

DIRECTIVE SPEECH ACTS IN RESEARCHER–AI INTERACTION: A REFLEXIVE CASE STUDY OF ACADEMIC JOURNAL SUBMISSION

Agung Pramujiono¹, Tri Indrayanti², Amelia Widya Hanindita³

¹²Departement of Indonesian language Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, Indonesia

³Department of Elementary School Teacher Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas PGRI Adi Buana, Surabaya, Indonesia
pram4014@yahoo.com; indrayanti.trie18@unipasby.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the realisation and interactional functions of directive speech acts in researcher–AI communication through a reflexive case study of an academic journal submission. While directive speech acts have been extensively examined in human–human institutional interactions, limited empirical attention has been paid to how directives are constructed and deployed when the addressee is an artificial intelligence (AI) system operating within digitally mediated academic workflows. As AI systems increasingly assist scholars in writing and navigating editorial platforms, it is necessary to examine how action, authority, and epistemic responsibility are negotiated in human–AI interactions. This study addresses this gap by analysing a naturally occurring dialogue between a researcher and ChatGPT during the real-time submission of a manuscript to an international Q1 journal. The dataset comprised a complete 46-turn interaction sequence, from which 16 researcher-initiated directive moves were identified as primary units of analysis. Adopting a qualitative reflexive case study design, the analysis draws on speech act theory (Searle, 1976), interactional epistemics (Heritage, 2012), and relational work (Locher & Watts, 2008) to examine the linguistic realisation and functional deployment of directives across submission stages. The findings reveal that directives are predominantly realised through interrogative constructions rather than bald imperatives. WH-questions (e.g., “What should I do?”) and yes/no interrogatives pragmatically function as action-eliciting moves, particularly at moments of procedural uncertainty. These interrogatives enable the researcher to seek guidance while mitigating imposition, constructing AI as a procedural authority without an overt command. In addition to interrogatives, mitigated imperatives (e.g. “please explain”) and declarative problem reports (e.g., “I clicked OK, but there is no response”) operate as directive resources, demonstrating that directive force is interactionally achieved rather than strictly encoded in the grammatical mood. Functionally, four directive categories emerged: procedural guidance, explanatory mediation, confirmation for epistemic risk management, and evaluative positioning. Procedural guidance directives are clustered during technically opaque stages, such as PDF generation and final approval. Explanatory directives seek clarification of institutional prompts, positioning AI as an interpretive mediator. Confirmation directives appear before irreversible actions, reflecting heightened epistemic caution. A smaller subset of evaluative directives solicits normative stances regarding open-access decisions, extending human–AI interaction into moral reasoning. Directive density increases in phases characterised by institutional opacity, suggesting a correlation between procedural risks and directive production. Notably, directives are consistently mitigated through relational address terms and politeness markers despite the AI’s nonhuman status. This persistence of mitigation indicates that relational framing may function as a routinised noncommunicative schema rather than solely as a face-protecting adjustment. Overall, this study argues that directives in researcher–AI interactions operate as mechanisms of institutional navigation and epistemic regulation rather than coercive command structures, contributing to empirical insights into the emerging field of human–AI pragmatics.

Keywords: directive speech acts; Human–AI interaction; epistemic positioning; relational work; academic discourse

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji realisasi dan fungsi interaksional tindak tutur direktif dalam komunikasi peneliti–AI melalui studi kasus reflektif terhadap proses pengiriman artikel jurnal akademik. Meskipun tindak tutur direktif telah banyak diteliti dalam interaksi institusional antarmanusia, perhatian empiris terhadap bagaimana direktif dikonstruksi dan digunakan ketika mitra tutur berupa sistem kecerdasan buatan dalam alur kerja akademik yang dimediasi secara digital masih relatif terbatas. Sering meningkatnya penggunaan sistem AI untuk membantu peneliti dalam penulisan dan navigasi platform editorial, penting untuk memahami bagaimana tindakan, otoritas, dan tanggung jawab epistematik dinegosiasikan dalam interaksi manusia–AI. Penelitian ini mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menganalisis dialog alami antara seorang peneliti dan ChatGPT selama proses pengiriman naskah secara real-time ke sebuah jurnal internasional bereputasi Q1. Dataset penelitian terdiri atas rangkaian interaksi lengkap sebanyak 46 giliran tutur, dengan 16 tindak direktif yang diinisiasi peneliti sebagai unit analisis utama. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus reflektif kualitatif, analisis ini memanfaatkan teori tindak tutur (Searle, 1976), epistematik interaksional (Heritage, 2012), dan relational work (Locher & Watts, 2008) untuk mengkaji realisasi linguistik dan fungsi direktif pada berbagai tahap pengiriman naskah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan

bahwa direktif lebih dominan direalisasikan melalui konstruksi interogatif dibandingkan imperatif langsung. Pertanyaan WH (misalnya, “Apa yang harus saya lakukan?”) dan interogatif ya/tidak berfungsi secara pragmatis sebagai tindak pemicu tindakan, terutama pada situasi ketidakpastian prosedural. Bentuk interogatif tersebut memungkinkan peneliti meminta panduan sambil memitigasi imposisi, sehingga AI dikonstruksi sebagai otoritas prosedural tanpa menggunakan perintah secara langsung. Selain bentuk interogatif, imperatif termitigasi (misalnya, “tolong jelaskan”) dan laporan masalah berbentuk deklaratif (misalnya, “Saya sudah klik OK, tetapi belum ada respons”) juga berfungsi sebagai sumber direktif, yang menunjukkan bahwa daya direktif dibangun secara interaksional dan tidak semata-mata ditentukan oleh bentuk gramatikal. Secara fungsional, ditemukan empat kategori direktif, yaitu panduan prosedural, mediasi eksplanatif, konfirmasi untuk manajemen risiko epistemik, dan positioning evaluatif. Direktif panduan prosedural muncul dominan pada tahap yang secara teknis tidak transparan, seperti proses pembuatan PDF dan persetujuan akhir. Direktif eksplanatif bertujuan meminta klarifikasi terhadap instruksi institusional dan memosisikan AI sebagai mediator interpretatif. Direktif konfirmasi muncul sebelum tindakan yang bersifat irreversible, mencerminkan kehati-hatian epistemik yang tinggi. Sementara itu, sebagian kecil direktif evaluatif meminta pandangan normatif terkait keputusan open access, sehingga memperluas interaksi manusia-AI ke ranah penalaran moral. Kepadatan direktif meningkat pada fase-fase yang ditandai oleh ketidakjelasan institusional, yang menunjukkan adanya korelasi antara risiko prosedural dan produksi direktif. Menariknya, direktif secara konsisten dimitigasi melalui sapaan relasional dan penanda kesantunan meskipun AI tidak memiliki status manusia. Persistensi mitigasi ini menunjukkan bahwa framing relasional dapat berfungsi sebagai skema komunikatif yang telah terinternalisasi, bukan semata-mata sebagai strategi perlindungan muka. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa direktif dalam interaksi peneliti-AI berfungsi sebagai mekanisme navigasi institusional dan regulasi epistemik, bukan sebagai struktur perintah koersif, serta memberikan kontribusi empiris bagi berkembangnya kajian pragmatik manusia-AI

Kata kunci: tindak tutur direktif; interaksi manusia-AI; pemosisian epistemik; kerja relasional; wacana akademik

INTRODUCTION

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into academic environments has transformed not only information retrieval practices but also the interactional dynamics surrounding scholarly work. AI systems are increasingly employed in activities such as drafting, revising, translating, summarising, proofreading, and navigating institutional procedures, including academic journal submission. In many cases, researchers no longer interact with AI merely as computational tools but as responsive conversational systems capable of providing procedural guidance, interpretive explanation, and evaluative feedback. Recent communication research demonstrates that users frequently orient toward AI systems as socially meaningful entities rather than neutral technologies (Guzman, 2018; Sundar, 2020). This orientation shapes how requests are formulated, how expertise is attributed, and how responsibility is negotiated during interaction. As AI becomes progressively embedded in academic workflows, examining the linguistic organisation of Human-AI communication becomes increasingly important for pragmatics and discourse studies.

Recent scholarship further suggests that conversational AI has begun reshaping professional and institutional communication patterns. Studies on AI-assisted writing and digital communication indicate that users frequently adapt interactional strategies when communicating with intelligent systems, particularly in contexts involving task completion, procedural navigation, and uncertainty management (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). In educational and academic settings, AI systems are increasingly positioned as collaborative assistants capable of mediating access to knowledge and institutional procedures. Research on generative AI in higher education also highlights how users develop interactional dependency on AI-generated explanations and recommendations during complex academic tasks (Tlili et al., 2023). However, while such studies discuss technological adoption and ethical implications, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the micro-level linguistic organisation of Human-AI interaction itself.

