

Directive Speech Acts by Child Characters in the Japanese Film *Monster* (2023): A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the forms and types of directive speech acts produced by child characters in the Japanese film *Monster* (2023) directed by Hirokazu Koreeda. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes 20 directive utterances drawn from the film's dialogue to examine how directive meanings are realized in emotionally and socially complex interactions. The data were selected by identifying utterances spoken by child characters that pragmatically function to prompt the addressee to perform or refrain from performing an action. The analysis is informed by speech act theory and contextual interpretation through Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, enabling systematic examination of linguistic form, pragmatic function, and interactional context. The findings reveal that directive speech acts are realized through direct and indirect as well as literal and non-literal forms. Among these, indirect literal directive speech acts of the requestive type occur most frequently. This pattern indicates that directive intentions are commonly conveyed through interrogative or declarative structures rather than explicit imperatives, particularly in emotionally sensitive interactions such as family communication and peer relationships affected by bullying. Overall, the study demonstrates that child characters exhibit pragmatic awareness by employing directive strategies that balance communicative effectiveness with interpersonal consideration.

Keywords: *Directive speech acts; Pragmatics; Japanese film; Child discourse; SPEAKING framework*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a medium for conveying information but also a form of social action through which speakers perform intentions, negotiate relationships, and influence others within specific interactional contexts. This perspective is central to pragmatic studies, particularly speech act theory, which conceptualizes utterances as actions that carry illocutionary force beyond their propositional content (Austin 1962; Searle 1975). Among various types of speech acts, directive speech acts play a crucial role because they are designed to prompt the addressee to perform or refrain from performing certain actions, thereby directly shaping interpersonal dynamics. Directives may be realized through diverse linguistic forms such as imperatives, interrogatives, or declaratives and can be expressed either directly or indirectly, as well as literally or non-literally, depending on contextual and relational factors (Searle 1975; Yule 1996). The strategic use of directive speech acts thus reflects speakers' pragmatic competence in balancing communicative effectiveness with social considerations, including politeness, emotional sensitivity, and power relations.

In Japanese, directive speech acts exhibit distinctive characteristics shaped by sociocultural norms emphasizing politeness, indirectness, and interpersonal harmony. Rather than relying on explicit imperatives, Japanese speakers often employ interrogative or declarative forms to convey directive intent in a mitigated manner, thereby reducing face-threatening effects (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ide, 1989; Maynard, 1997). The selection of linguistic expressions in Japanese interaction is closely related to contextual factors such as interpersonal relations,

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communicative intentions, and situational background (Saputra et al., 2022). This pattern is closely associated with the Japanese honorific system (*keigo*), which regulates linguistic choices according to social status, age, and relational distance. Consequently, the study of directive speech acts in Japanese requires careful attention to contextual and interactional factors.

Understanding the intended meaning of an utterance requires careful consideration of contextual factors that shape interaction between speakers and hearers (Firdaus, Kasmawati, & Taqdir, 2020). Therefore, pragmatic analysis must take into account the situational and social context in which an utterance occurs. To account for such contextual dimensions, pragmatic analysis often draws on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model, which conceptualizes speech events through eight interrelated components: *setting and scene*, *participants*, *ends*, *act sequence*, *key*, *instrumentalities*, *norms*, and *genre* (Hymes 1992). This framework allows researchers to analyze how utterances function within specific social and cultural environments rather than treating them as isolated linguistic forms. In narrative media such as film, where dialogue is inherently tied to character roles, emotional atmosphere, and situational context, the SPEAKING model offers a particularly useful analytical tool.

Film constitutes an important medium for pragmatic research because cinematic dialogue often reflects everyday conversational practices while simultaneously embedding them within culturally meaningful narratives (Dyrel 2011). Films not only entertain but also represent social realities and communicative norms, providing insight into how language is used to construct relationships, convey emotions, and negotiate power. This is especially relevant for examining children's language use, as film dialogue can reveal how children are portrayed as active communicators within social interaction.

