

# Learners' Perceptions of Tertiary Level Teachers' Code Switching: A Vietnamese Perspective

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**Abstract**—The literature on language teaching and second language acquisition has been largely driven by monolingual ideology with a common assumption that a second language (L2) is best taught and learned in the L2 only. The current study challenges this assumption by reporting learners' positive perceptions of tertiary level teachers' code switching practices in Vietnam. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of code switching practices in language classrooms from a learners' perspective.

Data were collected from student participants who were working towards a Bachelor degree in English within the English for Business Communication stream through the use of focus group interviews. The literature has documented that this method of interviewing has a number of distinct advantages over individual student interviews. For instance, group interactions generated by focus groups create a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because they include a range of communicative processes in which each individual may influence or be influenced by others - as they are in their real life. The process of interaction provides the opportunity to obtain the meanings and answers to a problem that are "socially constructed rather than individually created" leading to the capture of real-life data. The distinct feature of group interaction offered by this technique makes it a powerful means of obtaining deeper and richer data than those from individual interviews. The data generated through this study were analysed using a constant comparative approach. Overall, the students expressed positive views of this practice indicating that it is a useful teaching strategy. Teacher code switching was seen as a learning resource and a source supporting language output. This practice was perceived to promote student comprehension and to aid the learning of content and target language knowledge. This practice was also believed to scaffold the students' language production in different contexts. However, the students indicated their preference for teacher code switching to be constrained, as extensive use was believed to negatively impact on their L2 learning and trigger cognitive reliance on the L1 for L2 learning. The students also perceived that when the L1 was used to a great extent, their ability to develop as autonomous learners was negatively impacted.

This study found that teacher code switching was supported in certain contexts by learners, thus suggesting that there is a need for the widespread assumption about the monolingual teaching approach to be re-considered.

**Keywords**—Code switching, L1 use, L2 teaching, Learners' perception.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE literature on language teaching and second language acquisition has been largely driven by monolingual ideology which is underpinned by a common assumption that a second language (L2) is best taught and learned in the L2

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only. Although this simple assumption is not empirically supported [8], [28], [29], [77] it is still prevalent in language pedagogy [28], [93]. Reference [20, p.9] noted that the superiority and popularity of this approach "has remained largely immune from investigation until recently". This ideological orientation has been so influential that it has been translated into language policy in a number of language teaching institutions. For example, in the Hong Kong context, [31, p.109] states that "in all English lessons...teachers should teach English through English". Reference [58] reported that the National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages in England and Wales strongly advocates that the foreign language should be the medium of instruction and the practice of teaching in the foreign language only indicates a good modern language course. The Korean Ministry of Education has required school English teachers to first use English frequently and then to increase the level to exclusive use [56]. A similar explicit directive against the use of the L1 in instruction was previously imposed, for example, in secondary and tertiary teaching in China [55], [40], in tertiary teaching in Taiwan [82] and in Malaysia [5], [66] and in primary teaching in Brunei Darussalam and Botswana [7], [65]. In China, there is an underlying perception that teachers' use of Chinese indicates their lack of target language proficiency [81]. Teachers' utilisation of learners' mother tongue is interpreted in a negative sense, being described as "smuggling the vernacular in the classroom" [71, p.123], as a "skeleton in the cupboard" [72, p.5] or bad practice that should be "swept under the carpet" [66, p.88].

Regardless of the insistence by planners and policy makers that teachers use only the L2 or the pervasive sanctions against its use in the L2 classroom, the ideology clashes and the conflict between language ideology and classroom practice continues to be reported in the literature. For example, the teachers' use of code switching (CS) to the L1 in [56] study was found to follow certain patterns and principles. The findings in the studies by [55] and [40] revealed a considerable tension between the policy of English-medium instruction and the classroom, where teachers continued to use the L1 for a variety of purposes. Reference [55, p.49] claimed that CS in Hong Kong schools is "the teachers' and students' local pragmatic response to the symbolic domination of English in Hong Kong, where many students with limited English capital struggle to acquire an English-medium education because of its socioeconomic value". In Brunei Darussalam and Botswana, the teachers' use of the L1 challenges the English-only policy imposed by government [7]. Similar tensions and conflicts between language ideology

and classroom reality were reported in some other studies [71], [91].

