

DIRECTIVES IN ENGLISH

F.X. Nadar

English has many ways of expressing directives. This paper attempts to classify the examples of directives based on their linguistic forms, which then will be given some comments. These comments, despite being subjective, are based on observation and inquiries to native speakers of English. Finally, this paper discusses other possible ways which can be used to classify the directives and the implications for learners and teachers of English to speakers of other languages.

Austin (quoted by Coulthard, 1985) makes the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts, and he says further that "the interpretation of the locutionary acts concerns with meaning, the interpretation of the illocutionary act with force." Searle (cited by Coulthard, 1985) proposes five microclasses of illocutionary act: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. Directives (Coulthard, 1985:24) may be defined as

all attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something- in this class the speaker is wanting to achieve a future situation in which the world will match his words and thus this class includes not simply 'order' and 'request' but, more subtly, 'invite', 'dare' and 'challenge'.

Based on the definition and concept above, the examples of directives are gathered. They are taken from Gloria (1985), O'Neil (1971), Wong (1970), Hemmingway (1974) and Jordan (1986) which are likely relevant to students at tertiary level. These directives are classified according to their linguistic forms, and for the purpose of convenience in reading and reference-making, they are numbered. They are grouped into:

1. Group A - Directives expressed in verbal questions
2. Group B - Directives expressed with verbs in the stem forms
3. Group C - Directives expressed in pronominal questions

4. Group D - Directives expressed in statements

1. Group A Directives expressed in verbal questions

"Will you come down to breakfast, Harold?" his mother said.(1)

"Will you come over and watch me play indoor?"(2)

"Would you kneel and pray with me, Harold?" his mother asked(3)

Would you mind posting the letter for me?(4)

"Would you show me what's in that suitcase?" he is asking(5)

Will you set up the slight projector for me, please, Walter?(6)

Excuse me. Would you mind lending me your pencil for a moment so I can copy these book titles?" (7)

Excuse me, but could you turn down the radio? I can't hear the person on the other end of the line. (8)

Excuse me, but can you change a hundred dollar bill? I'm afraid I don't have any change. (9)

Peter, could you please stop talking? I can't talk when someone else is talking. (10)

A : Could you please ask Lois to come here? (11) I want her to type these letters for me.

Can you go shopping with me this morning? (12)

Can you help me with the cleaning this morning? (13)

X : Have these bookshelves been dusted?(14)

Y : Of course they have. I've just dusted them. I've been dusting bookselves for twenty minutes.

Liu Chung-tuan then walked back, frowning slightly. "May I suggest that you do my work here, mixing the cement, and I'll work for you at the bottom of the sewer. The air down there is poor; your headache will get worse." (15)

2. Group B Directives expressed with verbs in the stem forms

- A : Well, make her come. (16) And don't let her use the copying machine too long. (17) It'll get overheated.
And don't let her do stapling herself either. (18)
That's a waste of time.
- A : I'm tired of cooking. Let's eat out. (19)
- B : OK. Good idea..
- " Please, be seated, sir" A nurse urged him to sit down. (20)
- " Pull on, don't let go.-someone go call the fire engines and the ambulance..." (21)
- " Doctor, please don't cut off his legs! (22)
- " Doctor, please think of another way!" (23)
- " Let's work harder! Let's all work together!" (24)
- " Clean your teeth and then straight to bed." (25)
- " Try it on," the woman urged. " It's really lovely." (26)

3. Group C - Directives expressed in Pronominal questions

- " Why don't you and ... and Lucy, go outside and play for a little while , while I talk to Lucy's mummy." (27)
- " Mummy, I'm hungry..... when we are going to eat...?" (28)

4. Group D - Directives expressed in statements

- X : I thought you were going to dust the furniture this morning. (29) And you said you were going to mop the floor, too. (30)
- Y : I know, I was going to do that after I checked the wards, but I never had the chance to get out of the kitchen.

It seems English has so many ways to express directives. It is interesting, however, to note that the construction of first person singular followed by verbs expressing directives (such as **order, request, beg, ask, command, force, etc**) are not commonly used. Instead, English has indirect ways of expressing directives, by which the speakers can make the hearers understand

the message without necessarily showing that they are making directives.

