the use of politeness strategies in directive speech acts by the main characters in the film *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*. This study applies descriptive qualitative methods using the theory proposed by Searle (1979) regarding directive speech acts and Brown & Levinson (1987) regarding politeness strategies to examine the interactions of the main characters: Callie, Phoebe, Gary, and Trevor. The analysis shows that the most dominant type of directive speech act is commands. In urgent situations that require a quick response and emphasize clarity, commands are generally conveyed using the bald on record strategy. Meanwhile, the use of negative and positive politeness strategies is generally used in requests and suggestions to maintain respect and build cooperation. In addition, warnings and prohibitions usually use the bald on record strategy so that the speaker gets a quick response and the listener can easily understand what the speaker is saying. Meanwhile, the off-record strategy is not found, because the film *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire* has an action context that faces many urgent language situations that require quick responses. These findings emphasize how politeness strategies influence the way directives are conveyed, create cooperation, balance authority, and provide emotional support to the characters.

Keywords: directive speech acts; politeness strategies; pragmatics; cinematic discourse; *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menganalisis penggunaan strategi kesantunan didalam tindak tutur direktif pada karakter utama dalam film *Ghostbusters: Frozen empire*. Penelitian ini menerapkan kualitatif deskriptif sebagai metode dengan menggunakan teory yang dikemukakan oleh Searle (1979) mengenai tindak tutur direktif dan Brown & Levinson (1987) mengenai strategi kesantunan untuk mengkaji interaksi karakter utama: callie, phoebe, gary, dan trevor. Analisis ini memberikan hasil bahwa jenis tindak tutur direktif yang paling dominan adalah command, jika dalam situasi yang mendesak untuk mendapatkan respon cepat dan menekankan kejelasan maka umumnya disampaikan dengan menggunakan strategi "bald on record". Sedangkan penggunaan strategi negatif dan positif politeness umumnya digunakan dalam tindak tutur permintaan dan saran untuk tetap menunjukkan rasa hormat dan membangun kerja sama. Selain itu, peringatan dan larangan biasanya menggunakan strategi "bald on record" agar penutur mendapatkan tindakan yang cepat dan lawan tutur dapat dengan mudah memahami tuturan penutur. Sementara itu, strategi "off record" tidak ditemukan, karena film *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire* memiliki konteks aksi yang menghadapi banyak situasi bahasa dan mendesak sehingga membutuhkan tanggapan cepat. Temuan ini menekankan bagaimana pengaruh strategi kesantunan terhadap cara penyampaian direktif, menciptakan kerja sama, menyeimbangkan Otoritas, serta dukungan emosional pada para tokoh.

Kata kunci: tindak tutur direktif; strategi kesopanan; pragmatik; wacana film; *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*



INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning based on the context of language use. Pragmatics is very important to study in order to understand the communicative goals that humans want to achieve, as it examines the relationship between the speaker, language, and situation. One important branch of pragmatics is directive speech acts. Directive speech acts are utterances that aim to make the listener perform an action desired by the speaker. Such as giving commands, prohibitions, requests, warnings, and suggestions (Searle, 1979). Social relationships and the level of authority between the speaker and the listener are usually described through the use of directive speech acts. These speech acts can threaten a person's self-image, so they must be linked to politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), to maintain harmony and ensure that communication remains smooth without causing conflict.

Considering speech acts and politeness strategies, pragmatics is highly relevant when examined through the context of media, which includes various types of social interactions such as movie. *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire* movie is suitable for study and has an interesting story about a dangerous ancient force that attacks New York City, bringing together the Ghostbusters team and the Spengler family to unite against and eliminate this ancient force from the city. This film provides many examples of the use of directive speech acts by the four main characters in the Ghostbusters team, each of whom has a role and bears great responsibility, so that teamwork and coordination are regulated through directive speech acts. The characters consistently apply politeness strategies throughout the story to ensure that their speech remains appropriate to the context of the situation, social status, and closeness between team members. Therefore, this film is analyzed using speech acts and politeness strategies to provide us with an understanding of the use of language to negotiate power, roles, and solidarity within a team when facing critical situations.

