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Communication in the classroom: Speech acts, managerial modes, and student learning

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Article Info

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the variety of speech acts used by an English teacher in an EFL classroom and their functions in facilitating student learning. The purpose is to identify the types of speech acts used by the teacher and their frequency, as well as to examine how they contribute to the learning process. Methodology: The study employed a qualitative approach, using Searle's speech act model and Walsh's SETT framework to analyze the teacher's utterances. The data consisted of transcribed video recordings and interviews with the teacher. The speech acts were categorized into four types: directives, representatives, expressive, and commissive. Results: The results showed that the teacher predominantly used directives (59.59%), followed by representatives (31.48%), expressive (6.52%), and commissive (1.21%). The speech acts functioned mainly as managerial (41.84%) and material modes (43.29%), with a smaller proportion related to skill and system modes (12.72%) and classroom context modes (2.15%). Conclusion: This study highlights the importance of speech acts in EFL classroom interaction. The findings suggest that teachers predominantly use directives to manage the classroom and convey subject matter content. The study provides insight into the teacher's discursive activities and has implications for teacher training and language teaching methodologies. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of speech acts in both receptive and productive skills classes, with a larger participant pool.

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Learning and teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become an essential aspect of education worldwide. In Indonesia, EFL is a compulsory subject in schools, and its teaching and learning is a concern for educators and researchers. Effective classroom interaction is crucial in EFL learning and teaching, as it facilitates language acquisition and improves learning outcomes (Azhari, 2022).

However, studies have shown that EFL teachers in Indonesia face challenges in creating positive classroom interactions, resulting in low student participation and motivation. One of the factors contributing to this challenge is the limited use of appropriate speech acts by teachers.

Speech acts are an important aspect of language learning, as they can either facilitate or hinder language learning. Research has shown that teacher speech actions can affect student engagement, motivation, and language skills. However, there is a lack of research on teachers' discourse enactments in Indonesian EFL classrooms (House & Kádár, 2023).

Most studies on teacher discourse have been conducted in Western contexts, and their findings may not be applicable to Indonesian EFL classrooms. Therefore, research on teacher discourse enactments is needed to learn about teacher education and language teaching practices in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

This study aims to address this research gap by exploring the different types of discourse used by an EFL teacher and their functions in classroom interaction in an Indonesian context. The study will provide insights into the effective use of discourse enactments in Indonesian EFL classrooms, which can inform teacher education and language teaching practice.

Classroom interaction is one of the fundamental aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching system besides learner, teacher, materials/resources. Within positive interaction, it is believed that the outcome of the EFL teaching and learning processes may cause language acquisition (Pica, 1996). Positive classroom interaction depends on the teacher's speech. Speech is action (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969). Each teaching act can be seen as having its own 'teaching force', what the teacher intends the act to achieve. The actual effect of the act can be seen as its 'learning effect', the reaction of the learner to what is being taught. Through speech acts, teachers carry out most classroom activities such as sharing knowledge, controlling and organizing learning activities, as well as motivating learners to get involved in classroom activities.

In EFL classes the speech acts utilized by teachers might cause comprehension or misinterpretation. For this reason, teachers' speech act repertoire becomes an essential issue. Furthermore, teacher speech acts should be appropriately used based on the pedagogical functions of classroom modes in classroom interaction. For example, using directives to get learners to do something so that the EFL learners understand and respond such as to teacher's feedback (Baker & Bricker, 2010; Mauludin & Prasetyo, 2024; Syifa et al., 2024).

The key word or core of the interaction is communication, which is essential to the learning process, because it allows pupils to stop seeing themselves as objects and fosters growth (Anna et al., 2023; Diloyan, 2017). In line with this statement, Suryandani and Budasi (2021) argued that since communication influences classroom engagement, it is a crucial component of the teaching and learning process. Through communication, the speaker aims to convey to the listener a particular purpose or aim. Effective and successful communication occurs when the hearer—the person taking part in the communication process —fully understands the message that is being sent.

Teacher-learner communication, which is also termed teacher-learner talk, is characterized by utterances that serve a multiplicity of functions and consist of specifically varied speech acts. In classroom practices, Dialogue actions among teachers are very important, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of student acquisition (Andewi et al., 2022; Arifani et al., 2024; Hidayat et al., 2022; Juvrianto, 2018).

Speech acts in classroom settings have been a concern to some researchers. Recent research has found that teacher's speech acts types, such as representative, directive, expressive, and commissive ensure the teaching and learning process run well (Andewi & Waziana, 2019; Karim et al., 2024; Santosa & Kurniadi, 2020; Shinta et al., 2023; Sumedi & Rovino, 2020; Suryawati et al., 2020; Yanti et al., 2021). Being dominant, directive speech acts that show teacher-centeredness can encourage learners to be more active in classroom activities (Faturrochman et al., 2021). Meanwhile, other studies unfolded that representative speech acts are dominant. Different classifications of speech acts in classroom interaction such as elocutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary have been revealed by Christianto (2020). Zahroh and Susanto (2022) found explicit and implicit speech acts which can be categorized as directive speech acts like command and request in classroom interaction.

Concerning speech act functions used in the classroom, some researchers found Declaration of urgency, bald orders, request for substitution, address of the authorization and resolution of doubts, elicitation, instruction, advice, threat, and attention-getter (Budirahayu & Saud, 2023). In another context, in a grade 5 English language reading comprehension lesson in Singapore, Ong (2017) showed the classroom routine includes information about the teacher, teacher selection, children's offerings, teacher appointment, child response, teacher acceptance, teacher information, and teacher direction. Then, Milal and Kusumajanti's (2020) study, which investigated the variety of assertive language performances, reveals that the EFL teacher observed performed information, description, representation, explanation, end, abstract, comment, response, dissemination, retraction, delivery of tracks, announcement of a topic, announcement of a work and control/modification of a topic. It means that teachers generally perform various types of speech acts with various instances of speech acts.

Speech act functions in classroom modes in Iran were the research focus of Mohammadi et al. (2024). Unfortunately, this focus of study is still rare in Indonesian classrooms. Therefore, this present study is concerned with seeing the variety of language performances produced by the educator and how they function in classroom modes. Thus, the subsequent questions to answer are: (1) What variety of speech acts are used by the teacher in EFL classroom interaction?; and (2) How do the teacher's speech acts function in EFL classroom interaction?

Therefore, there are two objectives of this study. The first one is to explore the variety of speech acts used and which classification of speech acts is mostly used by a teacher in teaching an EFL class. The second objective is to find out the way the teacher's speech acts function in classroom modes of EFL classroom interaction.

Theoretically, this study closes a research gap on speech acts related to speech act variety applied in classroom modes in classroom interaction. Thus, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the body of literature on the analysis of speech actions employed by teachers in EFL classrooms in Indonesia.

Literature Reviews

EFL Classroom Interaction

In a foreign language classroom, "classroom interaction" refers to the interactions between the teacher and students that include presentation, negotiating subjects,

and repairs. Similarly, Wang and Lai (2023) refer to the classroom, the interaction between teachers and students and the interaction between students. They emphasize that Active participation and interaction are critical and valuable issues when it comes to student learning and second language acquisition. Teacher-student interactions in classrooms consist of three major domains: emotional, organizational, and instructional (Hamre et al., 2013). In EFL classroom interaction the interaction of teacher and learners involves presentation, negotiation of turns-at-talk, topics, and repairs in a foreign language classroom. Therefore, Interaction is necessary for classroom activity. It contributes to the correct development of the education and knowledge procedure and can increase scholars' communication skills. He says that students interact, including the teacher and the whole class.

Instructors should think about whether agility or accuracy is the object of the activity, before deciding what type of interaction should be used in the classroom, especially for a teaching activity. The end of the activity provides a good starting point for teachers to analyze the interaction activities before class. With a clear view of desired outcomes, faculty can better shape desired subjects and interactions, effectively aligning desired outcomes and goals. In smooth orientation activities, for example, teachers will want students to be able to speak permanently. The aim is to encourage the use of the whole language through activities that facilitate sustainable communication and communication.

Interaction makes communication activities flanked by educators and schoolchildren central in education and knowledge courses. Communication in the classroom is pedagogical; thus, from the part of the teacher, it is termed as teacher talk in which the teacher's speech acts reside. Because of this, the speech acts used in the classroom are mostly oriented to spread the goal of language education and knowledge.

The Nature of Speech Act

Speech act philosophers made a definition of speech act based on function, psychological, and social (Sbisà, 2023). The examples of articulation of psychological states are thanking and apologizing while social acts such as affecting other's conduct are warning and ordering or making contracts such as promising and naming. In line with the concept of social acts, Deppermann and Haugh (2022) outline speech acts as social actions carried out by way of utterances. It means that speech acts are acts done through utterances. The audience's recognition of speakers' messages defines the effectiveness of speech actions.

