Direct/Indirect Language Use of Teachers

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Abstract: Teacher-student interaction can be characterized as a systematic and intensive social contact requiring a mechanism that maintains order and control. Teacher controls the learning and the behavior in the classroom with definite kinds of speech acts. The purpose of the study is to find out whether teachers use direct or indirect language to the problematic students during the class and to what extent teachers’ age play a role in using it. The direct language consists of orders, the indirect language includes utterances displaying empathy and explanation. A questionnaire is given to 60 teachers of primary and secondary school. Results show that age is a crucial factor in determining teachers’ language choice.

Key-Words: Direct language, indirect language, age, non-verbal language in classroom, managerial role, authoritative teacher, democratic teacher.

1 Introduction
Teacher-student interaction can be characterized as a systematic and intensive social contact requiring a mechanism that maintains order and control. This mechanism consists of the multiple roles of teachers and students in classroom interaction. To Shamai et.al [1], the teachers’ role-set includes five major roles: instructional, motivational and evaluative which are determined by the academic curriculum and managerial and socializing which are determined by the hidden curriculum [2].

In a social interaction there are 3 parameters: the distribution of social power, the degree of social distance and the degree of imposition a particular pragmatic act is thought to have on the recipient.

According to Brown & Levinson [3] these 3 parameters play a central role in what degree of directness and indirectness a speaker will use in a given situation. In other words, teachers use linguistic devices to achieve different degrees of directness/indirectness in their classes. In fact all classroom speech acts can be categorized according to the teachers’ role sets and the unequal rights of students. Hence, teachers control the learning and behavior in classroom with definite kinds of speech acts where among them directives are used frequently to get students to engage in some activities or organize them in preparation for activities. Directives may be expressed as a form of imperative, interrogative or declarative. Imperatives are most frequently used as classroom directives, since they are relatively explicit and they tend to occur as realizations of directives in addressing to subordinates [4].

As for age, we know that it is central to human experience. The developmental perspective recognizes that development is lifelong. Indeed life is about to change. Throughout the life course speakers have a sense of moving forward in years and in maturity, anticipating the next developments in their lives and assuming new ways of being-perhaps new ways of talking-as they go [5]. From teachers’ perspective, age is a crucial factor in identifying their teaching experience throughout the years. The outcome of the teachers’ roles is instinctly determined by the teachers’ ages and teaching experience. And this fact may be related with their direct and indirect discourse strategy.

2 Problem Formulation
Teachers’ communications with students are performed mainly by orders, request, questions and directions. Directions control students’ activity in displaying knowledge and classroom discipline. Hence, teachers’ directions may occur as direct and indirect speech acts. In this study, direct speech acts include the imperative and imbedded structures like orders and the indirect ones include the structures that display explanation constructing logical arguments such as empathy.

2.1 Purpose
The purpose of the study is to find out whether teachers’ language is direct or indirect in a problematic situation and to what extent teachers’ age play a role in using the language. For this purpose a questionnaire is given to 60 teachers who are teaching to 5th. and 6th. grades.
preparing the questionnaire focus group methodology is used which is defined as the use of interaction between the researcher and with those working in the Primary Education Department. The group is engaged in a focused discussion around the specific topics accruing in classroom setting. Generating ideas, eliciting opinions and measuring the degree of consensus on the topic were the discussions made by the focus group who were besides being the research assistants of Primary Education Department had also to some extent teaching experience in such kind of classes. The questionnaire is prepared for the teachers working in the state schools in Eskisehir and Bursa in Turkey and it aimed at eliciting the answers of the teachers using discourse strategy to the students creating problem during the class.

2.2 Data analysis

The data of the study comprised the answers of the open ended questionnaire which included 5 questions as in the following:

1. A student insists on asking unrelated questions during the lesson. What do you say?
2. A student talks to his friend continuously without paying attention to the lesson. What do you say?
3. There is a student which violates the lesson by behaving harshly to his friends. What do you say?
4. A student is talking too much trying to show that he knows everything. What do you say?
5. A student is always raising an objection with his insufficient knowledge in order to make a show. What do you say?