Children, as developing language users, employ language not merely to convey propositional content but also to negotiate social relationships, express emotions, and assert agency. Previous studies have shown that children's directive speech acts are not limited to simple commands; instead, they often function as tools for social negotiation and emotional expression (Ervin-Tripp 1976; Ninio and Snow 2018). Nevertheless, much of the existing research on directive speech acts has focused on adult speakers or institutional contexts such as classrooms, leaving children's pragmatic behavior in media discourse relatively underexplored.

Several previous studies have examined speech acts in educational settings, everyday conversations, or mass media. For example, (Djuhaeni 2019) analyzed directive speech acts in teacher–student interactions, highlighting the role of institutional power, while (Rahmawati 2020) examined speech acts in daily social communication. Other studies have explored illocutionary acts in song lyrics, television programs, or literary texts (Rahmawati 2019; Saputri 2020). Although these studies contribute valuable insights into speech act realization, they predominantly focus on adult speakers and rarely address children as primary producers of directive speech acts, particularly within cinematic contexts.

Against this background, the Japanese film *Monster* (2023), directed by Hirokazu Koreeda, provides a compelling site for pragmatic investigation. The film portrays complex interactions among children, parents, and teachers, characterized by emotional tension, power asymmetry, and moral ambiguity. Child characters in *Monster* frequently produce utterances that function as directives, often realized indirectly through questions or statements rather than explicit commands. These interactions reflect broader sociocultural norms of Japanese communication and highlight children's pragmatic sensitivity to context and relational dynamics.

Despite the growing body of pragmatic research, studies focusing on directive speech acts produced by child characters in Japanese films remain limited. This gap suggests the need for research that integrates speech act theory with contextual analysis to better understand children's pragmatic practices in narrative media. Therefore, this study aims to examine directive speech acts produced by child characters in *Monster* (2023) by analyzing their forms, types, and contextual realizations using a pragmatic framework informed by speech act theory and the SPEAKING model. By doing so, this research seeks to contribute to pragmatic studies on child language use and to deepen understanding of sociocultural communication practices in Japanese cinematic discourse.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach to analyze directive speech acts produced by child characters in the Japanese film *Monster* (2023). The data consist of 20 directive utterances identified from dialogues spoken by child characters in the film. An utterance was classified as directive when it was pragmatically intended to prompt the addressee to perform or refrain from performing an action.

The qualitative approach is chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of the meanings underlying utterances and their social contexts. Qualitative research aims to analyze and describe social events, activities, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs (Sukmadinata 2005). It presents phenomena as they naturally occur and produces descriptive data in the form of spoken or written words and observable behavior (Lexy J. Moleong 2009; Nugrahani 2014). The data consist of meaningful words, sentences, and contextual elements, which are described in detail to reflect real conditions.

The data were analyzed through qualitative pragmatic analysis. First, the selected utterances were transcribed and classified according to their linguistic forms and directive types based on speech act theory (Searle 1975). Subsequently, each utterance was interpreted contextually using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework (Hymes 1992), which examines setting, participants, communicative goals, act sequence, tone, instrumentalities, norms, and genre. This analytical procedure allowed the study to identify how directive meanings are pragmatically realized within specific interactional contexts in the film. The classification of speech acts was also supported by contextual analysis using the SPEAKING components to ensure analytical accuracy.

The data were obtained through repeated observation of the film and transcription of the original Japanese dialogue. Only utterances functioning as directives were selected, and relevant contextual information such as participant roles, interactional setting, and emotional tone was noted to support pragmatic interpretation.

Data analysis was conducted by classifying the directive utterances according to their forms and types based on speech act theory (Searle 1975). To capture the influence of situational and social context, the utterances were further interpreted using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework (Hymes 1992). This analytical procedure enabled a systematic examination of how directive meanings are realized directly or indirectly within the film's interactional contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Direct Literal Directive Speech Acts of the Requirement Type



Figure 1. Saori and Minato commemorating the birthday of Minato’s deceased father

Data 1:

サオリムギノ : ケーキまたちっちゃくなったよね、お父さんだったら二口で

Saori Mugino : *Kēki mata chitchaku natta yo ne, otōsandattara ni-kuchi de*

ミナトムギノ : 食べないでしょう、死んでるんだし

Minato Mugino : *Tabenaideshou, shin deru ndashi*

サオリムギノ : 聞こえてるよ、近況報告して、学校のこととかお友達のこと
とか、声に出して！

Saori Mugino : *Kikoe teru yo, kinkyō hōkoku shite, gakkō no koto toka o tomodachi no koto toka, koenidashite!*

(Monster (2023), 00:06:36)

The interaction between Saori and Minato Mugino illustrates intimate family communication in a moment of remembrance for Minato’s deceased father. An analysis based on Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING framework shows that the conversation takes place in a private domestic setting with a strong emotional tone. The participants consist of Saori, who maintains an emotional bond with the deceased, and Minato, who responds in a more rational manner. The communicative goal extends beyond casual conversation, as Saori encourages Minato to sustain an emotional connection with his father by speaking about his school life and friendships. Differences in tone are evident, with Saori speaking gently and emotionally, while Minato’s responses are relatively flat. Culturally, the interaction reflects a common Japanese practice of addressing deceased family members, although Minato displays a more modern and logical perspective.

The utterance 近況報告して (*kinkyō hōkoku shite*, “report your recent condition”) is classified as a direct literal directive speech act of the requirement type. Linguistically, the expression derives from 報告する (*hōkoku suru*, “to report”) and appears in the –te form (して, *shite*), which is commonly used to issue instructions. The absence of politeness markers such as ください (*kudasai*) and sentence-final particles results in a direct and unmitigated command. Lexically, the combination of 近況 (*kinkyō*, “recent condition”) and 報告 (*hōkoku*, “report”) specifies the required action, while the lack of an explicit subject clearly directs the command to Minato. Within the interactional context, this directive functions to compel Minato to immediately report his recent experiences, demonstrating a clear requirement-oriented directive force.

2. Direct Literal Directive Speech Acts of the Requestive Type



Figure 2. Conversation between Saori and Minato regarding the CT scan

Data 2:

- ミナトムギノ : お母さんさ、レントゲン見た？
Minato Mugino : *okāsan-sa, rentogen mita?*
- サオリムギノ : CT?見たよ
Saori Mugino : *CT? Mita yo*
- サオリムギノ : 異常なかったよ
Saori Mugino : *ijō nakatta yo*
- サオリムギノ : 全然本当に、何もなかったよ、どうした？どうした？学校でなんかあった？食べるのおそいこと？なんで髪を短くしたの？なんでスニーカーをなくしちゃったの？これどうした？は？
Saori Mugino : *zenzen hontōni, nani mo nakatta yo,-dōshita? Dō shita? Gakkō de nanka atta? Taberu no osoi koto? Nande kami o mijikaku shita no? Nande sunikā o nakushi chatta no? Kore-dōshita? Wa?*
- ミナトムギノ : 豚の脳なんだよね？みなとの脳は豚の脳に入れ替えてんだよ。そういうところがなんか変とかさ、化け物というからさ
Minato Mugino : *buta no nōna nda yo ne? Minato no nō wa buta no nō ni irekaete nda yo. Sō iu tokoro ga nankahen to iu kasa, bakemono to iukara sa*

(Monster (2023), 00:13:30)

The interaction between Minato and Saori reflects a mother's concern over noticeable changes in her child's behavior. This concern is expressed through a sequence of rapid interrogative utterances addressing issues such as Minato's haircut, missing sneakers, and potential problems at school. Rather than responding directly, Minato conveys his distress metaphorically by stating that his brain has been replaced with a pig's brain, indicating an underlying psychological burden. An analysis based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework clarifies the social and cultural context of this interaction. The conversation occurs in a tense family situation after Minato abruptly exits the car, involving a close mother-child relationship marked by emotional distance. Saori's communicative goal is to uncover Minato's emotional state and restore open communication, whereas Minato adopts a defensive stance. The anxious tone, informal spoken Japanese, and reliance on indirect emotional expression reflect Japanese cultural norms that discourage overt emotional

disclosure, particularly within family interactions. The utterances produced by Saori are categorized as direct literal directive speech acts of the requestive type.