Three different kinds of activities that occur when someone speaks, serve as evidence of it. First, verbal acts that limit themselves to describing actions of transmission of meaning. Second, the illocutionist deeds intend to express ideas through action. Third, actions related to the effect of something, which are called perlocution acts. These three varieties are interrelated because, a speech, is sure to have all three types of actions (Stevani et al., 2023). This contributes to the definition of a speech act, as every act is performed through speaking, such as arguing, giving information, and so on. These acts are accomplished to communicate. Speech acts are used in social events like ceremonies, competitions, recipes, lectures, and many more.

Following Austin (1975) whose three essential components were: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act, Searle (1976) classified illocutionary speech acts into five types. Those types are representatives (assertion, claim, report, conclusion), directives in which speakers impose some actions on the hearer (suggestion, request, order, command), expressives (apology, complaint, thanks), commissives (promise, threat, refusal), declarative that "change the world" (decree, declaration). This classification is considered to be the clearest taxonomy and the most influential on linguistics. The foundation for his organization of speech act is the illocutionary opinion or the intention of the act from the speaker's point of view. In his summary, Searle (1979) emphasizes:

'...we tell people how things are, we try to get them to do things, we commit ourselves to doing things, we express our feelings and attitudes and we bring about changes through our utterances. Often we do more than one of these at once in the same utterance.'(Searle, 1979). The above explanation indicates that speech acts are classifiable into a minute quantity of fundamental classes according to intentions speakers have.

Teacher's Speech Acts

Speech act theory allows for the observation of all activities or teaching acts, pedagogic actions envisioned to have a positive impact on the learners in a second language learning classroom (Kasper, 2006). Each educational performance can be understood as carrying its own educational impact, that is the intended action carried out by the teacher. The impact of the teaching act can be considered as studying impact, the learners' reaction toward what is taught by the teacher.

Learn to teach and understand language activities: teaching, explanation, debate, consultation, response, listening, repetition, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Milal and Kusumajanti (2020) have investigated teachers'

assertive speech act variety and reported that teachers typically perform information, description, representation, explanation, end, abstract, comment, response, dissemination, retraction, delivery of tracks, announcement of a topic, announcement of a work and control/modification of a topic. As a result, a rich degree of utterances executing specific speech acts, for example providing information, elucidating, defining, prompting, asking questions, correcting, and providing a prompt, is indicative of teachers' discourse. In short, all linguistic communication requires linguistic actions and linguistic performances stand the rudimentary or minimum components of language announcement.

The term speech act relates to language function. The functions of speech which are called metalinguistic and contact are particularly relevant to a teacher's classroom communication concern. On the contrary, language in a social context is closer to real life, meaning that in the classroom, any type of speech act may occur. The types of speech acts commonly used in EFL classroom interaction have been identified and include directions, expressive, representations, and commissives (Azhari et al., 2018; Widya, 2017). Widya (2017) and Azhari (2022) showed that directive speech acts were highly frequent while Santosa and Kurniadi (2020) revealed that the assertive type was the most frequent, placing directives in the third rank, which seems to necessarily identify the reasons.

The Self Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) Framework

Walsh (2006) designed the SETT based on the analysis of classroom interaction and adopted a changing view of classroom interaction. He identified four micro technocrats with special rotation models. They were: managerial form, context in the classroom, skills and systems, and material form. Each form is composed of specific characteristics of interaction related to the objectives of the instruction. He added that the shapes identified are not integral and that other shapes can be introduced in a room depending on the micrometers.

Focusing on the speech act functions, the study carried out by Mohammadi (2024) in Iran revealed the teacher speech acts spread in four modes: the materials mode (42%), skills and systems mode (34%), classroom context mode (16%), and managerial mode (8%). The majority of speech acts, or almost 79 percent, were carried out by teachers in the form of requestive, suggestive, and advisory to manage and enhance the learning process, the overall findings of which point to the central role of the teacher in teacher-fronted classes in Iran. However, different results can be revealed considering the various classroom contexts may affect the speech act functions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the variety of teacher speech acts and their functions in EFL classroom interaction. The design was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the teacher's language performances and their impact on classroom modes in EFL classroom interaction.

Data sources/measurement

The data of this study were the teacher's speech acts, the sources of the data were the educator's words from the transcription of a video recording of education and knowledge procedure in an EFL schoolroom. The data were examined to identify the language act variety rummage-sale in schoolroom communication. Then, the speech acts variety identified becomes the source of data to identify the purposes of the instructor's language performances in terms of classroom modes in EFL classroom interaction.