Teachers’ answers were in the indirect speech form, so the following verbs/expressions used by the teachers are taken into consideration:

I warn, he/she should…..I tell, I explain, I try to….I help students to feel empathy..I have an eye-contact. I seem not to hear.. And the following classification is made according to the results:

i. Utterances in the form of order with imperative and imbedded imperative structure. (E.g. I warn, I tell him that He/she should....)

ii. Utterances displaying explanations, or helping students to feel empathy. (E.g. I tell, I explain, I try to..I try to help students to feel empathetic..)

iii. Non-verbal language including eye-contact and no reply showing silence. (E.g. I remain silent, I make an eye-contact.)

3 Problem Solution

i. Direct statements are preferred by teachers in the form of warnings and imbedded imperatives which indicate the power relationship between the teacher and the student. According to the results of 60 teachers’ age groups:21-25:12; 26-30:14; 31-35:17; 36-40:12; 41-45:2; 46-50:2; 50-...:1. However, because of the small number of participation in the age groups after 41 ,the last 3 groups are not evaluated. Figure 1 shows the frequencies of the usage.

![Figure 1.Warnings](image)

Age grading plays an important role in the use of direct language. Usually teachers are assigned to their work in schools by the age of 21-25. Until till they are thirties they improve their teaching experience. After their thirties the frequency decreases and their preference of using direct language decreases accordingly as we see it in Figure 1. This means that after certain age their managerial role in using the direct language changes to some extent.

ii. On the other hand, teachers used indirect discourse which is termed as ‘implies’. This indirect strategy included the teachers’ discourse showing explanation, empathy, jokes, idioms. Sometimes, teachers added a Turkish motto such as: to think that one knows everything is the biggest error or by means of idioms they tried to avoid the problematic situation .In this unwanted situation they tried to motivate the student. In Figure 2 the frequency of the usage of impliers are given.
Apart from 21-25 age group, the frequency is quite high in the other age groups (26-30, 31-35, 36-40). In these groups the results seem to be almost equal.

iii. As for non-verbal communication, Figure 3 gives the results according to the age groups.

For non-verbal language teachers either chose silence to ignore the situation or by means of eye-contact they tried to govern the student’s behavior. By keeping silent for some time they violate the rules of communication and stop acting to his/her role of speaker. In this way they try to have a solution. Among the age groups the frequency of usage is the highest in 21-25 age group and the lowest is seen in the 26-30 age group. This may be due to their eagerness to overcome the student’s problematic situation verbally.

4 Conclusion

Teacher is responsible for the outcome of students’ motivation and communication. However, it is not easy to categorize teachers for their managerial roles [6]. So we can generally classify them as authoritative and democratic.

Authoritative teachers do not share their decisions with the students and expect them to carry out the rules. So, in the classroom setting the social distance and the imposition of particular pragmatic act is related with teachers’ use of direct language: the use of imperatives display teachers’ authority. As it is seen in 21-25 and 26-30 age groups. They try to be authoritative in class. On the other hand, a democratic instructor behaves as if he/she is one of them. The social distance between them is minimum. He/she tries to save student’s face by stating general principles of behavior, placing themselves with the class by means of using indirect language whose surface meaning is not the same as their meaning in the interaction. They do not criticize the undesired behavior but they try to encourage the student to improve the self-confidence by using impliers, as it is apparent in 26-30, 31-35, and 36-40 age groups. The 26-30 age group is just in the period of transformation as they seem both authoritative and democratic at the same time.

So in this case study, it is apparent that in young age groups (21-25 and 26-30) putting social distance between teacher and student by means of direct language is quite common. As for the use of indirect language except for the 21-25 age group, 26-30, 31-35, and 36-40 used impliers for saving students’ face and minimizing social distance showing their teaching experience has been developed.

Another device used in the classroom is the use of non-verbal language, by means of silence and eye-contact teachers again tried to save student’s face but at the same time they intended to govern student’s behavior as a disciplinary and procedural tool. So, non verbal language use although seems very innocent it is a way of expressing mitigated authority in the classroom.

References:


