In this paper I have carried out a synchronic and diachronic analysis of the structural variations of directive speech acts in relation to politeness strategies involved in them. In my research I have employed both function-to-form and form-to-function methods of linguistic mapping, or, in other words, I combined a careful manual selection of samples from a limited study material (the collection of the Paston and Stonor family letters) and an automatic corpus-based research carried out on the material presented by the PCEEC. The work with the Paston and Stonor family letters was mainly devoted to the synchronic qualitative analysis of directives, whereas the corpus-based research was concerned with the quantitative presentation of the development of certain directive strategies throughout the 15th-17th centuries. In both synchronic and diachronic analysis I have tried to correlate different structural classes of directives with politeness strategies mentioned in the theory of politeness as postulated by Brown and Levinson (1987). When making judgements on the level of politeness of particular directive structures I also paid attention to the contextual and situational appropriateness of certain forms of directives in each particular case (Watts 2003), their conformity with the temporal variations in the standard of politeness (Ehlich 1992), and mitigation strategies involved in them (Blum-Kulka 1990). At the same time, I was careful not to make a direct correlation between the degree of directness of requests and their politeness level (Meier 1995).

Both methodological approaches used in the research have turned out to be quite useful. Moreover, the comparable quantitative results for the similar periods in the PCEEC and the Paston and Stonor family correspondence confirm the validity of both methods of research. My personal inclination remains with the method of manual selection of samples in the study material and a consequent function-to-form linguistic mapping, as I consider this method more accurate and comprehensive, especially in the case of such a highly pragmatic phenomenon as directive speech acts.

The results of my quantitative and qualitative research generally support the findings of the previous research in the field of diachronic speech act analysis.