TEACHER'S DIRECTIVE ACTS TO ACTIVATE LEARNERS IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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Abstract

One of the key factors contributing to the success of language learning is the learners' active involvement in the classroom interactional activities. One of the ways to promote such active engagement is the teacher's performance of directive acts, such as eliciting, prompting, giving instructions, checking comprehension, grouping/pairing, nominating, commanding, stimulating, encouraging, offering, asking, etc. to which learners' responses are either verbal or physical. When learners are frequently active in responding to such acts by comprehending the instructions, producing utterances, or conducting activities, it is more likely that language learning and/or acquisition is effective.

This paper tries to describe and explicate teacher's performance of directive acts which are capable of stimulating learners to be more actively engaged in classroom interaction. Hence, language learning process is more successful.

Key words: *speech acts, ELT, active engagement, classroom interaction*

Speech act is defined as a communicative force carried by verbal utterances produced by speakers (Searle, 1979). Blum-Kulka (1997:43) quoting Searle cites that "though there seems to be an endless number of illocutionary acts, such acts in fact may be grouped into five main types, namely representatives or assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations" (see also Yule, 1996:53; Mey, 1993:163; Leech, 1983:105-6).

Representatives or assertives are utterances that describe some state of affairs. Representatives commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. These are the kinds of speech acts which state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Statements of facts, assertions, conclusions, and descriptions are some examples of the speaker representing the world as s/he believes it is (Yule, 1996:53). Directives are utterances which are produced by speaker to get the hearer to do something, for example by ordering, commanding, requesting, advising, recommending, etc. Asking questions is also included in this category because by asking question, the speaker requests the hearer to do something, i.e. to provide answers (Wilson and Sperber, 1998:268; Blum-Kulka, 1997:43).

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Commissives are utterances which commit the speaker to some future action, such as promising, vowing, etc. Performing this act means the speaker commits him/herself to doing some action in the future. Expressives are utterances by which speaker expresses the psychological state of him/herself. In relation to politeness, this can be intrinsically polite, such as greeting, thanking, congratulating, apologizing, etc., but it can also be impolite, such as cursing, blaming, accusing, etc. (Leech, 1983:106). Declarations are utterances which affect a change of some state of affairs. Leech clarifies it by saying that this act is successfully performed if it brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality. The examples are resigning, dismissing, naming, christening, sentencing, etc.

This paper describes the directive acts which seem to be relevant to explicate the speech acts performed by teacher to activate learners in classroom interaction. The reactive responses given by learners towards teachers' communicative acts are in the forms of either verbal utterances or physical performances, such as their doing activities.

Method

This paper attempts to describe and explicate a classroom phenomenon of teacher's performance of acts which are capable of activating learners in classroom interaction. The data were obtained from an English language class of mixed-ability adult learners taught by a male teacher. They were collected by audio-visual recording and observation, a one-shot-site technique, preceded by taking some measures of preserving the naturalness of data.

The results of the recording were transcribed so that it is easier to prepare data fragments of teacher-learner interaction which contain such acts. Observation was done by the researcher's sitting at the back of the classroom taking field notes (Spradley, 1980: 59). This facilitates getting comprehensive understanding of the corpus and its context which is useful in the process of transcribing and analyzing.

The data were, then, analyzed qualitatively using the techniques of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1992:18), namely data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and interpretation. Parts of the transcript and the notes which were not directly related to the performance of stimulating learners' active involvement were set aside; thus, the remaining data were organized and manageable. The relevant data were, then, displayed in order to enumerate points, draw conclusions, and make interpretations.

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Directive Acts

Directives are utterances which are produced by speaker (S) to get the hearer (H) to do something, for example by ordering, commanding, requesting, advising, recommending, etc. Asking questions is also included in this category because by asking question, the speaker requests the hearer to do something, i.e. to provide answers (Wilson and Sperber, 1998:268; Blum-Kulka, 1997:43).