Within pragmatics, directive speech acts are conventionally understood as utterances intended to get the hearer to perform an action (Searle, 1976). Directives encompass commands, requests, instructions, suggestions, invitations, and recommendations, all of which attempt to influence the behaviour of others. Previous studies of directives in human-human interaction demonstrate that their linguistic realisation is strongly shaped by social power, politeness orientation, interpersonal distance, and institutional hierarchy (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Locher & Watts, 2008). Directive force is rarely realised through direct commands alone; rather, speakers frequently employ mitigation strategies such as interrogatives, hedges, politeness markers, and indirect formulations to maintain cooperation and relational alignment. Consequently, directives function not only as action-oriented utterances but also as interactional resources through which social relationships and epistemic positions are negotiated.

In digitally mediated communication, these pragmatic structures often persist while simultaneously being reconfigured through technological affordances (Herring, 2013). Online interaction modifies turn-taking organisation, response expectations, and forms of social presence while preserving many familiar communicative norms. Human–AI interaction, however, introduces a more complex communicative situation because the addressee occupies an ambiguous status between machine and socially responsive interlocutor. Although AI systems do not possess human consciousness, emotions, or face needs, users often continue to employ politeness strategies and relational language when interacting with them. This phenomenon creates a theoretically productive tension for pragmatics because traditional assumptions concerning obligation, interpersonal hierarchy, and face management become less stable when the hearer is an artificial system rather than a human participant.

Recent studies on Human–AI discourse increasingly indicate that users frequently anthropomorphise AI systems and orient toward them through relational communication practices. Research on conversational agents demonstrates that users often display politeness, gratitude, apology, and relational alignment despite awareness of the system’s non-human status (Araujo, 2020; Laban & Araujo, 2022). Similarly, studies on AI-mediated communication suggest that conversational systems are becoming interactionally embedded within everyday institutional practices, including customer service, education, and professional consultation (de Barcelos Silva et al., 2023). These findings imply that AI systems are increasingly functioning as interactional participants rather than passive technological interfaces. Nevertheless, most existing studies focus on perception, trust, usability, or ethical concerns rather than on the detailed organisation of speech acts within naturally occurring Human–AI discourse.

Interactional pragmatics further emphasises the importance of epistemic positioning in institutional communication (Heritage, 2012). Institutional interactions frequently involve asymmetrical distributions of knowledge, procedural uncertainty, and coordinated action. Directives commonly emerge during situations where participants seek clarification, validation, or guidance from individuals perceived to possess relevant expertise. Academic journal submission represents a particularly revealing institutional context because it combines structured workflows, technical interfaces, and irreversible procedural decisions such as manuscript approval and final submission. Researchers interacting with editorial management systems must interpret submission instructions, evaluate publishing options, and avoid procedural errors that may influence publication outcomes. Institutional interaction research suggests that environments characterised by uncertainty and procedural complexity intensify directive density and epistemic negotiation (Arminen, Koskela, & Palukka, 2014).

Within this context, AI systems may function not merely as informational tools but also as epistemic mediators capable of translating institutional procedures into actionable guidance. Researchers may therefore orient toward AI as a procedural authority when navigating unfamiliar or high-stakes submission processes. This orientation raises important questions concerning how directive speech acts are linguistically realised when the addressee is perceived simultaneously as technological infrastructure and socially responsive assistant. It also challenges conventional assumptions that directive mitigation exists primarily to protect human face needs. If users continue to mitigate directives despite the non-human status of AI systems, then politeness and relational framing may operate as routinised communicative practices rather than purely interpersonal adjustments.

Despite the rapid growth of AI-mediated communication, empirical micro-analyses of directive construction in researcher–AI interaction remain limited. Existing scholarship has largely concentrated on issues such as automation, authorship, plagiarism, ethics, and the pedagogical implications of AI-assisted writing. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to how researchers linguistically manage procedural uncertainty, negotiate epistemic authority, and construct relational alignment while interacting with AI during real-time academic workflows. As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how directive speech acts function within Human–AI institutional communication.

This study addresses that gap by examining directive speech acts in a naturally occurring interaction between a researcher and ChatGPT during the submission of a manuscript to an international Q1 journal. Rather than treating AI simply as a technological instrument, this study investigates how the researcher linguistically constructs the AI as a source of procedural guidance, explanatory mediation, and evaluative feedback. The analysis focuses specifically on the forms and interactional functions of directives across different stages of the submission process.