These directives are predominantly realized through simple interrogative forms such as どうした? (What happened?), 学校でなんかあった? (Did something happen at school?), and なんでスニーカーをなくしちゃったの? (Why did you lose your sneakers?). Syntactically, these utterances are interrogatives; pragmatically, they function as explicit requests for information. Following (Searle 1975) classification, they fall under requestives, as they aim to prompt the addressee to provide explanations or clarification. In line with (Yule 1996), these interrogatives are considered direct and literal because their grammatical form corresponds to their illocutionary function and their meanings are transparently derived from their lexical content. From a politeness perspective, the repeated use of interrogatives such as どうした? どうした? signals urgency and emotional pressure, reflecting heightened concern rather than mitigation. Some utterances function as bald on record strategies due to their directness, while others align with positive politeness strategies, as they are produced within an intimate parent–child relationship (Brown and Levinson 1987). Overall, the data demonstrate that directive speech acts in this interaction are not realized through imperatives but through interrogative forms that simultaneously express concern and demand responses. This finding underscores that, in Japanese family discourse, interrogatives serve as a primary means of performing directive functions that are pragmatically strong despite their ostensibly polite form.

3. Indirect Literal Directive Speech Acts of the Requestive Type



Figure 3. Minato recounting a dream he experienced

Data 3:

ミナトムギノ : お父さんいた。お母さんに伝言頼まれた。

Minato Mugino : *Otōsan ita. Okāsan ni dengon tanoma reta.*

サオリムギノ : 夢に出てきてくれたの?

Saori Mugino : *Yume ni dete kite kureta no?*

ミナトムギノ : いつもありがとう、大好きだよって

Minato Mugino : *Itsumo arigatō, daisukidayo tte*

サオリムギノ : 母さん駄目だからさ、ちゃんとしてあげられていない気がするからさ、みんなが可哀想にさ

Saori Mugino : *Kāsan damedakara sa, chanto shite age rarete inai kiga surukara sa, min'na ga kawaiōni-sa*

ミナトムギノ : お父さん生まれ変わったかな
Minato Mugino : *Otōsan umarekawatta ka na*

サオリムギノ : かもね
Saori Mugino : *Kamo ne*

ミナトムギノ : ミナトは何に生まれるかな？
Minato Mugino : *Minato wa nani ni umareru ka na?*

サオリムギノ : ミナトはまだまだ生きていますでしょう
Saori Mugino : *Minato wa madamada ikite irudeshou*

ミナトムギノ : お母さん
Minato Mugino : *Okāsan*

サオリムギノ : うん？
Saori Mugino : *Un?*

ミナトムギノ : 僕は可哀想じゃないよ
Minato Mugino : *Boku wa kawaiō janai yo.*

(Monster (2023), 00:39:11)

The utterance occurs within a calm and private domestic setting, specifically in Minato's bedroom, where Minato and his mother engage in an intimate conversation about Minato's deceased father. This setting supports emotionally deep communication between mother and child. The participants are Mugino Minato and his mother, Mugino Saori; although the father is not physically present, he remains emotionally salient as the topic of the conversation. The communicative purpose of the interaction is mutual emotional reassurance: Minato seeks to convey that he does not view himself as someone to be pitied while simultaneously offering comfort to his mother. The act sequence begins with Minato recounting a message from his father conveyed through a dream, followed by Saori's expression of guilt, and culminates in Minato's affirmative and consoling response, “僕は可哀想じゃないよ” (“I am not pitiful”). The key of the interaction is gentle and emotional, reflecting mutual understanding, while the instrumentalities consist of spoken, informal Japanese rich in emotional expression. Culturally, the conversation reflects Japanese norms in which dreams are perceived as a medium of spiritual communication with the deceased, emphasizing familial empathy and emotional support. The genre of this interaction is informal, emotionally charged interpersonal family communication.

