

# Functioning of Directive Speech Acts in Modern German Linguistic Culture

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## Abstract

The speakers have a large amount of personal freedom when expressing their opinions in German. In general, Germans do not feel the need to say what you should or should not do/have in a direct manner. This can be seen through many different types of linguistic behaviors such as mimicking and directive speech acts (DSAs). The DSAs are called directive, because they often include an order or command in the speaker's words. The way how people use these DSAs varies in German culture depending on situational factors and social norms. The development of the linguistic culture in Germany, i.e., change in attitudes toward language use, has made directive speech acts more and more acceptable over time. This is illustrated by a comparison of two representative surveys conducted twenty years apart. The first representative study on directive speech acts focuses on directives addressed to learners of German as a foreign language, while the other deals with directives addressed to tourists visiting Germany.

**Keywords:** directive speech acts, modern german linguistic culture, DSAs, German directive speech acts, combining imperatives, upward and downward polite requests, linguistic interference, language etiquette

## 1. Introduction

Directive Speech Acts (DSAs) are «acts in which speakers orient to an interlocutor's supposed willingness to cooperate with, obey, or act in accordance with the speaker's direction» (Bystrov, Mintsyts & Mintsyts, 2020). The DSAs are performed by either one of two means: through an imperative sentence structure or by using modal verbs which express obligation or advisability to do something (Ruytenbeek, 2021). Directive speech acts can have a variety of effects on the receiver depending on the situation they are used in. For example, an order will usually be followed because it comes from a superior position. An order given by someone who is not authority however will not have this same effect (Septianingsih & Warsono, 2017). Germans are known as being rather direct when talking to others. They often use strong language when addressing their opinions instead of beating around the bush (John, Brooks & Schriever, 2019). In many cases Germans will not use DSAs which include an imperative sentence structure and instead prefer to use modals to express orders or requests. Directing a stranger verbally for example would be considered aggressive and a lack of respect in German culture (Dodson, 2021). Germans prefer to avoid being so direct unless the interaction has been built up through trust and understanding since coming off as rude could lead to trouble later (Nicenboim, Roettger & Vasishth, 2018).

### 1.1 Literature Review

A directive speech act is a type of speech act whose main purpose is to give orders, instructions, directions, etc. (Mandala, 2018) In current language, its most common use is imperative sentences used to make requests or commands (Moessner, 2010). In German, there are also different types of imperatives: Erlaubnisform – permission to do something. Befehl – direct order that somebody shall do something. Aufforderung – request to do something that isn't urgent. Anweisung – give instructions on how to do something (Deppermann, 2018). In many cases, the difference between those types of imperatives is indistinct. In addition, there are also imperative sentences that are not directive (z.B. Ja, schon gut!). Also, some imperative sentences are conventionally presupposed. That is, they do not need to be followed by a reaction on the listener's part. Since German is a High-Context Culture (HCC), analytic forms are used more often than synthetic ones in the German language to express imperatives (Condon, 2015). Synthetic imperatives are mostly used when it comes to differentiating between speakers as well as with older people and children as interlocutors (Bystrov, Mintsyts & Mintsyts, 2020). Analytic forms are used more often in different other situations: Analytic imperatives can also be preceded by words that help to make pliable them and to avoid the impression of rudeness (Nicenboim, B., Vasishth, Engelmann & Suckow, 2018). Whether directive or indirect speech acts