Participants

The research was carried out using qualitative descriptive methods to explore the teacher speech acts variety and their functions in EFL classroom interaction. An observation and interview were used to collect the data. The subject of the study was an English teacher with his 35 respective students of senior high school in East Java, Indonesia. The observation was conducted through video recording.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a video recording observation and an interview guide. Recordings were transcribed to facilitate coding and analysis. Searle's (1976) classification of speech acts guided the coding process, classifying speech acts into five types: assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. To assess the variety of teacher speech acts, Searle's (1976) taxonomy of speech acts was used. The analysis showed that the teacher used four types of speech acts: assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive. The most dominant speech acts were directive (59.59%), followed by emphatic (32.68%), expressive (6.52%), and commissive (1.21%) speech acts. Notably, declarative speech laws were not found. For distribution of speech acts out of a total of 1,955 speech acts performed in five classroom meetings, teachers accounted for 1,523 (77.90%), while students accounted for 432 speech acts (22.10%). Table 1 summarizes the academics' language performance, providing a detailed breakdown of the speech acts used.

Table 1 Teacher's speech acts in EFL classroom interaction

Speech act type	Definition	%	Speech act variety
Assertive	Utterances that describe some state of affairs or which state what the speaker believes to be the case or not,e.g. statements of facts, assertions, conclusions, descriptions, etc.	32.68	informing, accepting, commenting, explaining, showing attention, announcing a topic, concluding, controlling/shifting a topic, announcing a task, exemplifying, giving a clue, describing, correcting, reformulating
Directive	Utterances are produced by the speaker to get the hearer to do something for example by ordering, commanding, requesting, advising, recommending, etc.	59.59	eliciting, nominating, checking knowledge, commanding, ordering, asking questions, checking comprehension, asking for confirmation, calling attention, asking for clarification, asking for repetition, checking learning, prompting, suggesting, stimulating, instructing
Expressive	Utterances by which the speaker expresses the psychological state of him/herself, such as greeting, thanking, congratulating, apologizing, cursing, blaming, accusing, etc.	6.52	thanking, praising, greeting, criticizing, joking
Commissive	Utterances that commit the speaker to some future action, such as promising, vowing, etc.	1.21	promising, implicit commitment, offering
Declarative	Utterances that affect a change of some state of affairs, such as resigning, dismissing, naming, christening, sentencing, etc.	0	None

Source: Prepared by the author (2024)

Data Analysis

The data collected went through a two-stage analysis process. First, the observational results were quantitatively analyzed using percentages to identify the frequency of speech activity. This helped to determine the different types of speech activities the teacher used in the classroom. The data were then qualitatively analyzed to identify emerging themes. It involves analyzing both observation and interview findings to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' speech acts and their functions in the EFL classroom. The qualitative analysis followed the interactive model of analysis proposed by Miles et al. (2014). This approach involves data reduction, data visualization, and concluding to identify patterns and themes in the data.

Research Procedure

1. Observation: The teacher's lesson was video recorded to capture their language performances.
2. Transcription: The video recording was transcribed to identify the teacher's speech acts.
3. Interview: An interview was conducted with the teacher to gather additional information.

4. Data Analysis: The data were analyzed using discourse analysis to identify the variety of speech acts and their functions.

Results

To assess the teacher's speech act variety, Searle's (1976) speech act classification consisting of assertive, directives, expressive, commissive, and declarative speech acts was used. From the total of speech acts performed in five meetings in the classroom (1,955), the teacher takes up 1,523 (77.90%) while the learners take up 432 speech acts (22.10%). Broadly speaking, we found the teacher used four types of speech acts including assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive speech acts. The most dominantly used speech act was directive (59.59%), followed by assertive (32.68%), expressive (6.52%), and then commissive (1.21%) speech acts. On the other hand, the declarative speech act was not found. Table 1 summarizes the information on the educator's language performances used.

These speech acts function in managerial, material, skill and system, and classroom context modes as can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2 The speech act functions in EFL classroom interaction

Classroom modes (%)	Speech act functions
Managerial (41.84%)	To transmit information: Controlling a topic, explaining, instructing, timing, suggesting, replying, informing, stating, announcing a task
	To organize the physical learning environment: Grouping, nominating, commanding, calling attention, accepting, commenting, explaining, asking questions, ordering, checking learning
	To refer learners to materials: Asking for confirmation, instructing, ordering, suggesting, commanding, showing attention, checking comprehension
	To introduce or conclude an activity: Announcing a task, announcing a topic
	To change from one mode of learning to another: Transitional markers "Okay" and "Well"
Material (43.29%)	To provide input around a piece of material: Eliciting, guiding, asking for repetition, repeating Ss utterances, reformulating learners language, extending learners' contribution, commanding, prompting, nominating, confirming, informing
	To elicit responses about the material: Eliciting, guiding, asking questions, joking, asking for clarification, stimulating, nominating, ordering, offering
	To check and display answers: Eliciting, repeating learners' utterances, suggesting, checking comprehension, asking for confirmation
	To clarify when necessary: Repeating own words, explaining, describing, summarizing/concluding
	To evaluate contributions: Commenting, praising, confirming, criticizing