The study is guided by two research questions:

- (1) What linguistic forms realise directive speech acts in researcher–AI interaction? and
- (2) What interactional functions do these directives serve within institutional submission processes?

By analysing directive forms, functional categories, and interactional trajectories, this study contributes preliminary empirical insight to the emerging field of Human–AI pragmatics and highlights academic journal submission as a productive site for examining evolving patterns of digitally mediated institutional communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative reflexive case study design, analysing a naturally occurring episode of researcher–AI interaction during the submission of a manuscript to an international Q1 journal. Reflexive case studies enable detailed micro-level examination of situated discourse while acknowledging the researcher’s participatory role (Haugh, 2013).

The dataset consists of a complete interaction sequence between the researcher (AA) and ChatGPT during real-time manuscript submission via Elsevier’s Editorial Manager system. The dialogue comprises 46 turns, from which sixteen researcher-initiated directive moves were identified as primary units of analysis.

Directive identification follows Searle’s (1976) classification of directives as attempts to get the hearer to do something. Three forms were coded: imperative constructions, interrogatives functioning pragmatically as directives, and declaratives with directive force. The analysis integrates speech act theory (Searle, 1976), interactional epistemics (Heritage, 2012), and relational work (Locher & Watts, 2008). Analytical procedures included turn segmentation, directive identification, form classification, and functional interpretation across submission stages.

Given the researcher’s dual role as participant and analyst, reflexivity is acknowledged. The analysis focuses on human linguistic behaviour rather than attributing independent agency to the AI system.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sixteen researcher-initiated directive moves were identified across 46-turn interactions. While directive speech acts have historically been associated with imperative constructions (Searle, 1976), the contemporary dataset shows that directive constructions in researcher–AI interaction are more often manifested through interrogative and mitigated versions rather than direct commands. The results are organised into two layers: (1) linguistic realisation and (2) functional deployment across the institutional stages.

1. Linguistic Realisation of Directives

1.1 Interrogative Directives as the Dominant Form

The majority of directives were realised through interrogative constructions. Consider the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1 – Procedural Uncertainty

“Apa yang harus aku lakukan Bro?”

(“What should I do, Bro?”)

Excerpt 2 – Risk Confirmation

“Yang manuskrip blind ya yang aku unggah?”

(“It’s the blind manuscript that I upload, right?”)

Excerpt 3 – System Warning

“Muncul peringatan itu Bro?”

(“That warning appeared, Bro?”)

When pragmatically justified, the response is to accept and proceed. They do not ask for information but for support, confirmation, or procedural guidance. Through interrogative modality, less directive force is conveyed, although there is still an expectation of corrective or instructive actions. This parallels previous observations that interrogatives often function as indirect directive resources in the context of institutional interactions, particularly with asymmetrical knowledge (Heritage, 2012). In this exchange, epistemic asymmetry is not an institutional hierarchy but procedural expertise. AI is seen as technically oriented with respect to submission workflows, but the researcher remains epistemologically uncertain. Thus, interrogative directives serve as mechanisms of epistemic alignment.

1.2 Mitigated Imperatives

Although less frequent, mitigated imperatives were also present:

Excerpt 4 – Explicit Request for Explanation

“Tolong jelaskan ini Bro.”

(“Please explain this, Bro.”)

The presence of the politeness marker “tolong” (“please”) softens the directive force. Instead of issuing a command (“Explain this”), the researcher reduces the imposition and frames the directive as a collaborative problem-solving exercise. Such research provides evidence that the strength of directive authority is negotiable and shaped by relational orientation (Locher and Watts 2008). This mitigation mechanism is intensified through the common relational address term “Bro” across most directives. While AI systems lack face in the human sense, the relational marker constructs an interactional frame of solidarity rather than a hierarchy.

1.3 Declaratives with Directive Force

Another notable realisation involves declarative problem reports that function indirectly as directives:

Excerpt 5 – Implicit Request for Correction

“Sudah aku klik OK Bro. Belum ada respon.”

(“I already clicked OK, Bro. There is no response.”)

