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Exploring spontaneous acts of lightheartedness in EFL classrooms: A reflective duoethnography

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Abstract

While research has extensively explored joy-related acts and attitudes, such as enjoyment, fun, play, and humor in language learning environments, no research has conceptualized or centered on spontaneous acts of lightheartedness. The aim of this research is to introduce the concept into the literature and provide a first glimpse understanding of its impact in face-to-face and online English as a Foreign Language classes. To accomplish this, consistent with emergent research analyzing spontaneous acts and underpinned by applied phenomenology, we appropriate methods of moment analysis and eidetic variation on duoethnographic data of reflections-on-, -in-, and -for-actions that occurred during the authors' face-to-face and online classes over the 2022 to 2023 academic year at a university in Türkiye. In this way, a detailed first glimpse understanding of the phenomenon of spontaneous acts of lightheartedness and its various impacts are provided. Findings reveal essential features of the phenomenon and potential benefits for English as a Foreign Language classes, including fostering an atmosphere of engagement via the phenomenon's prominent characteristics of vulnerability, comfortability, trust, and joy.

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INTRODUCTION

This research is inspired by burgeoning research on joy in classroom engagement (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014; Liu et al., 2025; Li & Wang, 2025; Sulis, 2024; Tews et al., 2015). While research has explored joy-related acts and attitudes, such as enjoyment, fun, play, and humor in language learning environments, no research conceptualizes spontaneous acts of lightheartedness in the classroom or their possible impacts. Our paper fills this gap by bringing into the field the conceptualization, operationalization, and first-look study on spontaneous acts of lightheartedness in the classroom and their impacts in the classroom through duoethnographic reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. Through our duoethnographic reflections, we provide five descriptive moments that represent illuminative understandings of SALs and their impacts in our classes, specifically, the impact of SALs in fostering learning via lightening the mood; in fostering student engagement, such as student-initiated spontaneous acts of lightheartedness, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between educators and students for fostering a positive and inclusive environment; in fostering trust; and in fostering teachers' and students' unique personalities and languacultures.

Our inquiry began through a conversation discussing acts in our classroom that promote student engagement. Author-Participant 2 mentioned a spontaneous and lighthearted act he did in class and wondered if Author-Participant 1 enacted similar acts. Author-Participant 1 realized that he did but that he did so in his own ways. We articulated this as spontaneous and lighthearted types of acts and perceived that it is likely commonly but uniquely enacted among teachers. Therefore, we conducted a deep dive into the psychology and philosophy of education literature concerning this phenomenon.

Based on the stand-out features of the phenomenon and how literature from various theoretical backgrounds describes such features, we call this phenomenon “spontaneous act of lightheartedness in the classroom” or simply “SAL” with its plural form as SALs for “spontaneous acts.” The existential-phenomenological tradition underpins our understanding of act to mean a movement chosen by the person making the act (Callard, 2018; Davenport, 2012; Khawaja, 2016; Kierkegaard, 2009; Noddings, 2013; Sartre, 2021). Our descriptor of spontaneous coincides with the term in the moment analysis literature wherein spontaneous is understood as a choice made in the moment rather than premeditated or pre-planned (Adams Corral & Sayer, 2024; Martínez Hinestroza et al., 2023; Wei, 2011). The applied linguistics humor literature underpins our use of lightheartedness as meaning the actor's intentions in the act are non-serious and positive (i.e., well-intentioned) (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016).

Corresponding to our theoretical framework and the conceptualization of our terms that derive from that, the acts of SALs are operationalized as external acts, observable by others. Acts are operationalized as being spontaneous if they are in-the-moment responses, such as a teacher responding to a student's in-the-moment mistake. The operationalization can be further confirmed subjectively by the actor since the actor can identify whether the act was pre-planned or not. Only the SAL initiator can know the intentionality of lightheartedness since others may misinterpret an act by, for example, taking an utterance as serious when the speaker intended whimsiness. Due to the importance of subjective knowledge in identifying SALs, we used a form of auto-methodological practitioner research: reflective duoethnography (Karas et al., 2022). In this way, we subjectively identified when our acts were spontaneous and lighthearted, and our claims were strengthened as we iteratively articulated the environments in which the acts occurred.

Due to the importance of joy in the classroom and given the lack of conceptualising, operationalizing, and studying SALs; our goal was to present an introductory study with the aim of raising awareness among the research community of this class type of act. Thus, our duoethnographic reflective analyses were meant to shed light on SALs in the classroom to raise awareness of SALs by way of defining and exploring SALs in EFL classrooms. Our research questions stem from this purpose:

RQ 1: In reflecting-in-and-on-action, how do the two teacher-participants in English as a Foreign Language university classes understand the essential features of SALs?

