‘Don't tell a great man what to do’:

Directive speech acts in American and British English conversations

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INTRODUCTION

- Directive speech acts are “attempts (of **varying degree** [...]) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle 1976: 13)

- Cross-cultural (intralingual) **variation** in speech act behaviour (cf. e.g Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Breuer & Geluykens 2007, Schneider & Barron 2008, Barron 2008)
- No comparison of American English and British English directive speech acts to date

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Research question 1:
Do directive speech acts differ structurally in American and British English?

- Bias towards use of experimental data (**DCTs**)
- Influence of methodology on the nature of data and results (e.g. Jucker 2009; Golato 2003)
- Most frequent request strategy in DCT-based studies: ***Can/ Could you do X?*** (e.g. Barron 2008)

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Research question 2:
Do authentic conversational data differ from data elicited by questionnaires?

METHODOLOGY

- Comparison of directives elicited with **DCTs** and drawn from authentic informal conversations
- Questionnaire data used for comparison are taken from Breuer & Geluykens 2007
- Conversational data retrieved from two **corpora** in a bottom up approach (cf. Kohnen 2008)
- Coding scheme: Head acts, downgrading and upgrading modifiers (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989)

At university: Ann missed a lecture and would like to borrow Judith’s notes.

Anne: _____

Judith: Sure, but let me have them back before the lecture starts.

Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 14

	ICE-GB	SBCSAE
Words	200,000	213,659
Medium	Spoken	Spoken
Genre	Conversation	Conversation
Sampled	1990-1993	Early 1990s

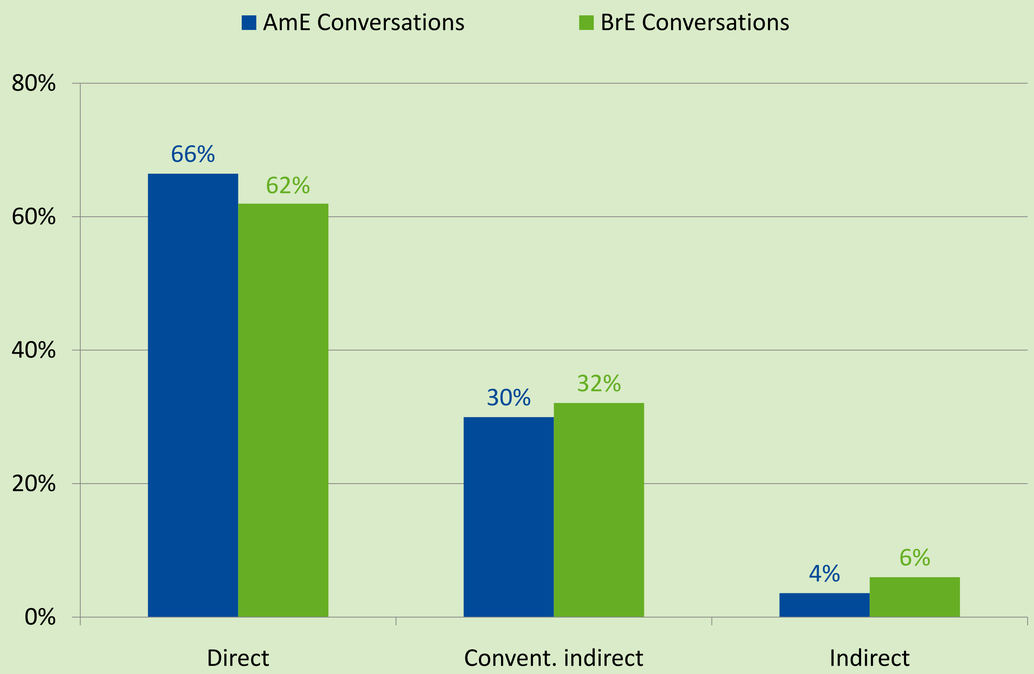
Head act superstrategies:

- Direct → *Turn it off Richard love* (ICE-GB)
- Conventionally indirect → *Can you pass the sour cream please* (ICE-GB)
- Indirect → *Your ten minutes are up* (SBCSAE)

RESULTS

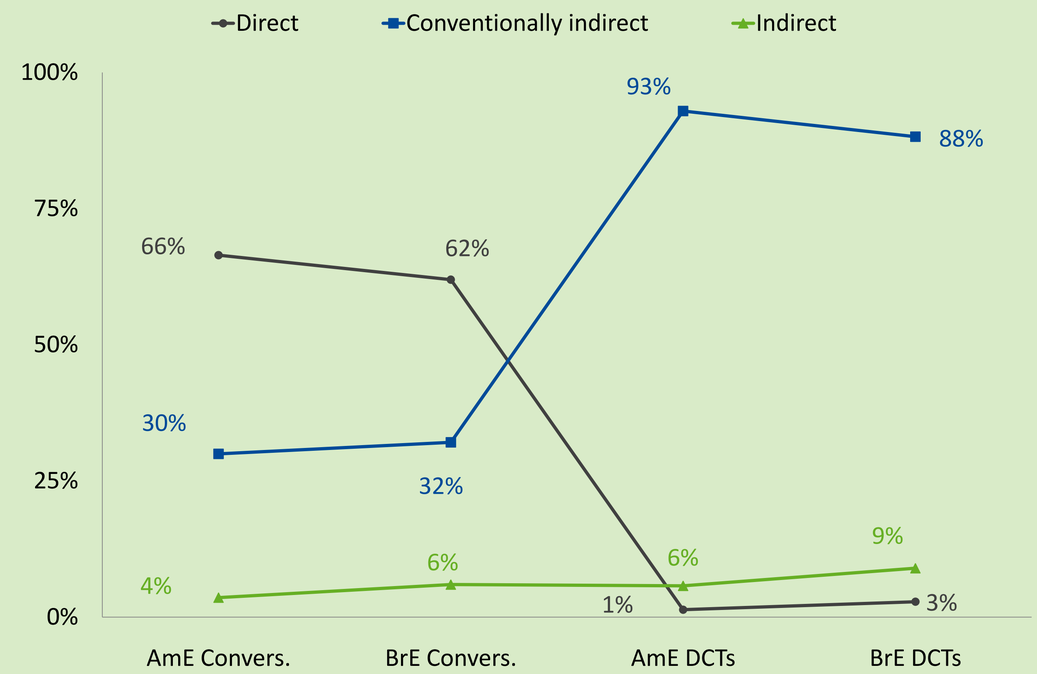
Research question 1: Cross-cultural differences

- No statistically significant differences in head act use in the cross-cultural condition (χ^2 $p > 0.05$)
- No statistically significant differences in modification in the cross-cultural condition (ANOVA $p > 0.05$)



Research question 2: Methodological differences

- **Significant differences** between in head act use in the methodological condition (χ^2 $p < 0.001$)
- DCT head acts are significantly more indirect and modified more frequently than in conversations



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