The efficacy of using the L1 is so compelling that it continues even when policies mitigate against it. In Vietnam, there has been a dearth of research in this area, and research on learners' perceptions of CS practices remains underexplored. This article aims to document university students' perspectives of their teachers' CS practices in English for Business Communication courses where there has been a tendency for the teachers to maximise the amount of time spent using the target language and there does appear to be a plan to introduce L2-only policy on the assumption that it will better foster student language learning.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. L1 Use in L2 Pedagogy

There has been considerable debate in the literature about the use of learners' native language in second language teaching and the merits of different approaches of language instruction. Advocates of monolingual instructional strategies believe that L2 instruction is best conducted only through the L2 (Direct Method), which means that "direct association between concepts and the new language" [16, p.472], and that there is no place for translation between the L1 and L2 [21], [29], [77]. This L2-only approach is underpinned by a number of theoretical arguments and assumptions.

To begin with, L2 learning is equated with the manner in which children learn their L1, labelled as "language equivalence" by [77], that is, learning comes about through imitation and reinforcement, and through the establishment of habits that override interference from the learners' L1 [93], [96]. Not only does the L2-only approach highlight the importance of immersion of learners in a language-rich environment, but it also explicitly requires that the language of instruction must be the L2 [21], [52], [73], [96]. Second, this pro-L2 stance is underpinned by [51] comprehensible input hypothesis: when learners learn an L2, it is not necessary for them to know the linguistic elements of their own language, as learning an L2 means adding a bit more of the new language to their store of knowledge [59]. It also has its foundation in [80] output hypothesis, which argues that it is a prerequisite for learners to speak and to write in the target language in order to master it, as the only way learners can learn an L2 efficiently is if they are forced to use it [9]. It follows that successful L2 learning must remain separate from the use of the L1 [21], [26], [29]. This argument is based on the assumption of co-ordinate bilingualism, which states that the two language systems are in distinct compartments of learners' minds, according to Weirein's observation [cited in 21].

Advocates of the L2-only approach argue that the L2-only instruction ensures the provision of authentic and abundant communication deemed necessary for language learning [35], [94], and enables learners to think in the L2 to minimise interference from the L1 [28], [29]. Others have added that through L2-only instruction, L2 learning is facilitated, and communicative competence is developed [30], [62], [76].

Reference [51], in particular, stressed the critical role of exposure to the target language, suggesting that the availability of the target language environment is of "paramount importance to success in a new language" [p.13]. As a corollary of this, the use of the L1, either by teachers or learners, will minimise the necessary exposure to the L2 [59], or in Krashen's terms, reduce the amount of comprehensible input.

Reflecting the principles of the Direct Method is the common assumption that teachers provide the sole linguistic model for students to follow [18], [35], [54], [93]. On this basis, various language teaching methods have been developed in an endeavour to create a foreign language environment conducive to, and supportive of, language learning. For example, Berlitz Method, Suggestopaedia, the Natural and Audio-Lingual Approaches, and Total Physical Response, among others, endorse the exclusive use of the L2 and highlight the need to avoid CS to learners' L1 in order to minimise errors of omission, overgeneralisation and transfer [37]. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which was prominent in the 1980s and continues to be influential, foregrounds language learning without reference to the L1, emphasising the use of authentic communication, repetition and memorisation. The characteristics of this teaching approach include: drawing on realistic L2 texts whenever possible, ensuring abundant exposure to the L2 and emphasising the sole use of the L2 [73]. Task-based language teaching (TBLT), which emerged from CLT, also explicitly supports L2 use, with little mention of the L1 found in the TBLT literature, except for advice given on how to minimise its use [21]. Content-based language teaching views language as a means of learning content and content as a resource for mastery of language [79], and aims to provide learners with both language and subject matter knowledge without using the L1 to do so [34]. A range of strategies is proposed for teachers to make content comprehensible but no reference is made to use of the L1 [73].

Overall, these different language teaching methods conceive of ideal instruction as using little, if any, of the L1 [21]. Such monolingual principles have permeated a number of language learning environments, and appear to dominate most teaching approaches [29], despite the fact that the "no L1 use" rule is rarely mentioned in teaching manuals [21]. It appears that the prime focus of language learning and teaching is on preparing learners to communicate in monolingual environments only [32], and aims to assist learners to achieve the native-speaker proficiency [44].