Table 2 Continued

Classroom modes (%)	Speech act functions
Skill & System (12.72%)	To enable learners to produce correct answers: Recasting
	To enable learners to manipulate new concepts: Prompting, giving clues, reformulating learners' utterances, explaining, exemplifying
	To provide corrective feedback: Explicit correction, repeating learners' errors, commenting
	To provide learners with practice in sub-skills: Eliciting, asking for clarification, asking for repetition, stimulating, ordering, suggesting, checking comprehension
	To display correct answers: Repeating Ss' correct reply
Classroom context (2.15%)	To enable learners to express themselves clearly: Ordering learners to do group discussions (included in managerial mode)
	To establish a context: Instructing suggesting, ordering, commanding, guiding, and controlling a topic
	To promote discussion and presentation: Nominating learners for presentation

Source: Prepared by the author (2024)

Based on the data in Table 2 above, the teacher's speech acts instances come up to construct all the classroom modes of EFL classroom interaction as proposed in SETT, the model of the variable approach of classroom discourse (Walsh, 2011). These four styles include decision-making, resources, skill and system, and schoolroom context, which are all employed by the teacher, in which specific pedagogical goals entail certain speech acts.

Different percentages shown in the table indicate that different goal of language teaching and learning produces different emphasis on classroom modes. It should be noted that the classroom interaction observed happened to be receptive skill classes, that is to understand the information or meaning contained in the texts. Therefore, the educator's language performances remained second-hand mostly for material modes. Meanwhile, the managerial mode received the second dominance since this mode functions as an enabling mode, especially for classroom organization which may also exist in other language skill classes.

Based on the percentages of classroom modes, skills, and system modes, it can be concluded that language accuracy, in this context, was of secondary importance. Furthermore, the fluency practice was not significantly accommodated since the small portion of classroom context mode in this study was actually to provide learners with opportunities to share their understanding of the information of the material learned.

Discussion

The main finding of this study is that in EFL classroom interaction, the teacher performed assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive speech act types with various acts as seen in Table 1. These speech acts function for managerial, material, skill systems, and classroom context modes. Directive speech acts are the type mostly used and they occur in all classroom modes. This finding reinforces the usefulness of a teacher's speech as a means to interact and engage learners in accomplishing the goal of language education and knowledge.

In terms of the type of speech act used, this is in good agreement with the studies conducted in the previous studies. Furthermore, the dominance of directive speech acts is in line with the findings of some studies. Anyhow, this present study found a much richer variety of speech acts than those reported in the previous studies. As expected, this study demonstrates that in EFL classrooms, the speech acts were produced more by teachers, and they are used mostly for managerial and material modes. Given that these results are based on a limited number of participants, the results of these exams should be recorded very carefully.

This research failed to account for a reason for the absence of declarative speech acts and the writers were aware that this research may have two limitations. The first is the context concerning goals and materials of language teaching and learning, which cause different percentages of speech act types to occur.

The second is the number of participants in this single case study. These limitations are evidence of the difficulty of collecting data on speech act variety.

A possible explanation for the speech act use may be that the data needed were teacher's speech acts abundantly found in receptive skill classes where the teacher had to organize the classroom activities, direct his students, and inform the learners about the materials. In productive skill classes, on the other hand, the learners generally occupy the classroom activities more dominantly with a teacher taking a minimum role. The present investigations so far have only been applied to EFL classroom interaction in receptive skill classes in senior high school. This factor may be the reason for this result.

Conclusions

This paper has given an account of the speech act variety performed by the educator in EFL schoolroom interaction and the functions of the educator language performances in the interaction. Taken together, these results suggest that the observed teacher performed four types of speech with various speech acts. Those various speech acts are needed to cover the required classroom modes in EFL classroom interaction.

This paper has highlighted the importance of the employment of effective or appropriate speech acts. These findings add to a growing body of literature on understanding the way the teacher's speech acts create learning opportunities. However, the present study has only examined educators' language performances in EFL schoolroom interaction in listening and reading classes under case study design. Consequently, the findings are not easily applicable to broader contexts.

In our view, these results represent an excellent initial step toward examining the teacher speech act use in a broader scope and with more participants. Therefore, future studies should address the speech act performance not only in receptive skill classes but also in productive skill classes. Additionally, the number of participants should be added for a more comprehensive conclusion.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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