RQ 2: In reflecting-in-and-on-action, how do two teacher-participants in English as a Foreign Language university classes understand SALs in terms of how SALs impact their classrooms; that is, did SALs assist in resetting classroom mood from heavy to light and/or in strengthening existing lighthearted atmospheres, fostering a norm of lightheartedness?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conducting a deep dive into the psychology and philosophy of education literature, we found that while prior educational research had extensively addressed phenomenon related to humor, enjoyment, and play in classes (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Neff & Dewaele, 2023), none had described spontaneous acts of lightheartedness or their possible impacts (see Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Liu et al., 2025; Sulis, 2024; Tews et al., 2015). Discovering this need, our paper fills this gap by bringing into the field a first-look study on spontaneous acts of lightheartedness (SALs) in the classroom and their impacts in the classroom through duoethnographic methods.

Our study began in earnest when we noticed how frequently SALs are enacted throughout our classes and that such naturally occurring acts had been underexplored. This need was our primary driver. Our review of the literature revealed further subordinate support for our research: Our research centered on teacher-initiated SALs and prior research shows that student enjoyment is heavily teacher-dependent (Li et al., 2018). Teacher enjoyment has been shown to lower student anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). The potential of teacher-initiated SALs to promote joy and mitigate anxiety is further supported by research on fun in the classroom which has been bifurcated into activities and deliveries, “Fun activities reflect a variety of hands-on exercises and ways to promote social involvement among students. Fun delivery, in turn, is more instructor-focused, capturing an instructor’s mode of delivery” (Tews et al., 2015, p. 24). Importantly, “fun delivery, but not fun activities, was positively related to student engagement” (p. 17), impacting student engagement more than even peer socialization and instructor praise. Furthermore, studies have shown that along with teacher enjoyment, “lightening the mood in the FL [foreign language] class can help ward off FLCA [foreign language classroom anxiety]” (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, p. 258). We hypothesized that teacher-initiated SALs might both reset classroom mood (from heavy to light) and strengthen existing lighthearted atmospheres, fostering a norm of lightheartedness.

In our literature review, we found the applied philosophy of Jorge Portilla shared our purpose: “The purpose of this work is not analogous to that of a physician who offers a diagnosis, but rather to that of a person who begins a dialogue” (Portilla, 1966, p. 14). Portilla’s philosophy does not adhere to any one method or philosophical school of thought; instead, due to the complex, historical uniqueness of each phenomenon, this framework understands that each phenomenon requires its own appropriation of methods from various theories: “As a general principle . . . it must be established that all descriptions presented refer to . . . active consciousness, to the world of lived experience . . . without . . . a theory” (Portilla, 1966, p. 31). Portilla does not mean one may not use theories; rather, there should not be narrow adherence to any one theory. What is called for, instead, is an appropriation of ideas, concepts, and/or methods from various theories befitting the phenomenon being studied. We applied this while reviewing the literature to find what theories best conceptualized the phenomenon we experienced.

Our review of the literature found the existential phenomenology conceptualization of acts to be most relevant to our phenomenon and useful in understanding it, as it provides insight into when it is operationalized. The existential phenomenology literature thoroughly describes what an act means and offers numerous arguments and examples to support its definition. To put it very briefly, it sees an act as a movement chosen by the person making the movement and observable by that same person (Callard, 2018; Davenport, 2012; Khawaja, 2016; Kierkegaard, 2009; Noddings, 2013; Sartre, 2021). Furthermore, it clearly defines every concept within that definition of act: observable, movement, and freewill choice. Space does not permit delving into defining

every word in every definition and every idea given to describe those concepts and so on, but suffice it to say the existential phenomenological research does so and, therefore, provides us with an accurate and rigorous conceptualization of act. We found the moment analysis literature to be the most relevant, accurate (in the sense of how things actually occur in real life), and useful in conceptualizing and operationalizing spontaneity, defined as a choice made in the moment based on unforeseen circumstances (such as a student having a specific problem) rather than based on anything created prior to the moment, such as a lesson plan or a joke created prior to the moment (Adams Corral & Sayer, 2024; Martínez Hinestroza et al., 2023; Wei, 2011). Lastly, we found the applied linguistics humor literature to be most relevant, accurate, and useful in conceptualizing and operationalizing lightheartedness as meaning the intentions of the actor in enacting the act are non-serious and positive in the sense of desiring the well-being of the student or other person affected by the act, e.g., desiring that they might better understand a word or that they might feel more comfortable in participating in class (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Data collection and analysis