Whilst this monolingual approach is widespread in practice, it is not grounded in theory and is considered by some as undesirable, unrealistic, and untenable [8], [28], [29], [53], [70], [77]. L1 avoidance, in effect, may be a hindrance to the speed, rate and route of L2 learning and inconsistent with psychological development [42]. Contrary to the deep-seated belief in monolingual practices that focus on the emulation of child language acquisition, [21] asserted that there is a noticeable discrepancy between L2 and L1 acquisition, as the innate system guiding L1 acquisition only partly or

imperfectly operates or disappears altogether in adult L2 learning. He maintained that learners' L1 plays a critical role in the L2 development. This view is supported by [12, p.49] who argued that adults do not acquire the L2 in the same manner as children as "the domain-specific language acquisition system of children ceases to operate in adults". He further argued that having mastered one language prior to their L2 learning also sets adult L2 learners apart from young learners.

Reference [70, p.211] maintains that the notion of maximum exposure is faulty reasoning, as "there is no correlation between quantity of L2 input, in an environment where the learners are exposed to L2 in the community, and academic success". Whilst it is now widely accepted that exposure to L2 is necessary, it is also acknowledged that exposure alone does not guarantee either learner engagement or successful language learning [14], [21], [36], [85], [87]. Exposure on its own cannot guarantee learning, as the L2 input must be understood and internalised by learners [86] and learners must be able to extract the patterns and extrapolate the rules necessary for L2 learning [15], [17].

Several other scholars refute the notion of language compartmentalisation in L2 learners' minds. According to [26], empirical evidence indicates that a bilingual's two languages are not kept apart. [78, p.282] observed "the L1-L2 connection is an indisputable fact of life", and [22, p.7] argued that "total separation is impossible since both languages are in the same mind".

In recent years, there has been a call for the underlying principles of the Direct Method to be revisited and reconceptualised [15], [17], [21], [28], [29], [42], [44], [46], [93]. However, the argument put forward by most is not a call for a return to the grammar-translation method which favours the memorisation of grammatical structures and word-for-word translation of decontextualised sentences. Neither is it a call to abandon intralingual instructional strategies [78], nor to ignore the crucial role that monolingual communicative activities play in language teaching and learning [17]. Rather than assuming that the monolingual instructional orientation is superior and bilingual strategies are banned at all costs [27], the call is for language pedagogy to explore the interplay between monolingual and bilingual strategies, to acknowledge the role of the L1 and translation in L2 teaching, and to recognise that L2 teaching and learning should be complemented by bilingual strategies [21], [27], [42], [78], [93].

#### *B. Learners' Beliefs about Code Switching Practices*

Barcelos asserted that beliefs are not only a cognitive concept but exist within one's experience and involves "the interaction, adaption, and adjustment of individuals to the environment", based on Deweyan philosophy [as cited in [11]], p.174]. According to Barcelos' interpretation, fundamental to the construction of an individual's experience in a Deweyan sense are two principles: the principle of continuity and the principle of interaction. The former refers to "the connection between past and future experiences.

Everything that we experience takes up something from the past and modifies the quality of future experiences" [11, p.174]. The latter is the interaction between an individual and others and the environment; thus, in interacting with others and with the environment, an individual's beliefs are shaped.

Learner beliefs are defined as "general assumptions that learners hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language learning and teaching" [90], and are characterised as part of their experiences [10], [48]. Learner beliefs are "socially constructed, emerging from interaction with others" and "more or less variable" because they vary from one learner to another and "from one context to another" [48, p.196]. Learner beliefs are related to their learning process and learning outcomes [6], [33], [38], [49], [92], with language learning strategies and motivation [68], [95]. Learners hold their own beliefs about how an L2 should be learnt and taught in the classroom context, which are induced by their previous classroom experiences [1], [45], [69], [83], [84], by their personality [1], [84], and by their own cultural backgrounds [1], [45], [69].

It has been found that learners in a range of studies hold positive attitudes towards teacher CS to the L1. Findings have shown that learners "do not appear to want teacher CS to L1 excluded from classroom interaction" [60, p.720], although they have reservations when this practice is used extensively [61], [74], [88], [89].