The presence of the politeness marker “tolong” (“please”) softens the directive force. Instead of issuing a command (“Explain this”), the researcher reduces the imposition and frames the directive as a collaborative problem-solving exercise. Such research provides evidence that the strength of directive authority is negotiable and shaped by relational orientation (Locher and Watts 2008). This mitigation mechanism is intensified through the common relational address term “Bro” across most directives. While AI systems lack face in the human sense, the relational marker constructs an interactional frame of solidarity rather than a hierarchy.

2. Functional Typology of Directives

Beyond form, directives were classified functionally into four categories.

2.1 Procedural Guidance Directives (56.25%)

The majority of directives request step-by-step navigation during system uncertainty. These cluster during high-risk procedural stages.

Excerpt 6 – Navigation During Submission

“Ini saya harus bagaimana?”

(“What should I do here?”)

Excerpt 7 – Final Approval Stage

“Terus apa yang harus aku lakukan Bro?”

(“Then what should I do, Bro?”)

Excerpt 8 – Technical Concern

“Apakah laptop bisa saya matikan?”

(“Can I turn off the laptop?”)

Such directives would be developed when the system interface becomes opaque, or potentially irreversible actions are involved. The submission process consists of several critical stages — file upload, PDF generation, and final approval — each associated with procedural risk. The directive density increases at these junctures. In this sense, procedural guidance directives serve as institutional navigational aids. Instead of calling forth the AI, the researcher executes them as instructions to convert the institutional workflow into actionable steps. AI is a bridge between the user and the interface.

2.2 Explanatory Directives (25%)

Explanatory directives seek interpretation of institutional language or publishing policies.

Excerpt 9 – Article Type Selection

“Tolong jelaskan ini Bro? Choose the Article Type of your submission from the drop-down menu.”

“Please explain this, Bro. ‘Choose the Article Type of your submission from the drop-down menu.’”

Excerpt 10 – Publishing Options

“Maksudnya ini apa Bro? Secara branding akademik → OA memberi efek simbolik dan visibilitas.”

“What does this mean, Bro? In terms of academic branding, OA provides symbolic value and visibility.”

Here, the researcher requests interpretive clarification, rather than procedural action. AI is positioned as an explanatory intermediary capable of decoding institutional discourse. These directives illustrate that submission platforms produce textual prompts that require semantic analysis. At these moments, the directive function extends beyond action elicitation to epistemic mediation. The researcher seeks understanding before proceeding, reflecting a heightened awareness of the consequences.

2.3 Confirmation Directives (18.75%)

Confirmation directives appear prior to irreversible decisions.

Excerpt 11 – Blind Manuscript Verification

“Oke yang manuskrip blind ya yang aku unggah?”

“Okay, it’s the blind manuscript that I should upload, right?”

This yes/no interrogative serves to validate the procedural correctness before the final submission. Confirmation directives function as tools for epistemic risk management. The researcher anticipates potential errors and seeks external validation before committing to action. The frequency of confirmation directives increases at stages involving file integrity and submission approval, suggesting that directives are sensitive to perceived institutional value.

2.4 Evaluative Directive (6.25%)

A single but analytically significant directive shifts the interaction from procedural to normative terrain.

Excerpt 12 – Open Access Decision

“Ini amal jariah dengan berbagi gratis karya kita. Menurutmu gimana Bro?”

This yes/no interrogative serves to validate the procedural correctness before the final submission. Confirmation directives function as tools for epistemic risk management. The researcher anticipates potential errors and seeks external validation before committing to action. The frequency of confirmation directives increases at stages involving file integrity and submission approval, suggesting that directives are sensitive to perceived institutional value, and unlike other directives, this utterance solicits moral evaluation rather than technical guidance. The AI is invited to normative reasoning about Open Access as ethical sharing. This expands the functional domain of directives beyond institutional navigation to value-based positioning. The presence of this evaluative directive indicates that human–AI interaction may extend into domains traditionally reserved for human interlocutors, including moral deliberation.

3. Relational Framing and Mitigation

Across all directive categories, mitigation strategies are pervasive. Three recurrent markers appear: (1) Relational address term: “Bro”; (2) Politeness marker: “*tolong*”; (3) Apologetic marker: “*maaf*”. Even in urgent troubleshooting contexts, the researchers avoided bald imperatives. Directive force is consistently softened using solidarity-oriented language. This pattern suggests that relational work persists even when the addressee lacks a human face (Locher & Watts, 2008). Rather than functioning solely as face-protective strategies, mitigation appears to be habitual. The researcher’s directive formulation reflects routinised politeness schemas embedded in the communicative practice.

