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Research Paper

EFL Teachers' Language Awareness and Communication Strategies

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Abstract
English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' spoken English in classroom is an important input for students because they have few opportunities to practise English out of the classroom context. However, the use of classroom oral English has been shown to be a big challenge to EFL teachers due to different factors such as students' low proficiency. This qualitative study investigates five lecturers' use of oral English communication strategies (CSs) in EFL non-major classes at two public colleges in Vietnam and how different roles and domains of teacher language awareness affect those strategies. Data were collected via classroom observations and individual interviews with lecturers. Findings reveal that they used six main types of CSs to both enhance classroom communication and facilitate students' overall learning process. Results also show that while the domains of language user and language analyst were manifested in lecturers' practical use of communication strategies, the role of a language teacher shaped lecturers' beliefs on communication strategy functions. This study concluded that EFL teachers need to develop a highly critical language awareness so as to provide well-formed and rich L2 input to students. Also, examining the role of EFL teachers' communication strategies requires a more mindful consideration of classroom contexts.

***Keywords**:* Teacher Language Awareness; Oral English; Communication Strategies; EFL Teachers; EFL Non-major Classes

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1. Introduction

EFL teachers' own language awareness about the English language and how to teach the language helps them present rich and well-formed language patterns and models, and provide explanations of grammatical forms to their students (Riordan, 2018). There is a close connection between teachers' language awareness and their approach to communication in the classroom. In fact, a focus on teacher language awareness in relation to language in general can help enhance multilingual students' learning at school (Turner & Tour, 2025). Communication strategies are an underlying and often unconscious mental process (Bialystok, 1990); however, teachers need to know about and be able to intentionally use a range of these strategies.

This article explores EFL teachers' classroom communication strategies to strengthen comprehensibility and support student learning and engagement in Vietnamese college non-English major contexts. The focus of this research is on EFL teachers' language awareness and how it is manifested in EFL teachers' communication strategies. This article addresses two questions:

1. What communication strategies do EFL teachers use when speaking English in the classroom?

2. How are the domains of teacher language awareness manifested in EFL teachers' classroom English communication strategies?

Although there has been much research in classroom communication strategies in language education, previous studies mainly focused on the stance of learners. Therefore, from the perspective of academic contribution, this in-depth study of classroom English communication with a focus on teachers, including a purpose-designed research-informed communication strategy taxonomy, contributes to the literature in this field. Particularly, the addition of a new element to the existing communication strategy taxonomy, as well as certain distinct functions of EFL lecturers' communication

strategies, the findings of this study highlight the need to refocus existing taxonomies so that they are more relevant to L2 or FL classroom contexts.

More importantly, because the situations of the two researched contexts are common in language classrooms, the findings of this study can inform policies and practices regarding English education reform in other Vietnamese education contexts. As for those lecturers who do not use much English in non-major classes, the final and completed taxonomy can be a useful guideline for them, which can help them feel more confident and give them ideas for finding opportunities to use more English communication.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Teacher Language Awareness

Teacher language awareness refers to "teachers' cognitions (knowledge and beliefs) about language in general and the language they teach" (Andrews & Svalberg, 2017, p. 219). For language teachers, language awareness involves both language proficiency and metalinguistic knowledge of the language being taught (Andrews, 2001). Language proficiency is an individual's skill level in speaking, writing, reading, or understanding a language (Tavakoli, Rakhshanderoo, Izadpanah, & Moradi, 2014). It is central to language learner success because the likelihood of a learner succeeding is minimal when a teacher is not proficient (Dippenaar & Peyper, 2011). Metalinguistic knowledge refers to knowing the general rules and universal templates of language structures (e. g. nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, word order, morphological patterns) (Bialystok, 2001). EFL teachers' metalinguistic knowledge and feedback stimulate students' language awareness by helping them better understand grammatical rules and thus enhance their deep learning (Supiani, et. al, 2025). However, language proficiency and metalinguistic knowledge alone seem to be insufficient in EFL teaching as "in language teaching, language is both the content of teaching as well as the

means by which it is taught" (Parab, 2020, p. 52). Such elements as discourse, culture, and knowledge about learners should also be part of teachers' language awareness. Language teachers need also to be aware of their own key role in input for learning and anticipating learners' potential difficulties (Andrews & McNeill, 2005).

It is clear that teacher language awareness is complex and multifaceted, and requires L2 teachers to take on different roles: for example, as teachers with deep knowledge about learners and their language competence and needs, as effective language users, as language analysts, and as effective mediators/facilitators. Taken all together, Andrews (2003, 2007) viewed teacher language awareness as the combination of three domains:

(1) User domain: The teacher takes the role of a language user; language proficiency ensures him/her to function as a model and to provide diversified and well-formed input for learners; communicative competence is crucial (Celce-Murcia, 2008)

(2) Analyst domain: The teacher takes the role of a language analyst; his/her metalinguistic knowledge of the language systems and ability to understand how the target language works enable him/her to offer explanations of grammatical structures and language patterns, and to respond to learner errors. Metalinguistic awareness is important (Van Lier, 1998).

