

Research Paper



## Pedagogical language use among lecturers in university of uyo

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### Article Info

#### Article History:

Received: 30 January 2025

Revised: 17 April 2025

Accepted: 25 April 2025

Published: 10 June 2025

#### Keywords:

Ethnography

Speech Act

Communication

Language Use

Socio-Linguistics



### ABSTRACT

With an emphasis on how language works in academic contexts to accomplish learning objectives, this study examines the pedagogical language use of lecturers at the University of Uyo. The study, which is based on Speech Act Theory, looks at the different speech acts that instructors use to engage students, manage classrooms, and impart knowledge. In addition to semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and secondary sources, a survey method was used to gather data. Fifteen instructors from the university's three main campuses: Annex Campus, Main Camp and Permanent Site, were selected as a purposive sample. A wide variety of directive, assertive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts are revealed by the descriptive analysis, illustrating the complex use of language in educational settings. The results show how language may be used strategically to promote good communication, hold students' interest, and improve the learning process. The study highlights the value of pragmatic approaches in examining classroom speech and advances our understanding of the linguistic dynamics in higher education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

One essential instrument for teaching and learning is language. In educational settings, it facilitates engagement, motivation, clarification, and feedback in addition to acting as a medium for knowledge transfer. Lecturers use language extensively in the classroom to regulate student behaviour, ask questions, provide instructions, explain concepts, and gauge understanding. Thus, language use and instructional

effectiveness are intimately related. This emphasises how crucial it is to research pedagogical language, or the particular linguistic patterns and techniques used by teachers to promote learning.

Lecturers at universities like the University of Uyo are vital in influencing the intellectual growth and academic experiences of their pupils. Their use of language is not random; rather, it is frequently modified to fit the topic, the audience, and the desired learning objectives. Word choice, tone, communication structure, and speech act types can all have a big impact on how students interact with the material, view their teachers, and absorb information. Enhancing instructional strategies and encouraging successful communication in academic settings require an understanding of the dynamics of this language use.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the types and purposes of language that instructors use when instructing students on the university's three campuses (Annex Campus, Main Camp and Permanent Site). The study's theoretical foundation is Speech Act Theory, which provides a practical lens for analysing language in terms of the functions it fulfils. We'll look at speech acts like directions, declaratives, expressives, assertives, and commissives to see how they work in educational discourse.

The study intends to discover similar communicative methods, highlight potential gaps in language use, and offer suggestions for how language might be used more successfully in academic instruction by examining the language patterns displayed by these lecturers. A more linguistically aware and pedagogically successful academic environment is promoted by the research, which adds to the expanding body of literature on language in education with a particular focus on Nigerian tertiary institutions. It also offers useful implications for curriculum designers, language instructors, and lecturers themselves.

## 2. RELATED WORK

### Perspectives on Pedagogical Language Use

The deliberate use of language by teachers to accomplish learning objectives such information transfer, critical thinking stimulation, classroom management, and student involvement is known as pedagogical language usage. Pragmatic theories of language, especially Speech Act Theory, which offers a fundamental framework for comprehending how lecturers carry out different communicative tasks in academic settings, are the cornerstone of the analysis of educational language.

The tenets of the Speech Act Theory, as detailed by [1], [2], states that language is utilised to carry out acts in addition to transmitting information. The five main categories of speech acts identified by this theory are declaratives (statements that alter reality, like pronouncements), directives (commands or requests), expressives (emotional expressions), directives (promises or commitments), and assertives (statements of fact). All five categories are frequently used by lecturers in classroom settings to guide, challenge, support, correct, and evaluate pupils. An example of a directive with pedagogical meaning would be a lecturer saying, "I expect you all to submit your assignments by Monday."

The Cooperative Principle of [3] and its related conversational maxims (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) also shed light on how lecturers mould their discourse to guarantee instruction that is clear and pertinent. In order to accommodate students' different comprehension levels, effective educational language use frequently entails striking a balance between informativeness and simplicity.