Several previous studies have analyzed various contexts of directive speech acts, such as interactions in the classroom, literary works, and films. The use of directive speech acts that serve to control actions, build relationships, and convey expressions effectively has been demonstrated in most of these studies. Suryandani & Budasi (2021) analyzed the use of directive speech acts by teachers in EFL classrooms and found that the most frequently used type of speech act was the question directive speech act. Their research shows that teachers use many speech acts to regulate student participation and maintain order in the

classroom. Meanwhile, Wijaya & Helmie (2019), examined speech acts in the film script *The Fault in Our Stars* and found that the most frequently used type of directive speech act was suggestion, which functions in an emotional context to provide support and persuasion. Another study by Diana et al. (2015) analyzed directive speech acts in the comic *Civil War* and found that the speech act frequently used in the comic was commands, which aimed to show the strength and authority of the characters.

However, some of these studies only focus on the classification and frequency of directive speech acts without linking them to politeness strategies. In fact, politeness strategies play an important role in determining how to express speech acts to others without threatening a person's identity in real-life interactions and media representations. Therefore, this study aims not only to identify types of speech acts but also to examine in depth the relationship between language function (directive speech acts) and ways of maintaining politeness in language use. By highlighting the relationship between these two aspects, this study is expected to contribute new insights to pragmatic studies. Specifically, this study aims to provide new knowledge about the interaction between directive speech acts and politeness strategies that occur in popular media discourse. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to answer the following questions: (1.) What types of directive speech acts are found in the film *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*? (2.) How politeness strategies are applied in the directive speech acts performed by the main characters in the film *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Directive Speech acts

Directive speech acts are one of the five categories of illocutionary acts proposed by Searle. Directive speech acts are utterances made by the speaker to make the listener perform an action. In other words, speech acts are performed with the aim of influencing the listener's behavior to suit the speaker's wishes, either directly or indirectly (Searle, 1979). Directive speech acts were chosen for this study to demonstrate control, authority, and persuasion in communication. Searle (1979), classified types of directive speech acts such as commands, prohibitions, requests, warnings, and suggestions. Commands serve to demonstrate authority and are delivered directly, for example, "*Close the window!*" Prohibitions are used by speakers to prevent listeners from performing an action, for example, "*Don't go out!*" Requests are usually expressed indirectly and tend to be conveyed



in a subtle and polite manner by the speaker, for example, *“Could you close the window?”*. Warnings are used by speakers to inform listeners about the consequences of an action that will or will not be taken. Suggestions are used by speakers to encourage listeners to take action after considering it (Holmes, 2013). According to Holmes (2013), directive speech acts can be influenced by social factors, such as social distance, situational context, and power relations between the speaker and listener. Directive speech acts have a hierarchical nature that is used in a relationship, while indirect speech acts are used in more equal relationships. To manage this variation, politeness strategies must be used so that directive speech acts are conveyed in a way that shows respect without threatening the interlocutor and maintains good cooperation in communication.

Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies play an important role in conveying commands. This is because commands given verbally by the speaker to the listener can threaten the listener's self-esteem (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, certain speakers often add politeness strategies to keep communication harmonious and reduce conflict. Brown & Levinson (1987) classify politeness strategies into several types. First, there is “direct politeness” (bald on record), a strategy used by speakers to convey messages directly, without softening their expressions, and used in emergency situations or by speakers with clear authority. Second, there is positive politeness, a strategy used by speakers to add praise or language that involves and shows familiarity and solidarity. Third is negative politeness, a strategy used by speakers to apologize, use indirect expressions, or soften their statements to show respect to the listener. Fourth is off record, a strategy used indirectly so that the listener must first guess the speaker's true meaning based on the clues or cues provided. This strategy shows that the use of politeness strategies cannot be separated from directive speech acts. Spencer (2008), emphasizes that politeness strategies in practice have functions that depend on shared cultural norms and mutual understanding between speakers and listeners. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the role of language in social interaction can be obtained by examining directive speech acts combined with politeness strategies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses qualitative descriptive research as its method with the aim of clearly and thoroughly describing linguistic phenomena (Creswell, 2009). This study examines