(3) Teacher domain: The teacher acts as a language teacher; his/her theoretical knowledge about the pedagogy and principles of language teaching help him/her to plan and implement instruction that engages and supports a wide range of language learners.

Andrews' framework has been used to investigate language teachers' practices. For example, Lindahl (2019) investigated how new educators responded to pedagogical tasks which required them to apply and reflect upon their language awareness. The new educators had a mostly negative

orientation towards the teacher language awareness activities. Recent researchers (e.g. Krogager Andersen, 2024; Turner & Tour, 2025) have expanded teacher language awareness to the multilingual, sociocultural, and critical dimensions. Although different, these dimensions point out that language awareness should apply to the various ways in which language flows through learners and mediates the learning process. This perception implicitly aligns with the three domains suggested by Andrews' framework namely user, analyst, and teacher in that teacher language awareness supports a wide range of language learners. These three domains have underpinned a range of studies about teachers' language awareness in many teaching contexts, and provides the framework for the study described in this article.

2.2 Communication Strategies

In the context of second language acquisition, the concept of communication strategies (CSs) has been defined differently depending on which theoretical frameworks have been applied. From an interactional perspective, CSs refer to a "mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (Faerch & Kasper, 1983, p. 65). In other words, CSs are conceptualised as "attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the second language learner, and the linguistic knowledge of the target language interlocutor in real communication situations" (Tarone, 1983, p. 65). During a communicative activity in the classroom context, learners may not be able to discuss or convey their thoughts effectively to the listeners due to a lack of linguistic proficiency skills. Communication strategies are therefore key to solving such problems. Yang and Gai (2010) regarded CSs as techniques people use when facing communicative problems or trying to achieve communicative goals. The use of CSs is interactively affected by factors such as "a learner's level of language proficiency, a learner's personality and

communicative experience, and his/her attitude towards a particular strategy, nature of task, problem source, or communication situations" (p. 74).

Over the last three decades, a range of communication strategy typologies have been proposed in the research literature, influenced by linguists' varied approaches to language analysis. The most important among those may be that of Dörnyei and Scott (1997), who reviewed nine different taxonomies (e.g. Bialystok, 1990; Færch & Kasper, 1983; Tarone, 1980) and discovered significant similarities among them. They subsequently integrated the different approaches and suggested the new taxonomy, with a total of 33 communication strategies, as in the table below:

Table 1.
Dörnyei and Scott's Taxonomy (1997, p.188-194)

Direct Strategies	**Interactional strategies**	**Indirect strategies**
Resource deficit-related strategies **Message abandonment* **Message reduction* **Message replacement* **Circumlocution* **Approximation* **Use of all-purpose words* **Word-coinage* **Restructuring* **Literal translation* **Foreignising* **Code-switching* **Use of similar sounding words* **Mumbling* **Omission* **Retrieval* **Over-explicitness* **Mime* *Own-performance problem-related strategies* **Self-rephrasing* **Self-repair* *Other-performance problem-related strategies* **Other-repair*	*Resource deficit-related strategies* **Direct/indirect appeals for help* *Own-performance problem-related strategies* **Comprehensive check* **Own-accuracy check* *Other-performance problem-related strategies* **Asking for repetition* **Asking for clarification* **Asking for confirmation* **Guessing* **Expressing non-understanding* **Interpretive summary* **Responses (repeat/ repair/ rephrase/ expand/ confirm)*	*Processing time pressure-related strategies* **Use of fillers* **Self-repetition/ Other-repetition* *Own-performance problem-related strategies* **Verbal strategy markers* *Other-performance problem-related strategies* **Feigning understanding*

The context of the language classroom is different to the interactional contexts that most communication strategy taxonomies are designed for. This

study examines CSs from the stance of EFL teachers, in the context of a high-level interlocutor communicating in English with much lower-level proficiency language learners in a context where they both share L1. This is different from the contexts and subjects of most current taxonomies. To address this difference, the first author created a context-based CS taxonomy, drawing mainly from Dörnyei and Scott (1997). The basis of the taxonomy proposed in this study is a consideration of the characteristics of teachers' talk and the purposes of CSs. A synthesis of the CSs taxonomy used in this research is provided in the following table:

Table 2.
EFL Teaching Communication Strategies Taxonomy

Strategies	**Adopted from**	**Definition/ Description by linguists**
Code-switching	Dörnyei and Scott (1997)	Using L1 lexical items in L2 speech; ranging from single words to whole chunks and even complete turns (p. 189).
Translation	Dörnyei and Scott (1997)	Translating L1 words, phrases, or structures to L2 (p. 189).
Nonverbal	Dörnyei and Scott (1997) (Embodied in *Mime*) Nakatani (2006)	Describing whole concepts nonverbally or accompanying a verbal strategy with a visual illustration (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997, p. 190). Directly linked to learners' use of body language such as eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions to achieve communication (Nakatani, 2006, p. 157).
Interactional	Dörnyei and Scott (1997) (Embodied in *mumbling; omission; retrieval; over-explicitness; comprehensive check; own-accuracy check; asking for repetition/ clarification/ confirmation; expressing non-understanding; interpretive summary; response (repeat/ repair/ rephrase/ expand/ confirm); use of fillers;* and *verbal strategy markers)*	Involving an approach which enables participants to "carry out trouble-shooting exchanges cooperatively, and therefore mutual understanding is a function of the successful execution of both pair parts of the exchange" (p. 199).
Self-repetition	Dörnyei and Scott (1997)	Saying a word or a string of words again right after they appear (p. 190).
Simplification	Faerch and Kasper (1983); Willem (1987) (Embodied in *Reduction* strategy) Poulisse (1993) (Embodied in *Substitution* strategy) Dörnyei and Scott (1997) (Embodied in *message abandonment/reduction/replacement; circumlocution; approximation; use of all-purpose words; use of similar sounding words; word-coinage;*	A proposed strategy in this study. It is defined as using techniques excluding the use of L1 or nonverbal means to make L2/FL speech simpler/more comprehensible at the point of, or after utterances.

	restructuring; foreignising; and *self-rephrasing*)

"Simplification" occurs when a speaker thinks that, by using this strategy, he/she will be best understood by the addressee. Since parts of a teacher's L2/FL speech, such as vocabulary or structures, may pose challenges for students to understand, one of the ways for the teacher to tackle this problem is to modify the lexical and linguistic units in his/her speech so that they are more familiar or easier for students to gauge their meanings. I categorised these modification processes as simplification strategies.

The idea of the simplification strategy originated from different strategies which all serve to substitute the original linguistic unit with a new one which is simpler. The current simplification strategy is thus based on the concepts of 'reduction' (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Willem, 1987); 'substitution' (Poulisse, 1993); and some previously-mentioned strategies in the taxonomy of Dörnyei and Scott (1997). By using the strategies of 'message abandonment/reduction/replacement'; 'circumlocution'; 'approximation'; 'use of all-purpose words'; 'use of similar sounding words'; 'word-coinage'; 'restructuring'; 'foreignising'; and 'self-rephrasing', a speaker wants to make it easier to express and/or more accessible to the interlocutor. For the case of an L2/FL teacher speaking English to students, those strategies aim at simplifying their speech; hence, they were integrated into the simplification strategy. Putting together all the suitable attributes of the strategies constituting the simplification strategy and referring them to the context of our research, the definition of simplification strategy is given in the above table.

2.3 Teacher Language Awareness, Communication Strategies, and Pedagogical Practices

Teacher language awareness, especially in L2/FL classrooms, has been shown to have a significant impact on pedagogical practices. Andrews (2001) believed that teachers' language awareness has a profound impact on the teachers' performance of many tasks in the classroom such as making input comprehensible to learners, making key grammatical features salient, or providing clarification and exemplification. Degrees of teachers' language awareness also enable them to perform such pedagogical tasks such as responding to language-related questions raised by learners and recognising dialectical varieties among learners (Andrews & Lin, 2017). The level of teacher language awareness largely determines students' engagement in classroom practices (Andrews, 2007).

Teacher language awareness plays a pivotal role in their use of communication strategies. For instance, from a traditional view, Faerch and Kasper (1983) claimed that awareness results from difficulties or deficiencies that require target language users to resort to a compensatory strategy. Those users intentionally employ one of the strategies to deal with such difficult situations as facing limitations of lexical resources. From an interactional perspective, awareness belongs to a property of discourse where both speaker and interlocutor realise it as a resource to counter deficiency and to negotiate input (Yule & Tarone, 1991). As can be seen, despite differences in the origins and purposes of communication strategies, both the traditional and interactional approaches confirm speakers' consciousness in using those strategies.

From the discussion above, a close connection between teachers' language awareness and their approach to communication in the classroom has been identified. Since a teacher's English communication is an important

source of input for learners, his/her language awareness has a profound impact on this also. Because communication strategies are an underlying mental human process (Bialystok, 1990), teachers need to know about and be able to intentionally use a range of these strategies. Teacher language awareness is argued to enable teachers to provide strategies such as exemplification and clarification to make the target language input more comprehensible to students. It can, therefore, be assumed that teacher language awareness is a key factor accounting for teachers' practices and perceptions about their using communication strategies when speaking English in the classroom.

2.4 Interaction Hypothesis as a Theoretical Framework

The interaction hypothesis was formulated by Long in the 1980s and it has laid an important foundation for contemporary language teaching approaches. This hypothesis integrates the roles of comprehensible input, opportunities for output performances, and meaning negotiation during interaction for creating effective L2/FL acquisition. Since input itself is not as helpful as interactionally modified input in facilitating language teaching and learning, "the interaction hypothesis plays a central role in learning through conversational interaction on improving language learners' speaking skills" (Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019, p. 221). The focus of the hypothesis on the role of interaction as a means to learn makes the interaction hypothesis central to the theoretical foundation of my study into classroom English communication.

