

A Pragmatic Evaluation of Directive Acts in Grade 10 English Textbook Instructions

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Abstract

This study examines how directive speech acts are realized in the written task instructions of an official Grade 10 EFL textbook used in Indonesia under the Kurikulum Merdeka. Textbook instructions function as primary written input that guides autonomous learner behavior, so their pragmatic formulation is important for preventing communication breakdowns. Grounded in Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy, this qualitative content analysis investigates the frequency distribution of directive forms across all chapters of the textbook. The results show a strong dominance of direct commands (72.73%), with requests (15.58%), suggestions (9.74%), and invitations (1.95%) appearing much less frequently. While direct imperative verbs contribute to task clarity and support independent learning, an overreliance on unmitigated commands diminishes the social complexity of the target language. This imbalance limits secondary level learners' exposure to a range of polite and context-sensitive pragmatic structures that are crucial for real world English use. The study therefore recommends that textbook authors deliberately diversify task delivery formats to foster more balanced communicative competence among adolescent learners.

Keywords

Directive Speech Acts, EFL Textbook, Pragmatic Evaluation, Task Instructions.



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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia's EFL context, textbooks are a central pillar of instruction, serving as a key communicative link among the national curriculum, teachers, and adolescent learners. Since the rollout of the Kurikulum Merdeka, text-based learning has shifted toward greater student autonomy, transforming textbooks from passive references into active pedagogical tools that promote independent learning (Kurniawan, 2022). This shift is especially significant for Grade 10 students, who encounter more complex and abstract language than in lower secondary levels. As a result, textbooks often provide the most accessible and structured exposure to the

target language for these learners, which makes the linguistic quality of textbook materials crucial for effective language acquisition (Gunawan, 2019).

From a pragmatic standpoint, the written instructions and task prompts in these textbooks carry substantial consequences. Instructions are inherently action-oriented: they aim to change learners' cognitive and behavioral states by directing them to read, write, discuss, or synthesize information. When task prompts are syntactically ambiguous, culturally detached, or pragmatically overly demanding, learners often experience breakdowns in comprehension that result in task failure or misalignment with intended learning outcomes (Wibowo, 2021). Thus, investigating instructions from a pragmatic perspective helps ensure that textbook language effectively signals the cooperative principles learners need to understand and carry out their assigned tasks.

A substantial body of literature has examined speech act theory in educational settings. Previous studies have focused on directive speech acts in teachers' spoken classroom interactions (Basma et al., 2018) or on conversational exchanges between fictional characters in Indonesian EFL textbooks (Murniasih, 2022). Although these works shed light on spoken pragmatic input, systematic analyses that concentrate specifically on written task instructions are still scarce (Lestari, 2023). Unlike a teacher's verbal command, which can be immediately clarified through conversational repair, a printed textbook instruction must be pragmatically complete and self-sufficient. This study fills that gap by moving the analytical emphasis away from dialogues and classroom talk to examine the written task instructions presented to students in a contemporary Grade 10 English textbook.

The primary aim of this study is to provide a thorough pragmatic evaluation of directive speech acts used in textbook task instructions. Specifically, the research addresses two questions: (1) What are the dominant types and frequencies of directive speech acts in Grade 10 English textbook instructions, as classified by Searle's taxonomy? and (2) What pedagogical implications do these pragmatic formulations have for secondary language learners? By answering these questions, the study seeks to offer practical recommendations for curriculum developers and materials writers to improve task delivery and better support learner outcomes (Rahayu, 2023).

METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design, employing qualitative content analysis to examine the textbook materials (Prasetyo, 2021). The primary data consisted of written task instructions, activity prompts, and exercise rubrics collected from every chapter of the official Grade 10 English textbook, *English for Change*, published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.