speech with contextual meaning emphasized in the dialogue of the film *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*, which was released in 2024 and has a duration of 115 minutes. The data obtained for this study were the dialogues of the four main characters in the film transcript, namely Callie, Phoebe, Trevor, and Gary. This is because they are the characters who play a central role in the narrative and represent the most significant dynamics examined in this study. The researcher collected and analyzed the data through four stages. In the first stage, the researcher watched the film in its entirety to understand the context of the characters' communication, the storyline, and the relationships between the characters. In the second stage, the researcher watched the film again to identify and classify the directive speech acts used by the main characters using theory of (Searle, 1979), which includes commands, prohibitions, requests, warnings, and suggestions. In the third stage, the film is watched again to identify the types of politeness strategies used in speech acts by the main characters using theory of (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the fourth stage, researchers conduct verification to ensure that the data is accurate and consistent and appropriate to the context of the situation in the film. After completing these four stages, the results of the analysis of directive speech acts with politeness strategies were compared to describe the interaction between the two in demonstrating aspects of leadership, authority, compassion, and teamwork, focusing on the speech acts performed by the four characters so that the main storyline would be more focused, thus ignoring the speech acts of the other supporting characters.

FINDINGS

This section discusses politeness strategies in imperative speech acts identified by researchers in the four main characters in the film *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*. Searle's theory of the classification of directive speech acts and Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategies were used in this analysis. The distribution of politeness in directive speech acts is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Politeness Strategies in Directive Speech in The Movie *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*

Directives Speech Acts	Politeness Strategies				Total
	Bald on Record	Positive Politeness	Negative Politeness	Off Record	
Command	44	7	3	0	54
Request	3	2	20	0	25
Prohibition	11	0	2	0	13
Warning	7	0	2	0	9

Suggestion	2	4	3	0	9
Total	67	13	30	0	110

The results show that the most dominant speech act is commands, with 54 occurrences. These consist of 44 uses of bald on record strategies, 7 uses of positive politeness, 3 uses of negative politeness, and 0 uses of off record. The dominant use of bald on record shows that in the film, commands are conveyed clearly, firmly, and directly without mitigation. This is due to the urgent situation faced by the main characters when operating and when their lives are threatened, causing them to disregard politeness. The off record strategy was not found in these speech acts because they were conveyed indirectly or sarcastically, requiring the listener to interpret the meaning first and taking more time, which would be impractical and more confusing in an emergency context.

In addition to commands, requests are also frequently used by the main character, appearing 25 times. These consist of 3 uses of bald on record, 2 uses of positive politeness, 20 uses of negative politeness, and 0 uses of off record. Negative politeness is more often used when the characters make requests while still showing respect and minimizing coercion. Meanwhile, bald on record and positive politeness are used to describe characters who are in urgent situations or have close relationships with fellow team members, so they are limited in number in the film. Meanwhile, off record does not appear at all in the film because it indicates that the characters' indirect intentions are never implied. Given that this film is an action film with situations that demand speed, clarity and efficiency are prioritized by the characters so that the message can be understood immediately by the audience and a quick response can be generated.

Meanwhile, prohibitions were found 13 times, consisting of 11 bald on record, 2 negative politeness, and 0 positive politeness and off record. The dominant use of bald on record indicates that authority must be asserted by figures and requires immediate compliance by listeners, especially when facing threatening situations. Direct speech for prohibitive speech acts is very effective, and assertiveness is necessary to prevent dangerous actions. Meanwhile, the use of negative politeness, especially towards individuals of higher or equal status, aims to create a sense of respect and avoid giving an overly authoritarian impression. The absence of off-the-record strategies indicates that prohibitions are not conveyed ambiguously or indirectly because, in high-risk contexts, this would be impractical. Thus, the message spoken by the speaker can be directly understood by the listener, and swift action is urgently needed.

Warnings speech acts appeared 9 times, consisting of 7 bald on record, 2 negative politeness acts, 0 positive politeness acts, and off record. The use of bald on record strategies in this speech act reflects clear and immediate communication by the speaker so that the listener does not take risky actions in urgent situations. The use of negative politeness in this film shows that when speaking to individuals of equal status, the speaker must maintain a tone that is not too harsh when delivering warnings. The absence of positive politeness strategies is because the warning must be conveyed clearly, so it does not require familiarity or camaraderie. Meanwhile, the absence of an off-record strategy indicates that the warning is not conveyed ambiguously or vaguely, which could cause the listener to misunderstand or require more effort to think about the true meaning.