Leech and Svartvik (1975) suggest the use of *will* and *would* to express commands, requests and invitation. They (1975:147) also suggest that " it is more tactful to use a request rather than a command; i.e. to ask your hearer whether he is willing or able to do something". They also write further that there are many more ways of making a polite request, e.g. by making a statement about what somebody wishes. Both writers (1975:147-148) also mention that as " ways of influencing other people, advice, suggestion and invitations are milder than commands."

Leech and Svartvik do not clearly mention which forms of directives will result in prompt or instant performances from the hearers. They mention, however, there are certain degrees of tactfulness and persuasiveness. *Would* and *could* are more tactful than *will* and *can*, while negative questions such as " *Won't you come in and sit down?*" is more persuasive.

The idea of politeness above is shared by Coulthard (1985:122) who writes that " the function of the preceding items seems to be in part to carry as yet unclassifiable degrees of 'politeness'."

What is interesting to observe is, it seems the longer the directives, the more polite they seem to be. The addition of remarks such as " please" (10,22,23) and "excuse me" (7,8,9) also increase the degree of politeness. It also seems that the higher the social rank or status people have, the shorter and the more bossy the directives they make. In this case the directives numbers 16,17,18,25 and 26 are the examples. Close friends also use shorter directives among them, but they do not use any bossy tone (19). Cynical directives are expressed in the statement forms (29,30) and it seems they hurt the feeling more though they sound polite and soft. Intimate or close relationship in a family seems to produce directives with elements of affection, request and closeness (27,28).

Considering the various angles which can be used to analyse the directives in English, there should be some other ways of classifying them apart from their linguistic

forms. The following two ways may be taken into consideration :

A. Classification based on the degree of politeness

In this case, the directives are classified based on the degree of politeness, the shortest can be regarded as the least polite, the use of *will* and *can* indicate the more polite forms, and the use of *would* and *could* plus remarks such as *excuse me* and *please* indicate the most polite forms.

B. Classification based on the person involved

In this classification, the directives are classified based on the persons involved in the performing of the directives. Are the hearers the addressees (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30), or the idea comes from the speaker and then both the speaker and the hearer carry out the performance of the directives together (19, 24, 28).

It is a fact that English is the most widely used language in the world. Unfortunately, learners and teachers of English do not always have similar cultural background with the native speakers of English. So, when it comes to the use of language items where culture is involved, problems may arise. In the degree of politeness expression, in relation to the study of directives, for example, non-native speakers of English may use the combination of gestures and change the linguistic forms in the directives uttered. People with Javanese background express the degree of politeness in Javanese in a very different way. Geertz (1968) as quoted by Coulthard describes that Javanese has three major language styles with unique lexical items and grammatical constructions. Learners with Javanese background, who express the degree of politeness by lengthen-

ing the vowels before the final consonants, added with some physical gestures, will absolutely change their manner when using English directives appropriately.

Learners and teachers of English should be aware that directives are not easy to learn and use because they carry with them cultural, social and linguistic problems. Those having different ways in expressing directives will have to be very careful in order not to sound strange, impolite or foreign when making directives. Finally it should be born in mind that behind the common and distinct language elements, such as grammar and vocabulary, there do exist other elements, one of which is directives, which deserve full attention from the viewpoints of linguistic, social and cultural thoughts.

References

- Austin, JI. 1962. *How to do things with words*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Coulthard, Malcolm. 1985. *An Introduction to Discourse Analyses*. New York: Longman INC
- Geertz, C. 1968. Linguistic Etiquette In Fishman, JA (ed) *Reading in the Sociology of Language*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Hemmingway, Ernest. 1974. "Soldier's Home". In Charles Scribner (ed) *The Enduring Hemmingway*. New York : Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Jordan, Penny. 1986. *Loving*. London : Mills and Boon Limited.
- Leech, Geoffrey and Jan Svartvik .1975. *A Communicative Grammar of English*. Singapore: Longman Singapore Publishers (Pte) Limited.
- O'Neil, Robert et al. 1979. *Kernel Lessons Intermediate*. Yogyakarta : Percetakan Kanisius (Under arrangement with Longman Group Limited).
- Poedjosoedarmo, Gloria. 1985. *Dialogues for Oral Practice in English*. Jakarta : PT Gramedia.
- Searle, JR. 1965. "What is a speech act?" In Black (ed.). *Philosophy in America*. New York : Cornell University Press.
- Wong, Meng Voon. 1970. "Eight Hours in the Sewer". In Wong Meng Voon *Glimpses of the Past Stories*. Singapore : Heinemann Asia Limited.