4. Directive Trajectory Across Interaction Stages

Directive density and type vary according to submission phase:

Stage	Dominant Directive Type
Article Type Selection	Explanatory
Blind Manuscript Verification	Confirmation
Open Access Decision	Explanatory + Evaluative
Technical Troubleshooting	Procedural Guidance
Final Approval	Procedural + Confirmation

The highest concentration of directives occurs during PDF generation and approval stages, where system opacity peaks. This trajectory indicates that directive production correlates with institutional uncertainty.

5. Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals that directives in researcher–AI interaction: (1) are predominantly realised through interrogative constructions rather than bald imperatives. (2) Mitigation and relational markers are frequently employed. (3) They serve four primary functions: procedural guidance, explanatory mediation, confirmation of correctness, and evaluative positioning. (4) An increase in density during high-risk institutional stages. (5) Persist in relational framing despite the addressee’s non-human status. Together, these findings demonstrate that directive speech acts in human–AI institutional contexts function as mechanisms of procedural mediation and epistemic risk management rather than coercive command structures.

Interrogative Directives as Epistemic Alignment Mechanisms

The results indicate that directive speech acts in the researcher–AI dialogue do not come off as direct imperatives but rather through interrogative and mitigated forms of action. Given this tendency, human–AI communication is expected to reflect much of the pragmatic nature of institutional human interaction, particularly where epistemic imbalance is concerned and procedures exist with little or no certainty (Heritage 2012; Locher and Watts 2008). Far from serving as direct commands, directives in the current dataset serve as requests for guidance, clarification, and validation. These findings align with previous pragmatic literature, which posits that indirectness and mitigation are core resources for directing institutional discourse (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Locher & Watts, 2008).

However, the present study attempts to generalise these findings to human–AI communication, in which the addressee does not have any traditional face requirements in the absence of consciousness (Araujo, 2020; Laban & Araujo, 2022). An illustrative example involves the frequency of interrogative directives, especially WH-questions and yes/no interrogatives, in the presence of procedural uncertainty. Phrases like “What should I do, Bro?” pragmatically: are not just the pursuit of information-based questions but also a means to effect actions. This implies that interrogatives are processes of epistemic convergence in human–AI interactions (Heritage, 2012).

The researcher placed the AI in the role of having procedural knowledge of journal submission workflows and then presented himself as epistemologically unsure. This renders the directive mechanisms of negotiations of knowledge asymmetry, rather than methods of coercion. Recent research exploring conversational AI suggests that users perceive AI systems to be more intelligent and authoritative intermediaries for complex tasks (Sundar, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2023). This interpretation is confirmed by the current findings, because procedural authority is interactionally attributed to AI in high-stakes academic engagement (Kasneci et al., 2023).

Directives as Institutional Navigation and Risk Management

The results also show that directive density rises in processes characterised by institutional opacity, particularly in relation to PDF generation and final submission approval. The trend is that directives are likely to appear more strongly in environments of uncertainty, technical vagueness, or irreversible options. The literature on institutional interaction has maintained for some time that the formation of directive systems is enhanced in environments of procedural risk and coordinated action (Arminen et al., 2014). The present study extends this understanding of digitally mediated human–AI interaction by investigating the possibility of an AI system operating as a mediating layer between users and institutional interfaces (de Barcelos Silva et al., 2023).

Instead of engaging directly with the editorial management system, the researcher repeatedly used AI to comprehend the instructions, explain warnings, and confirm procedural correctness. These directives can be understood as mechanisms of institutional navigation and epistemic risk management. Confirmation directives like “Is the manuscript blind that I uploaded?” show the researcher's method of reducing procedural errors before taking irreversible actions. This suggests that directives are not only interactional tools but also cognitive resources that help reduce uncertainty in high-stakes institutional workflows (Heritage, 2012; Kasneci et al., 2023).

The conclusions therefore indicate that conversational AI systems are gradually emerging as procedural intermediaries with the ability to render institutional complexity into helpful insights. This role is particularly important in academic settings, where unfamiliar submission systems, publishing policies, and technical interfaces can leave researchers feeling anxious and uncertain. Similar tendencies have been found in recent studies of AI-facilitated academic communication, in which users frequently draw on AI systems that simplify procedural complexity and assist in decision-making (Tlili et al., 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Relational Framing Beyond Human Face Needs

Another significant finding concerned the persistence of relational framing for the addressee who is not human. In most cases, directives are consistently mitigated through relational markers (e.g. *bro*), politeness markers (e.g. *please*), and apologetic language (e.g. *sorry*). However, even in critical troubleshooting situations, the researcher avoided bald imperatives, placing directives instead in a solidarity-language framework. The interactional nature of this pattern indicates that the relational labour of digital communication is still in practice.