Based on the analysis of the classroom discourse data, the directive acts which stimulate learners to be actively involved in the activities are as follows: eliciting, prompting, giving instructions, checking comprehension, grouping/pairing, nominating, commanding, ordering, requesting, stimulating, encouraging, offering, asking, asking for confirmation, asking for repetition, calling attention, correcting, guiding, checking knowledge, and drilling.

These communicative functions are categorized as directive acts because in performing the acts, the S gets the H to do something. In eliciting, for example, the teacher gives stimulus to the learners so that they produce certain utterances. In sum, by this act, the teacher makes the learners do something, i.e. saying the language expected by the teacher.

Eliciting

Eliciting is an act of drawing language from the learners rather than giving it. This is done by the teacher to make learners actively involved in the process of teaching and learning. By eliciting the target language, the teacher is able to activate learners' background knowledge of the topic under discussion. Thus, it is easier for the learners to comprehend it and make it more memorable in their minds. In addition, eliciting the target language from the learners rather than giving it ensures that the learners are basically not blank minded. They actually possess basic knowledge by which teacher can further develop it.

Elicitation is done by teacher when he wants to elicit the phrase "Life Stages", the topic of the discussion. To achieve that purpose, he starts by giving some sample parts of the stages, such as married couple, then middle-aged, and the last is retired, hoping that the learners would come up with the expected phrase. In practice, however, one of the learners mentions the words "part of." Then, he gives more clues by saying, "Baby, and then young, and then married

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couple…. OK?" Due to the possible unfamiliarity of the expected phrase, after waiting for some time, the teacher gives prompt by saying incomplete parts of the phrase, i.e. "Life sta….?" In that way, one of the learners manages to present the elicited word. Finally, the teacher states the targeted phrase, "Life Stages" and says that it is the topic of that day's discussion.

There are some ways the teacher elicits language from learners, but most of them are in the forms of questions, whether they are in complete question form or in unfinished statement ended with question intonation, for example, (1) Yes, *the synonym of waiting?* This utterance is the example of elicitation in the form of statement but with rising intonation of a question. This question is responded by learner's answer.

Prompting

Prompts or cues are words/phrases/pictures/gestures used by a teacher to stimulate a response from learners. Prompt functions similarly to elicitation in that both are used to stimulate learners to produce language. The main difference between elicitation and prompt is that the former emphasizes on the expectation of certain target language expressions, whereas the latter on the giving of cues.

Prompts are mostly manifested in the forms of unfinished words, phrases, or sentences. The example of prompt can be seen in utterance, (2) *Mother taking care of …?* Teacher says this while showing a picture and saying an unfinished phrase. Without such a prompt, learners might not know what the teacher wants them to respond. Based on the picture shown and the prompt given by the teacher, what is expected becomes clear, and the learner is able to complete the phrase properly.

Teacher's physical movement clarifies his meanings. He is looking at the picture of a mother taking care of her baby on the screen while saying "What do you think about this picture?" This helps learners to get clear idea about what he means by "this picture." The deictic word "this" has clear referent when teacher makes a behavior of looking at the picture on the screen.

Giving Instructions

This act is performed by a teacher about what and how a task or an activity is to be conducted by classroom participants. It normally contains the name of the activity, like, a

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matching task, for instance. Then, it is followed by the steps or techniques of how it is conducted. To make learners really understand how to do, the teacher usually gives models or demonstration. To assure that the learners know how to do it properly, the teacher sometimes checks their comprehension. Finally, when the teacher is sure that learners understand what to do, the instructions are followed by nominating, assigning learners to pairs or groups, and commanding to start the activity.

The forms usually used to give instructions are affirmative statements consisting of some modal auxiliary verbs and imperatives. Another usual form is "I want you to … or I would like you to …" The following excerpt exemplifies how the teacher gave instructions.

> (3) So, we are doing a guessing game (making hands gestures). So, I will show you some pictures (as if holding a picture), and then you guess the picture. I just want one of you to sit down here (pointing a chair in front of the class). He or she will not see the picture (making hand gestures in front of the chest) and you will help your friend by describing the picture (hand gestures). You know what I mean? …, OK? You know what I mean? OK, Bu Suri, (pointing one of the Ls).

