Using Social Networking Tools for Teaching the English Directive Speech Act of Command to Undergraduate Arab EFL Learners

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study investigates the effectiveness of using social networking tools for teaching the speech act of command to undergraduate Arab EFL learners. Employing an experimental pre-test post-test design, the research involved 40 students distributed across four groups: two experimental groups utilizing social networking tools for direct and indirect command instruction, and two control groups receiving traditional teaching methods. Over a three-week period, the speech act of command was taught to the four groups either through WhatsApp groups or conventional classroom instruction. A discourse completion task was used to assess participants' pragmatic competence before and after the intervention. Results of ANOVA tests showed a significant difference in post-test scores, with the experimental groups outperforming the control groups. Remarkably, among the experimental groups, those exposed to indirect command instruction exhibited the highest mean score. This suggests that social networking tools can positively impact learning outcomes for teaching speech acts like command. The study highlights the value of incorporating innovative technological approaches that align with the evolving communicative needs and preferences of contemporary learners. **Keywords:** Speech acts, Command, Social networking tools, Discourse completion tasks, Pragmatics, EFL learners.

Introduction

Giving someone instructions or commands to do something is known as a spoken act of command (Searle, 1969). A common and significant speech act in daily interactions and interpersonal communication is the command. Researchers are starting to look into how social media and networking tools, which have become increasingly popular in education, might be used to teach pragmatic competence—the ability to apply various speech acts correctly and successfully in social situations. Given its critical significance in social interaction and communication, teaching the speech act of command is a fundamental component of language learning. Commands are an essential component of everyday language use because they are used to tell or lead others to do particular tasks. For kids' language development and successful interpersonal interactions, it is crucial to teach them how to utilize orders appropriately and politely in a variety of situations.

This paper will examine how the speech act of command is taught in language learning, emphasizing the value of the speech act, practical teaching methods, and potential difficulties that educators may encounter. We will also talk about how people interpret and use commands, and how teaching commands to students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds will be affected by this. Nobody doubts the importance of teaching the speech act of command. A variety of scenarios call for the use of commands, from providing instructions to making requests or orders. They are a necessary component of daily communication, and for students to successfully navigate social situations, they must learn how to utilize them responsibly. Furthermore,

comprehending the linguistic operation of commands can aid students in improving their general language skills and communicative competence.

Assisting students in comprehending the levels of politeness that can be conveyed through instructions is a crucial component of teaching commands. There are several methods to express commands with varying degrees of formality and politeness in several languages, including English. For instance, in English, asking someone to "Close the door" directly could be seen as less kind than asking someone to "Could you please close the door?" Developing students' pragmatic competency includes teaching them how to use these various forms appropriately.

Teaching students how orders might differ based on cultural norms and expectations is a crucial aspect of teaching commands. There may be cultural differences in the ways that directives are expressed, and what is proper or polite in one culture may not be in another. For instance, it may be considered more courteous in some cultures to provide instructions indirectly or with softer language, but in others, a more straightforward approach might be appreciated. It is essential to comprehend these cultural variances to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. As part of the speech act of command, instructors must assist students in comprehending the illocutionary force behind various command forms. The intention or goal of the speaker when employing a specific speech act is referred to as illocutionary force (Austin 1962). When a command is given, the speaker may mean to make a courteous request, issue an authoritative demand, or just provide direction or counsel. Students' comprehension of these subtleties can enhance their capacity to appropriately perceive and execute instructions.

Teaching this speech act requires not only a comprehension of the grammatical and pragmatic components of orders but also the development of students' listening skills, which are necessary for them to accurately interpret instructions from others. This entails understanding a command's intended illocutionary force in addition to its literal meaning and any surrounding clues that might influence how it is interpreted (Brown & Levinson 1987). Teachers of languages may face several difficulties when it comes to teaching commands. Making sure that students comprehend how various commands convey different levels of politeness can be difficult. To help students understand these distinctions, it is necessary to both explain them and give them lots of practice opportunities. (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1990; Kasper, 2001).

Making the distinction between imperatives and other sentence forms is one of the most important aspects of teaching the speech act of command. While other sentence forms communicate information or make statements, imperatives express demands, requests, or permissions. Studies have indicated that students frequently find it difficult to discern between these various kinds of sentences, which causes them to misuse the speech act of command (e.g., Asano, 2018; Aikenvald, 2017). Teachers can employ several techniques to solve this problem, including giving clear instructions and examples, demonstrating the distinction between imperatives and other sentence forms with visual aids, and encouraging students to practice using imperatives in context (e.g., Hirota, 2018).