The above discussion has shown that the combination of comprehensible input, meaning negotiation, and productive output facilitate the process of language acquisition. In addition, communication strategies play important roles in making input more comprehensible, negotiation of meaning more effective, and output more productive. Through the use of communication

strategies, L2 teachers and learners can improve their oral proficiency and communication skills (Díaz Larenas, 2011). Classroom interaction during learning is vital because it makes the achieved language fluency of teachers and learners dynamic and ongoing (Kamyabi & Mukhrib, 2026). The interaction hypothesis; therefore, inform the theoretical framework for my research into classroom English communication strategies since it conceptualises the significant role of interaction in L2 development, which is central to my study.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach in order to have "an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, experience, attitudes, intentions, and motivations, on the basis of observation and interpretation" (Ahmad et al., 2019, p. 2829). Classroom observation and interviews were used as the data gathering tools in this research.

3.1 Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select lecturers and students to be research participants who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Purposeful selection was found to be appropriate for this case study research since it helps researchers to reach the best possible source that is most likely to share information that is rich and relevant to the issue under investigation.

Table 3.
Description of Participants and Research Sites

		College A	**College B**
Training Majors		Computer science	Tourism
Syllabi of English	Number of Modules and Periods (Each period lasts 50 minutes)	Four modules 165 periods	Three modules 240 periods
	Programmes	General English (135 periods)	General English (150 periods)

		English for specific purpose (30 periods)	English for specific purpose (90 periods)
Lecturers of English	Number	Two	Three
	Teaching experience	5-10 years	3-15 years
	Academic qualification	Master's	Two Bachelor's, one Master's
	First Language	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
Students of English	Geographical background	Urban Rural Mountainous	Urban Rural Mountainous
	Level of English	Beginning Lower-intermediate	Beginning Lower-intermediate

3.2 Instruments

Observation was used to document and reflect systematically upon classroom interactions and events, as they actually occurred rather than as they might be thought to occur (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Data gathered from classroom observation is authentic and reliable since it captures the full sense of the existing situations that take place during the actual teaching-learning process (Bryman, 2012). Classroom observation aimed to describe lecturers' use of oral English communication strategies.

Being aware that the communication strategy field was new and a challenge for the researcher, the final list of communication strategies with their types and functions was checked by a peer who was interested in and knowledgeable about the field. This aimed to make sure that the researcher had properly understood and classified the communication strategies. Sometimes, they came back to the fieldnote data to discuss and reach agreement on the use of some strategies, especially the nonverbal and humour categories. This peer debriefing section could have reduced my subjectivity, focused on correctness, and enhanced accuracy of research interpretations (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020).

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted to find out lecturers' awareness of communication strategy use and choice. In-depth semi-structured interviewing enables "understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Because all the lecturers did not want to read through all the transcripts, the key findings (in the English language) were given to the lecturers so that they could check the language and add comments if they desired. As a result, one lecturer further explained why she used more Vietnamese during grammar lessons. This member-checking phase enhanced validation of data since it helped corroborate findings as well as produce any further evidence which might not have given during initial data gathering (Yin, 2014).

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection began with classroom observations. Each lecturer chose two of their classes for observation, each with a different skill level and a different focus. A total of ten classes were observed. Eight of them were beginner level and two were pre-intermediate level. Because teachers' instructional practices are not the same for all lessons (Kane et al., 2012), observations were conducted over two different lessons/skills (two consecutive periods for each) from two different classes and in different weeks for each lecturer to ensure adequate and reliable data collection for analysis. Audio-recordings were made of each observed lesson and field notes added details that would not be captured by the audio-recorded data, such body language (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). The audio-recordings of classroom observation was transcribed to have a holistic picture of what had been observed. The transcriptions together with the fieldnotes on the observation protocol were used to look for the particular categories of the lecturers' behaviours and expressions. A checklist with descriptions of communication strategies was used to sort out all that were relevant to the

lecturers' communication strategies and patterns. However, some categories that had not been listed in the protocol were also noted to have a complete picture of the lecturers' communication behaviours. The frequency was counted and the types of strategies were identified before each strategy was examined and described in relation to its use in the lecturers' English speech. Two weeks after the classroom observations were completed, interviews were undertaken. The interviews lasted from 50 to 80 minutes and key and probing questions provided a guide. A small recording device and mobile phone were used simultaneously to capture the interviews which were later transcribed.

I coded the data using Microsoft Word's comment function and Microsoft Excel to tag and collate it. I compiled a list of codes that identified both patterning and diversity of relevant meaning within the data and collated data which was identified by the same codes. I then took a closer look at the codes and combined, clustered, or collapsed them to form meaningful patterns. I thought carefully to identify similarities and relationships across a range of different codes to decide if they should be clustered together to make a key idea. I maintained my focus on the research questions to avoid getting lost in analysis and to keep the analysis relevant.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Permission and voluntary agreement from the participants were obtained, as well as a detail explanation about what their participation would entail. The consent forms and information sheets were sent to participants and signed before the commencement of the pilot study and the main data collection.