Reflective acts and duoethnography

We had four main justifications for selecting reflective duoethnography: (1) Only the actor can determine phenomenologically the spontaneity and lighthearted intentionality involved in her/his act; therefore, a study on teacher-initiated SALs ought to be done by teachers enacting the SALs. This ensures a study on SALs achieves the quality criterion of accuracy. (2) Reflective duoethnography is an effective means to allow educators to deepen their understanding of teaching activities (Ahmed & Morgan, 2021). This adds to the trustworthiness of the study. (3) The sharing-and-making of meaning among two researchers increases phenomenological reflectivity by fleshing out personal experiences. This adds to the rigor of the study. (4) Duoethnographies provide more than one cultural-historical perspective through which to perceive and articulate the phenomenon, adding to the credibility, accuracy, and trustworthiness of the study (Polat, 2013).

Author-participants and reflections-on-and-in-action

It should be remembered that in a duoethnography, the authors are the participants. Author-Participant 2 was born and raised in the eastern region of Türkiye, and Author-Participant 1 was born and raised in an anglophone region in the Midwest United States. This provided us with different cultural-historical languacultural lenses through which to reflect on and develop awareness of our spontaneous, lighthearted practices. During the study, both authors were teaching at a university in eastern Türkiye. The courses they were teaching from which they discussed their experiences of enacting SALs were English as a Foreign Language courses, each author-participant taught two separate classes each semester for a total of eight English as a Foreign Language courses.

As we discussed the phenomenon throughout the first several weeks of the 2022, Fall Semester, in order to get a better hold of the phenomenon, we reflected on our past actions of enacting the phenomenon. We refer to these kinds of discussions as reflection-on-action based on Donald Schön methods (Schön, 1991). Again, while we use Schön's terminology, our study is not couched merely in Schönian theory. Rather, his method here is useful to the phenomenon, SAL, that we were studying since these methods are clearly described and are immediately relevant to first-person experienced phenomena. Similarly, we use the term reflective duoethnography to represent our methods of dialoguing about our reflections, and we use the term moment analysis to represent our means of demarcating phenomenological instantiations from which we enact eidetic variation. Specifically, reflection-on-action involves thinking on previous experiences of living out the phenomenon with the intention of enhancing our understanding of it. Reflection-on-action occurs when recalling the phenomenon's instantiation earlier that day or further in the past. We also enacted Schön's sister methods of reflection-for-action and reflecting-in-action.

For Portilla, the one indispensable aspect for doing phenomenology is that “whoever undertakes the task of describing to adopt the point of view of the subject and perform the described act in order to bring to light meanings that are inherent to it” (Portilla, 1966, p. 50). As we agreed in our reflection-for-action, we needed to perform the described act ourselves in order to bring to light meanings inherent to it. As Portilla did, so did we, we “placed ourselves in that ‘internal’ position relative to the issue that we are studying” (p. 50). We were doing philosophy how Portilla perceived philosophy as being done, “in the streets” about phenomenon in the real world, “alive and well in our community” (Portilla, 1966, p. 15) in order to make what is “implicit . . . present and explicit” (p. 16).

Therefore, it was important that we be as close to the phenomenon in the real-world as possible, not only recalling the phenomenon hours or days removed from instantiating it, but being vigilant as to when new instantiations of the phenomenon occurred in order to reflect on it as close as possible to experiencing it. Since we would not be present when the moment occurred in the other researcher’s courses, we agreed on the same prompts for knowing when the phenomenon was occurring. Our first prompt was when we acted spontaneously and our second prompt was if our act was done with an intention to be lighthearted. Given these prompts, we reflected in our act (reflection-in-action) while or immediately after our spontaneously well-intentioned act played out (Schön, 1991). So as not to interrupt the act, this reflecting-in was not meant to be a physical documentation of the act but rather a mental, phenomenological reflection (a mental note) that the act was occurring.

Reflection-in-action involved increasing our understanding of SALs by near-simultaneous phenomenological reflections of our usage and the classroom reactions to SALs in real time. Immediately after the class, we reflected on such acts and how the class responded to them by writing out or audio recording such reflections and sending them to the other researcher as part of our reflective duoethnography. Because our phenomenon was likely a common classroom occurrence but instantiated differently by different teachers, to study it, both a method that was auto-methodological in nature would be needed wherein the experiencer-actor of the phenomenon describes the phenomenon, and a dialogical method would be needed wherein two experiencer-actors dialogue to more perceptively describe, articulate, and therefore understand the phenomenon and see what is truly unique about it from other phenomenon and what is common across all occurrences of the phenomenon. As Portilla put it, “the search for self-consciousness and clarity can only be achieved individually and in the state of withdrawn concentration on work [and] in a dialogic state of concentration that points toward communication” (1966, p. 14). Thus, we combined auto-methodological means (individual SAL reflections-in-action) and duo-methodological means (reflective duoethnography) to understand the phenomenon. Reflective duoethnography has been defined as a “method where two or more people interact with each other and critically analyze phenomena important to them” whereby those two or more researchers/participants are “the sites of their own inquiries” (Karas et al., 2022, p. 120). Hence, our dialogues were perceptions of participant-researchers about their experiences as participant-researchers living out the phenomenon.