Another level of understanding is provided by [4] model of classroom discourse, namely the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) structure. This model shows how instructors introduce subjects, get answers from the class, and then give comments, organising the interaction to encourage involvement and strengthen learning. The theory of mediated learning as opined by [5] emphasises the contribution of language as a cultural instrument for knowledge construction from a sociocultural standpoint. Thus, in addition to imparting knowledge, lecturers also serve as linguistic mediators, facilitating student learning through dialogic engagement. Pedagogical language use, as opined by [6] has multifaceted theoretical foundations that draw from sociocultural theory, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. Together, these viewpoints demonstrate how language is a dynamic tool for action, engagement, and meaning-making in the classroom rather than just a means of conveying information.

### Language in Higher Education Classrooms

In the dynamics of teaching and learning in higher education, language is crucial [7]. It serves as a tool for producing knowledge, structuring ideas, and encouraging communication between instructors and students in addition to being a medium of instruction. The ability of lecturers to use language effectively in context, or pragmatic competence, is a major factor in how well students communicate in university classrooms [8], [9].

Language is used to motivate students, coordinate class activities, provide feedback, explain concepts, and gauge understanding in university classrooms [10]. Language is essential to cognitive development, according to [5] sociocultural theory; in this perspective, a lecturer's speech serves as a scaffold for students' learning rather than merely a means of disseminating information. This viewpoint is supported by [11], [12], which emphasises that in order for students to fully engage in the academic community, they must understand discipline-specific speech patterns that are part of academic language.

According to studies conducted in Nigeria, the primary language of instruction—English—can occasionally present difficulties, particularly in multilingual contexts. [13], [7] observe that many Nigerian students, who are frequently second-language English speakers, scuffle with the technical and formal components of academic speech. In such situations, instructors frequently use code-switching, local idioms, or simplified English to promote intelligibility and student involvement [14].

Furthermore, lecturers' interactional styles—whether dialogic or monologic—influence the learning process. [4] as well as [15] established the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern, a frequent framework in classroom discourse that promotes instructor authority while allowing for student participation. However, [16] as well as [17] advocates for a more interactive and student-centered use of language, which stimulates critical thinking and knowledge co-construction.

### Contextual Studies on Language and Education in Nigeria

Language use in Nigerian educational environments is inextricably linked to the country's sociolinguistic environment, which is marked by high levels of multilingualism and cultural diversity. Nigerian colleges typically use English as the medium of instruction, but many students and professors also speak Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and other indigenous languages, in addition to Pidgin English. This linguistic diversity generates a distinct ecosystem in which language choice serves as a tool for navigating both academic and social circumstances.

According to [18], [14], the necessity to close the gap between formal education, which requires the use of English, and the unofficial realities of students' daily linguistic experiences shapes the complicated language dynamics in Nigerian classrooms. Many students in Nigerian universities, for example, feel more at ease speaking their native tongues, which hinders their ability to fully understand and participate in English-taught courses. Because of this, instructors frequently use techniques like code-switching and code-mixing to help students understand, which makes educational communication more inclusive [19]. Instructors at Nigerian colleges overcome these linguistic challenges by using flexible language practices [20]. Their use of Pidgin English, which acts as a linguistic link between the more comfortable forms of student communication and the official academic discourse, or code-switching between English and local languages are examples of this. In addition to aiding in the communication of difficult concepts, this adaptive method guarantees that all students, irrespective of their language proficiency, may actively engage in the educational process.

In Nigerian education, sociocultural variables impact language use. Lecturers' linguistic usage frequently reflects sociocultural values, such as deference to authority and hierarchy, in addition to academic performance [21]. Cultural variations in the language of instruction in many Nigerian classrooms affect how students interact with the material and how they react to their teachers. Language is frequently used as a tool for respect and authority; instructors employ formal, authoritative language to maintain control over the class's flow and command attention.