In addition to providing research information and obtaining consent, some other ethical precautions were taken in relation to the data collection techniques and procedures. The first issue was protecting the privacy of

individual participants and the identities of the research sites by using pseudonyms when reporting the results of the observation and interview data. Furthermore, a basic ethical principle for qualitative researchers is not to "tamper with the natural setting under study" (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2008, p. 19). I tried to minimise the influence of my presence by conducting nonparticipant observations, taking one short visit for each class to get the lecturers and students familiar with me, and choosing to sit in the back of the class where few students could see me. In this way, I encouraged the lecturers and students to behave normally as they do in their daily lessons. My position as a researcher, rather than colleague or some other work-related roles made it easy to for me to observe without intrusion and to prevent the ethical dimensions of teacher judgment (Mockler, 2014).

4. Results

4.1 What communication strategies do EFL teachers use when using classroom oral English?

The classroom observation (Two lessons lasting totally 90 minutes for each lecturer) data revealed that the participants employed various types of communication strategies when speaking English to students. The different strategies and how often they were used (as given in raw frequency counts and percentages) are presented in Table below.

Table 4.
Frequency and Percentage of Strategies Used by Lecturers from Classroom Observation Data

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Self-repetition	40	29.5
Code-switching	32	23.5
Translation	28	20.5
Interactional	18	13.2

Simplification	12	8.8
Nonverbal	6	4.5
Total	136	100

As demonstrated by the table, the lecturers all used communication strategies, despite with different frequency levels. Based on their occurrence, these six observed strategies can be divided into high frequency, medium frequency, and low frequency groups.

Self-repetition, code-switching, and *translation* strategies are the most frequently used and all three strategies presented with quite similar occurrence levels. In particular, these three strategies made up a total of 73.5% of all strategies used. The lecturers used L2 repetition for different purposes, such as to draw more attention from students or provide students with more L2 input. L1-based strategies were used to make sure students have understood teachers' English, save classroom talking time, and as habits.

The above finding from classroom observation is further confirmed by the interview data, as in the extracts below:

I have difficulties using English to teach [them] because making them understand my English requires a lot of effort and techniques. For example, I speak again and again and translate into Vietnamese a lot (Ellen)

The proficiency of non-English major students is much lower than that of the majors, leading to a lot of difficulties in making sure they will all comprehend my English. I often speak English and then change to Vietnamese (Olive)

Both Ellen and Olive identified the competence level of students to be the main problem to their using a lot of English in non-major classes. Students' limited comprehension ability particularly challenged the lecturers' ability to use English as the sole medium of instruction. Therefore, they are both aware that a lot of repetition, L1-L2 translation, or even switch to L1 will work better for their students to understand the lesson.

Interactional and *simplification* strategies were used at a medium frequency, with a total of 22%. Interactional strategies were found to be used by the lecturers to prevent communication breakdowns, facilitate the exchange of information, and increase interaction. This was achieved by the use of context markers *let's see/ you know/ that's it …;* saying some words or strings of word much longer, louder, or higher or clapping hands before or after an making an utterance; summarising what they have said; and checking for student comprehension by giving them questions. When the lecturers wanted to make an illustration or describe the properties/functions of the target language, they applied such simplification strategies as replacing L2 words with simpler ones or paraphrasing structures/messages.

The low frequency group included *nonverbal* strategies which made up 4.5%. As an English communication strategy, the lecturers' nonverbal behaviours were mainly gesturing and body language to model action ve.bs, phrases, and utterances to help students understand what they meant.

4.2 How do EFL teachers use classroom oral English communication strategies?

Self-repetition was used by the lecturers to repeat the words or phrases that conveyed the main idea of their utterances or the new lexical units which belonged to parts of the lesson to give students more exposure to them as L2 input for better memorization. Also, when the lecturers realised that an incorrect word had been used, they employed repetition in order to repair their own speech, to re-establish the fluency of the speech, due to uncontrolled mistakes in L2 production, as in the following two examples:

Excerpt 1 (Observation class 2 - Polly)

How did you feel how do you feel?

Excerpt 2 (Observation class 1 - Olive)

So I will have the word (paused 2 seconds) oh a word one by one a word on the board

When making mistakes, the lecturers chose repetition with adjustments to reproduce correct utterances. In excerpt 1, Polly recognised that she had misused the verb tense and repeated the utterance one more time replacing do with did to make sure the whole question was accurate. Similarly, in excerpt 2, Olive had to repeat word because she misused the article *the* and immediately replaced it with *a*. Here the lecturers realised the importance of being good language models with correct grammar; hence, they did not hesitate to self-correct their mistakes and errors with the use of self-repetition. This might be because EFL classroom communication contexts are different from others as teachers seek not only to make sense with their words but also act as a language model for students.

The lecturers used **code-switching and translation** to further explain or elaborate lexical or syntactic units:

Excerpt 3 (Observation class 1- Una)

How do you understand irregular verbs?. Các bạn chú ý lên đây cho cô chúng ta có thể hiểu như sau [class, pay attention here we can understand as follows]

Excerpt 4 (Observation class 2 - Olive)

I don't love you at all! So in the negative way "at all" in the negative sentence. Tôi không yêu bạn tí nào cả. Vậy ở dạng phủ định người ta dùng "at all" ở cuối kèm với "not" để nhấn mạnh tính phủ định của câu. Ví dụ như … ["I don't love you at all". So in the negative form beside "not", we use "at all" at the end of the sentence to stress the negative mood. For example, …]

In excerpt 3, Una switched to Vietnamese when she elaborated on how to use *irregular verbs* in the simple past tense. Olive explained the meaning of the linguistic unit *not… at all*. She translated all the utterances into Vietnamese and elaborated on its functions with further examples.

