Article

Rapport in Practicum Supervisors' Directive Strategies in WhatsApp Group Chats

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ABSTRACT

Text messaging applications manage and support the lack of face-to-face interaction. Considering the lack of studies on rapport management in online group communication, interlocutors in an asymmetrical power relationship may often be uncertain about the strategies and forms of language use to manage rapport. This study addresses WhatsApp communication between Malaysian practicum supervisors and their TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) trainee teachers and presents an analysis of a total of 479 WhatsApp text messages containing directive speech acts sent by nineteen practicum supervisors to their trainee teachers in their group chats. It examines strategies and lexical downgraders in the practicum supervisors' orders and requests. The findings show that they use direct strategies with a significant number of lexical downgraders to manage rapport. The lexical downgraders in most of the orders could signify an effort to maintain rapport in the group chats. The illocutionary domain of Spencer-Oatey's (2008; 2015) rapport management model is used to highlight the appropriate handling of orders and requests to maintain harmonious relations in the WhatsApp group chats.

KEYWORDS: WhatsApp, rapport management, orders, requests, practicum supervisors

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed the development of non-face-to-face communication technology, from basic voice calls on wired telephones to text messaging, voice and video calls on smartphones using a wireless Internet connection (Tocci, 2024). Most non-face-to-face

communications have now moved away from chargeable voice calls and short message service (SMS) due to the advance of Internet-enabled smart device applications on computer-mediated platforms. Smartphone features and modes of communication have expanded (Herring, 2004). The latter include email applications (e.g., *Gmail*, *Outlook*, *Yahoo! Mail*), social media messaging applications (e.g., *Facebook Messenger*, *Instagram Direct Messenger*), and social messaging applications (e.g., *WhatsApp*, *Telegram*, *WeChat*). WhatsApp is one of the most popular forms of instant communication chosen by individuals and groups in Malaysia (Siddharta, 2023). Specific groups of individuals such as university course mates, parents of pupils at schools, colleagues, family members, and friends have adopted WhatsApp to facilitate communication.

WhatsApp interactions, like many other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC), use a QWERTY keyboard to type text messages that appear on the recipient's device. The inclusion of non-verbal objects such as emojis, emoticons, GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format), and stickers, which are a recent extension of WhatsApp (Kang, Park, Shin, Choi, & Kim, 2022), facilitates users' personal and emotional meanings. Moreover, since WhatsApp communication is socially oriented, the style of text messages sent by users is usually 'oralized written text' (Yus, 2011). Text messages closely resemble utterances in a spoken language. However, physically, they are type-written to mirror sentences. Even though emojis and stickers are available to complement text messages and improve pragmatic meanings, textual messaging is the preferred and most significant means used by interlocutors on WhatsApp (Crystal, 2006).

As Locher (2010) puts it, online interaction is as genuine as offline communication. Online communication may appear to be as regular and spontaneous as offline interaction; however, the text messaging applications enable interlocutors to plan, organize, and check their text messages before sending them. Checking text messages prior to sending them allows interlocutors to revise them not only for grammar, but also for politeness and pragmatic clarity. Since there are no WhatsApp text messaging writing manuals, users may not be certain which language forms and functions are appropriate, particularly in an academic or professional setting. The present study focuses on WhatsApp communication among the participants of 19 WhatsApp groups, each of which consists of one practicum supervisor and at least two trainee teachers. The study aims to analyse strategies and lexical downgraders used in the WhatsApp requests employed by the practicum supervisors.

This paper is structured as follows. The first section presents a review of previous research conducted on WhatsApp, requests and rapport management. In the next section, the study's methodology, design and data collection are described. The analysis of the results is presented in two parts: first, the WhatsApp request strategies, then, the lexical downgraders in the WhatsApp conversations. Finally, the results are discussed in view of existing literature, followed by the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and the conclusions of the study.

Literature Review

Text Messaging Application: WhatsApp

The literature on CMC has examined various aspects of language use in digital and social settings, in relation or task-oriented interactions, as well as in symmetrical and asymmetrical-relationships. Research on CMC, particularly through WhatsApp, has highlighted its role in

facilitating interpersonal interaction (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018; Seufert et al., 2016; Harrison & Gilmore, 2012), supporting emergency rescue and relief efforts (Bhuvana & Arul Aram, 2019), and providing personal social support (Aharony & Gazit, 2016). Studies on interpersonal interaction have also looked at interlocutors in an asymmetrical relationship such as teachers and students (Eshghinejad & Moini, 2016; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018; Shanmuganathan, 2021; Farida & Yuliana, 2018; Yuliawati, Hazma, & Bakhti, 2019). While some studies have focused on the interpersonal and social aspects related to WhatsApp, little research has been conducted explicitly on the pragmatic features of WhatsApp text messages.