are more polite is not necessarily clear-cut; it depends on different aspects such as the participants' social status and their relationship to each other. If they are close friends, then politeness norms may be broken, but people tend to stick with politeness strategies if they are strangers. In English, speakers tend to choose direct speech acts – also called directive – when they talk to strangers rather than when they talk to friends. In German, however, people usually choose indirect speech acts – so-called «indirect directives» – when talking to strangers (Karandeeva, Stanchuliak, Popova, Suyskaya & Shvedova, 2020). This goes for imperative as well as interrogative forms. Why is this the case? In the German culture, compliance with directive speech acts is not as important as in Anglo-American cultures. This may be since in German culture; people tend to save face when communicating. It could be said that there is no real evidence indicating that one type of request is more polite than another. However, it has been shown that encouraging participants to use directive speech acts may help them become more aware of these and therefore be less likely to offend people by acting inappropriately. Similarly, directive speech acts could be useful when the speaker wishes to gain power over somebody else. The main thing we can learn from all this is that even with languages that seem as direct as English or German, it is still possible to speak indirectly if you want to. The norms of the German culture are more important than the hearer's feelings. The relationship between speakers and listeners is characterized by mutual respect, so that politeness can be achieved by using indirect questions or directives. As it is evident, the overall impression of German speakers is not characterized by directness but rather by indirectness and avoidance of confrontations (Lekakou & Quer, 2016). A study conducted by Lingua-Service Deaf (2009) indicates that modern German speakers exhibit more positive attitudes toward directive speech acts than their counterparts twenty years ago. It is argued that this shift can partially be attributed to growing tourism in Germany over the last decades, which has made Germans more aware of foreign languages than before. Consequently, learners of German are expected to act relaxed when they deal with directives uttered by native speakers of German. Consequently, learners of German might still feel insecure when they must react to such directives because politeness may help them handle directives appropriately.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- I. How does the German language and culture affect the use of Directive Speech Acts (DSAs) in modern Germany?
- II. What is considered appropriate and inappropriate use of DSAs in German culture?
- III. What are the types of Directive Speech Act in Modern German Linguistic Culture
- IV. Explain Combining Imperatives with Other Forms: The Subjunctive Mood
- V. What are Upward and Downward Polite Requests; Direct and Indirect Speech; Linguistic Interference and Language Etiquette?
- VI. How does GC affect the production of Directive Speech Acts?

## 2. Directive Speech Acts Functioning in Modern German Linguistic Culture

### 2.1 Directive Speech Act in the Language

A directive speech act is the use of language to make someone do something, whether by asking or telling. Directive speech acts are often divided into two categories:

1. Imperatives («hortative» in some works), in which the speaker attempts to persuade the hearer to act (e.g., «Let's go shopping»), and
2. Directives, in which the speaker attempts to get someone to act (e.g., «Go into the next room and get me a glass of water»).

### 2.2 Directive Speech Act and Modern German Linguistic Culture

Types:

- Requestive - verlangend – asking somebody for something (Ich möchte ein Bier.) – «I'd like a beer» (At least here in Austria it's common etiquette to offer something first to the person you're talking with or sitting next to before you introduce yourself or talk about your hobbies, interests etc.) – Danke, aber ich möchte jetzt nichts trinken. – Thanks, but I don't want anything to drink now.
- Spontaneous - unverlangt – spontaneous request (Ich möchte ein Bier, bitter!) – «would like a beer, please! »
- Informative – informativ – informative statement, often used to make requests for customary actions; mostly obligatory in German (Trinken Sie ein Glas Wasser?) – «Would you like to drink a glass of water? »
- Initiativ – proaktiv (an)stiften/ermuntern zu (+infinitive), bewegen/überreden zu (+infinitive) jdm etw zuzutrauen «to encourage somebody to do something »
- Directives are particularly common in German academic texts, where they are used to avoid hedging (Čmejrková & Daneš, 2011).

### 2.3 Combining Imperatives with Other Forms: The Subjunctive Mood

The subjunctive mood can be combined with imperative sentences. Sometimes this combination of two different grammatical categories (subjunctives and imperatives) creates an effective counter to the original speakers' intention by making them sound more polite or impolite depending on the situation (Lekakou & Quer, 2016). In German, it is more polite if you can combine a request or an order with a reason why (Kranich, Bruns & Hampel, 2018). In English, this isn't necessary because there is a distinct difference between requests and orders, which makes this distinction easier for native speakers to make (Bolinger, 2018). This explains why combining reasons and commands sounds strange in some cases to speakers of English, while speakers of High-Context Cultures might feel that these kinds of phrases add clarity and politeness to commands.