Also, L1-based strategies were observed to be used for affective purposes, which were also described by the lecturers in the interview, as illustrated in the extracts below:

When I was speaking English and students seemed to be unhappy and begged me to speak Vietnamese, I then used translation to make them happy and understand the lesson better. (Amy)

In first-year classes, I usually speak English, followed by Vietnamese translation. This helps students better understand my English and reduces their fear and shock; they have just transitioned from a high school English learning environment. (Una)

Amy commented that she based the decision to use translation on students' reactions to her English speaking. She believed that the use of translation would not only enhance students' comprehension but also make students more comfortable and less stressed. In the same vein, Una thought that she used more translation for classes of year one, because those students had just transitioned from the high school English education environment where they had not been exposed to a lot of English. This shows that Una wanted to give her students time to adapt to the dominant use of English in their classes. Amy's and Una's decision on their use of translation is closely linked to their concern for students' learning experience. Also, they believed that translation into English was a useful way for students to improve their comprehension of English.

The lecturers used **interactional strategies** (e.g. *fillers, discourse markers*) and intentionally changed their volume and tone of voice to make an emphasis on key words and phrases in their speech to draw students' attention and convey meaning. They also checked students' comprehension by using interactional questions. During the interviews, two lecturers said they used interactional strategies as a way to enhance students' English comprehension:

To ensure students' comprehension, I also regularly check by asking questions or requiring one student to do a sampling. (Amy)

I normally check by asking questions. For example, I use yes - no questions to ask students what they have to do and if they have understood me or not; I also try to speak in an interesting way and I emphasise many words to maintain students' attention. (Una)

Although they did not explicitly mention any words related to interaction, Amy's and Una's accounts revealed their use of interactional strategies in the

form of comprehension check and attention-getting. Two of these techniques were found to be the most commonly used among the interaction strategies.

The lecturers **simplified** their speech was by using alternative lexical items, such as superordinate or related terms which share semantic features with the target words or structures. An example of the simplification strategy is presented below:

Excerpt 5 (Observation class 2 - Una)

We will listen about Jack and Liu's vacation, right? (rising intonation and pause) their holiday.

Una introduced a listening activity, which contained the new word *vacation*. Hence, after realising that the word *vacation* was challenging to students, she replaced it with *holiday*, another common noun, which was much more familiar to them. To make their English speech easier and more accessible for students, the lecturers also illustrated or described the properties of the target object to explain the meaning of a new or strange term, as in:

Excerpt 6 (Observation class 1 - Ellen)

I want you to talk more about routine. Now talk about yourself talk about your routine, talk about what you do every day, something that happens regularly, a routine.

In this situation, Ellen described the lexical properties of *routine*, by using lexical units that were simpler in order to support students' deduction of its meaning. One interesting point here is that she illustrated the meaning of the word twice using two different phrases to increase students' comprehension.

During the interviews, three lecturers said that they tried to use simple language to make sure that students could fully comprehend their English speech. This reflects that most of the lecturers were aware of the necessity to make their English speaking simpler so that it would be more accessible to students. However, they did not share any more insights into how they made their speech simpler, and the observation data did not feature many uses of simplification strategies either. These may illustrate that not all the lecturers

were aware that simplification techniques could be used as communication strategies, although it was found to be used by all of them. Ellen was the only lecturer who described her use of simplification strategies:

As for low level classes, I usually use simple words and structures; I also include a lot of examples, explanations, and illustrations to make it easier for them to follow and understand my English speaking. (Ellen)

To enhance students' L2 comprehension, Ellen used examples, explanations, and illustrations, which are types of simplification strategies.

As **nonverbal communication** strategies, hand movements and gestures were the most commonly used. Most of the lecturers used their hands to point at items or enact action words that featured in their speech. For example, Ellen pointed at the desks when asking students to come back their seats or drew lines with an imaginary pen in the air to represent the action *write*. Olive showed her four fingers when she asked the students to *pay attention to number 4*. Polly moved her hand up and down to signal when asking students to *stand up* or *sit down*. Una slapped her hand on the table when she said *time is up* or *finish* to emphasise her directive meaning because slapping hands normally conveys meaning of *start* or *finish* in the Vietnamese culture.

Two lecturers, Ellen and Una, said that they used a lot of nonverbal strategies when speaking English. Their comments are presented in the excerpts below:

To create a pleasant class atmosphere and make students interested in learning, I often use gestures, repetitions, stresses, and facial expressions. These are my work routines and change over time in a way that I am often not aware of. (Una)

When speaking English to students, I use a lot of gestures, even facial expressions, or mouth and hand models. I think they are useful for students' comprehension. (Amy)

Based on Una's and Amy's perspectives, the use of nonverbal strategies was useful for students' comprehension and made students interested in their learning. Una also added that her use of nonverbal strategies was so much part of her teaching routine and she now uses them subconsciously.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Domains of Teacher Language Awareness in Communication Strategy Practices

As mentioned in 2.1, there are three key roles of language teachers pertinent to language awareness: language user, language analyst, and language teacher (Andrews, 2007). Findings have demonstrated the interwoven of the three roles in lecturers' communication strategies (CSs). While the domains of language users and language analysts are enacted via their use of CSs, the role of language teacher is reflected in their beliefs and cognition of communication strategy.