The above excerpt contains an example of instructions. The teacher announces that it is a guessing game. Then, it is followed by the detailed ways of doing it, i.e. the teacher would show a picture, all other learners describe it, the learner sitting in the front seat should guess what it is. To make sure learners understand what to do, the teacher checks their comprehension. Finally, the teacher ends the instructions by nominating a learner to start the activity.

Body language can help speaker make deictic expressions clear. When teacher says "For example like this" while taking a picture from his table, it is apparent that what he means by "this" is the picture taken from his table. In so far as this is an extract of teacher's giving learners instructions to conduct a guessing game, it becomes clear what and how the learners are supposed to do the game.

Checking Comprehension

This act is performed by the teacher to check if her/his instructions or explanation is well understood by the learners; hence they are able to execute the task. The form commonly used to perform this act is a question such as "Do you understand?" There are actually many other ways to check learners' comprehension, for examples, "Do you know what to do? Do you get it? Can you follow me? OK?, etc." The result of the analysis of the data, however, shows that the subject

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of this study uses only "OK? And Do you know what I mean?" But, this is expressed using a statement form with rising intonation as a question.

This act is commonly used especially when the audience has low level of language ability. That is intended to see if the Hs understand the S's utterance, thus communication can be maintained. In the context of giving instructions to do a task, the teacher checks learners' comprehension to assure if they are able to conduct the activity as properly as instructed. That the audience comprehend the teacher's language is important because that will be, theoretically, effective to support the development of language ability. This is in line with Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis which states that comprehensible input is required to promote acquisition.

Another significance of checking comprehension is that the teacher is able to adjust his/her speech according to level of the learners' competence. Hence, s/he can comply with the requirement of i+1 as is required by effective comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). Checking comprehension is categorized as directive because it is performed by S asking question whereby the Hs are supposed to do something, i.e. to provide response informing the existence or non-existence of such comprehension being checked.

Grouping/Pairing

This is one of the acts which is performed by the teacher to put learners into groups or pairs in carrying out the task. Harmer (2001) mentions some grouping techniques in managing classroom activities, i.e. whole-class, group work, pair-work, and individual work. In order to assign learners into groups or pairs, the teacher performs this act. This is usually done by counting the learners to a certain number, and then put the number of the learners in groups or pairs.

In grouping, teacher starts by counting the number of the group members. When counting the numbers, the teacher is also pointing each learner indicating that the learners being pointed belong to the group to which they are assigned. In that way, it is clear for each learner to which group s/he belongs; thus, eliminating confusion.

Grouping or pairing is classified as directive because in that act the speaker gets the hearer to do something, i.e. forming groups or pairs. Therefore, when the teacher says, "*One, two, three… group one,"* for example, as if he said, "Learners one, two, and three, please go

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together and create a group. We call it group one" This is an imperative form conveying directive act.

Nominating

This is an act by which the S calls one of the Hs to do something. This is done after the teacher gives instructions so that learners start to do a task. Instructions are addressed to whole-class; hence all learners listen and are engaged in the proceeding of lesson stages. Then, one of them is invited as the task requires it individually. Sometimes, moreover, the call is not addressed to individual learner, but to a group so that one of the members of the group can represent them to do the task. The example of nominating individual learner can be seen in (4) *OK, group two?* This utterance exemplifies nominating a group to answer the question. Therefore, one of the members of the nominated group gives the answer.

Nominating is also classified as directive because in that act the S gets the H to do something. Therefore, by calling the name or the group, "OK, Bu Suri, or OK, group two," the teacher can be understood to say, "OK, Bu Suri, please come forward and sit on this seat," whereas to the group, as if he said, "OK, any one of the members of group two, please answer this question."

