

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of directives by teachers and students in Malaysian ESL classrooms. Two main research questions were posed in this study.

To answer the first research question, “Are there any similarities or differences between teachers’ and students’ use of directives in Malaysian ESL classrooms?”, analysis of the data showed differences in the number, types and pedagogical goals of directives produced by the teachers and the students.

The teachers performed much more directives (85.2%) than the students did (14.8%). The teachers performed all six types of directives listed by Bach and Harnish (1979), which in decreasing order of frequency were requirements, questions, prohibitives, advisories, permissives and requestives. These directives assisted the teachers in achieving various pedagogical goals. First, classroom activities were organised and controlled by means of all six types of directives. Second, the students were prompted through requirements, questions, advisories and permissives. Third, the students were guided towards discovery of knowledge through questions and advisories. Other than that, questions enabled the assessment of the students’ comprehension. Moreover, requirements, permissives and prohibitives allowed the teachers to act as a resource to the students. Requirements and prohibitives also aided the teachers in offering feedback and making corrections. Finally, the building of teacher-student rapport was made easier by questions, advisories and requestives.

On the other hand, the students realised four of Bach and Harnish’s (1979) types of directives. These were, in decreasing order of preference, questions, requestives, advisories and permissives. These directives helped the students to fulfil pedagogical

aims that differed from the teachers'. For instance, questions and requestives were useful in obtaining previously unknown information and obtaining repetition of a previous utterance. Besides, questions enabled the students to verify presumptions and establish teacher-student rapport. Apart from that, the students offered suggestions through requestives, advisories and permissives.

The difference between the teachers' use of directives and the students' could be attributed to socialisation and education, which shaped the teachers' and students' perception of their roles and functions in the classroom hierarchy. Perceiving themselves as powerless and passive recipients of knowledge in the classroom, the students were more accustomed to reacting than acting. The students were used to being the hearer and responding to directives instead of being the speaker and giving directives. From the teachers' and the students' use of directives, it can be concluded that most of the lessons were teacher-centred with the teachers controlling the course of the lessons. The teachers generally employed directives to organise classroom activities whereas the students generally utilised directives in response to the teachers' actions.

To answer the second research question, "Are there any similarities or differences between teachers' and students' use of politeness strategies in performing directives in Malaysian ESL classrooms?", the findings of the study revealed both similarities and differences in the types of politeness strategies used by the teachers and the students. However, the results indicated similarity in the factors that determine the teachers' and the students' selection of politeness strategies in producing directives.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness, bald on record and negative politeness strategies were discovered to be used by both the teachers and the students in producing directives. However, off record strategies were not employed owing to time limitations on the part of the teachers and possible language limitations on the part of the students.

Positive politeness (45.8%) was the politeness strategy most preferred by the teachers, followed by bald on record (39.2%) and negative politeness (15.1%). Positive politeness was the teachers' most favoured politeness strategy for requirements, requestives and advisories. Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness strategies employed by the teachers include using in-group identity indicators, using first-person plural pronouns, using proximal demonstratives and unclear references, giving reasons and avoiding disagreement. The bald record strategy was the teachers' most frequently strategy in the realisation of questions, followed by prohibitives and permissives. Hedging, using indirect speech acts, minimising the imposition, impersonalising the speaker and the hearer, apologising and nominalising were the forms of Brown and Levinson's (1987) negative politeness delivered by the teachers in performing directives.

On the other hand, positive politeness was most frequently utilised (50.7%) by the students, followed by negative politeness (30.4%) and bald on record (18.9%). Positive politeness was the politeness strategy employed most often in the students' questions, requestives and permissives. Positive politeness strategies discovered in directives include using in-group identity indicators, using proximal demonstratives and unclear references, giving reasons, avoiding disagreement, and using first-person plural pronouns. Negative face redress, which was strongly preferred in the students' advisories, was most often delivered through giving deference, followed by hedging. As for the bald on record strategy, it was used by the students albeit infrequently in the realisation of questions, requestives and advisories.

The teachers' and the students' choice of politeness strategies could be concluded to be influenced by the key factors of power, social distance and imposition. The teachers were more powerful than the students by virtue of position in the classroom hierarchy. However, the social distance between the teachers and the students were low

as they had been meeting weekly for an average of more than two years. Moreover, most of the directives performed were low in imposition since they were related to the curriculum. Therefore, the factors of power, social distance and imposition justify the teachers' use of the bald on record strategy and the students' use of the positive politeness strategy in making directives.

The teachers' and the students' selection of politeness strategies were also determined by the type of directive being realised. Each type of directive served various communicative and pedagogical functions, thus posing varying degrees and types of face threat. Hence, certain politeness strategies were more frequently preferred than others in performing each type of directive.

The intrinsic advantages of each politeness strategy could be concluded to be another determinant of the teachers' and the students' choice of politeness strategies. For example, positive politeness allowed both the teachers and the students to be efficient in communication especially during routine procedures and when urgency was of the essence. Positive face redress also enabled both the teachers and the students to increase the possibility of the hearer's compliance and to establish closer teacher-student rapport. Additionally, the teachers could increase student participation whereas the students could save the teachers' positive face through the conveyance of positive politeness. Secondly, the bald on record strategy aided the teachers in preserving clarity of communication to maximise student comprehension as well as in emphasising their authority to increase possibility of compliance and to maintain control of the classroom. The bald on record strategy was also useful to the students when a directive had to be realised urgently and when they desired to demonstrate rapport and familiarity with the teachers. Finally, negative politeness strategies assisted the teachers in deemphasising their authority and the imposition of directives to increase possibility of compliance and aided the students in emphasising deference towards the teachers.

The teachers' and the students' choice of politeness strategies was also affected by individual styles of communication. Interactional styles, which are influenced by degree of language proficiency and may be influenced by local communicative styles, vary from individual to individual. The use of politeness strategies displayed by the teachers and the students may have been spontaneously and unintentionally shaped by their personal styles of communication.

5.2 Implications

This study contributes to and enriches existing research in the areas of speech act theory, politeness theory and teacher-student interaction. It has demonstrated the significance of directness in language classroom communication. Directness proves to be advantageous in language classrooms where efficiency of communication is paramount to the exchange of knowledge.

This study has also shown the importance of context in studying politeness in classrooms. Without studying the context in which the directives were realised, it would have been impossible to interpret the meaning of the directives.

Apart from that, this study has demonstrated the significance of directives and politeness in language classrooms. Directives and politeness have been proven to be central to teacher-student interaction and the teaching-learning process, helping teachers and students to achieve fundamental pedagogical goals in the classroom. In the researcher's opinion, the types and functions of directives and politeness should be made an essential part of teacher training syllabi so that teachers can be made aware of the linguistic tools available to them in managing lessons and facilitating learning. Other than that, formal instruction on directives and politeness may help students to learn better. Having knowledge of types of directives, types and degrees of face threats associated with them as well as politeness strategies that can be used to redress these

threats may empower the students to perform directives to their advantage in the classroom.

5.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study are based on a sample of three different classes in a single language learning centre. Future research could include a larger sample comprising more classes of similar skill levels from various private language learning institutions for increased reliability of results.

Furthermore, future research could also compare directives used in ESL classrooms in private language learning centres and directives used in ESL classrooms in public schools. The similarities and differences in types of directives and politeness strategies utilised to realise the directives could be studied.

The scope of the present study did not include examining the relationship between directives, politeness and student involvement in the learning process. Therefore, future research could look into the effectiveness of politeness strategies utilised for each type of directive in producing student participation in the learning process.