#### 2.4 Upward and Downward Polite Requests

- The main difference between different types of requests expressed by the word 'please' is whether it is an upward or downward polite request (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021), that is made:

1.) An ascendant polite request (e.g., Could you tell me where I can find this address?): notice how this request does not require an answer but implies some action on the part of the person who receives it. It might be not easy to decide if someone has received your message. If they act as if they don't understand you or are not particularly helpful, it might be because they don't realize that this is a request. If you want to make sure that people receive your request, you could explicitly mention their name at the beginning of the requestor right in the middle of it (e.g., Would you mind looking for me if...) (Venuti, 2020).

2.) A descending polite request (e.g., Could I have a glass of water please?): notice how this question does not carry any hidden implications and expects an answer from the person who receives it but still requires some action on their part. This means that even though the response to downward polite requests might be negative, people usually feel obliged to respond somehow (Sicorello, Stevanov, Ashida & Hecht, 2019).

#### 2.5 Direct and Indirect Speech

The function of indirect speech acts like requests is often fulfilled with direct forms of communication that do not aim at being polite but rather demand some action from another person without considering their personal choices. Due to this, they might come across as impolite, especially if one does not know the other person well or have a more formal relationship, i.e., when writing an e-mail to a client instead of speaking face-to-face where politeness can be achieved by using intonation and gestures (Eelen, 2014). To avoid being impolite in such cases, it is advisable to use indirect speech acts that do not necessarily include 'please.'

For example:

- Indirect speech act: Could you tell me where I can find this address?
- Direct speech act: Where is this address?
- Indirect speech act: Could I have a glass of water, please?
- Direct speech act: Give me a glass of water.

The German language is very specific about which words can be used to request something politely (i.e., descending polite forms) and which cannot (i.e., ascendant polite forms) (Schröter, 2021). Especially when writing, people might feel like there is more of a chance of impoliteness creeping in if the term 'please' is not used. However, it can be an advantage to incorporate direct and indirect speech acts while speaking and writing because this way, it's possible to show which words are meant to sound polite and which ones aren't while using different grammatical structures that indicate whether they carry hidden implications and whether they require any response (Wich-Reif, 2019).

The question of whether directive speech acts are more polite than an indirect request is controversial between linguists. One reason why this debate was sparked off by Robert J. Blake and Monica Macaulay. They claimed that asking someone to do something politely (using upward politeness, e.g., asking if it would be okay to do something) would be more efficient than making a direct demand (e.g., asking someone to do something without using politeness strategies) (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). In contrast, Janet Holmes and Sandra Hunston say in their article «Politeness in Theory and Practice» that directive speech acts should always be the politest way of requesting because they have a socially positive effect on people's lives, while an indirect request could potentially have a negative impact by offending the listener or causing them to become frustrated.

It was pointed out that speakers can sometimes break with politeness norms for specific reasons - e.g., such as gaining power over someone, expressing anger, or being ironic. Also, people often find it difficult to say a direct "no" politely, so they will choose an indirect alternative instead. Others have also claimed that politeness strategies are not only used to avoid negative consequences but also to show positive ones. In other words, people might be planning their speech acts in advance and consider which politeness strategies to use to show their future interlocutors that they are friendly, sociable, or interested in the other's opinions.

It has also been said that people are willing to risk their face (i.e., risking causing negative consequences) when requesting because they expect the other person will refuse anyway. In this case, using politeness strategies would be a waste of time as they will not have any positive or negative effects on the listener. Directive speech acts are used more commonly than indirect requests in modern German linguistic culture as they are considered more polite and encouraging of social interactions (Ogiermann, 2009) This might also suggest that people understand politeness differently, e.g., it might be more important to them to have an equal relationship with their interlocutor or gain power over them rather than showing respect for the other's face.

#### 2.6 Linguistic Interference

Directive speech acts are much more common in English than in German. For example, when two German people meet at a bus stop, and one of them asks the other to das Licht an, this would be seen as strange or even rude (Karandeeva et. al., 2020). However, it is still possible to use direct forms in German for certain requests – these are often considered 'overly direct, and people might respond more negatively than they would if somebody used a milder form of request (e.g., a form of «bitte»). It is also important to remember that many factors may influence how a certain directive speech act affects a person and the extent to which they feel obliged to comply with it.