Additionally, research such as that conducted by [22] demonstrates that language is not only a means of conveying knowledge but also a social tool; language choices can indicate inclusion or exclusion, and in certain instances, lecturers' proficiency in multiple languages can elevate their social standing within

the academic community. As a result, the fluidity of language in the Nigerian educational system reflects the nation's larger social, political, and cultural realities. The significance of comprehending language as a dynamic factor that influences teaching and learning is emphasised by contextual research on language and education in Nigeria. Beyond simple communication, language use in Nigerian classrooms reflects the nation's diverse linguistic environment and plays a significant role in determining students' academic experiences.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-methods design. Surveys were used to gather data, while secondary sources, interviews, and non-participant observation were also used. Fifteen instructors were chosen using a purposive sampling technique from the University of Uyo's three main campuses: Annex Campus, Main Camp and Permanent Site. These informants were picked because they were eager to participate and have teaching expertise. In order to learn more about the language usage of lecturers in the classroom, the survey instrument had both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Along with the survey, a few lecturers were chosen to participate in semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of their language use in teaching settings. In order to document how language was used during lectures, discussions, and student-teacher interactions, the researcher used non-participant observation to watch interactions in the classroom firsthand. Course syllabi and institutional standards were among the secondary data that were examined in order to comprehend the institutional context of language use in the classroom.

Speech Act Theory served as the theoretical foundation for the descriptive analysis of the gathered data. The classification of lecturers' speech acts—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives—was made easier by this method, which made it possible to have a thorough grasp of how language is employed to accomplish learning objectives, control classroom dynamics, and engage students. This methodology provides a thorough assessment of the educational language use at the University of Uyo.

#### Theory

For this study, Speech Act Theory as opined by [1], [2] was selected as the anchor. According to the view, language serves as a tool for both executing activities and transmitting information. Five categories of utterances are distinguished: declaratives (statements that alter the world, such as declarations), directives (requests or instructions), expressives (expressing feelings or attitudes), commissives (assurances or offers), and assertives (statements of facts). A framework for comprehending how lecturers employ language to carry out different tasks in the classroom is offered by Speech Act Theory. Lecturers frequently use directives to guide student behaviour (such as instructing or inquiring), expressives to build rapport or demonstrate empathy, commissives to commit to future activities (e.g., pledges to offer feedback), and assertives to impart information.

One can learn more about how language affects classroom dynamics, promotes learning, and maintains power in the classroom by looking at the speech acts lecturers employ. For example, a forceful speech act can demonstrate the lecturer's knowledge, while a directive speech act in the form of a question can encourage student involvement. By examining these speech acts under the prism of Speech Act Theory, one can gain a better understanding of the interactional patterns in University of Uyo academic settings and uncover the instructional purposes underlying language choices.

#### Data Presentation

**Table 1.** Data on Language Use among Lecturers in University of Uyo (*Town Campus and Annex*)

Sr. No.	Utterance	Speech Act Type	Illocutionary Force
1	"Let's begin today's lecture with a quick recap."	Directive	Opening/engagement
2	"As you all know, language is a social tool."	Assertive	Content assertion