The researcher served as the main research instrument, responsible for identifying, transcribing, and interpreting the contextual meanings of individual text units. To enhance consistency and transparency, a data tabulation sheet based on Searle's (1979) speech act taxonomy was used, with a specific focus on directive subcategories (commands, requests,

suggestions, and invitations). Data collection proceeded iteratively: the researcher read all chapters, extracted explicit and implicit task instructions, coded each instruction according to its pragmatic form, and calculated percentage distributions to reveal structural patterns across the textbook (Sukmawan, S., & Syaifullah, 2024).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The content analysis identified 154 written task instructions in the Grade 10 English textbook that contained directive speech acts. The frequency and percentage distributions of these directive subcategories, classified according to Searle’s taxonomy, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Directive Speech Acts

No	Subcategory of Directive Act	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Commands / Directives	112	72.73%
2	Requests	24	15.58%
3	Suggestions	15	9.74%
4	Invitations / Prohibitions	3	1.95%
	Total	154	100.00%

Discussion

The empirical results reveal a pronounced dominance of direct commands, which account for 72.73% of the dataset. This pattern corresponds to the functional aim of textbook instructions: to provide clear behavioral guidance for students (Sukmawan, S., & Syaifullah, 2024). Under the Kurikulum Merdeka, textbooks are intended to foster independent, self-regulated learning; to support this autonomy without ongoing teacher mediation, materials writers frequently rely on direct imperatives to reduce ambiguity and ensure that students immediately understand task expectations (Lestari, 2023).

Nevertheless, the distribution also indicates a notable scarcity of alternative pragmatic forms, such as suggestions and polite requests (Phaisarnsitthikarn, 2024). An overreliance on imperative constructions limits Grade 10 learners’ exposure to the pragmatic variation typical of natural English interaction, potentially leaving them less prepared for context-sensitive, polite language use outside the classroom. The following four excerpts, drawn from the textbook, illustrate representative directive forms and are analyzed here in terms of their pragmatic structure and likely communicative effects:

Data 1: *“Read the text about digital safety and underline the main ideas.”* (Chapter 2, p. 45)

Analysis: This instruction uses a straightforward imperative structure that functions as a command according to Searle’s (1979) taxonomy. The verbs “Read” and “Underline” are unmitigated and direct, promoting immediate behavioral compliance and leaving little room

for interpretation. Such a form effectively serves the pedagogical aim of ensuring clear task execution for Grade 10 learners (Isnawati & Masitoh, 2021).

Data 2: *"Please discuss with your partner what steps you should take to prevent cyberbullying."* (Chapter 4, p. 82)

Analysis: This data represents a request. By introducing the politeness marker "please," the textbook writer mitigates the illocutionary force of the directive, softening what would otherwise be a command into a collaborative request (Nurani, 2019). This construction models essential social language patterns for students, demonstrating how speakers can direct others politely within a cooperative learning framework.

Data 3: *"You might want to check the definitions in the glossary before completing the vocabulary quiz."* (Chapter 1, p. 14)

Analysis: The use of the modal phrase 'You might want to' frames this utterance as a suggestion rather than an absolute requirement. This gives students the cognitive flexibility to choose whether they need to consult the glossary, aligning perfectly with learner-centered pedagogy. Ultimately, it encourages metacognitive awareness by leaving the decision-making process up to the student."

Data 4: *"Let's explore how visual imagery enhances the narrative of the poster."* (Chapter 5, p. 113)

Analysis: This instruction employs the inclusive hortatory marker 'Let's,' classifying it as a collaborative prompt rather than a strict directive (Austin, 1962). This shift in discourse rank transforms a top-down textbook command into a shared learning journey. By fostering this supportive stance, the text reduces learner anxiety and invites adolescents to engage more comfortably with the task (Handayani, 2020).

While direct commands successfully ensure clarity, a healthier balance that integrates mitigated requests and modal-based suggestions is highly necessary. Relying exclusively on imperatives limits students' exposure to pragmatic variety, which may lead them to believe that English directives are solely direct. Consequently, this narrow input can inadvertently cause students to produce abrupt, overly demanding language in real-world interactions (Hidayah et al., 2024).