5.1.1 The Domains of Language User and Language Analyst

Firstly, the analysis of the lecturers' use of CSs showed the efforts they made to teach English as a foreign language in non-English major classes, which draws on their roles of **language users**. For example, all the lecturers employed the self-repair strategy right after they made grammatical mistakes to promote proper grammatical forms and create well-formed input for students. The lecturers frequently made self-corrections when their previous phrases were grammatically or lexically incorrect. They seemed to place priority on providing accurate language models by correcting their own language performances. Although those mistakes were insignificant and did not much affect the overall meanings of the utterances, those lecturers still decided to repair them so that the sentences would be accurate input samples. The lecturers' self-repair and paraphrasing practices came from their determination to produce the best possible language models for students. In doing so, the lecturers appeared to have a certain level of language awareness in the user domain (Celce-Murcia, 2008) by monitoring their own language production in classroom oral discourse.

Secondly, the lecturers were seen to use a focus-on-form approach (Ellis, 2015), which draws on their metalinguistic knowledge of the language system and suggests awareness of the **language analyst** role. For example, they used code-switching and translation to L1 to give further explanations or

elaborations to syntactic units to raise awareness of students towards the use of those grammatical structures/expressions. Moreover, when speaking English, they intentionally repeated and emphasized certain salient language components by using fillers, word stress, and changing intonation to raise students' awareness of a specific grammatical part of the speech (e.g. -ed ending on past tense verbs). The lecturers' techniques to emphasize certain language functions are linked to their high language awareness in the analyst domain. Those strategies are presumed to come from their knowledge of the general rules of language structures (Bialystok, 2001).

In addition to focusing on forms, the lecturers also employed a meaning-focused approach by using probing questions to check for students' comprehension. An example of such questions is *How do you understand irregular verbs?*. This question is a form of probing that focuses on meaning during conversational situations that aim at drawing students' attention and awareness to how the target language system works, which again reflects the lecturers' role as language analysts. Teachers' high critical language awareness enables them to provide comprehensible input to students and monitor their own output so that it fits students' understanding (Andrews, 2001). In order to do this, apart from a high level of subject-matter (or content) knowledge, teachers also need a high level of critical language awareness and discourse skills so that they can use such knowledge appropriately in the classroom (Andrews & Lin, 2017; Parab, 2020).

From the discussion above, this study argues that language user and language analyst - as the two domains of teacher language awareness - are obviously manifested in the lecturers' practical use of classroom CSs. Those two roles are interconnected and work together as the lecturers intentionally use certain communication strategies when speaking English to non-major students. Interconnected here means that there is no clear boundary of each

domain/role in the lecturers' use of communication techniques. For instance, the lecturers' focus-on-form and probing techniques could demonstrate their experiences as both language users and analysts.

5.1.2 The Domain of Language Teacher

It is evident that the lecturers in this study used experiences accumulated from their teaching to put an emphasis on the significance of using certain oral communication strategies in their teaching practices. For example, two lecturers shared that they used a lot of L1-based strategies in response to students' reactions and behaviors during the lessons to make sure they would fully understand their instructions and grammatical structures and feel comfortable. Thus, the lecturers' professional experiences of classroom teaching are major factors underpinning their perceptions in the significance of those strategies, which aligns with previous research (e.g. Borg, 2003; Levin & Wadmany, 2008). The use of L1-based strategies seems to be part of the lecturers' experiential knowledge that had been developed over their teaching years. The lecturers oriented their decision-making more towards an everyday perspective that suited the teaching settings.

With their language proficiency and metalinguistic knowledge of the language being taught, the lecturers developed and employed different strategies to increase the quality of input they produced and used appropriate content and presented that to the students based on the challenges (Andrews, 2001, 2007). In other words, they were responsive to their teaching context and students. The role as language teachers, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge about learners and teaching environment also enabled them to anticipate the challenges their students faced regarding their L2 talk (Andrews & McNeill, 2005; Andrews, 2007). Thus, the lecturers perceived that using a lot of L1, repetition, and simple English could facilitate and

enhance students' L2 comprehension and increase a positive relationship with students.

The lecturers in this study demonstrated a strong awareness of the relation between the use of certain communication strategies and creating comprehensible input for students. However, most of the lecturers showed a weak awareness of how communication strategies related to students' opportunities to produce the language. This is partially reflected by the fact that the lecturers mostly used monologue patterns and did not provide many opportunities for their students to reply to their English speaking.

As can be seen, the teacher domain of their language awareness was clearly reflected in their perceptions of how important it was to make their L2 speaking more comprehensible to students. And for most of the teachers, L1-based strategies, that is, translation and code-switching to L1, and simplification techniques were the most effective.