Investigations have been conducted into WhatsApp in different settings, namely in a personal setting (e.g., between family members, friends, former classmates) or in an institutional setting (e.g., between university/college classmates, parents/guardians of children in the same class/school, co-workers). The participants on these WhatsApp chats know each other (Seufert, Schwind, Hoßfeld, & Tran-Gia, 2015) and their communication may not be governed by anyone in power (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; 2015) nor bound by formality. Research has concentrated on the WhatsApp interaction of participants in symmetrical relationships (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018). Not much attention has been given to the pragmatic features of WhatsApp text messages between participants in asymmetrical relationships.

Yus describes the feature of text messaging as "text deformation" (2011) that triggers "moral panic" (Sánchez-Moya & Cruz-Moya, 2015). Text messages are "deformed" due to creative features such as non-standard and unconventional spellings and punctuation, which can affect the interlocutors' ability to use a standard variety of language. Text messaging language can be characterised as employing abbreviations (e.g., *bro*), stylised punctuation and spelling (e.g., *veeery*), non-conventional spelling (e.g., *fone*), letter/number homophones (e.g., gr8) and emoticons (😊). However, Sánchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya's (2015) study suggests that such features used by teenagers (between 13 and 18 years old) and adults (between 28 and 33 years old) cannot be systematically associated with their literacy and communicative practices. Furthermore, the study's corpus of thirty WhatsApp conversations and online questionnaire answers indicate that the use of non-standard and unconventional features in text messaging is intentional and influenced by the users' relationship and the setting. However, the study does not provide any pragmatic analysis of WhatsApp conversations.

Politeness and Rapport Management

Brown and Levinson (1987) is a seminal work on politeness and still an important influence. Grounded on Goffman's perception of "face", i.e., a person's public self-image, their model establishes strategies for the mitigation of face-threatening acts (FTAs). They suggest that during interactions, interlocutors address two kinds of face needs: positive face, i.e., the wish to be accepted, and negative face, i.e., the wish to be respected and to be free of imposition. Brown and Levinson further claim that their concept of "face" is universal (1987). Although still prominent in politeness research worldwide, Brown and Levinson's model has been criticised for excessive pessimism (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1997), its focus on the individual rather than on the interactants' relationship or society (Arundale, 2006; Mills, 2003), methodological issues (Mills, 2003; Eelen, 2001), its claim of universality (Watts, 2003; Eelen, 2001), and cultural insensitivity (Wierzbicka, 1991; Gu, 1990; Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988).

Spencer-Oatey's (2008; 2015) rapport management model has a more diverse and enhanced perspective on politeness compared to Brown and Levinson (1987). The rapport management

model goes beyond politeness to include the broader management of interpersonal relations and social harmony. Additionally, unlike Brown and Levinson's western oriented approach, Spencer-Oatey acknowledges different cultures and their values in rapport management. The rapport management model can be applied to not only interpersonal communication in various settings, but also organizational communications. Introduced two decades ago, Spencer-Oatey's (2008; 2015) model has gained the attention of researchers and scholars in politeness. The model focuses on three rapport bases, which may be maintained or compromised depending on the handling of rapport management domains. Rapport orientation choices are influenced by the interlocutors' relationship, contextual variables, and cultural differences. Hence, the protection of or threat to face, social rights and obligations, and interactional goals depend on the appropriate handling of rapport management domains, in particular, the illocutionary domain.

Directive Speech Acts

The illocutionary point of directives is to attempt to get the hearer to do something. Requests and orders (also known as commands) are both directives but have different illocutionary forces. A request is an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something for the speaker (Searle, 1979) while Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018) state that a "request is a directive speech act and a pre-event which initiates the negotiation of face during a conversational interaction". In this paper, a request is seen as directive that does not demand that the hearer obliges or commits, and an order as one that does, particularly when the speaker has a higher status derived from a position in an institution (Searle, 1979).

Requests have been comprehensively researched in the literature due to their regular use and threats to face (Brown & Levinson, 1987) as well as their rapport-threatening features (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; 2015). A request can be composed of a head act, alerts, and external and internal modifications. However, alerts and modifications may not be essential for realizing a request (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018).