The findings of this study reveal that directive speech acts in the Grade 10 English textbook are overwhelmingly dominated by commands, accounting for 72.73% of all identified directives, while requests (15.58%), suggestions (9.74%), and invitations (1.95%) appear far less frequently. This pattern indicates that textbook writers prioritize clarity, efficiency, and instructional certainty in guiding learners through classroom tasks. From a pedagogical perspective, the dominance of imperative constructions reflects the practical function of textbook instructions as tools for directing learner behavior. Since textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum are expected to support autonomous learning, instructional clarity becomes a primary concern. Direct commands such as *Read the text*, *Discuss with your partner*,

and *Write your answer* minimize ambiguity and ensure that students can independently interpret and complete assigned activities without excessive teacher intervention. This finding aligns with the argument of John R. Searle that directives are intended to make the hearer perform an action, making them particularly suitable for educational contexts where task completion is the central objective.

The predominance of commands found in this study is consistent with previous research on textbook pragmatics. For instance, Sukmawan and Syaifullah (2024) reported that Indonesian curriculum-based textbooks predominantly utilize imperative structures because they facilitate straightforward task execution and reduce learner confusion. Similarly, Lestari (2023) found that written instructions in secondary school English textbooks frequently rely on direct directives to maintain instructional efficiency. The consistency between the current findings and these earlier studies suggests that the preference for command-based instructions is not incidental but rather reflects a broader trend in Indonesian English language teaching materials. This recurring pattern demonstrates that curriculum developers and textbook writers continue to prioritize functional comprehensibility over pragmatic diversity.

However, while the findings support earlier studies regarding the prevalence of commands, the current study also highlights a more critical issue concerning pragmatic representation. The proportion of requests, suggestions, and invitations remains relatively limited, indicating that learners receive restricted exposure to the wide range of directive strategies commonly used in authentic communication. This observation corroborates the findings of Phaisarnsithikarn (2024), who argued that many EFL textbooks present directives primarily through imperatives while underrepresenting indirect and politeness-oriented forms. Such imbalance may inadvertently shape learners' perceptions that English directives are typically direct and authoritative, despite the fact that real-life communication often relies on mitigated expressions to maintain social harmony and interpersonal relationships.

From the perspective of pragmatic competence theory, this phenomenon can be explained through the distinction between linguistic competence and communicative competence proposed by Dell Hymes. While direct commands effectively develop learners' ability to understand instructional language, they do not necessarily prepare students to use language appropriately across varying social contexts. Communicative competence requires speakers to understand not only what linguistic forms mean but also when, where, and how those forms should be employed. Consequently, the overrepresentation of commands may support procedural learning but simultaneously restrict opportunities for learners to acquire sociopragmatic knowledge regarding politeness, indirectness, and interpersonal sensitivity.

The analysis of the request category further illustrates this issue. Requests constitute only 15.58% of the data, despite their significant role in authentic English interaction. The presence of politeness markers such as *please* demonstrates an attempt to expose learners to more socially nuanced directive forms. This finding is consistent with the work of Nurani (2019), who found that politeness strategies in educational materials help learners recognize how authority and cooperation can coexist within communicative exchanges. Nevertheless,

the relatively low frequency of requests indicates that such pragmatic modeling remains insufficient. Compared with natural discourse, where requests are often preferred over direct commands in peer interactions, the textbook appears to prioritize task completion over the development of interpersonal communication skills.

The limited occurrence of suggestions (9.74%) also deserves critical attention. Suggestions are particularly important in learner-centered educational environments because they encourage autonomy, reflection, and decision-making. Expressions such as *You might want to check the glossary* allow learners to evaluate their own needs and select appropriate learning strategies. This finding resonates with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes learner agency and active knowledge construction. According to constructivist principles, students learn more effectively when they are encouraged to make decisions and regulate their own learning processes rather than merely following prescribed instructions. Therefore, the relatively low proportion of suggestions may indicate a mismatch between the learner-centered philosophy promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum and the directive patterns embedded in the textbook itself.