Suggestions appeared 9 times, consisting of 2 uses of bald on record strategies, 4 uses of positive politeness, 3 uses of negative politeness, and 0 uses of off record. The more dominant use of positive politeness strategies shows that the speaker tries to invite or persuade the interlocutor to do something without threatening the social relationship. Thus, the speaker uses a friendly and inclusive attitude so that the invitation does not sound forceful. Meanwhile, the use of negative politeness indicates that the interlocutor should not feel pressured, so the speaker is more careful in delivering advice. In order to maintain the listener's autonomy, the speaker must use advice that creates distance and shows respect. The use of bald on record is relatively rare, but when the speaker is confident that the advice given will have a positive impact on the listener, the use of the bald on record strategy is very much needed because it provides speed and clarity. The absence of an off record strategy in this speech act shows that the speaker does not give advice in an ambiguous or indirect way that risks the listener misinterpreting and ignoring it, so clear communication is very much needed.

The use of direct directive speech acts is relatively common due to urgent factors. The pattern of suggestive speech acts, especially with positive politeness strategies, is used so that rational strategies tend to be clear. This shows that cooperation and saving face are prioritized by figures, especially when the situation allows it, compared to direct and firm communication.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire movie on the four main characters shows that the use of directive speech acts is often associated with politeness strategies. These

strategies describe how the characters maintain social balance and respect when they give orders, requests, prohibition, warnings, and advice. This section emphasizes politeness strategies found to explain the function of these strategies in various types of directive speech acts. The following description explains the strategies that appear in each form of directive, accompanied by examples of findings obtained in this study.

Command

Data 1 (00:06:14 – 00:06:23)

Phoebe: We're gonna lose him.
Callie: *Phoebe Spengler, you stay inside this car!*
Phoebe: I have a ghost to bust.
Gary: Alright, That was cool.

Callie's utterance "*Phoebe Spengler, stay inside this car!*" falls under the category of directive speech acts, as it conveys an order to the listener directly without allowing for negotiation and requires immediate action (Searle, 1979). Linguistically, authority and seriousness are emphasized in the command through the use of the full name "*Phoebe Spengler*" and the imperative structure "*stay inside this car*". From the perspective of politeness, Callie uses bald on record because clarity and efficiency are prioritized (Brown & Levinson, 1987), so there is no need for a soft and gentle tone in speech. In this statement, Callie tries to instruct her daughter to take action in order to avoid possible danger. Therefore, in order to deal with urgent situations, decisiveness becomes more important than politeness for the sake of safety and control of the situation. The role of parents has been reflected through their tone of voice, which is reinforced by emotional concern, where affection and dominance are expressed through the use of imperatives. As explained by Lisma et al. (2023), when faced with high-risk situations, bald on record strategies are often used because they require clarity and efficiency, such as when giving instructions or direct orders. In this context, politeness is not prioritized over ensuring understanding and quick action (Revita et al., 2025). Therefore, in family discourse, Callie conveys speech to describe the function of commands and expressions of protection and authority.

Request

Data 2 (00:10:14 – 00:10:34)

Mr. Mayor: How old are you?
Trevor: I'm 18, I'm an adult.
Mr. Mayor: I'm not talking to you. Her.
Phoebe: Fifteen.

Mr. Mayor: Minor? We don't let kids become cops, we don't let them fight fires, and we certainly don't let them become Ghosbusters.

Gary: Uh, Mister-Mister...

Callie: Sir..

Gary: *I-I'm sorry. Uh, Mr. Mayor, m-may I approach the bench?*

Mr. Mayor: Do you see a robe? I am not a judge.

Gary's utterance "*Mr. Mayor, m-may I approach the bench?*" falls under the category of request speech acts, because Gary politely expresses his request for permission to the mayor directly with the aim of having his action approved by the listener (Searle, 1979). Linguistically, Gary's speech uses a negative politeness strategy conveyed through the expression "*may*" This strategy aims to maintain respect for the mayor and reduce coercion (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Through this strategy, Gary expresses his awareness of the difference in power and social hierarchy between himself and his interlocutor. As explained by Mulyono et al. (2025), in order to avoid conflict or communication failure, negative politeness strategies tend to be used by speakers in both formal and institutional contexts. This helps to maintain social honor and hierarchical balance. Therefore, from a pragmatic point of view, Gary's discussion of passive politeness and indirect expression plays a role in maintaining decorum in power negotiations especially in institutionalized contexts, where these mechanisms prevent speakers from provoking conflict and avoid their inferior position compared to the message recipient.