Within this context, Minato's utterance “僕は可哀想じゃないよ” (*Boku wa kawaiō janai yo*) exemplifies an indirect literal directive speech act of the requestive type. Syntactically, the utterance takes the form of a declarative statement conveying information. The sentence-final particle *yo* functions pragmatically as a marker of emphasis and speaker stance, highlighting the communicative intention behind the utterance (Maynard 1997).

Although structurally declarative, the utterance pragmatically conveys an implicit emotional request for Saori not to regard or treat Minato as an object of pity. This indirectness aligns with the defining characteristic of indirect directive speech acts, in which the speaker's intention is not explicitly stated (Searle 1975). At the same time, the intended meaning is immediately accessible to the interlocutor without ambiguity, qualifying the utterance as literal in the sense proposed by (Yule 1996). More specifically, the utterance falls under the

category of requestives, as it seeks to influence the addressee’s emotional stance and subsequent behavior (Tsui 1994). By framing the request in a declarative form, Minato mitigates potential emotional impact and maintains interpersonal harmony, consistent with politeness principles described by (Brown and Levinson 1987).

4. Direct Literal Directive Speech Acts of the Requestive Type

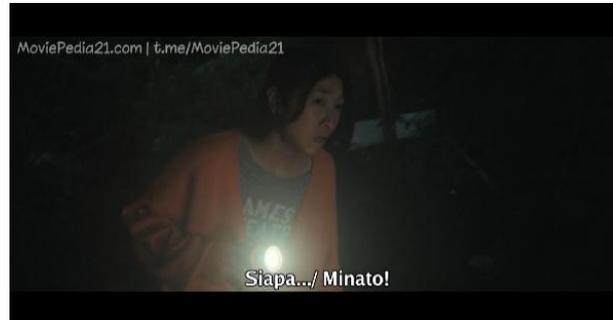


Figure 4. Saori expressing concern over Minato’s late return home

Data 4:

- ミナトムギノ : 怪物だれだ
Minato Mugino : *Kaibutsu dareda*
- ミナトムギノ : 怪物だれだ?
Minato Mugino : *Kaibutsu dareda!?*
- サオリムギノ : みなと?
Saori Mugino : *Minato?*
- ミナトムギノ : 怪物だ~
Minato Mugino : *Kaibutsu da~*
- サオリムギノ : みなと!
Saori Mugino : *Minato!*

(Monster (2023), 00:10:31)

The brief interaction between Mugino Minato and Saori Mugino takes place in an emotionally tense setting inside a cave near the forest. In this scene, Minato repeatedly asks, 怪物だれだ、怪物だれだ? (*Kaibutsu dare da? Kaibutsu dare da?* “Who is the monster?”). Viewed through Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING (Hymes 1992), the interaction occurs in a private, family-related space marked by reflective yet pressured emotions. The participants are Minato as the questioner and Saori as the respondent, while the communicative goal is to seek confirmation of the “monster’s” identity, which symbolically represents a perceived wrongdoer. The act sequence is characterized by Minato’s repeated questioning followed by Saori’s brief response, みなと? (*Minato?*). The key of the interaction is tense and emphatic, reinforced by repetition, and the instrumentalities involve informal spoken Japanese. In terms of norms, Saori’s immediate embrace of Minato signals relief and emotional reassurance, and the genre can be described as a reflective yet confrontational family dialogue.

From a pragmatic perspective, Minato's utterance 怪物だれだ、怪物だれだ? is a nominal interrogative functioning to request information. Syntactically, it consists of the noun 怪物 (*monster*), the interrogative pronoun だれ (*who*), and the informal copula だ, forming a basic Japanese question structure meaning "Who is the monster?". Illocutionarily, however, the utterance functions as a direct literal directive speech act of the requestive type (Searle 1975), as the speaker explicitly demands an answer. The repetition of the interrogative serves as a pragmatic strategy to intensify illocutionary force and convey emotional urgency, a function commonly associated with repetition in Japanese discourse (Maynard 1997). Consequently, the utterance operates not merely as an information-seeking question but as an emotionally charged directive that pressures the addressee to respond, highlighting the affective dimension of interpersonal family communication.