Another noteworthy finding concerns the extremely limited use of invitations, which represent only 1.95% of the total directives. Inclusive expressions such as *Let's explore* create a collaborative atmosphere by positioning learners and instructional materials as partners in the learning process. This approach reflects the concept of positive politeness introduced by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, whereby speakers seek to reduce social distance and foster solidarity. The scarcity of such forms suggests that the textbook largely adopts an authoritative instructional voice rather than a collaborative pedagogical stance. Although authoritative instructions may enhance efficiency, they may also reduce opportunities for students to encounter discourse patterns that promote engagement, cooperation, and social rapport.

A comparison with previous studies also reveals an important difference. Earlier research, such as that conducted by Murniasih (2022), primarily examined speech acts within textbook dialogues and conversational texts, where greater pragmatic variation was observed. In contrast, the present study focuses specifically on written task instructions and finds considerably less diversity in directive realization. This difference suggests that pragmatic richness may be concentrated in textbook dialogues while remaining largely absent from instructional sections. Scientifically, this distinction contributes to the literature by demonstrating that different textbook components may serve different pragmatic functions and therefore require separate evaluation. A textbook may appear pragmatically balanced when dialogues are analyzed, yet still provide limited pragmatic input through its instructional language.

Theoretically, the findings can also be interpreted through the lens of speech act theory. According to Searle's classification, directives encompass various levels of illocutionary force, ranging from strong commands to weaker suggestions and invitations. The dominance of commands in this textbook indicates a concentration of high-force directives. Such

concentration reflects a pedagogical orientation that prioritizes certainty and compliance. However, language learning involves not only understanding propositional content but also recognizing variations in illocutionary force. Learners exposed primarily to strong directives may struggle to distinguish subtle pragmatic differences between commands, requests, recommendations, and collaborative invitations in real-world communication.

The implications of these findings are therefore significant. On one hand, the prevalence of commands successfully supports instructional clarity and independent task completion, confirming the effectiveness of imperative forms for educational purposes. On the other hand, the limited variety of directive strategies may constrain learners' pragmatic development and reduce their readiness for authentic communication beyond the classroom. The findings suggest that future textbook development should seek a more balanced distribution of directive forms by integrating additional requests, suggestions, and collaborative invitations. Such diversification would not undermine instructional clarity but would instead enrich learners' exposure to authentic pragmatic patterns, thereby supporting the development of both linguistic competence and communicative competence.

Overall, the present study extends previous research by demonstrating that while directive speech acts remain essential for instructional effectiveness, their excessive concentration in command forms may create a pragmatic imbalance within EFL learning materials. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on textbook pragmatics by highlighting the need to reconcile pedagogical efficiency with communicative authenticity. A more balanced representation of directive speech acts would enable textbooks not only to guide learning activities effectively but also to function as valuable sources of pragmatic input for developing communicatively competent English users (Hidayah et al., 2024; Phaisarnsithikarn, 2024; Sukmawan & Syaifullah, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the pragmatic distribution of directive speech acts in the written task instructions of an Indonesian Grade 10 English textbook. Quantitative analysis reveals a heavy dominance of direct commands, which account for 72.73% of all directives, followed by requests (15.58%), suggestions (9.74%), and invitations (1.95%). While this reliance on imperative verbs effectively minimizes task ambiguity and promotes independent learning under the Kurikulum Merdeka framework, it ultimately creates an imbalanced pragmatic input for secondary learners (Sukmawan & Syaifullah, 2024).

To address this imbalance, textbook writers and curriculum designers should deliberately diversify the linguistic phrasing of task instructions in future editions (Wibowo, 2021). Integrating more varied structures such as modal-hedged suggestions, indirect queries, and polite request frameworks allows textbooks to fulfill their instructional purpose while simultaneously serving as a rich source of pragmatic modeling. This adjustment is crucial for ensuring that Grade 10 students develop the well-rounded communicative competence needed for authentic, real world interactions.

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