Eidetic variation and moment analysis

We applied Portilla’s version of eidetic analysis as opposed to the more common Husserl version of eidetic analysis to avoid any implication at bracketing from personal experience or from contextual features in which the phenomenon is couched as well as to avoid any implication at infallibility (Husserl, 1931; Portilla, 1966). Portilla’s is a realistic phenomenology rather than the pure phenomenology of Husserl: “Portilla . . . does not follow Husserl into the realms of pure phenomenology, remaining instead grounded in the fallibility of his personal experience” (Sánchez, 2012, p. 72). Including “fallibility” as part of the grounding of the phenomenological analysis makes the Portillan method honest concerning human reality, honest that the methods, the applications of them, and the results are all fallible.

We use a method in educational research known as moment analysis to assist to “make explicit, even in the most succinct manner, some of the ways in which the phenomenon offers itself” (Portilla, 1966, p. 52). Portilla applied his eidetic variation to a common social phenomenon in his social circles called *relajo*. In this eidetic variation, Portilla provides “different instances of the appearance of *relajo* out of which an essence [is] extracted or intuited. Each instance of *relajo*, after all, is a contingent manifestation . . . which could be otherwise, but to which belongs an essence (Sánchez, 2012, p. 69, emphasis in original). We provide five contingent manifestations of our SAL phenomenon from which we extract the phenomenon’s features or essences. We call these contingent manifestations “Moments” and appropriate methods from moment analysis to demarcate them.

Moment analysis is a technique for demarcating what may be called a contingent manifestation, moment, instantiation, or situation and was created as a “shift away from frequency and regularity oriented, pattern-seeking approaches to a focus on spontaneous, impromptu, and momentary actions and performances” (Wei, 2022, p. 1224). Moment analysis is meant to discern and analyze mundane-but-memorable moments from the perspective(s) of one or more of those who experience them. The analysis focuses on gleaning spontaneous acts that “influence subsequent events in an interaction” (Martínez Hinestroza et al., 2023, p. 1105). Because our focus is on understanding a spontaneous phenomenon in the classroom that influences subsequent events, we used moment analysis to demarcate SAL situations. This was key in assisting our phenomenological investigation, especially our eidetic variation. Moment analysis demarcates the study of the instantiations of SAL via three to potentially four elements it delineates of any given moment: (1) the emergence of the moment, for example, an interaction that preceded the phenomenon, (2) the phenomenon itself, (3) immediate response(s) to the phenomenon, and (4) potentially cumulative impact of the phenomenon (Wei, 2011).

Data collection dates, tools, and analysis

Our data collection occurred between October 2022 (initial reflections) and February 2024 (final reflections). Our analysis of the data was concurrent with their collection (in both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action) and following their collection (in reflection-on-action). Moments 1 to 4b and reflections-in-action ended June 2023 when our academic year at the university in Türkiye ended. Our methods provided data from personal reflective written and audio recordings and from dialogues with each other: face-to-face in-person, Zoom, email, text, and audio-clip (voicemail) interactions. This data concerned our face-to-face (Moments 1 and 3) and online (Moments 2 and 4a and b) classroom experiences with the SAL phenomenon. Because the dataset combined both online and face-to-face experiences, we acknowledge that interpretations may diverge depending on the affordances and constraints of the two modes of instruction. For example, while online lessons highlighted the role of digital interactional cues, face-to-face lessons emphasized embodied practices such as gesture, gaze, and classroom atmosphere. This dual context enriched but also complicated our interpretations, as the salience of particular SALs sometimes varied across modalities.

We employed primarily written and audio-recorded emails and texts because we noticed that these modalities enhanced clarity and encouraged slower, more-nuanced reflections. We were able to document our SALs shortly after they occurred via written or audio messages that we would immediately send to the other researcher, whereas setting up an appointment to talk meant the dialogue was further removed from the situation. Furthermore, verbal repetitions lacking new insights occurred during oral dialogues which were not realized until later transcribed. We avoided this repetition during written dialogues via a simple keyword search to determine if the idea had already been covered. Then, we could expound on what we already said, making reflective additions to past reflections, rather than merely repeating a past point without realizing it. In these ways, we were able to identify SAL moments that most represented our increased understanding of the phenomenon, eventually distilling them down to five illuminating moments. To further contextualize the study, it is worth noting that these moments emerged within undergraduate

English language teaching methodology courses, where the content involved microteaching practice, classroom management strategies, and peer feedback activities. This context shaped the types of spontaneous acts that were recognized as SALs.