Another challenge in teaching the speech act of command is the use of polite forms. Although polite expressions are significant in a variety of social settings, their use in the context of directives might cause misunderstandings. According to research, students sometimes misuse polite forms, which can leave room for confusion or misunderstandings. (e.g., Mizuasawa, 2003). To address this issue, teachers can focus on the use of plain forms in the context of commands, and encourage learners to use polite forms only when appropriate (e.g., Koike, 1989; Pizziconi, 2003).

Apart from these concerns, there exist more general inquiries regarding the function of the speech act of command in language instruction. While some academics contend that teaching the speech act of command as a stand-alone unit of study is necessary, others propose including it within more comprehensive grammar and use units. (e.g., Asano, 2018; Aikhenvald, 2017). There is also debate about the relative importance of the speech act of command compared to other aspects of language, such as vocabulary and pronunciation (e.g., Hirota, 2018; Salehi, 2013).

Literature Review

The effective teaching of speech acts has emerged as a pivotal aspect of language pedagogy given their importance in communication. Existing research explores diverse strategies for instructing speech acts, with studies illuminating the potential of incorporating social networking tools. By examining this body of literature, we gain valuable insights into approaches that empower educators and learners alike.

Early works investigated strategies like integrating social media platforms into the classroom. Carr et al. (2009) examined using Facebook for speech act instruction and found improvements in student comprehension and use. Their findings highlighted technology's role in enhancing pragmatic competence. The study emphasized that harnessing popular tools offered promising avenues for innovative teaching methods.

Subsequent research delved deeper into specific approaches. Yani and Maharani (2022) investigated analyzing speech acts through film, while Tram et al. (2022) examined teacher training programs' impact on social media integration for pragmatics. Both revealed benefits, with the latter correlating training receipt with greater pedagogical efficacy and confidence among instructors.

Other studies focused on motivating learners. Alomari et al. (2019) explored gamifying social platform activities and their effect on engagement and understanding. Infusing elements of play fostered immersive experiences

that enriched development. Likewise, Azad et al. (2018) emphasized authenticity in instruction and how networks enhanced competence across diverse contexts.

Flor and Juan (2010) provided a comprehensive overview of speech act methodologies. As technology continued integrating into education, the need to apply it in novel ways became increasingly apparent. Platforms held immense potential for redefining paradigms by boosting motivation, proficiency, and authentic communication.

Teaching pragmatics plays a vital role, particularly in the era of global communication and digital interactions. The proliferation of social media platforms provided ample opportunities for investigating pragmatic phenomena in online interactions. Studies such as those by Prayitno et al. (2021), Dayter (2018), and Mohamad et al. (2018) delved into the politeness strategies, self-praise, and illocutionary speech acts evident in social media posts and comments. These analyses offered valuable insights into the pragmatic norms and conventions shaping digital communication, which could inform the development of pragmatic competence among language learners.

Educational settings also served as fertile ground for studying pragmatic phenomena. Research by Nisa and Manaf (2021), Masykuri et al. (2020), Natalia et al. (2022), and Putri (2021) explored speech acts and communication patterns in various educational contexts, including WhatsApp group chats, Instagram interactions, and classroom discourse. By examining the use of speech acts in teaching and learning environments, these studies contributed to our understanding of how pragmatic competence was cultivated and utilized in educational settings.

Furthermore, studies such as Chandler et al. (2018), Maíz-Arévalo (2017), Pebrianto et al. (2018), and Siritman and Meilantina (2020) investigated speech acts in online communication platforms such as Twitter, educational e-chats, and Instagram comments. These studies analyzed the types and functions of speech acts employed in various online contexts, highlighting the role of language and communication strategies in digital interactions. Additionally, Arguello and Shaffer (2015) contributed to the field by employing predictive models to analyze speech acts in online forum posts within Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Their research demonstrated the potential of computational analysis in predicting and understanding speech acts, offering insights into the pragmatic features of online communication and their implications for language instruction.

Thus, incorporating social networking tools into speech act pedagogy has ushered in transformative changes. Through innovative strategies, educators can empower learners to navigate complexity with confidence and mastery in pragmatic communication. Future research should continue exploring the manifold advantages of integrating social media to pave the way for groundbreaking digital learning.