In language classes, learners perceive teacher CS as a means of promoting their knowledge of linguistic features of the L2. Of particular concern for a large number of students is their understanding of grammatical structures and unfamiliar lexical items [19], [74], [89]. In [89]'s investigation, English-speaking learners' perceptions of the use of the L2-only and CS approach to teaching French grammar stated that "they would use mostly-French if they were French instructors and would use English-only for grammar explanations" because of the ease, speed and accuracy of understandings [89, p.84]. Apart from the importance of understanding target language structures, students in most studies placed emphasis on understanding the meaning of lexical items. For example, the learners in [60] study said that it was easier for both young and adult language learners to understand L2 lexical items through direct comparison with their L1. One adult learner in [60]'s study highlighted the value of teacher CS for his learning of L2 vocabulary, explaining how this practice expedited his understanding and, more importantly, ensured acquisition. This echoes comments by a number of participants in [63] investigation, who indicated their strong support for the practice of making connections with their Arabic language when learning English vocabulary. According to some students, teacher CS plays a role in enabling them to recollect the meaning of lexical items [43], [74] and supports the development of cultural understandings. For example, Japanese learners of English in [61] study had a positive view regarding CS by bilingual assistants as this enabled them to understand concepts and culture which were not comprehensible without reference to the L1. Investigations

by [13], [63] suggest that use of CS, particularly in accessing prior knowledge, raises learner awareness of differences and similarities between the two languages, thereby making their L2 learning easier.

A majority of learners in discipline-based classes also view teacher CS in a positive light. Given the added cognitive burden represented by the presence of the L2 when learning a content subject, the learners see teacher CS as a means of strengthening their comprehension, particularly of terms or related concepts integral to their disciplinary areas [3], [5], [64], [82].

Along with comprehension, learners have reported their preference for instructions, evaluation-related issues and administrative information to be explained in the L1 [2], [57], [60], [88]. The study by [60], for instance, suggests the value that both young and adult learners attached to teacher CS for explanations of complex procedures, whereby explanations in the L1 facilitate the smooth running of the task. However, a large number of participants (66%) in [4] study disagreed with teacher CS when giving class instructions, as those instructions were already simple to understand. The French learners in [74, p.255] study, where "the exclusive use of French in instruction was not only a sign of teaching excellence but also beneficial to learning the language", revealed a similar viewpoint. A high percentage of the learners preferred class instructions to be delivered in the L2. These differences in learner views seem to be related to the teaching techniques deployed by the teachers and the teaching context. On this basis, it appears worthwhile to investigate the perceptions of Vietnamese learners working in the unique context of learning English for business purposes - an area that is still under investigated in the literature.

Learners attribute a range of affective benefits to teacher CS. For example, it has been reported that CS mitigates the anxiety inherently associated with L2 learning in their early stages, promotes confidence, creates a sense of achievement [13], [61], [88], and fuels learners' interest in learning [[41]. Some learners in [41] study indicated their preference for the use of CS, albeit at a minimal level, for its motivational effect. They contrasted it to the discouragement they felt when a previous teacher had spoken entirely in the L2. Other students maintained that CS increased their involvement in the learning process [3], [13].

### III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

A qualitative research method was adopted with the pragmatism paradigm, based on the premise that "actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with the world and objects in the world" [25, p.43]. It is a perspective that claims that "knowledge arises out of actions, situations and consequences" [23, p.11], or "result(s) from taking action and experiencing the outcomes" [67, p.1049], and that current truth, meaning, and knowledge are tentative and change over time [24], [39], [47]. Within the pragmatist paradigm, knowledge is relative and constructed based on the reality of the world we experience; hence, research findings are provisional truths given that experiences change from day-to-

day [47], [75].

Participants were five groups of Vietnamese undergraduate students, aged between 18 and 21, of both genders, enrolled in the four-year Bachelors degree course in English within the English for Business Communication stream.

Focus group sessions facilitated by video data showcasing teachers' CS practices were used to gather the students' reflections and responses to the following guiding questions and were recorded on a digital recorder and then transcribed:

1. What are your comments on this practice?
2. Can you see any benefits of your teacher's use of Vietnamese toward your Business English learning?
3. Are there any drawbacks of your teacher's use of Vietnamese toward your Business English learning?
4. What do you think if your teachers teach exclusively in English?
5. If you were a teacher, how would you select language for instruction that can improve students' Business English learning?

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, the data revealed that the students had complex and multifaceted views of teacher CS practices. On the one hand, the students perceived that teacher CS is a learning resource for content and language knowledge and it fulfils a role in providing positive psychological support for their learning. In addition, they also believed it acts as a vehicle that prepares them for their future language production. On the other hand, the students believed that this practice should be balanced, as extensive use has the potential to exert some adverse influence on their language learning and their learning autonomy.