Requests can be divided into three groups according to level of directness: direct (imperatives), conventionally indirect (forms which mitigate the degree of imposition), and non-conventionally indirect (hints to indicate intentions) (Blum-Kulka, 1989). Following previous classfications of request strategy types, Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018) classify requests into nine strategy types divided between the three levels of directness: direct request strategies include imperatives, performatives, obligations, wishes, needs; conventionally indirect request strategies comprise ability, willingness, suggestory formulae; and the unconventionally indirect request strategy is hints (refer to Table 1). Their coding scheme of requests is based on Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), Trosborg (1995), and Yu (1999). Hence, these nine strategy types fit into Blum-Kulka's (1989) three directness levels. The choice of request strategy can be impacted by the power balance between interlocutors, the cost of the request, and the hearer's effort to comply with it (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018).

The illocutionary force of a request can be modified by not only the interlocutors' choice of levels and strategies, but also modification items (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018). Syntactic downgraders consist of interrogatives, conditional clauses, and modals, whilst lexical downgraders include politeness markers, understaters, and cajolers. Requests have been analysed in several cross-cultural studies of various languages. These studies have investigated

the realisation of requests in various languages based on the variables of context and socio-culture. The participants in Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez's (2018) study are parents, who use a WhatsApp group chat for daily classroom concerns. Since they do not know each other well and have symmetrical power, their preferred style of interaction is rather modest and formal. However, the balance of power between the participants in this study is asymetrical. A request made by a practicum supervisor, who has higher authority, can be perceived as a directive that a student, who has less authority, is expected to obey.

As yet, there are not many studies on requests and orders performed by Malaysian TESL practicum supervisors using WhatsApp. Some studies investigate requests performed by teachers in the classroom (Thuruvan & Md Yunus, 2017) while more studies focus on students' realisations of request strategies both in the classroom and online (Gan & Manivannan, 2023; Razali & Abdullah, 2021; AlAfnan & dela Cruz-Rudio, 2023; Tan & Farashaiyan, 2012). Relatively little research has been carried out on teachers' requests, and even less on their orders/commands in the classroom. This study aims to fill the gap and to encourage more research on the use of directives in WhatsApp, especially those of interlocutors with higher authority in an asymmetrical power relationship.

Practicum Supervisors

Teacher-student communication is a variety of 'institutional talk' (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005), and 'educational discourse' (Wright, 2005). It comprises but is not limited to the teaching-and-learning process in education institutions (i.e., school, college, and university), where teachers are responsible for their professional obligations towards students (Wright, 2005). The professional obligations involving the use of language include giving instructions to students in the classroom with an authoritative tone (Scrivener, 2011). Hence, when students are given instructions by their teacher, they respond physically (Asher, 1968) and/or verbally depending on the context. Scrivener comments that instructions should be given using simple and unambiguous language in the classroom. However, it is worth noting that the classroom instructions discussed are mostly in the imperative mood followed by the interrogative (2011).

Practicum supervisors are academic lecturers in teacher education's institutions appointed to supervise and guide trainee teachers in the execution of their practicum tasks. Practicum is a sub-component of professional practice for trainee teachers, enabling them to apply their teaching and learning skills in real classroom settings in schools, thus linking theory to practice (Nair & Ghanaguru, 2017). Practicum supervisors are assigned a list of tasks to be carried out collaboratively with their trainee teachers. The list covers a meeting with the assigned trainee teachers, a social visit to the school, clinical supervisions, lesson observations, post-lesson consultations, joint evaluation with the trainee teachers' cooperating teachers (who are appointed by the school administrators to mentor trainee teachers in school), and submission of documents to the practicum unit.

Frequent communication is vital to arrange clinical supervisions, lesson observations, and post-lesson consultations. However, communication is often obstructed by schedule differences and the distance between campus and school. The schedule differences might be due to the teaching timetables given to the trainee teachers by their schools and their practicum supervisors' academic responsibilities on campus. Thus, face-to-face communication has to be supplemented with non-face-to-face modes of communication, such as WhatsApp, which is

one of the preferred modes due to its ability to support effective communication and ubiquitous learning (Annamalai, 2018).

The social messaging application, WhatsApp, offers group chats to connect family members and workplace colleagues (WhatsApp Inc, 2020). This messaging application is also used by interlocutors in asymmetrical power relations in an academic setting. Practicum supervisors have authority over and are more knowledgeable than their trainee teachers. As there are explicitly defined social roles, the language use in their group chats may be different from that in other social groups, such as those of friends, family, and co-workers. Practicum supervisors use the messaging platform to manage most of their practicum matters, which include requests for lesson observation arrangements and information on school events.