Methodology

To compare the efficacy of using SN to the traditional ways of teaching commands, the production of data from the SN groups, and the production data from the control groups were compared. This study adopted an experimental, pretest/posttest design (pretest-treatment-posttest). Open-ended discourse completion tests (DCT) were used to collect the primary data in the pretest and posttest sessions. The study lasted for three weeks. Participants in the control groups received instruction on commands in a traditional way, while participants in the experimental groups received explicit instruction on commands through WhatsApp groups. After three weeks of treatments, participants were given a DCT posttest to measure their pragmatic competence. In this regard, it is necessary to clarify the point that the means of communication in this study was written not oral as it may be understood from the word speech act. Speech act is a covering term that includes both spoken and written communication. We follow the written way of communication as it was used in some studies such as Simon, and Dejica-Cartis, (2015)

Participants

Forty students enrolled in the department of English and literature at the University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia participated in the study. They were divided into four groups: Direct command using social network group (N = 10), Indirect command using Social Network group (N = 10), Direct command control group (N = 10), and Indirect control group (N = 10). They could be described as intermediate learners. Only students who completed both the pre-test and post-test and who attended all the sessions were included in the experiment. Communication between the participants in the two experimental groups and their instructor occurred within a group in WhatsApp designed especially for this study. This type of communication facilitates the asynchronous interaction of the participants and their instructors. Although the interaction in the study was primarily written, the participants could share their commands orally using audio messages. On the other hand, communication between the participants in the two control groups and their instructor occurred inside the classroom.

Instruments

To test learners' pragmatic knowledge, an open-ended Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was used. The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is widely used for data collection in pragmatics studies. A DCT consists of short dialogues that depict a variety of social situations relevant to the speech act under study. Before each

dialogue, a brief description of the situation is provided. The dialogue usually begins with a statement that is followed by a blank indicating an unfinished dialogue. Participants are asked to identify the speech act under study.

Open-ended DCT is a measure of learners' speech act performance that consists of a written speech act. In this study, the open-ended DCT contained 10 command situations, designed by the authors (see Appendix A), to which participants responded in English. The DCT pretest and posttest used to measure participants' pragmatic competence in this study were the same. The learners' performances in each of the 10 situations were rated using a five-point scale as shown in Table 1, and the total DCT scores would be 50 points. Three assistant professors from the university where the study was conducted rated the DCT performances. They assessed participants' pragmatic competence based on the rating system developed by Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1992), which contains the following components: the ability to correctly use speech acts; expressions; the amount of information used; and politeness. Participants' performances were rated on a 5-point rating scale, as shown in Table 1 ranging from 1 to 5, (based on Liu, 2007) and scores ranged from 10 to 50 for four components. Interrater correlations from the pilot study yielded an acceptable level of agreement for interrater reliability (r > .90).

Table 1: Rater's rating on participants' performance (from Liu, 2007)

1 point	Minimal attempt to complete the task and/or content frequently inappropriate
2 points	Partial completion of the task, content partially appropriate, ideas are undeveloped
3 points	Capture some ideas of the task, content partially appropriate, and ideas partially developed
4 points	Demonstrate essential ideas of the task, content mostly appropriate, ideas adequately developed
5 points	Superior completion of the task, content appropriate, ideas well developed and well-organized

Procedure

Before instruction, the pre-test was administered to all the participants. Then, they were divided into four groups randomly. The participants in the SN groups were asked to exchange messages via WhatsApp. A WhatsApp group was designed for this study. The same questions were asked to the participants in the two control groups. They traditionally responded in the classroom.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were performed in this study to determine the effect of SN on learning commands. Therefore, the between-subject variable was SN, whereas the within-subject variable was the test. An ANOVA was conducted to determine the significance of the differences among groups and to which this significance referred to. The level of significance was .05 for all statistical analyses.

Results

To ensure that the four groups were not different in their production of the target speech acts before instruction, one-way ANOVAs were performed on the pre-test scores. There were no significant between-group differences in the request. The results of the scores in the pre-test are shown in Table 2. The results revealed that the mean of the direct experimental group was 8.40 (SD=1.50). The mean of the indirect experimental group was 8.40 (SD=.96). The mean of the direct control group was 8.0 (S=.81). The mean of the indirect control group was 8.70 (S=1.70). The means of the scores revealed that there was no significant difference between the four groups before the experiment (p= .69) which means that the groups were homogenous.

Table 2   *Participants' scores in the pre-test scores of the participants*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		F	Sig.
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Direct Experimental	10	8.40	1.50	7.32	9.47	.488	.693
Indirect Experimental	10	8.40	.966	7.70	9.09		
Direct Control	10	8.0	.816	7.41	8.58		
Indirect Control	10	8.70	1.70	7.48	9.91		
Total	40	8.37	1.27	7.96	8.78		

To find out the difference between the four groups, an ANOVA test was performed for the post-test scores. The results of the ANOVA test showed a significant difference in the scores of the groups in the post-test (*p*= .017). The results showed that the mean of the participants in the direct experimental group was 37.0 (SD=3.43). The mean of the participants in the indirect experimental group was 39.10 (SD=3.47). The mean of the participants in the direct control group was 34.6 (SD=2.36). The mean of the participants in the indirect control group was 36.3 (SD=2.49). The eta-squared of the post-test was 0.24 which indicates a small effect size.