Prohibition

Data 3 (01:06:48 – 01:06:55)

Phoebe: Honestly, if you weren't a Spengler, you'd be answering our phones.

Callie: Excuse me?

Gary: *Don't talk to her like that!*

Phoebe: Are you serious?

Gary: I'm very serious. She's your mom.

Gary's utterance "*don't talk to her like that!*" is a prohibitive speech act, because it aims to prevent an action from being carried out or to restrict the behavior of the addressee (Searle, 1979). Pragmatically, this utterance uses the bald on record strategy, because it is delivered firmly and directly without softening the tone so that it is immediately understood by the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987). A protective attitude and urgency are shown through the use of the negative imperative "*don't*". Gary's emotional involvement is reflected in this utterance to show his defense of his wife and to show that appropriate social boundaries must be upheld. The use of this strategy is very much needed

when efficiency and moral urgency are more important than saving face for the interlocutor (Ramzan & Khan, 2024). In line with Okafor, (2023) view sociopragmatically, the purpose of direct assertiveness is to maintain harmony during communication and to convey moral concern. Thus, Gary's statement is not a form of rudeness, but a form of concern, and in the context of family, international relations are maintained.

Warning

Data 4 (00:13:04 – 00:13:11)

Callie: We both got some action

Gary: Yeah, we did.

Phoebe: Okay, Gross. For you, I get it--you're a scientist-- but.. she's just..

Callie: *Choose your next words very carefully.*

Callie's utterance “*choose your next word very carefully*” is a warning speech act, because it implicitly aims to make the interlocutor more cautious and prevent them from saying something inappropriate (Searle, 1979). In terms of politeness, Callie uses a negative politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Linguistically, this utterance is indirect and subtle, even though it appears firm. To emphasize caution without threatening the interlocutor, the phrase “*choose your next words*” is used. This form is conveyed with the intention that Phoebe can improve herself, and Callie uses it so that her authority as a parent remains intact. The addition of the phrase “*very carefully*” indicates that the situation is serious, but politeness is not compromised. According to Lee et al. (2023), when the speaker intends to maintain a harmonious relationship in an emotional situation and regulate behavior, assertiveness can be used in conjunction with politeness.

Suggestion

Data 5 (01:23:52 – 01:24:09)

Phoebe: I trusted somebody that I shouldn't have. I just feel stupid.

Gary: it's okay to feel stupid. Some of the smartest people I know are morons.

Callie: yeah, and I told you to make mistakes.

Phoebe: Yeah, not release a monstrous deity.

Callie: *Maybe next time, get a tattoo.*

Gary: *Or try shoplifting. Hey, that'd be fun.*

Callie's utterance “*maybe next time, get a tattoo*” and Gary's utterance “*or try shoplifting, hey, that'd be fun*” are suggestive speech acts. Because they are humorous and non-binding, both try to give Phoebe options so that she can be influenced without coercion (Searle, 1979). In terms of politeness, both utterances use positive politeness strategies (Brown &



Levinson, 1987), the aim is to maintain a sense of familiarity and reduce Phoebe's feelings of guilt for doing something that worried everyone. The utterance “*maybe next time*” is an empathetic tone used by Callie to soften the suggestion. And the utterance “*hey, that'd be fun*” is humor used by Gary to maintain emotional support and warmth. To maintain harmony and avoid tension, a relaxed tone and humor must be used. According to Kim & Plester, (2021), in order for interpersonal relationships to last and to reduce the threat to the interlocutor, positive politeness and humor must be used in speech.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of directive speech acts in *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire* movie serves to create a way for characters to interact and express authority. There are five types of directive speech acts that have been classified, namely commands, requests, prohibitions, warnings, and suggestions. One of the most dominant speech acts is commands. In terms of politeness strategies, bald on record and positive politeness are the most frequently used strategies. Bald on record is used more in high-risk contexts to convey assertiveness, clarity, and the need for quick action, negative politeness is used to show respect and maintain the autonomy of the addressee. While positive politeness aims to maintain a sense of solidarity when possible. The absence of off-record strategies is because the film presents scenes with direct communication, especially when the characters face urgent moments. These findings emphasize that pragmatic analysis is very effective in revealing the relationship between power, politeness, and context, and suggest that future researchers should look at the types of directive speech acts and politeness strategies in a discourse by comparing genres or cultural contexts.

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