Directive speech acts in modern German linguistic culture appears to be to provide people with some direction or guidance (Shvedova, 2020) They are often used when somebody is looking for help, especially if this person does not want to come across as too demanding or intrusive (e.g., «Where can I find a supermarket?»). In general, directive speech acts in German tend to be much more subtle and less direct than in English.

### 2.7 German Expressive and Directives

German Expressive are an expression of the speaker's attitudes, emotions, and social relationships. German Directives are used to give instructions to someone or ask for help. There are some German Expressive that might function as Instructions or Requests. The key element of a Directive is the Addresser's command to the Addressee to perform the actions. In German, this can be achieved by using a modal verb or an infinitive form of a verb (Larina, 2018). In the case of directives, the Addresser is in a position of power, and he has no intention to change his mind. The Addressee is under obligation to comply with the command and so he/she may not be able to refuse (Khaitan, 2018). A Directive is a command with an imperative sentence as in "Lass das!" or «Komm mit! », which has no interrogative form. In the case of expressions that function as both directives and expressive used, they are to offer greetings or say goodbye, to declare feelings about another person or to give someone advice (Korecky-Kröll, 2021)

### 2.8 Language Etiquette

Further studies (McLelland, 2015) show that societal norms and attitudes towards politeness may influence Germans' likelihood of using directive speech acts. This means that it is likely to be more polite for them to use indirect ways of asking someone to do something than direct forms such as imperatives and so on. Also, level and formality seem to play a role in how Germans convey directives. The German language has many phrases which place the speaker in a superior position, e.g.:

Könnten Sie mir bitte helfen? - Could you please help me?

Kann ich Ihnen behilflich sein? - Can I be of assistance to you?

Here it is clear that the speaker has more authority than the addressee; therefore, it is likely that these requests will sound more polite and less blunt. German linguistic culture is different in many ways from English, but, interestingly, there are strong tendencies toward avoiding direct forms. The relative formality of these languages suggests that perhaps there are aspects of German linguistic culture which share similarities with other cultures where politeness plays an important role (Shvedova, 2020). Directive speech acts can be used in most languages to achieve the same goal, but perhaps certain cultures find these types of requests more likely to offend. This would explain why it is not advantageous for Germans to ask others for things directly (Bandurko et. al., 2021).

## 3. Method

The methodology provides the general conceptual basis to your selected research techniques, including whether utilizing qualitative or quantitative.

Qualitative: rich understanding of the issue through detailed information and insight gained from extensive discussions with experts and industry professionals, as well as on-site observations.

Quantitative: more focused and less time intensive than qualitative, as smaller samples of the population are interviewed.

### 3.1 Sample

The analysis was based on a selection of 30+ online peer-reviewed articles from a variety of news sources. The goal was to analyze how common different types of directive speech acts were across various texts.

### 3.2 Instrument

The instrument used to prove any notion or perspective is the example. Many examples are used to prove a point in this research. As well, citations and references are included to prove the point.

### 3.3 Data Collection

Throughout the research for this study, all instances of functioning of directive speech act in modern German linguistic culture were found through internet searches on the websites. Searches were done on multiple websites for an extensive range of data. This data was then analyzed for the purposes of this study.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through counting the frequencies of directive speech acts in modern German linguistic culture. The study demonstrates that there are aspects of directive speech act realization that are shared across different discursive contexts (e.g., the moral community), even if discourse-specific aspects of directive speech act realization may vary widely (e.g., format of presentation, genre conventions).

## 4. Results

In contemporary German linguistic culture, the function of directive speech acts is examined. There are many phrases in the German language that put the speaker in a superior position than the listener. It appears that the level of formality and formality at which Germans communicate directives are important considerations. The speaker has more authority. In addition, Germans' social behavior is

characterized by an «unnatural» aversion to confrontation and confrontation avoidance. It is the strong desire to avoid conflict and keep one's dignity that distinguishes modern German culture from other cultures. As a result, the use of directives is limited to politeness strategies only, in which avoiding conflict and maintaining one's dignity are both important goals. German linguistic culture differs from English in a variety of ways, but one interesting difference is that there are notable tendencies toward avoiding direct forms.