5.2 Pedagogical Knowledge and Perceptions of Communication Strategies

Findings from this study suggest that knowledge about learners plays a defining role in shaping teachers' practical knowledge and is most influential in forming their pedagogical knowledge and beliefs about classroom CSs use. This kind of knowledge, also called pedagogical learner knowledge (Le, 2020), allows teachers to decide which language to use, and when, in order to ensure student comprehension and encourage students' language development.

It is evident that the lecturers used their own experiences accumulated from their teaching to put an emphasis on the significance of using certain communication strategies in their teaching practices. For example, two lecturers shared that they used a lot of L1-based strategies in response to students' reactions and behaviours during the lessons to make sure they

would fully understand their instructions/directions. One lecturer's favourite choices of L1-based and repetition strategies came from her personal cognition about the goals of English education for non-English major students. From her perception, the final learning goal of those students was to understand the English linguistic knowledge required to pass the final tests and ultimately to graduate. Thus, the lecturers' professional experiences of classroom teaching and their practical teaching cognition are major factors underpinning their perceptions in the significance of those strategies, which aligns with previous research (e.g. Levin & Wadmany, 2008;). They seem to be part of the lecturers' experiential knowledge that had been developed over their teaching years. In other words, the lecturers oriented their decision-making more towards an everyday perspective that suited the teaching settings.

In a nutshell, the lecturers' pedagogical intentions, decisions, and practices of classroom CSs are largely correlated with their language awareness and knowledge base. Knowledge about the nature of communication and the subject matter/content knowledge were embodiments of teacher language awareness, reflected via the lecturers' practices of CSs. Pedagogical knowledge as part of the teacher domain of language awareness shaped the lecturers' perceptions of CSs. Over the course of the lecturers' lifetime, their knowledge background and language awareness intertwine and together with the teaching settings and the lecturers' social and cultural milieus could have formed their communication strategy repertoire.

6. Conclusions

The study reported here investigated how the EFL teachers' language awareness affected their practices of classroom English communication strategies. It found that the lecturers in this study used six main types of CSs for the main purpose of comprehension enhancement. Those strategies did

not merely aim at enhancing communication but also facilitating students' overall learning process. Obviously, the lecturers used language to communicate lesson content, teaching activities, and other pedagogical intentions, and CSs supported them to do those teaching tasks in more effective ways. The lecturers' classroom CSs provided comprehensible input valuable for students to follow/learn and created a better teacher-students relationship. Also, as L2 learners, the lecturers in this study used CSs to assist their own L2 fluency. Therefore, raising teacher knowledge and awareness of the communication strategies they use should enhance their decision making as teachers. Also, being more intentional about communication strategies would improve teaching.

It was also found that the lecturers' intentions, decisions, and use of CSs in the classroom are largely correlated with their language awareness and knowledge base. Knowledge about the nature of communication and the subject matter/content knowledge were embodiments of teacher language awareness, reflected via the lecturers' practices of CSs. Pedagogical knowledge as part of the teacher domain of language awareness shaped the lecturers' perceptions of when to use CSs. It is, therefore, hypothesized that over the course of a lecturer's lifetime, their knowledge background and language awareness intertwine and together with the teaching settings and lecturers' social and cultural milieus form their communication strategy repertoire.

Lastly, this study's results imply that lecturers' knowledge from their previous teacher education programmes influences their understanding of classroom language and communication strategy uses. However, due to different constraints and assumed perceptions about their students' learning motivation and purposes, the lecturers' classroom practices did not reflect many ideas espoused from the knowledge or cognition they acquired from

teacher education. Instead, all the lecturers in this study oriented their understandings of L1 and CSs use more towards an everyday perspective that suited the teaching settings. Hence, it is suggested that education programmes for EFL teachers move beyond the provision of content knowledge and general theories in teaching methodology and also include pedagogical techniques and skills. Those programmes need to provide prospective teachers with more practical experience in how to teach English communicatively and effectively in actual classroom contexts.

7. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the promising findings, several limitations should be considered. Firstly, investigating the five college lecturers might also overlook a possibility that university lecturers' practices can be significantly different and worth researching. Similarly, this thesis only demonstrated the classroom English used by lecturers of non-English major students, missing the opportunity to compare major and non-major lecturers and students. Lastly, communication strategies were analyzed from data provided by the lecturers, overlooking the case that students can have potentially different perception on CSs in their class. These could be research topics within a large case investigation. Findings from those studies could yield more valuable insights that contribute to the current CSs literature.

This study has described the specific purposes and characteristics of CSs used by lecturers speaking English to students with limited proficiency and low motivation. The analysis has not identified some aspects of CSs use such as the origins of the communication breakdown, the influence of interlocutors' characteristics (e.g. language proficiency), and other objective factors (e.g. power effects) influencing the use of CSs. Although communication breakdowns prompt CSs and the final goal of CSs is to reach specific communicative goals, the above underlying conditions which decide

how CSs can be effectively used are also important. This could be a new CSs research orientation for other communication contexts and situations.

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