Using the five moments, we enacted Portilla's version of eidetic variation, imagining what features were and were not (im)possible to change in each moment for the phenomenon to continue to be a SAL phenomenon. If the phenomenon could survive the change, then the changed feature was deemed inessential. If the SAL could not survive (could no longer be considered an SAL in any way), the changed feature was considered essential to the phenomenon's kind. The result of what we articulated as essential features of the phenomenon was the variations that, if changed, the phenomenon (SAL) would not survive. Through the moment analysis, our study did what Portilla did: described a number of contingent instantiations of the phenomenon to uncover the phenomenon's essential dimensions (Portilla, 1966, pp. 13-23).

FINDINGS

Through four exemplaric moments, we gleaned seven essential features of SALs, answering our first research question. Also, we were able to discover impacts of SALs in terms of lightening the mood from tense or anxious to more relaxed and positive and in maintaining and fostering lightness that was already there.

Moment 1: Well-intentioned and fostering learning via lightening the mood

Moment 1 is the moment that Author-Participant 2 provided in the first conversation that worked as the catalyst, leading us to perceive such a phenomenon as a spontaneous, lighthearted act that is regularly instantiated by us and, likely, most teachers. This moment occurred in a face-to-face advanced English class at a university in Türkiye. While a student was giving a presentation, he sought guidance on the pronunciation of "ticklish." Author-Participant 2 explained,

In response to his nervousness. I exaggerated each syllable of "tick-" "lish" with a playful gesture of my fingers towards his stomach (without contacting him). This impromptu act, which aimed at alleviating anxiety, was successful: the student, who had initially seemed nervous and hesitant, continued his presentation with greater fluency, fewer hesitations, and a noticeably more relaxed demeanor. Both teacher and peers observed this shift, which suggested that the student's mood had been lightened.

The act was clearly spontaneous, as the teacher could not have known what specific problem the student would have beforehand. Furthermore, it was lighthearted in that it was clearly meant to lighten the mood. Evidence for the effectiveness of this moment emerged from multiple sources: the teacher observed a noticeable shift in the student's delivery, peer observers documented similar impressions, and the video-recorded presentation displayed fewer hesitation markers such as pauses and fillers. Author-Participant 2's display of the word "ticklish" lowered the student's inhibitions throughout the rest of his presentation. This SAL lightened the mood, effectively calming the student's nerves as the student continued presenting. In terms of pedagogical benefits, Author-Participant 2 explained:

SALs create an atmosphere that alleviates anxiety and encourages active participation. The impromptu finger movement and playful pronunciation show the transformative potential of SALs that can turn a nervous, uncertain student to one who would deliver his presentation with enhanced confidence and fluency.

To strengthen the analysis, we examined multiple SAL moments across two teachers' classrooms using eidetic variation. This phenomenological method enabled us to identify recurring structures rather than isolated events. Reflexive journaling and peer debriefing were also incorporated into the process to check interpretations, thereby supporting the consistency of the findings and their faithfulness to participants' lived experiences.

When enacting eidetic variation, we realized that if the SAL did not lighten the mood for the student, the intention by the teacher to do so is enough to consider this SAL. . Nevertheless, when claiming that a student's mood was "lightened," we relied on objective criteria, including (a) reduced hesitation (fewer fillers, smoother sentence flow), (b) more natural delivery (eye contact, body language), and (c) willingness to continue engaging with the task despite initial nervousness.

The student having calmed nerves is not an essential feature of SAL, but the teacher's good intention to lighten the mood or maintain a lightened mood is what is essential here. It was not simply to lighten the mood for any reason, such as simply to entertain, but specifically to assist in creating an environment conducive for learning. It was well-intentioned in that it was not meant to spite or make fun of but rather to help benefit the student by creating or maintaining an environment conducive for learning, such as feeling freer to take the risks needed to master the material. This was found in both teachers' classes, as seen in SAL Moment 2. Also, Author-Participant 1 began to notice what would become a common theme, trust, *"This moment showed vulnerability: that of the teacher vulnerably trusting the class enough to act goofy which made the student feel less inhibited interacting with the class through the material."*

Moment 2: Teacher-initiated SALs inspiring student-initiated SALs

During an online class, some of Author-Participant 1's students exhibited difficulty pronouncing the schwa sound. While they could identify the sound, they struggled making the sound, and it became clear that they were feeling self-conscious about it as they ceased to volunteer to participate in the ongoing activity. Noting their struggle, Author-Participant 1 facetiously said, *"Some people make this sound when punched in the stomach. It could help to punch yourself or have someone else punch you in the stomach while attempting the noise."* Laughter followed. A student's ironic response, *"That's reasonable,"* led to more laughter. Another student added, *"But don't actually try this at home,"* intertextualizing a common utterance, fostering further laughter.