3	"This concept might seem tricky at first."	Expressive	Acknowledging difficulty
4	"I expect your assignments by Friday."	Directive, Commissive	Instruction + expectation
5	"Remember to cite your sources correctly."	Directive	Reminder/instruction
6	"Next week, we'll cover stylistics."	Commissive	Future plan
7	"That's an excellent question."	Expressive	Encouragement
8	"This theory was proposed by J.L. Austin."	Assertive	Factual statement
9	"Can anyone explain what a locutionary act is?"	Directive	Questioning/engagement
10	"You're not paying attention!"	Expressive	Reproach/disappointment
11	"By the end of the lecture, you will be able to..."	Commissive	Learning goal statement
12	"Let me give you an example."	Commissive	Demonstrative action
13	"I want you to work in pairs for this task."	Directive	Instruction
14	"The assignment carries 20 marks."	Assertive	Assessment structure
15	"You must attend 75% of lectures."	Directive	Policy reminder
16	"Yes, that's correct."	Assertive	Confirmation
17	"Make sure you revise this before the test."	Directive	Encouragement
18	"I appreciate your contributions today."	Expressive	Gratitude
19	"Any questions before we move on?"	Directive	Seeking feedback
20	"Turn to page 103."	Directive	Instructional guidance
21	"This is a common exam question."	Assertive	Curriculum pointer
22	"I'll explain that again."	Commissive	Repetition promise
23	"You've made a valid point there."	Expressive	Positive feedback
24	"Unfortunately, many students fail this topic."	Assertive, Expressive	Warning and opinion
25	"This is how you write a research proposal."	Assertive	Instructional definition

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

**Table 2.** Data on Language Use among Lecturers in University of Uyo (*Permanent Site*)

Sr. No.	Utterance	Speech Act Type	Illocutionary Force
1	"You should check the course handbook."	Directive	Advising
2	"If you miss a test, you won't be re-assessed."	Assertive	Policy assertion
3	"We will conduct a quiz next Monday."	Commissive	Future commitment
4	"Don't forget to sign the attendance sheet."	Directive	Procedural reminder
5	"This class is very interactive today—well done."	Expressive	Praise
6	"I hope you all did your reading."	Directive, Expressive	Expectation and concern
7	"Lectures resume immediately after the mid-semester break."	Assertive	Schedule notification
8	"Don't plagiarize!"	Directive	Ethical instruction
9	"I'm happy with the progress so far."	Expressive	Satisfaction
10	"Please raise your hand before speaking."	Directive	Class control
11	"We derive this result from the earlier equation."	Assertive	Logical explanation



12	"Your exam starts at 9 a.m. sharp."	Assertive	Procedural statement
13	"Try to engage more during discussions."	Directive	Encouragement
14	"Let me summarize what we've covered so far."	Commissive	Reiteration
15	"Some of you didn't submit your assignment."	Assertive, Expressive	Report and disappointment
16	"Learning is a continuous process."	Assertive	Philosophical perspective
17	"Let us now look at the next case study."	Directive	Instruction
18	"Be honest in your academic work."	Directive	Moral appeal
19	"That's beyond the scope of this course."	Assertive	Boundary marking
20	"I will return your scripts next class."	Commissive	Future commitment
21	"Why do you think this theory applies here?"	Directive	Stimulate thinking
22	"Group A will present next week."	Commissive	Task assignment
23	"Well done, you understood the concept."	Expressive	Encouragement
24	"I'm disappointed with the level of participation today."	Expressive	Negative feedback
25	"This concludes today's lecture."	Declaration	Closure signal

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

## Figures



Figure 1. University of Uyo Main Gate © Uniuyo. Edu. Ng



Figure 2. University of Uyo Annex Campus © Prof. Charles Obot



Figure 3. Students in a Lecture Hall in the University of Uyo



Figure 4. University of Uyo © Prof. Charles Obot



Figure 5. Faculty of Communication Studies, University of Uyo © Prof. Charles Obot

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Assertives

As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, assertives are used to express views, ideas, policies, or facts. Examples: “Language is a social tool”, “Lectures resume after the break.”

Function: Establish credibility and impart knowledge.

Perlocutionary Effect: Educating and providing a knowledge-based foundation for the lecture.

### Directives

Directives, as evident in Table 1 and Table 2, are used to teach, mentor, or regulate the conduct of students.

Examples: "Turn to page 103", "Don't plagiarize."

Function: Promote learning and uphold academic standards.

Perlocutionary Effect: Participation, discipline, and compliance.

### Commissives

As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, commissives are used to make commitments or schedule future activities; frequently connected to tests, lessons, or answers.