#### *A. Teacher CS as a Learning Resource*

An emphasis was placed on the value of teacher CS to learning, including CS as an aid to student comprehension and as a means by which a positive affective learning environment was created and sustained.

##### 1) An Aid to Student Comprehension

Overall, the students held positive views regarding the role of teacher CS, describing how it ensured the comprehensibility of teacher input, a finding that reflects students' perspectives on content-based classrooms in other investigations [13], [41]. The students emphasised the significance of teacher CS in enabling them to develop a deep level of understanding of subject content, particularly business terms and related concepts. This finding is similar to the view of a number of students in other content-based contexts, who also emphasised the importance of understanding concepts and terms integral to the disciplines [3], [5], [64], [81]. One student's observation (G4), which was reiterated by several other students, was that CS facilitates a deeper processing of business terms than was possible by use of the definitions provided only in the L2:

"I can understand the teacher's explanations of business terms in English, but can only have a deep understanding when he reiterates those terms in Vietnamese."

This view also emerged in G3 and G5, where a number of students commented that teacher use of CS when outlining the meaning of business terms renders those terms more comprehensible. This aspect of CS is particularly important given that most business terms are challenging and abstract. Like his fellow learners, one student in G2 expressed a strong view favouring teacher CS use for translating business terms, observing that the translations of English definitions of terms such as "payable amount" and "bond" crystallised his understanding.

The role of teacher CS as a support for understanding business concepts was also reflected in the discussions the students had about their preferred teaching methodology. Most of the students in the five groups supported a switch to the L1 to explain business terms or concepts:

"(If I were the teacher) I would shift into Vietnamese to explain business terms (G3).

From my perspective, the teacher should use Vietnamese to explain challenging business concepts, particularly concepts in reading texts (G4).

As I have mentioned, I do not think I can grasp business terms with English-only clarifications. I have failed to make sense of my teacher's explanations no matter how hard she has endeavoured to make herself understood in English. So, it is essential to include Vietnamese in teaching business concepts (G1)."

Some students believed that teacher CS plays a role in clarifying the meaning of business concepts and this, in turn, increased their comprehension. One student in G1 explained that this practice helped her discern the distinction between seemingly similar business terms:

"I think it is necessary for teachers to rely on Vietnamese to differentiate similar terms such as "piece work" and "out work" as this can preclude student confusion."

Two other students in G1 also subscribed to this belief adding that only when the term "piece work" was delivered in the L1 did they come to a realisation that they had misconstrued its meaning (based on the teacher's English explanation only, they had labelled it "làm mẫu" [demonstrate]). A student in G2 echoed this viewpoint, stating that CS is useful, as a teacher speaking English entirely can cause ambiguity and misunderstanding, particularly when it involves highly specialised disciplinary content, where several terms may have meanings different from their everyday usage:

"Some lexical items have different meanings, depending on the context in which they occur, in business or everyday English one. We usually misconstrue business terms in everyday English. For example, when the teacher explained the term "specification", I labelled it "quy cách". However, I recognised that this wording was not used in the business context when my teacher provided its Vietnamese translation."

Additionally, some students in G2 and G4 stated that some business terms have varied meanings and are context-specific; therefore, teacher CS minimises student confusion in such

situations. One student in G4 reported that the monolingual dictionary entries of business terms left her floundering about selecting the proper definition and the teacher's explanation in the L1 had a significant role to play:

"On several occasions I am in two minds to determine one among several definitions of a term and have to wait for the teacher's clarification in the L1."

The interviews also provided supporting evidence for the view that the students see teacher CS as a resource for their enhanced comprehension of English language features. This is consistent with the views expressed by students in a number of studies in which English grammar was believed to be more comprehensible after being explained or clarified in the L1 [19], [74], [89]. Notably, one student in G3 and another in G4, who generally disagreed with teacher CS practices, nevertheless saw the value of teacher CS in aiding comprehension. These two students asserted that some English structure patterns and grammatical rules are complicated and challenging and the grammatical terminology used to present these structural patterns in the textbook is linguistically specific; thus, it is critical for teachers to switch to the L1 for the sake of their comprehension. Other students in G2 concurred and emphasised the need for CS to ensure that grammar structures were understood accurately and quickly, a finding reflecting the students' views in [89] study. Specifically, one student in G2 described how the teacher CS assisted him to make sense of grammar rules (i.e., some adverbs in the L2 allow either sentence-final or sentence-initial, while some do not - this compromised their comprehension if they were only explained in the L2).