The language of social text messaging is filled with colloquial and unconventional features which may not be appropriate for an academic setting. Hence, considering Brown and Levinson's (1987) limitations, the present study has adopted Spencer-Oatey's (2008; 2015) rapport management model. The paper examines directive strategies performed by Malaysian TESL practicum supervisors in WhatsApp group chats. The study also explores the use of internal modifications in their directive text messages. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the strategies employed by Malaysian TESL practicum supervisors to initiate directives to their trainee teachers in WhatsApp group chats?
2. What internal modifications are employed by practicum supervisors in their directive text messages to manage rapport with their trainee teachers?

Method

This section discusses the methodology employed in this research, describing the research participants, the data collection and data analysis procedures.

Data and Research Participants

The data in this study comprise 2,744 text messages in English sent by 19 practicum supervisors to their trainee teachers and were retrieved from 19 group chats between July and November 2018. The participants were Malaysian second language speakers of English and were TESL academic lecturers at two different institutes of teacher education located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. There were 2 male and 17 female participants, whose ages ranged from 40 to 59. Messages from their chats are used because the messages are related strictly to practicum matters. The participants formed a teacher-student community in WhatsApp group chats whose main purpose was supervision of trainee teachers during practicum. The practicum supervisors were asked to provide their written consent to be part of the study. All personal information and proper nouns are coded in order to maintain participant anonymity.

Instrument

WhatsApp chats offer an opportunity to study natural communication, placing this study not only in the area of CMC analysis (Herring, 2004), but also in the study of daily communication (Stenström, 1994). Furthermore, they permit the study of speech acts and events, drawing on

natural data (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018). The corpus comprises 479 directives, the most common speech act in the WhatsApp conversations examined in this study.

The data collection procedure involved requesting the practicum supervisors' trainee teachers to export their WhatsApp group chat history files to the principal researcher's email address (WhatsApp Inc, 2020). The files, which were received in .txt (text document) format, were converted to .docx (Microsoft Word document) format, and saved as .rtf (rich text format) as recommended by ATLAS.ti 22 to facilitate the document uploading for data analysis (Friese, 2021). Only practicum supervisors' request text messages are analysed in this study, using procedures from pragmatics (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018) and online communication (Herring, 2004).

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is the text messages initiated by practicum supervisors in their respective WhatsApp group chats with their trainee teachers. To determine how they maintain rapport with their trainee teachers, the illocutionary domain (Spencer-Oatey, (2008; 2015) of their directive messages is examined. Specifically, two important types of features are analysed across these text messages: the degree of directness and indirectness, and the type of downgraders. Their requests are, then, analysed using codes from Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018), which is based on Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) seminal CCSARP framework and Trosborg's (1995) strategy labels (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Request strategies

Request strategy	Sub-strategy	Examples
Direct	Imperatives	*Clean up* the kitchen
	Performatives	I *ask/require* you to move your car
	Obligations	You *must/have* to move your car
	Wishes	I *want* to borrow your notes
	Needs	I *need* to borrow your notes
Conventionally indirect	Ability	*Could* you lend me your notes?
	Willingness	*Would you mind* lending me the money?
	Suggestory formulae	*How about* $40?
Non-conventionally indirect	Hints	(Intent: getting a lift home) Will you be going home now?

The study also investigates lexical downgraders within the directive text messages. The lexical downgraders are determined by referring to the types Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) listed in their seminal CCSARP framework, for example, the politeness marker 'please'.

Results

This study focuses on the practicum supervisors' directives. This section presents the pragmalinguistic strategies observed in the interactions across 2,744 chats. The data is examined for levels of directness, directive strategies and lexical downgraders.

Pragmalinguistic Characteristics of WhatsApp Directives

Overall, the 19 practicum supervisors produced a total of 479 directives using different strategies across 2,744 exchanges to their trainee teachers in 19 WhatsApp group chats on practicum matters. The directive speech acts are distributed across all three levels of directness: direct, conventional indirect, and non-conventional indirect (refer to Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the request strategies

Level of directness	Direct	Conventionally indirect	Non-conventional indirect	Total
Total	298 (62%)	98 (21%)	83 (17%)	479 (100%)

Table 2 indicates that, of the 479 requests, 62% (n = 298) are direct requests, 21% (n = 98) are conventional indirect requests, and 17% (n = 83) are non-conventional indirect requests. The direct strategy is used most frequently by the practicum supervisors when making a request to their trainee teachers, followed by the conventionally indirect, and the non-conventional indirect.