Commanding

This act is defined as S's telling Hs to do something immediately. The linguistic form used to perform this act is blunt imperative or imperative without "please." This is done by the teacher to make learners immediately do what is being ordered. In this finding, commanding is differentiated from ordering in the sense that commanding has greater imposition than ordering, that commanding is to make learners do the activity immediately, that ordering uses "imperative + please," statement form, or "try to…." The similarity between them is that both are performed by the powerful (in this case, the teacher) over the powerless (the learners). Even weaker imposition than ordering is requesting in which S uses the same form, i.e. imperative + please, but told by learners (the powerless) towards the teacher (the powerful). The example of commanding compared to ordering can be seen in the following utterances. (5) *Give applause*. (Ss clapping hands)

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Utterance (5) is commanding by which the teacher commands all of the learners in the class to give applause at that very moment for Bu Suri who is able to guess the word correctly. Giving applause is a way to give appreciation or praise. Utterance (6) *You can sit down* (B Suri moved back to her seat), on the other hand, is an order given to Bu Suri to get back to her seat, so that another learner would be invited to sit in the front chair to be the guesser of the game. In that utterance, the teacher uses affirmative form instead of imperative.

Ordering

Like commanding, ordering is an act by which S tells H to do something. However, the level of imposition is less. The linguistic forms used to perform it are imperative + please, statement, try to …. An example of ordering is as follows: (7) *Yes, return the table.* (Ss put the tables back to their place in the corner of the room). This utterance is ordering by which the teacher tells the learners to get back to their previous position. Although it is stated in imperative form, it is an order rather than command because it is preceded by "*Yes*" which implies less forceful.

At that time, learners have just finished doing a matching task with table-tops around them. In order to do the following task, reading a text, learners are supposed to do it individually; thus, they do not need table-tops. Therefore, the teacher commands them to take the table away. Otherwise, the table might disturb the proceeding of the lesson. At this point, commanding is needed because taking the table away is obligatory. Due to its emphasized importance, commanding is given twice. Taking the table away should be done immediately.

On the other hand, the teacher only orders the learners to return to their previous positions meaning that they should not have sat surrounding a table-top, but rather they should sit at their previous seats, making a U-shaped whole-classroom seating arrangement. If only do they not return to their previous positions, the teacher will not have any objection as far as they sit in the original arrangement, U-shaped position. It implies that obligation or imposition of ordering is weaker than that of commanding.

Requesting

Requesting is an act of S's asking the H to do something. This is characterized by the S's lower position, having less power than the H. In this context, request is conveyed by the learners

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towards teacher, and not the other way around. The linguistic form of request might be similar to that of order, i.e. please + imperative. The difference, however, lies on the position of S against H. In giving command and order, the S has greater power than the H, whereas in requesting, the position of the S is lower than that of the H. The normal linguistic form of requesting is the insertion of "Please," followed by imperative. The example is that, when the students want to get the copy of material, they request the teacher to copy it. In response to the request, the teacher promises to do so. This complies with the requirement of a request, i.e. the S gets the H to do something but the S has lower position than the H.

Stimulating

This act is the S says something to encourage the H to produce utterances. In the context of language teaching and learning, it is important that the learners be courageous to be active in using the target language in the form of producing utterances, and not only receiving input. The example of stimulating is (8) *Yes, speak up* (facing to class, hand gestures). This represents a part of a guessing game done by learners. Learners describe a picture in order to be guessed by a learner. After description is given by another learner, some others are silent. Therefore, to activate the involvement of as many learners as possible, the teacher stimulates them by saying "*Yes, speak up."* This stimulation seems effective evidenced by the involvement of other learners in giving description.

Offering

Offering is an act performed by S to give a chance to H to do something, to answer a question, or to produce an utterance. In this case, the teacher as the speaker gives freedom to the learners as the hearers to take or not to take the chance. So, every learner in the classroom has equal opportunity to take the responsibility. This is good to make everyone engaged in thinking process, and to give the one who is most prepared to take the chance to do something or to answer a question. The example of offering is (9) *Who wants to answer number five?* This consists of utterances when learners are involved in doing a gap-filling task. After Learner 3 answers question number four, the teacher gives feedback telling that the answer is correct and praised. As his teaching style, the teacher often repeats the learners' answer. Utterance (9),

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furthermore, is an example of offering by which the teacher gives all learners a chance to answer the following question, number five.