Understanding the phonetic rules of the L2 was also perceived to be promoted by teacher CS. Some students in G4 stated that rules of stress on certain words in a sentence or syllables in a lexical item are linguistically specific and the teacher's explanation of these rules in the L1 assisted their comprehension. Two students in G4 observed:

"I think this practice is good for my English language learning as I can understand and pay attention to stress rules in a sentence (G4).

We find it very difficult to understand phonetic rules in English and wonder how we can have good pronunciation without understanding a single word if the teacher explains it in English only (G4)."

Teacher CS to the L1 was also seen as a vehicle for aiding student comprehension of the implicit messages in some reading texts, particularly those texts requiring the skill of "reading between the lines" (G2). Like his fellow class members, one student in G5 said that teacher CS increased his understanding of passages using metaphors or similes.

Comprehension of some aspects of L2 pragmatic knowledge was believed to be boosted when the teacher switched to the L1. The following comments made by one student in G2 were also echoed by two other students in this group. When the teacher reminded the students of the importance of paying close attention to politeness norms in composing emails, she shifted into the L1 and asked what the students would reply to an email saying "trả tiền tao máy"

[give back my money]; the pronouns used to address the sender and receiver in the example are deemed impolite in writing in the Vietnamese culture]. This student commented that the impolite connotations could not be conveyed if the teacher solely used the L2 and the politeness norms in composing emails might be overlooked. One student in G1 expressed a similar sentiment when he commented on his teacher's L1 switch for the statement "your top looks nice" (a suggestion of how to start to converse with someone at an event), arguing that the translation raised his awareness of L2 politeness norms and acted as a reminder to help him exercise caution in determining appropriate topics for starting a conversation (given that it is not appropriate to comment on someone's outfit in the Vietnamese culture when we first meet them). It seemed to this student that the reminder would not have had the same force if it were in English rather than in Vietnamese:

"I think teacher CS to reiterate the statement is more effective than the expression "your top looks nice" as it helps us connect with the Vietnamese culture and remember that it is not appropriate to comment on someone's appearance when we first meet them. This in turn helps me to be prudent in selecting proper topics for starting a conversation with someone."

Further, teacher CS to the L1 was also perceived to act as a bridge to students' prior content knowledge which, in turn, contributed to their comprehension of new concepts. In line with one student's opinion [13], [63] studies, a student in G1 indicated that her teacher's incorporation of the L1 activated and enabled her to make connections with her pre-existing knowledge and this fostered her comprehension of new concepts:

"If we learned this unit in English only, we would not know that we have learned a lot of concepts when taking extra courses such as Human Resource Management which are taught in Vietnamese. Therefore, when the teacher switches into the MT we can refer to what we have learned to gain a greater comprehension of what he is lecturing."

Another student in G1 commented that when the teacher shifted into the L1, he recognised that he had already learned several concepts which augmented his understanding of new concepts and made his learning more meaningful.

In all, teacher CS practices were generally perceived to secure student understanding of both business concepts and some aspects of the English language.

## 2) An Aid to Student Learning

Teacher CS was seen as playing a contributing role in building up student background knowledge. One student in G1 commented that teacher CS was essential for student learning of unfamiliar business concepts, exemplifying this by describing a previous learning experience in which her teacher provided an overview of the Public-Private Partnership model in the L1 (its definition and examples):

"I think teachers should provide background knowledge in the L1 for unfamiliar concepts. As far as I

can recollect, when learning PPP we found my teacher's class more comprehensible as he provided a gist in the L1 beforehand."

Another student in this group indicated her support for this practice:

"I would brief students on basic information of a concept before going into detail if I were the teacher. For example, I would outline what the concept Corporate Social Responsibility involves."

Similar to the view expressed by the students in G1, one student in G3 made the following suggestion: encourage the students to do pre-reading pertaining to a topic prior to the class so that they could have some schematic knowledge on which to build.

Teacher CS was also perceived to expand student content knowledge. One student in G2 reported that when his teacher shifted into Vietnamese to explain a concept, further information related to that concept was provided, which significantly extended his knowledge:

"When our teacher explains a concept in Vietnamese, she always provides us with further information, so we can considerably widen our knowledge."