This moment demonstrates that spontaneous acts multiply as students respond to the teacher-initiated SAL. It shows that SALs may promote student self-expression. Following the SAL effects in this moment, other more reserved students began voluntarily participating in attempts at pronouncing the schwa in the activities that followed. Author-Participant 1 conveyed: *"We continued with more practice. The class participated more enthusiastically, vulnerably attempting the schwa. Through this, their performance immediately spiked."* Hence, SALs may foster participation related to the class's learning objectives even if the SAL itself appears unrelated to learning: Author-Participant 1 did not believe that punching oneself in the stomach helps one produce the schwa, but his humor produced a snowball effect that led to more students' attempts at using the schwa. This moment highlights features of trust-and-comfortability of SALs and supports our eidetic findings of Moments 1 and 3.

Moment 3: SALs require and foster trust

As an activity was about to begin in one of Author-Participant 1's classes, one student stated she and a classmate had left their textbooks in a different building and asked if she could get them. Author-Participant 1, realizing this was the third occurrence, spontaneously smiled and responded, *"Ok, but double-time it. No, triple-time it."* The student returned the smile, setting out quickly, but then switched to walking in slow motion. She looked back, smiling, to see the teacher's reaction. Author-Participant 1 laughed and responded with "Thanks." The student quickly returned with the books.

In this moment, we identified mutual trust between Author-Participant 1 and his student, evident in his trust of her quick return, rather than suspiciously assuming the books were misplaced to avoid class. The trust was not unfounded since the prior two times the student returned quickly with the books. Never did both students try to miss class to pick up both books but always only one went to get their books. Moreover, trust was evident on the part of the student in her trust of his lighthearted intentions in using triple-time and that Author-Participant 1 would not be offended at her responding with a slow-motion walk. In dialogue with Author-Participant 2, Author-Participant 1 expressed:

Trusting students and valuing their agency encourages them to express their personality. The student's comedic response portrayed trust, which my genuine enjoyment reinforced. This moment is representative of regular SALs that occur in our class that have fostered classroom ease, resulting in community building where students freely interact creatively with each other.

Through eidetic variation, the two-way trust was seen as an essential feature of teacher-initiated SAL. For example, if the student responded by being offended, Author-Participant 1 would try to repair trust by explaining he was being facetious, and she could return in a reasonable timeframe. The trust from the student to the teacher, that he actually has good-intentions, was necessary or such SAL acts could not continue in the situation. If the student had a genuinely panicked look and ran sprinting, the teacher would likewise feel the need to make it clear he trusted her to return in reasonable time. On the other hand, if the student did not return for a long period of time, the teacher would worry that perhaps something bad may have occurred to delay her. He would not default on mistrusting her because the spirit of distrust was not in the SAL, only one that trusted the student and, therefore, had a light mood about the students forgetting their books. If the students genuinely were taking advantage of the teacher and it became clear, the teacher would change his tone and talk about it, setting new parameters on retrieving books. There would be little-to-no arena for a SAL to take place within the context of that moment of dialogue about setting new out strictures. Trust in the good-intentions held by the other party needed from both sides.

SAL Moments 4a and 4b: Context-awareness and languaculture

SAL Moment 4a: Context-awareness and languaculture

Author-Participant 2 described a moment in the following way:

When I asked the class “What is your favourite dish?,” a student responded with “logi.” Realising that the student meant to say “logic” which translates to “mantık” in Turkish, I found the amusing connection: the missing letter k in mantık corresponds with manti, a type of Turkish dumpling, and the missing letter c in logic. Embracing the moment, I continued, “Logi! That’s a unique dish choice. It is like the missing k in mantık. It seems like the missing c in logic played a trick on us.” Some laughter followed and it occurred to me this may be a good opportunity to introduce the concept of culinary fusion, saying, “Let’s imagine a dish called logi-mantık, something that would be a delicious combination of logical ingredients and traditional Turkish flavours!” Laughter increased as students began to join in the exercise, feeding off of each other to create amusing descriptions of what this dish might entail.

Author-Participant 2 noticed that this shows how SALs may show students the joy in using an aspect of a subject they are beginning to advance in. However, we realized this is not an essential feature of SALs since the SALs would still be there even if the students did not respond so joyfully to it. Still, we also realized from this is that an essential feature of the SAL, and all SALs we lived out, is understanding at least some of the cultural-historical context of our students.