The preference for the direct strategy could be a result of the asymmetrical power balance between the practicum supervisors and their trainee teachers. Examples of direct strategies are illustrated below (the use of text messaging language features has not been corrected by the researchers).

(1)   M here at the canteen. *Come.*
(2)   *Need to see* some lesson plans.
(3)   <Attachment> *Wld like* to know who left this form in my pigeon hole.
(4)   One of you *will have to* negotiate to change your class earlier.

In this study, the majority of the direct requests are in the form of 'imperatives' (n = 277) as shown in (Example 1), followed by 'needs' (n = 15, Example 2), 'wishes' (n = 5, Example 3), and lastly, obligation (n = 1, Example 4).

In Example (1), the imperative verb *Come* is a performative verb used to express the illocutionary force of a request. Since the trainee teacher cannot reject a directive from the supervisor, who is a higher authority, it is an order. The use of the 'need' request sub-strategy signals the practicum supervisor's demand in Example (2). Such a direct request has a high cost and a definite expectation of more effort from the trainee teacher. Example (3) might be seen as a low-cost request as the practicum supervisor asks for simple information, which needs less effort compared to the direct requests in (1) and (2). However, the direct request expressed through the sub-strategy 'obligation' in Example (4) can be seen as a high-cost request requiring great effort from the trainee teachers.

Conventional indirect forms are used in 21% of the practicum supervisors' WhatsApp request messages. These interrogative forms cover ability (n = 75), followed by possibility (n = 15), asking for acceptance (n = 7), and willingness (n = 1). Some examples are given below:

(5)   *Can* one of you resend the group timetable?
(6)   Is is *possible* to give me the time table 2morow?
(7)   T, i plan to come for your 11.50am class later. *Is that ok*?

(8)   T, *will you* be able to wait for me so that I will know how to get to your class tomorrow?

In Example (5), the practicum supervisor uses the modal verb *can* to ask about the hearer's ability to do something and also to ask the hearer to do something again. Example (6) is similar. Here, the practicum supervisor asks about the possibility of the trainee teachers doing something and also asks them to comply with the request. Since both requests can be deemed as high-cost requests requiring effort from the hearers, the practicum supervisors use conventionally indirect realisations. To mitigate a direct request, a question seeking agreement, "Is that ok?", can be employed, as in Example (7). The conventionally indirect request is realised through the 'willingness' sub-strategy in Example 8. The high cost and the trainee teacher's effort are acknowledged by the practicum supervisor.

Finally, the least common strategy is the non-conventionally indirect sub-strategy, hinting, (17%), as illustrated below:

(9)   I'm at the staffroom.

In Example (9), the practicum supervisor uses a hint to indirectly request the trainee teachers to meet her at the stated location. The strategy could be an attempt to reduce the imposition as the request could have a high cost and require much effort on the trainee teachers' part. The trainee teachers might have to either stop doing something or change their plans to accommodate their practicum supervisor's indirect request. Since as Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018) observe, it is vital to foster clarity and prevent ambiguity to achieve successful communication, this strategy is the least used in the data.

Lexical Downgraders

Lexical downgraders (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018) are used to modify requests to mitigate their illocutionary force. Their function in the practicum supervisors' request messages is to reduce the imposition that could be felt by the trainee teachers. There are 219 lexical downgraders in the practicum supervisors' direct requests or orders (refer to Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency of the use of lexical downgraders

Lexical downgrader	The politeness marker "please"	The particle "ya"	The exclamation "okay"	The adverb "just"	Total
Total	189 (86%)	21 (10%)	6 (3%)	3 (1%)	219 (100%)

Lexical downgraders occur only in the practicum supervisors' order text messages (n=277), the most frequent being the politeness marker "please" (86%), followed by the particle "ya" (10%), the exclamation "okay" (3%), and the adverb "just" (1%). Of the 277 orders, 195 are downgraded or softened through the use of one lexical downgrader and 24 through two. Examples of the practicum supervisors' order text messages with lexical downgraders are given below:

(10)   …*pls* hand in yr revised ttable by dis afternoon.

(11)   Set a date and time to meet up *ya*, everyone.
(12)   Keep ur days available for me *k*.
(13)   *Just* confirm your class timing below Please.