Another student in this group provided an example to underscore the importance of this practice being adopted by all teachers:

"For example, I got extra information related to the term "agenda" - such as how it is prepared and used at work and how important it is to ensure the success of a meeting - when my teacher switched to the MT to explain it. It is critical for teachers to provide us with such practical information to broaden our knowledge."

CS used by the teachers was believed to play a facilitative role in student learning, including aiding their retention of the meaning of business terms and getting them more involved in the learning process. Some previous studies have reported that students responded very positively to teacher CS, particularly to its role in the recollection of lexical items [43], [74]. This finding is mirrored in the observations by some students in this study. The meaning of business terms was easily retrieved (G1) or retained longer (G3) when they were translated into the L1. One student in G2 commented that business terms that were provided in the L1 coupled with jokes considerably assisted her recollection of their meaning. Another student in G2 observed:

"Given the fact that a large number of business items are provided in each teaching session, it is almost impossible for us to remember them all. However, this is resolved if my teacher explains and displays the definitions in the L2 and provides a brief translation in the L1."

Some students also believed that teacher CS promotes student involvement in the language learning process. Given that students' language abilities were varied and the teaching of some challenging features of the English language through immersion might exclude some less linguistically developed students, CS was seen as a means by which these factors were accommodated. One student in G5 argued: the teacher's

incorporation of the L1 to explain a grammatical point "must/could/may have, plus past participle" assisted all students to understand the point, given the clarity of L1 translations in expressing levels of deduction such as "ắt hẳn là", "rất có khả năng" and "có thể" [must be; be very likely; probably be]. However, there was not universal support for this position, with another student arguing that students should be organised into two levels for this unit, depending on their linguistic abilities:

"I think in order to ensure that every student gets involved in a lesson, there should be two categories of Business English classes: one taught in English only for high proficiency students and one in English and Vietnamese for others."

Most of the students expressed their opposition to the proposed implementation of an English-only teaching policy, highlighting the importance they attach to the engagement of all students in a lesson. An L2-only approach would risk students being left behind and increase the likelihood of them dropping out of the course:

"I think it is very important for every student to be engaged in a class. Otherwise, it is likely they will lose heart and quit the course (G1)."

On the whole, the students considered teacher CS as an additional source of support for their learning processes.

### 3) Affective Support for Learning

Not only is teacher CS considered necessary to facilitate students' cognitive processing of content knowledge and the English language, it was also seen as a way of promoting positive affective states such as interest in learning, self-confidence and as a means of building a low-stress classroom atmosphere.

As observed by one student in G1, her engagement with the course was significantly increased by her teacher's use of the colloquial L1. When he introduced the class on business protocols with the expression "I don't want you to nói lụi" ["I don't want you to utter sentences that are both grammatically and pragmatically inappropriate"], the language was very informal and more commonly used by young people and was in stark (and hilarious) contrast to the topic under discussion. More importantly, as argued by this student, this introduction stimulated her interest to learn the business protocols provided by the teacher. This view was supported by another student in this group, who believed that teachers should occasionally use colloquial expressions in the L1 in order to stimulate and sustain students' interest in learning. Along the same lines, some students in G2 and G4 stated that, at times, they found that their teachers' illustrations of business concepts through the use of jokes injected fun and provided inspiration for their learning in the unit. Similar to the experience described by some students in [41] study, one student in G2 recalled his lack of interest in learning induced by his teacher's use of "formal L2" throughout the previous level of this unit:

"Our former teacher of this unit used English-only while we badly needed L1 explanations and did make our request for L1 explicit to him. However, to our

disappointment, he kept using the L2 only which really dampened our interest in learning."

The teachers' utilisation of CS played a role in promoting students' confidence. One student in G1 believed her teacher's CS allowed her to cross-check her comprehension and, when her understanding was confirmed, she felt more confident about her language abilities. Another student in G1 referred to the example mentioned above (the teacher's switch into the L1 to remind the students to make utterances both pragmatically and grammatically appropriate) and commented that this really enhanced her positive attitude about her ability to get involved in the assigned role play. One student in G1 expressed her outright opposition to the proposed implementation of an English-only policy in teaching this unit on the grounds that students would not feel confident to contribute their opinions because of their lack of English language proficiency (students may insert L1 expressions and teachers would counter with appropriate equivalents in the L2). This finding substantiates prior research by [61] with Japanese students in an EFL study-abroad course in the UK which found that assistance provided by bilingual assistants encouraged students to say things that they perhaps might not otherwise have said.