This finding has theoretical implications as it complicates the usual assumptions about mitigation as an instrumental way to guard the face of the hearer. As AI systems do not have emotions or face social vulnerability in the human sense, the continued use of politeness strategies suggests that mitigation is structuring a routinised communication schema in habitual interactional behaviour. Such findings are echoed in human–AI communication studies, where users commonly adopt politeness and relational language towards conversational agents despite knowing that they are artificial. Thus, the persistence of relational framing suggests that politeness in human–AI interactions is not merely a condition for determining the ontological state of the hearer but rather the product of stable communicative norms reproducible across interactional contexts.

Expanding Human–AI Interaction into Evaluative Domains

The inclusion of evaluative directives further expands the scope of human–AI communication. The researcher’s request for moral evaluation regarding Open Access publication indicates that AI interaction may go beyond mere guidance of procedures and include normative reasoning processes. Instead of simply asking for technical guidance, the researcher sought an evaluative stance on ethical knowledge-sharing practices. This seems to coincide with recent discussions suggesting that conversational AI systems are increasingly positioned as reflective interlocutors rather than as passive informational tools (Dwivedi et al., 2023; de Barcelos Silva et al., 2023).

Thus, we must recognise that human–AI pragmatics is not only functional task-focused; there are also relational, epistemic, and moral aspects related to the interplay of interaction. Overall, the findings show that directive speech acts in researcher–AI interaction operate more as procedural mediation, epistemic negotiation, and institutional navigation techniques than as coercive command frameworks. By highlighting the interactional organisation of directives, this study presents initial empirical findings for the burgeoning area of human–AI pragmatics and emphasises institutional academic settings as productive locations for studying emerging forms of human–machine communication (Sundar, 2020; Tili et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that in the researcher–AI interaction, directive speech acts are generally practised through the interrogative and mitigating forms rather than direct commands. Based on a natural interaction during the academic journal submission process, this article illustrates that directives do not serve as commands but as interactional mediations for procedural direction, explanatory mediation, epistemic alignment, and risk management. The predominant role of interrogative directives suggests that researchers orient themselves towards AI systems as normative experts on processes that would provide reasons and support decisions with the help of a complex institutional workflow.

The study also illustrates that directive density increases in stages of institutional opacity, with researchers being exposed to uncertainty, technical ambiguity, and potentially irreversible decisions in these stages. Under the guise of mediator mechanisms, AI systems act as carriers that turn institutional processes into practical advice in such scenarios. This finding reflects a trend towards using conversational AI as a helpful tool for mediating academic navigation and facilitating procedural uncertainty in digitally mediated scholarly settings. However, it is an important observation regarding the continuation of mitigation and relational framing even in the face of the non-human addressee. The frequent application of politeness markers, relational address terms, and indirect formulations indicates that relational work in the human–AI interface can act as a routinised communication practice, as opposed to a face-protective device.

The results thus question traditional pragmatist beliefs and assumptions that politeness is contingent on social vulnerability in the audience. Rather, users seem to recreate conventional social norms, even when interacting with artificial intelligence technologies. More generally, this work adds initial empirical evidence for the nascent field of human–AI pragmatics by showing that institutional academic workflows

are valuable sites for investigating changing patterns of human–machine communication. The interaction between humans and AI involves not only information exchange and task performance but also epistemic exchange, relational alignment, and evaluative positioning. To gain insights into how speech acts, authority, and relational practices constantly evolve in digitally mediated communication, future research needs to extend the dataset across more users, institutional contexts, and AI platforms.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Complete Name	Institution	Education	Research Interests
Agung Pramujiono	Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya	S3 Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra	Pragmatik, Analisis Wacana Kritis, Bahasa dan Budaya, Pembelajaran Bahasa
Tri Indrayanti	Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya	S2 Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia	Pragmatik, Analisis Wacana Kritis, Pembelajaran Bahasa
Amelia Widya Hanindita	Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya	S2 Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia	Pragmatik, Literasi SD, Pembelajaran Bahasa