SAL Moment 4b: Context-awareness and languaculture

Author-Participant 1’s reflections on Moment 4a highlight that SAL instantiations are uniquely created based on the known histories of the students and teacher:

SALs like these reveal unique individual histories. I would not have deduced the logi(c)-manti(k) connection due to not knowing Turkish sufficiently. It reminds me of SALs where I display my pronunciation of Turkish. For example, in one online class, I complimented a student’s fluent response by stating he had a “Good reaksiyon” [Turkish for ‘reaction’] and he responded with a laugh and “Good Turkish” which brought about laughter from others. I added, “Teşekküürler” exaggerating my inability to pronounce ü when followed by r, and a different student added, “Your pronunciation of teşekkürler is great too.” I immediately responded, “You just got 10 points extra credit” ending class with bonding notes and mutual chuckles. This expresses the idiosyncrasy of SALs based on knowledge of each other’s knowledge and it also shows how SALs may act to maintain and strengthening the classroom’s camaraderie.

These Moments reveal the “knowing your students” and “knowing what your students know about you” aspect of SALs. Students who did not have already know Turkish would not appreciate either of the prior moments nor would students who did not already know Author-Participant 2 knew Turkish, and Author-Participant 1 knew very little. In other words, with all the SAL moments, but brought to the fore with these, knowledge of the history and intersubjective knowledge of one’s interlocutors is an essential feature of a SAL.

DISCUSSION

We found that teacher-initiated SALs stem from good intentions and two-way trust, using context and knowledge of students' histories and knowledge of their knowledge of our histories to foster an environment conducive to learning via lightening the mood. Considering our first research question, essential features gleaned via using eidetic variation to reflect-on-action include the following: A SAL (Feature 1) must be enacted in the classroom, whether online or in person, (Feature 2) must not have been preplanned, (Feature 3) must be formed in and by the context (necessarily including some knowledge of students' histories and of their knowledge of the teacher's history), (Feature 4) must include trust of the student(s) and from the student(s), (Feature 5) have some element of non-seriousness in its intention, (Feature 6) must have the good-intentions of creating or maintaining a relaxed environment conducive to safely taking risks for potential learning, and (Feature 7a-7c) be a positive act in that (Feature 7a) it is external, (Feature 7b) freely chosen, and (Feature 7c) an act-for something.

Feature 7 requires more unpacking. When we say the act of SAL is a positive act, we mean it is a freewill act-for something, not an act-detracting-from something. SALs are an act of positive freedom where "For Portilla . . . positive, freedom is actualized in confronting the values which give themselves to us in experience and committing to their realization" (Sánchez, 2012, p. 78). Acts of positive freedom do not intend to violate the values of the situation, here the classroom situation. Values that violate a situation are acts that threaten what the situation actually is; for example, if the teacher began yelling at students or simply refused to respond to students. In those cases, the classroom is in danger of ceasing to be a classroom in the sense of being a place where teaching-learning may occur. A positive act is one that reflects the commitment to the realization of the values of the classroom—of that which fosters teaching-learning. Thus, in Moment 1, it was to both teach the student the meaning of a word and to assist in calming the student's nerves so that they may more fluently continue their presentation. As Sanchez further explicates, "Moral behavior is behavior which makes this realization, or transit, possible" (Sánchez, 2012, pp. 77-78). Still, a positive act of freedom does not mean a value is best or fully realized, as Ortega explains, "perfect justice is never achieved but always desired" (Ortega y Gasset, 1931, p. 16). An essential feature of SAL (Feature 7) is that this desire is in some way reflected in the SAL.

Even given these seven features, we maintain Portilla's purpose: "Portilla's purpose is . . . to leave the essence indeterminate enough so as to 'initiate' a conversation which is less about defining an essence and more about initiating [dialogical] action" (Sánchez, p. 69, emphasis in original). We offer the above as likely essential features of the SAL phenomenon without a claim to have exhaustively described its essences. We hope that the dialogue through the publication of this work provides a nascent space to discuss the phenomenon.