Examples: "We will conduct a quiz", "I'll explain again."

Function: Establish commitment and set expectations.

Perlocutionary Effect: Engagement, expectation, and trust.

### Expressives

As evident in Table 1 and Table 2, expressives are used to convey empathy, gratitude, grievances, or sentiments.

Examples: "That's an excellent question", "I'm disappointed."

Function: Establish emotional connection, inspire, or control behaviour.

Perlocutionary Effect: Support, uplifting, and criticism.

### Declarations

Although it is uncommon in lectures, it is used to formally conclude or transition activities.

Examples: "This concludes today's lecture."

Function: Control the order of talk.

Perlocutionary Effect: Indicates a change in status or closure.

As deduced from the data in Table 1 and Table 2, a variety of well-planned speech acts are used in classroom interactions by lecturers at the University of Uyo, according to a review of their pedagogical language use. Based on Speech Act Theory, the study discovered that the most commonly utilised speech acts were assertives, and lecturers regularly offered factual information, clarifications, and elaborations to aid students' learning. The closeness of the lecture halls as shown in Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5 would demand the lecturer has some leadership prowess and a good command of classroom management in order to get the attention of the students. Figure 1 shows the entrance of the school depicting the serene environment for learning. The lecturer's authority was established and the required material for academic development was supplied by these assertive actions.

Directives, as shown from the data in Table 1 and Table 2, also played a crucial role, with lecturers employing requests, directions, and questions to guide student engagement and maintain classroom order. These instructions were crucial for encouraging participation and making sure that pupils followed the curriculum. Additionally, the survey found that lecturers were using expressives to foster a supportive learning atmosphere and establish relationship with their students by demonstrating empathy and rewarding good behaviour.

To highlight the instructors' dedication to the academic success of their students, commissives like pledges to offer feedback or extra resources were occasionally employed. Although they were less common, declaratives were used by lecturers to announce things or to formally mark changes in the lesson.

The results demonstrate how instructors deliberately use various speech acts to control classroom dynamics, inspire students, and promote learning. This illustrates the complex character of instructional language, where each speaking act fulfils distinct educational purposes and enhances the University of Uyo's dynamic and productive learning environment.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Through the prism of Speech Act Theory, this study has investigated the educational language use of University of Uyo lecturers. The results show that lecturers deliberately use a variety of speech acts,



especially directives, expressives, commissives, and assertives, to control classroom interactions, promote student involvement, and impart knowledge. Contextual elements like audience, discipline, and communicating goal affect these language choices. The study emphasises the significance of conscious language use in accomplishing educational objectives and the critical role that pragmatic competence plays in effective instruction. The study offers a greater comprehension of how language serves as a tool for instruction and classroom management by utilising Speech Act Theory. In order to improve teaching efficacy and foster meaningful learning experiences in higher education, it concludes by recommending that lecturers be more conscious of the language they use.

### Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable support and guidance received from Professor John Udoidem and Professor Ikechukwu Acha throughout the course of this research. Sincere appreciation is also extended to Dr. NseAbasi Etukafia, Dr. Ubong Andem, Mr. Nnamso Dan, and Mr. Kufre Etuk for their constructive feedback, encouragement, and moral support during the development and completion of this article.

### Funding Information

This research was entirely self-sponsored by the author. No external funding or institutional grant was received for the execution or publication of this study.

### Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Kingsley James Effiong	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Informed Consent

Not applicable. This study did not involve any human subjects, personal data, or interviews requiring informed consent.

### Ethical Approval

Not applicable. The research did not involve any procedures or participants requiring ethical review and approval by an institutional board.

### Data Availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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**How to Cite:** Kingsley James Effiong. (2025). Pedagogical language use among lecturers in university of uyo. *Journal of Language and Linguistics in Society (JLLS)*, 5(1), 26-35. <https://doi.org/10.55529/jlls.51.26.35>

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