5. Direct Non-Literal Directive Speech Acts of the Question Type



Figure 5. Conversation between Minato and Saori concerning the “pig brain”

Data 5:

- ミナトムギノ : 豚の脳を移植した人間は、豚? 人間?
Minato Mugino : *Buta no nō o ishoku shita ningen wa, buta? Ningen?*
- サオリムギノ : 何の話?
Saori Mugino : *Nanno hanashi?*
- ミナトムギノ : そういう研究があるの
Minato Mugino : *Sōiu kenkyū ga aru no*
- サオリムギノ : 誰がそんなことを言ったの?
Saori Mugino : *Dare ga son'na koto o itta no?*
- ミナトムギノ : ほり先生
Minato Mugino : *Hori sensei*

(Monster (2023), 00:06:36)

This interaction takes place between Minato and Saori at home, where Minato poses an unusual yet thought-provoking question: “豚の脳を移植した人間は、豚? 人間?” (*If a human receives a pig's brain transplant, would they be a pig or a human?*). Initially, Saori is confused and asks Minato about the source of this idea, to which Minato responds that he heard it from his teacher, Hori-sensei.

Viewed through Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the conversation occurs in a relaxed and informal domestic setting, specifically on the balcony. Minato acts as a curious questioner, while Saori responds attentively despite her initial surprise. The interaction

functions not merely as a question-and-answer exchange but as a reflective discussion of scientific and speculative issues. The conversational sequence begins with Minato’s question, followed by Saori’s response, and is clarified when Minato attributes the question to information he learned at school. The tone remains casual despite the complexity of the topic, and the use of informal spoken Japanese reflects an open family norm that allows discussion of unconventional subjects. The genre of the interaction can thus be characterized as an informal, reflective discussion with a scientific nuance.

From a pragmatic perspective, Minato’s utterance constitutes a direct non-literal directive speech act of the question type. It is considered direct because the interrogative form explicitly seeks a response from the addressee, as indicated by the repeated alternatives “豚？人間？” and interrogative intonation. At the same time, the utterance is non-literal, as it is not intended solely to obtain a factual answer but to invite deeper philosophical and ethical reflection on identity, consciousness, and the boundary between humans and animals. Accordingly, the utterance functions as a directive question that both requests a response and guides the interlocutor toward reflective engagement rather than a simple informational reply.

6. Direct Literal Directive Speech Acts of the Question Type



Figure 6. Minato and Hoshikawa discussing Hoshikawa’s experience of bullying in the forest

Data 6:

ミナト	: ほり先生に言ったら？ほり先生は優しいよ
Minato	: <i>Hori sensei ni ittara? Hori sensei wa yasashī yo</i>
ホシカワ	: 男らしくないって言われるだけだよ
Hoshikawa	: <i>Otokorashikunai tte iwa reru dakeda yo</i>
ミナト	: 嫌？
Minato	: <i>Iya?</i>
ホシカワ	: 豚の脳だからね
Hoshikawa	: <i>Buta no nōdakara ne</i>
ミナト	: 豚の脳じゃないよ、ホシカワくんのお父さん間違ってるよ
Minato	: <i>Buta no nō janai yo, Hoshikawa-kun no otōsan machigatteru yo</i>
ホシカワ	: パパは優しいよ。絶対病気治してやるって。治ったらお母さん帰ってくるって。
Hoshikawa	: <i>Papa wa yasashī yo. Zettai byōki chi shite yaru tte. Naottara okāsan kaette kurutte.</i>

- ミナト : 病気じゃないと思う
Minato : *Byōki janai to omou*
- ホシカワ : まっ、親だしさ。気を使うじゃん。
Hoshikawa : *Ma~, oyadashi sa. Ki o tsukaujan.*
- ミナト : それはうちも気を使うけど
Minato : *Soreha uchi mo ki o tsukaukedo*
- ホシカワ : お父さんさ、死んだんでしょ？
Hoshikawa : *Otōsan-sa, shinda ndeshou?*
- ミナト : 本当はね。ノグチミナコさんという女の人と温泉行って事故死したの
Minato : *Hontōwa ne. Noguchiminako-san to iu on'ano hito to onsen itte jikoshi shita no*
- ホシカワ : へ...
Hoshikawa : *E...*
- ミナト : ノグチミナコさんはね、ダサイニットを着てんの
Minato : *Noguchiminako-san wa ne, dasai nitto o ki ten no*
- ホシカワ : へ...だいぶ面白いね
Hoshikawa : *E... daibu omoshiroi ne.*