Concerning our second research question, we found that SALs impacted the classroom, resetting classroom mood from heavy to light, by students' increase in using aspects of their target language with more fluency and joy than they were previously enacting and in language areas that they were having difficulty with (Moments 1 and 3). In this, our findings support those of Tews et al. (2015) in that SALs—often a form of "fun delivery"—encouraged student participation and reduced anxiety, such as language presentations. SALs were also found to lighten the mood to strengthen existing lighthearted atmospheres, by increasing enjoyment in the classroom as seen by the increase of chuckles and laughter the SALs brought about (Moments 2, 3, 4a, and 4b). This aligns with Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) research, which demonstrated that sources of enjoyment may lower FLCA. Furthermore, the cascading effect of SALs, where one act of lightheartedness leads to a series of similar acts (a SAL chain), mirrors the concept of "social glue" (Neff & Dewaele, 2023, p. 575), where students engaged more deeply with the material and each other through SALs. Other positive impacts were an increase in student comfortability and willingness to be vulnerable (Moments 1, 2, and 4.b) and laughter and creativity (Moments 3 and

4.a). Furthermore, our findings from Moments 4.a and 4.b support those of Kwihangana (2021) wherein a certain amount of translanguaging enhances EFL students' participation (Moment 4.b).

In sum, we identified what may be seven features of SALs, beginning the dialogue of what the essential features of SALs may be in accord with our first research question's aim. Also, we discovered impacts of SALs in our classrooms as concerns lightening the mood and maintaining a positive atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

Our study indicates that SALs emerge as valuable pedagogical tools and, therefore, should be fostered in a way that seems most natural to the teachers so that the students as well may feel empowered to enact SALs using their own unique personalities. This understanding shaped the following interpretation of our findings and highlights the broader significance of SALs for both language learning and teacher identity. SALs were used in order to help the students relax and spur them on to take more risks in those areas in which they were experiencing the difficulty (Moments 1 and 3). SALs were also used to show confidence and trust in the students (Moments 2 and 4.b). This role of SALs in fostering community and mutual trust within the classroom echoes Ahmed and Morgan's (2021) findings on the critical role of trust during educational transitions. SALs were also used via translanguaging in order to help the students master the material (Moment 4.a). Underpinned by Portilla's philosophy and utilising a combination of reflective duoethnography and moment analysis, our research extended the traditional methodological boundaries of moment analysis (Wei, 2022) by applying it to reflective research in and on action (Schön, 1991) and applying it to a diverse array of spontaneous verbal and non-verbal acts, uncovering a wider spectrum of spontaneous phenomena beyond what moment analysis has been used to uncover (beyond translanguaging). In this way, our results not only provide a clear conceptualization and operationalization of SALs but also illustrate their capacity to enhance engagement, foster joy, and reduce stress within classroom settings.

SUGGESTIONS

While qualitative studies admit to their limitations in replication, since it is impossible to study the same object when it comes to human acts in time, since humans differ from each other and from themselves at different points in time. However, it would be "productive to ask whether similar results would emerge from a repeat study of a similar object" (Gorichanaz, 2017, p. 4). That is, it would be interesting to see if other teachers of English as a Foreign Language classes, especially those in universities in other countries, would discover similar findings of SALs producing positive effects in their classrooms even given other teachers' unique ways of producing SALs.

Our study indicates that SALs emerge as valuable pedagogical tools and, therefore, should be fostered in a way that seems most natural to the teachers so that the students as well may feel empowered to enact SALs using their own unique personalities. Moreover, the spontaneous and well-intentioned nature of SALs aligns with the preferences of students, highlighted by Neff and Dewaele (2023) who found that students value natural over forced humor from teachers since it tends to promote authenticity and strengthen connections within the classroom.

As noted in Moments 1, 2, 3, and 4b, when teachers are vulnerable enough to initiate their SALs and subsequently enjoy when students do the same, students take more ownership of their language use and are emboldened not only to initiate more SALs but also to engage in more language learning risks. Furthermore, we suggest that even in stressful classroom moments, a teacher should feel free to use SALs that come naturally to the situation. This is because by enhancing joy, trust, and community SALs work to mitigate the adverse effects of educational stressors and enrich overall classroom dynamics. Similarly, student comfortability increases and, likewise, willingness to be vulnerable (Moments 1, 3, and 4b), to laugh (Moments 2, 3, 4a, and 4b), and to join in with their own creative acts (Moments 2, 3, and 4a). We suggest that even in stressful classroom moments, a teacher should feel free to use SALs that come naturally to their personality

and to the situation because SALs tend to mitigate adverse effects of various educational stressors (Moments 1 and 2) and promote the values of the students and of the classroom as a whole.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its small sample size, its reliance on self-reported and observed classroom moments, and its focus on a single educational context. These constraints mean that findings cannot be generalized to all teacher populations. Future research could examine SALs in different cultural and institutional contexts, compare novice and experienced teachers, or employ longitudinal designs to trace how SALs evolve over time. For teacher education, this suggests that SALs should be incorporated not as prescriptive techniques but as reflective practices that can be adapted to diverse teaching styles and classroom realities.

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