In that way, all learners feel that they have equal responsibility to give an answer, thus engaged in the thinking process. Offered similar chance, learners feel the teacher is fair and does not endorse one over others. That is good to preserve the conduciveness of learning condition because everyone feels to have equal chance to take an active part in the lesson activities. Given offer, learners may also feel to be given freedom to make initiative of whether or not to participate in the lesson.

Asking Questions

Asking is defined as an act by which the S asks for information from the H because the S honestly does not know it. This is distinguished from other forms of questions by which the S or the teacher asks questions to which s/he has already known the answer, such as eliciting, prompting, guiding questions, etc. So, this is a real communicative behavior whereby there is a filling of information gap. For example, (10) *What is bald?* This utterance is an act of asking a question performed by a learner because he really does not know the meaning of the word "bald." He needs information about it. To satisfy this needs, the teacher answers him by using a body language, i.e. touching his head, which is fortunately bald. There are several other examples of asking questions addressed by learners, and almost all of them are about the meaning of words or phrases.

The asker, however, is not always the learners, sometimes it may also be the teacher. For example, (11) *Do you like Mr. Bean?* This utterance is an example of asking questions by the teacher. In (11), the teacher asks this question because he sincerely does not know whether learners like Mr. Bean. He asks this question to personalize the topic of discussion. That is to relate the topic of discussion with the personal experience of the learners. In that way, the teacher knows whether the topic is relevant with learners' life. It turns out that L5 seems not quite to have any idea about Mr. Bean as implied by his answer that his son, instead of he himself, likes him.

When the teacher asks (12) *Can you see it?* This utterance is also an example of a sincere question asked by the teacher because he really does not know if the learners could see the picture clearly. When asking this question, the teacher is showing a picture of Mr. Bean. Then,

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he is talking about him and saying that Mr. Bean is very, very funny. That funny appearance can be seen on the picture, therefore the teacher asks the learners if they see it. The teacher needs this information to make sure that the learners are really interested in the topic, as it is aided by visual media of a picture.

Asking for Confirmation

In the process on communication, it is quite possible that H is not quite sure of what the S says. In that case, the H might ask the S for confirmation on what s/he says. So, asking for confirmation is an act whereby the H says an utterance to confirm what the S says. This is usually performed when the H does not quite understand what the S says. In the context of language teaching and learning process, however, this can also be performed by the teacher to give a hint of unexpected or incorrect answer. By asking for confirmation, the teacher expects that the learner who gives the answer rethinks or reconsiders his/her answer.

This illustration represents a classroom procedure when the teacher and learners are discussing a picture of someone who is in the jail, counting days and looking forward to being released. This is a context to clarify the use of the phrase "look forward to." When the teacher, pointing to the picture, asks where the man in the picture is, L2 answers that he is at school. The teacher repeats the answer and follows it by asking a question to confirm, "*Are you sure?"* That indicates that the answer is incorrect and asks other learners to rethink of the answer. Then, L1 corrects it by saying that it is in the jail. That is correct and the teacher confirms it by giving a positive feedback and praise, followed by repeating the proper answer, "In the jail or in the prison." Then, he continues to lead learners to elicit the phrase "look forward to."

In sum, asking for confirmation is used not only to confirm understanding of what the S says but also to give a hint that the answer is not quite right and to expect the learners to rethink of it, and to come up with a better answer. This act is classified as directive because the H gets the S to do something, i.e. to confirm that the understanding is correct or to rethink of the answer and to provide a better one.

Asking for Repetition

Asking for repetition is an act performed by the H to ask the S to repeat what s/he has just said. It is produced because the H does not quite get what has just been said for non-

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comprehension or inaudibility. The example of asking for repetition is performed by the teacher so that the learner repeats his answer. Although apologizing lexical item is used, it is clear from the context that he asks the preceding speaker to repeat his utterance. As if he said, “Sorry I can’t hear what you said, can you repeat it?” That is obvious as indicated by the subsequent utterance, the same phrase that L1 has just said. When the teacher gets it clearly, since the answer is accurate, he, then, confirms it by echoing his statement.

This is classified as directive because in this act, the performer gets the other party to do something, i.e. repeating what s/he has just said.