(Monster (2023), 01:29:56)

The interaction occurs between Hoshikawa and Minato Mugino in a peer-to-peer context. Viewed through Dell Hymes' SPEAKING (Hymes 1992), the setting involves a personal conversation between close friends, with Hoshikawa seeking confirmation about Minato's father. Hoshikawa acts as the questioner and Minato as the addressee, and the communicative goal is to verify the truth of the reported death. The sequence begins with Hoshikawa's question, anticipating Minato's response, and is characterized by a serious and inquisitive tone. Informal spoken Japanese is used, and the interactional norms indicate that, in certain peer contexts, sensitive topics such as death may be addressed directly. The genre of the exchange is an interpersonal question-answer interaction.

Hoshikawa's utterance お父さんさ、死んだんでしょ？ (*Otōsan sa, shinda n deshō?* "Your father passed away, right?") is classified as a direct literal directive speech act of the question type. Formally, it is a confirmation interrogative, as the sentence-final *でしょ* signals a request for the addressee's agreement or verification rather than a mere statement. Pragmatically, the utterance functions as a directive because it prompts Minato to confirm or deny the information. It is considered direct because its interrogative form aligns with its communicative function, and literal because its lexical meaning corresponds transparently to the intended illocutionary goal. The mitigative use of *でしょ* softens the inquiry, aligning with politeness strategies that reduce imposition (Brown and Levinson 1987). Socially, the question reflects both Hoshikawa's curiosity and a desire to understand Minato's emotional situation, demonstrating how directive questions can simultaneously seek information and maintain interpersonal sensitivity (Searle 1975; Yule 1996).

7. Direct Non-Literal Directive Speech Acts of the Advisory Type



Figure 7. Hoshikawa discreetly bringing snacks to school

Data 7:

- ホシカワ : 内緒ね。直せつ触ってないから汚くないよ
Hoshikawa : *Naisho ne. Chokusetsu sawattenaikara kitanakunai yo*
- ミナト : 汚いとか思っていないよ
Minato : *Kitanai toka omottenai yo*
- ホシカワ : 病気移るかもって
Hoshikawa : *Byōki utsuru ka motte*

(Monster (2023), 01:17:11)

The interaction between Hoshikawa and Minato represents an interpersonal exchange that reflects feelings of embarrassment, stigma, and self-acceptance among adolescents. An analysis based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model (Hymes 1992) reveals that the conversation takes place in a calm yet emotionally tense setting between close friends, specifically in a music storage room at school. Hoshikawa expresses hesitation and embarrassment related to secretly bringing snacks to school, an act prohibited by school rules, while Minato responds with openness and acceptance. The communicative goal is for Hoshikawa to seek understanding and reassurance, while Minato affirms that he does not perceive the act as disgusting or problematic. The tone of the interaction is personal and slightly awkward, conveyed through informal spoken Japanese typical of adolescent peer interaction. Social norms concerning cleanliness, health, and stigma are implicitly negotiated, with Minato displaying empathy and rejecting negative judgments.

The utterance 内緒ね (*Naisho ne*, “Keep it a secret, okay”) is categorized as a direct literal prohibitive speech act. Pragmatically, prohibitive speech acts function to prevent the addressee from performing a particular action—in this case, disclosing information to others. Lexically, 内緒 means “secret,” while the sentence-final particle ね serves to seek shared understanding and agreement, thereby reinforcing the speaker's intention. The utterance is considered direct because its intended meaning is immediately clear without requiring additional interpretation, and literal because the lexical meaning corresponds directly to the illocutionary intent. Beyond its prohibitive function, the use of *naisho ne* also operates as a trust-building strategy, signaling Hoshikawa's expectation that Minato will respect the confidentiality of the information. This illustrates how explicit prohibitions in adolescent interaction can simultaneously function to regulate behavior and strengthen interpersonal solidarity.