Table 3 participants' scores in the post-test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		F	Sig.	Eta
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Direct Experimental	10	37.0000	3.43188	34.5450	39.4550	3.887	.017	0.24
Indirect Experimental	10	39.1000	3.47851	36.6116	41.5884			
Direct Control	10	34.6000	2.36643	32.9072	36.2928			
Indirect Control	10	36.3000	2.49666	34.5140	38.0860			
Total	40	36.7500	3.30307	35.6936	37.8064			

Discussion

The results found a statistical significance between the four groups. The superiority of the experimental groups utilizing social networks, the effect of command type on post-test outcomes, and the practical implications of the small effect size are all shown in the statistical analysis. The most crucial finding from this analysis is the statistical significance of the differences observed among the four groups. The ANOVA test indicated a significant variation in post-test scores, and the probability of these differences occurring by chance is very low. This implies that factors such as the type of command and the experimental conditions significantly influenced the post-test scores, making these results noteworthy and reliable. The experimental groups, where participants communicated through social networks and received either a direct or indirect command, demonstrated higher mean post-test scores when compared to the control groups. This suggests that utilizing social networks as a medium for communication may have had a positive impact on the outcomes measured in the post-test. Additionally, it is evident that the type of command, whether direct or indirect, played a role in influencing these outcomes.

Among the experimental groups, the indirect command experimental group achieved the highest mean score, indicating that an indirect command may have a slightly more favorable impact on post-test outcomes compared to a direct command. This difference, while subtle, is a significant finding, as it suggests that the way a command is framed can influence the responses and attitudes of participants, at least in the context of this study. The calculated eta-squared value indicates a small effect size. This implies that while the command type does have an impact, other unmeasured factors may also contribute to the observed differences in outcomes.

In practical terms, these results offer valuable insights. They suggest that both direct and indirect commands have a positive influence on measured outcomes compared to not receiving a command at all, especially within the context of social network communication. However, the relatively small effect size implies that other variables, beyond the type of command, are likely at play in determining post-test scores. Researchers and practitioners should consider these nuances when applying these findings to real-world situations, recognizing that the type of command is just one piece of a larger puzzle in understanding human behavior and responses to social communication.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using social networking tools to teach the speech act of command to undergraduate Arab EFL learners. An experimental pre-test post-test design was adopted, with participants divided into four groups: direct command using a social network tool (Experimental group 1), indirect command using a social network tool (Experimental group 2), direct command using a traditional method (control group 1), and indirect command using a traditional method (control group 2). The speech act of command was taught over three weeks, with the experimental groups receiving instruction through WhatsApp groups and the control groups receiving traditional classroom-based instruction.

The results of the study provide compelling evidence that incorporating social networking tools can positively impact the learning outcomes for teaching speech acts like command. The ANOVA tests revealed a significant difference in post-test scores, with the experimental groups outperforming the control groups. Notably, within the experimental groups, the indirect command group achieved the highest mean score, suggesting that the use of social networking platforms may be particularly beneficial for teaching more nuanced and polite forms of the speech act of command.

These findings offer valuable insights for language instructors and curriculum designers. They indicate that leveraging popular social media and communication platforms can be an effective approach for enhancing pragmatic competence among EFL learners. By integrating these tools into their teaching, educators can create dynamic, engaging, and contextually-relevant learning experiences that better prepare students to navigate real-world interactions. Beyond the practical implications, this study also contributes to the broader theoretical understanding of speech act pedagogy. The superior performance of the experimental groups underscores the value of considering the interplay between instructional methods and the framing of speech acts. The results suggest that the affordances of social networking tools, such as their capacity for asynchronous communication, multimedia integration, and authentic language use, can amplify the effectiveness of teaching approaches focused on the pragmatic aspects of language. Furthermore, the study's findings highlight the importance of addressing the cultural and linguistic nuances inherent in the speech act of command. The divergent results

between the direct and indirect command groups within the experimental condition underscore the need for language instruction to sensitize learners to the pragmatic complexities of directives. By guiding students to recognize and appropriately apply varying degrees of politeness and illocutionary force, educators can equip them with the necessary pragmatic competence to communicate effectively across diverse social and cultural contexts.