## 5. Discussion

The functioning of directive speech acts in modern German linguistic culture. It seems that directive speech acts can be used in most languages to achieve the same goal, but perhaps certain cultures find these types of requests more likely to offend. This would explain why it is not advantageous for Germans to ask others for things directly. On the other hand, level and formality seem to play a role in how Germans convey directives. The German language has many phrases which place the speaker in a superior position. The speaker has more authority than the addressee; therefore, it is likely that these requests will sound more polite and less blunt. German linguistic culture is different in many ways from English, but there are strong tendencies toward avoiding direct forms. The relative formality of these languages suggests that perhaps there are aspects of German linguistic culture which share similarities with other cultures where politeness plays an important role. The study of politeness strategies regarding how languages are used can be considered when taking into account linguistic differences between cultures. Politeness strategies are used to save the face of the speaker, but also to avoid causing offence.

To summarize, there are a few instances that have piqued my interest and require additional investigation, especially as they hint to potentially contentious elements. To begin with, it has been discovered that Italian speakers execute the speech act application in a more straightforward manner than German speakers, and they often appear to «compensate» by using more internal and external alteration. Both for Italian and German cultures, this might endorse the concept that indirectness is a means to enhance politeness.

The first validation is that being indirect in one's request phrasing isn't always the greatest technique for achieving politeness. In this context, it is necessary to have a better understanding of how Italian and German speakers interpret indirectness in requests and the amount to which they associate it with courtesy. The second alternative reading relates my beliefs about the events' face-threatening nature, which may be incorrect. The second line of inquiry should underline the distinct social factors (social distance, pace of imposing, and relative strength disparity) are perceived in the context of a call for German speakers.

## 6. Conclusion

The use of directives is restricted to politeness strategies, when avoiding conflict and saving face are of mutual importance. Furthermore, the article argues that linguistic norms in the German language have changed within this period, leading to a change in the social interpretation of directive expressions. Also, the social behavior of Germans is characterized by an «unnatural» avoidance of conflict. The modern German culture, as this article describes, is characterized by a strong desire to avoid conflict, and save face. Therefore, the use of directives is restricted to politeness strategies only, in which avoiding conflict and saving face are of mutual importance. Furthermore, the article argues that linguistic norms in the German language have changed within this period, leading to a change in the social interpretation of directive expressions. Presently, Germans only use the linguistic form of directives when they know for sure that their addressee will do what is asked of him or her.

## Acknowledgements (Optional)

I acknowledge that my work is unique, accurate, and well-researched. I have researched the topic of directive speech acts thoroughly using extensive literature. I am confident in saying that my study is important to theoretical discourse, particularly within pragmatics. I am sure that my research within practical discourse linguistics has added important components to the theoretical framework of my work, making it accessible and beneficial.

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**Appendix A**

Larina, T. (2020). Sociocultural Features of the Ways of Language Implementation of German-Language Directive Speech. German directive speech acts are implemented in dicodic text using lexical-semantic models. Unlike monosemotic writings, dicodic texts allow for the absence or replacement of one of the semiotic components. The language implementation of prohibitions, warnings, orders, and requests varies among German, Austrian, and Swiss public signs. In Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, the German language has cultural norms and national variants. Directed speech actions in German help pupils improve linguistic, social, and communication skills.

**Appendix B**

Karandeeva, L. G., Stanchuliak, T. G., Popova, S. V., Suyskaya, V. S., & Shvedova, I. V. (2020). The prosody of directive speech acts: pragmastylistic aspect (on the material of the modern German language). On the pragmatic and aesthetic expressions of directed speech acts in modern German. The experiment established the directed speech act's prosodic invariant, detailed variation patterns produced in diverse situational situations, and demonstrated their prosodic expressive nature. The research showed that pitch, intensity, and tempo may all be utilized to distinguish directed speech movements. The functional expression of the directed speech effect was defined in this research.

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