8. Indirect Literal Directive Speech Acts of the Advisory Type



Figure 8. Minato and Hoshikawa meeting outside the school

Data 8:

ホシカワ : おはようございます
Hoshikawa : *Ohayōgozaimasu.*

ミナト : おはよう
Minato : *Ohayō*

ホシカワ : 昨日何時に寝た?
Hoshikawa : *Kinō nanji ni neta?*

ミナト : 1 2 時
Minato : *12-ji*

ホシカワ : 2時
Hoshikawa : *2-ji*

ミナト : 2時?
Minato : *2-ji?*

ホシカワ : うん
Hoshikawa : *Un*

ミナト : 何してたの?
Minato : *Nani shi teta no?*

ホシカワ : ムギノくん寝るのをもったいないって思うことない? ないか
Hoshikawa : *Mugino kun neru no o mottainai tte omou koto nai? nai ka*

他の男 : ドーン、なんで宇宙人と一緒に喋ってるんですか? ヌキだよ
ヌキ、びっくりした
Hoka no otoko : *Dōn, nande uchūbito to issho ni shabeteru ndesu ka? Nukida yo nuki, bikkuri shita*

ホリ先生 : おはようホシカワ、どうした?
Hori sensei : *Ohayō Hoshikawa, -dōshita?*

ホシカワ : 靴を脱げちゃって
 Hoshikawa : *Kutsu o nuge chatte*

(Monster (2023), 01:15:17)

The interaction takes place at school in the morning, with the scene initially informal and relaxed before shifting to a semi-formal tone upon the teacher's arrival. The participants are two students, Hoshikawa and Minato, and their teacher, Hori-sensei. The communicative goals evolve from sharing personal reflections about sleep and existential thoughts to responding to a situational concern (a shoe coming off) when the teacher appears. The act sequence progresses from greetings and casual questions about sleep habits to personal reflection, an absurd remark, and finally a functional response to the teacher. The key shifts from friendly and humorous to formal, while the instrumentalities involve informal Japanese among students and more polite forms when addressing the teacher. The norms reflect adolescent peer communication that permits casual and reflective talk, alongside a normative shift in the presence of authority. The genre thus moves from casual peer conversation to functional student–teacher interaction.

Within this context, the utterance ムギノくん寝るのをもったいないって思うことない? ないか (*Mugino-kun, don't you ever feel that sleeping is a waste? Or maybe not?*) is structurally a negative interrogative with a mitigative tag (ないか). Although framed as a question, its pragmatic function is not to elicit a literal answer but to express the speaker's stance and invite affective alignment. Rather than requesting information, the utterance encourages the addressee to share or affirm a similar viewpoint. Accordingly, following Searle's classification, the utterance is best analyzed as an indirect directive speech act, in which the speaker's intention is conveyed implicitly through interrogative form. This strategy allows the speaker to prompt agreement or reflection while maintaining social politeness and interpersonal sensitivity within adolescent school discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that directive speech acts produced by child characters in *Monster* (2023) are strategically shaped by emotional, relational, and situational contexts rather than being realized solely through explicit commands. Analysis of 20 directive utterances reveals diverse realizations direct and indirect, literal and non-literal across the types of *requirement*, *requestive*, *question*, and *advisory*. The findings show that indirect literal directive speech acts of the requestive type occur most frequently, particularly in emotionally charged interactions involving Minato, his mother, and Hoshikawa. In contexts such as bullying, emotional distress, and interpersonal support, directives are predominantly conveyed through interrogatives or declaratives, allowing speakers to prompt responses while minimizing imposition.

By incorporating Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, this study highlights the crucial role of context in mediating the relationship between linguistic form and pragmatic function, especially within family and peer interactions. The findings contribute to pragmatic research by demonstrating children's agency in employing indirectness and mitigation to navigate sensitive social situations. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its focus on a single film and on directive speech acts alone. Future research may expand the data scope and explore other speech act categories to enrich understanding of child pragmatic behavior in Japanese discourse.

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