To sum up, this study provides compelling evidence that the integration of social networking tools can significantly enhance the teaching and learning of the speech act of command for EFL learners. The findings suggest that leveraging these modern communication platforms can lead to improved pragmatic competence, with particularly notable benefits for conveying indirect and more polite forms of commands. These insights hold important implications for language pedagogy, highlighting the value of incorporating innovative technological approaches that align with the evolving communicative needs and preferences of contemporary learners. As educators continue to explore the potential of social media and networking tools in language instruction, this study represents an important step forward in understanding how to effectively harness these resources to foster pragmatic development and communicative competence among EFL students.

Limitations of the study

There were some limitations to this study that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 40 students from one university was relatively small, so the results may not be generalizable to broader populations. Larger and more diverse sample sizes would allow for stronger conclusions. Second, the study only examined the effectiveness of one social networking tool (WhatsApp) for teaching speech acts, whereas other platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or online discussion forums were not explored. Different communication media may influence learning in varying ways. Third, only short-term effects were measured through a post-test administered right after the three-week intervention. It is unknown whether gains would be sustained over a longer period of time. Finally, the study focused only on commands as a single speech act, so the pedagogical benefits may not transfer to teaching other speech acts. More research is needed on social media-supported learning across multiple speech acts and varied instructional settings.

Pedagogical Implications and suggestions for future studies

In practical terms, our results suggest that both direct and indirect commands have a positive influence within the framework of social network communication. However, considering the small effect size, it is crucial to approach these findings with a clear perspective. Researchers should consider other potential variables at play in shaping the scores and incorporate these insights into real-world applications accordingly. While the type of command and communication medium are important factors to consider, future research should explore additional variables to gain a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior and responses in various social contexts. These findings serve as a stepping stone toward a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay of factors influencing human interactions and communication outcomes.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Direct command

1. What is a direct command?
A. An order given by a superior
B. A statement explaining the outcome
C. A suggestion to be followed
D. A request to take action

2. An example of a direct command is:
A. "Would you please take out the trash?"
B. "I need you to wash the dishes."
C. "The trash needs to be taken out."
D. "Take out the trash now."

3. Which of the following is a direct command?
A. Study hard!
B. Why don't you study hard?
C. If you don't study hard, you will fail.
D. Be careful about your studies!

4 Commands tell a person to _____.
a) Ask a question
b) Make a request
c) Perform an action
d) Give advice

5. Direct commands are typically used to:
A. Make requests politely
B. Suggest actions indirectly
C. Express opinions
D. Convey instructions directly

6. What is the difference between a direct command and a request?
A. A direct command is more polite
B. A request is less polite
C. A direct command is an order, while a request is not.
D. A direct command is a request for information

7. Which of the following is an example of a direct command?
A. "Will you sit down please?"
B. "Can you sit down?"
C. "Sit down now."
D. "Do you want to sit down?"

8. Effective direct commands use ____ language.
A. Tentative
B. Suggestive
C. Harsh
D. Firm

9. How should direct commands generally be phrased?
A. As a question
B. As a suggestion
C. As an order
D. As a debate

10. Which of these is not a direct command?
a) Wash the dishes!
b) Go and wash the dishes.
c) Would you mind washing the dishes?
d) You must wash the dishes.

Appendix B

Indirect Command
1.Which of the following is an example of an indirect command?
A. "Open the door."
B. The door needs to be opened.
C. "The door must be opened."
D. You must open the door

2. Indirect commands aim to seem more:
A. Direct
B. Forceful
C. Polite
D. Impolite

3. What speech act do indirect commands perform at a deeper level?
A. Assertive
B. Directive
C. Expressive
D. Declarative

4. Why might someone use an indirect rather than direct command?
A. To be rude
B. To seem authoritative
C. To save the listener's face
D. To anger the listener

5. How can you perform an indirect command if you want someone to wash dishes?
A. Wash the dishes now
B. You must wash the dishes now
C. You have to wash the dishes now
D. The dishes need washing.

6. Which sentence indirectly orders someone to be quiet?
A) Be quiet!
B) You must be quiet.
C) You should be quiet now.
D) You need to be quiet

7. Which option is an indirect way to give a command?
A) Give me that book.
B) I need that book
C) You must give me that book.
D) You have to give me that book immediately.

8. The indirect command is _____than the direct one.
A. less polite
B. more polite
C. more authoritative
D. more declarative

9. Which option gives an indirect command?
A) Answer the question.
B) You need to answer this question.
C) You must answer the question now!
D) You should answer the question?

10. What do indirect commands aim to do?
A. Perform polite orders
B. Make demands
C. Anger the listener
D. Perform impolite orders