Calling Attention

Calling attention is an act performed by S to ask H for attention. This is especially important when the teacher wants the learners to pay attention to her/him or to a particular point in the lesson. When the teacher is going to show a picture, or s/he is going to deliver instructions to conduct an activity while learners are busy doing something else, for instance, s/he calls their attention. It is said by teacher before he gives instructions to the learners to conduct an activity, a pair-work, of describing the most important event in one’s life to a friend. Since it is done after learners finish doing another task, i.e. group-work of classifying game, they need to be called to attention for the subsequent activity.

Correcting

Correcting is an act performed by the addressor in order to correct the utterance produced by the addressee. This is categorized as directives because the addressor gets the addressee to do something, i.e. correcting her/his own utterance. This act is pedagogical in nature in the sense that it is normally performed in the process of language learning and teaching and rarely happens in natural communication. Correction is given by the teacher in order that the learners correct their pronunciation error. After giving the correction, the teacher drills the correct pronunciation.

Sometimes, correction is also given by another learner, which is called peer correction. The teacher, first, asks the learners if the answer is right. Then, learners say that it is not right, therefore, Learner 1 immediately gives correction. After that, the teacher confirms the accurate answer and reformulates the correct, complete utterance.

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Correction is usually preceded by negation “not” or “no” then followed by the corrected version. The negation is intended to reject the error, thus eliminating the erroneous habit. Without it, the learners might not be aware of their errors and the presence of the correction. This direct correction can be effective in addition to another way which is indirect correction.

Checking Knowledge

Checking knowledge is an act performed by the S to check the existence or non-existence of the knowledge owned by the H. For pedagogical purposes, when the H does not have the knowledge it becomes the basis for the S to provide it. When the H has got the knowledge, checking is to create a frame in which interlocutors can communicate successfully. It often happens in a teaching and learning process that checking knowledge is done by the teacher intended to spread it to all learners. Although some of them have known the information, it is quite possible that some others have not. In such a case, checking is just a sort of focusing attention and a way to pass on information for those who have not known it.

Learner 4 provides an answer by saying a phrase “raise up.” The teacher wants to assure if all other learners know the meaning of the phrase, therefore he checks it by asking what it is. The teacher then clarifies his intention by rephrasing his question in the form of prompting. In order to remind the learners of the answer, he also gives the first word of the phrase. Finally, the learners know what the teacher wants and provide the expected answer.

Checking knowledge in this context is useful to remind the learners of the meaning of certain vocabulary. In other time, what is being checked is the knowledge of the world, thus the communicants can stand in the same frame. For example, the teacher checks whether the learners have known the real name of Mr. Bean, (13) *Do you know the real name of Mr. Bean?* Due to the fact that they have, it is easier for the teacher to talk further about him. That is one way for the interlocutors to create a frame for successful communication and to focus the attention of the addressees to the topic of discussion.

Drilling

Drilling is normally a pedagogical act performed by the S to give the H a restricted repetition activity to practice certain forms or pronunciation. This is normally pedagogical because it hardly happens in real authentic communication. Instead, it is usually done in the

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process of language teaching and learning. The teacher drills in order to be repeated by the learners to practice the pronunciation of the target language, multi-word verbs. Its benefit for the learners is not only to be able to pronounce them properly but also to acquire the collocation of the verbs with their particles. By frequently repeating the articulation of the verbs together with their particles, learners may automatically perceive a hunch that a certain verb collocates with a specific particle. That might become automatic habit.

Drilling is categorized as directive because in this act the S, in this case the driller, i.e. the teacher gets the learners to do something, i.e. to repeat and practice what is being drilled.

Final Remark

The directive acts manifested in the communicative functions performed by the teacher in the classroom mentioned above are substantially effective to encourage and stimulate learners to be actively involved in classroom interaction. Learners' active engagement is realized in the forms of either verbal responses or physical performance of the activities. Both forms are essential in promoting the effectiveness of learning process. Therefore, it is recommended that teacher consider the performance of those acts as ways to activate learners and increase the effectiveness of language teaching and learning.

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