The practicum supervisor's order in Example (10) has a politeness marker "pls" to soften its imperative (Carter & McCarthy, 2006) and to alleviate its imposition on the trainee teachers. However, the use of "please" could also be interpreted as adding force to the order and indicating urgency. The Malaysian English particle "ya" (Tay, Chan, Yap, & Wong, 2016) in Example (11) is also used by the practicum supervisors to soften their orders. The inclusion of this particle not only mitigates the directness of the order but also reduces its formality. Similarly, in Example (12), the order is softened with the exclamation "k" (short for "okay"), which could be seen as seeking acceptance from the trainee teachers. As in Example (13), the adverb "just" is another means of softening orders (Carter & McCarthy, 2006) and further reducing the level of formality.

Discussion

In the data, the directive speech act is most frequently performed as an order in the imperative form. These results do not correspond with previous research in this area, in which the conventionally indirect request is the preferred strategy (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018). Even though most of the directives analysed involve high cost and effort from the trainee teachers, the practicum supervisors prefer to use this strategy to achieve their interactional goals. The participants in Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez's (2018) study do not have close relationships and, thus, do not perform their requests directly. The practicum supervisors in the present study also might not have close relationships with their trainee teachers due to their roles as superiors in a professional academic setting. However, their selection of strategies is influenced by their authority, the trainee teachers' obligations, as well as both interlocutors' face, social rights and obligations, and interactional goals (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; 2015).

The practicum supervisors created the group chats to guide and support the trainee teachers in practicum matters. Nevertheless, that they are communicating and sending directives in a group could have influenced their choice of different strategies. It is interesting to note that when the practicum supervisors give a directive to all the trainee teachers in the group chat, they rarely employ conventionally indirect strategies. Instead, they use either an order or a non-conventionally indirect request, i.e., a hint. Compliance is the expected response from their students. But when a directive is meant for a particular trainee teacher in the group chat, the practicum supervisors use a conventionally indirect request strategy, which allows either compliance or rejection as a possible response. Conventionally indirect request strategies reduce the imposition and preserve the trainee teachers' equity rights and, thus, maintain rapport.

Internal modifications in the form of lexical downgraders occur in most of the orders and direct imperative requests analysed. The politeness marker "please" is preferred to other downgraders to reduce the level of directness and imposition. However, the other interpretation of "please", which is to add force to the order, is less probable as text messages do not carry any intonation or tone. The imposition and level of directness in the orders are mitigated also through the particle "ya", the exclamation "okay/k", and the adverb "just". "Ya" and "okay/k" are typically used in spoken exchanges. In WhatsApp communication, the inclusion of such lexical

downgraders make orders less indirect and less of an imposition and more like an informal "oralized written text" (Yus, 2011).

Thus, when practicum supervisors consider their trainee teachers' equity rights and use lexical downgraders in their orders, the reduced imposition helps them achieve their interactional goals. These findings are consistent with Spencer-Oatey's (2008; 2015) notion that speech acts should be realised appropriately to reflect the speakers' rapport orientation, whether to enhance, maintain, neglect, or challenge the harmonious relations. Hence, although the the balance of power is asymmetrical, it is evident that practicum supervisors strive to maintain good rapport with their trainee teachers through indirect requests.

Conclusion

Performing directive speech acts such as orders and requests can easily threaten the rapport between interlocutors. Most studies on directives focus on interlocutors with symmetrical power relations or on communication from students to their teachers. However, this study looks at how practicum supervisors manage rapport in their directives to their trainee teachers. In the teacher-student relationship within the classroom, directives are given orally in an authoritative tone by the teacher, which cannot be represented textually online. Analysis of the practicum supervisors' directives in the WhatsApp group chats suggests that the illocutionary domain plays an important role in management of rapport. This should provide interlocutors insights and ideas on how they can manage rapport online.

Spencer-Oatey (2008; 2015) posits that threats to face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals can affect rapport. Appropriately formulated directive messages from practicum supervisors may not only reduce the sense of imposition felt by trainee teachers but also aid the achievement of interactional goals. Practicum supervisors' directive text messages can help trainee teachers to develop proficiency in classroom communicative language and positive rapport with their own students.

The practicum supervisor's authority over their trainee teachers is evident even in their WhatsApp group chats. Their text messages are an authentic source of orders and requests in an educational setting and in the field of English Language Teaching. This study has insights for practicum cooperating teachers as well as English language teachers who aspire to be TESL academic lecturers at the tertiary level. This information can also aid the planning and developing of teacher-student communication courses.

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