It has been reported that teacher CS relieves the stress inherently associated with learning the L2 in the early stages of its development [13], [88], a view with which some students in the study agreed. For instance, some students in G4 stated that it was very stressful for them to attend this unit as they were in the early stages of learning the L2 and simultaneously had to acquire content knowledge; therefore, the teacher's inclusion of the L1, either for teaching purposes or for more effective interaction with students, alleviated the pressure they felt they were under. One student in G1 expressed strong opposition to the proposed adoption of an English-only policy because this would lead to a stifled and stressful classroom atmosphere. Another student in G1 suggested that, where possible, teachers employ CS to provide encouraging feedback to promote a positive and supportive learning environment:

"I think teachers can utilise some warm-hearted interaction with students such as praising students for their achievements to lighten the classroom climate. However, it is more effective for this to be done in Vietnamese."

### *B. Teacher CS as Support for Language Production*

In addition to the value attached to CS in support of their learning, the overriding concern that most students expressed was whether they could apply what they had learned to generate accurate English language output of their own. In some students' views, teacher CS assists them to develop appropriate word choices for translation tasks. One student in G1 argued that, without his teacher's provision of content terminology in the L1, he would not be able to use appropriate modes of expressions for business when undertaking L2 to L1 translation tasks. Like his fellow learner, one student in G4 observed:

"I find my word-for-word translation really inadequate, so his Vietnamese switches are definitely of great help for my translation assignments."

With respect to translation from the L1 to the L2, one student in G1 maintained that her teacher's explanations and translation of business terms into the L1 facilitated her conceptual processing and this, in turn, assisted her to complete translation tasks:

"I find it is a real challenge to perform Vietnamese-English translation tasks due to the difficulty in choosing business terms. However, the teacher's translations of business terms remind me of the contexts of those terms, help me fully understand the concepts and assist me to select appropriate terms for my translation assignments."

In some other students' views, teacher CS assists them to use English grammar properly. One student in G4 and another in G3 outlined the importance of appropriate syntax in their language output:

"It is very important for teachers to rely on CS to explain English structures so that students can produce grammatically appropriate sentences.

I think once English grammar is explained with the support of Vietnamese, students will have a good understanding and later they can produce proper sentence structures."

Another student in G5 described how he believed this practice helped him use English grammar:

"I reckon everyone is aware of the Vietnamese word "must". However, "must have done" and "should have done" have different Vietnamese equivalents and are used in different contexts. The provision of these equivalents assisted me to use this grammatical point accurately."

In addition, some students valued teacher CS as it assists them to complete class assignments. One student in G4 described an example: the teacher explained the core message of a listening transcript in Vietnamese and then translated all the listening comprehension questions, which helped her complete the task. Like his fellow learners in studies by [3] and [81], another student in G2 strongly favoured teacher CS in teaching, explaining how it helped him obtain a deep understanding of lesson content which, in turn, increased his capacity to undertake end-of-term assessments.

Some students, who appeared to view benefits brought about by teacher CS from a longer term perspective, described how CS supported the development of knowledge they would use in their prospective careers. A comment made by one student in G2, which was also shared by some other students, was that this improved knowledge and understanding would benefit them when they enter the job market in the next few years. One student in G1 identified the importance of making sense of business terms so that he had the ability to discuss them in future workplace settings (a future colleague might discuss business terms and ask the student to provide Vietnamese translations). Aligned with this view, a student in G5 expressed the strong opinion that CS develops his

vocabulary, which would be important in his work as an interpreter:

"I think teacher CS is of great help as I can learn the expressions in Vietnamese for business terms such as "depreciation", "margin" and "merger and acquisition" so that I can use those Vietnamese terms accurately when working as an interpreter. Being Vietnamese does not necessarily mean that I am able to label English business terms appropriately in Vietnamese."

### *C. Potential Dangers of Teachers' Extensive Use of CS*

Although the students attributed a range of benefits to CS behaviour, they preferred CS to be restrained. Some of the students gave some examples of when they felt CS was overused: according to some students in G2, prior to a listening activity in which the teacher had explained the concepts in the L1, he then kept translating all the listening comprehension questions into the L1, which they considered was redundant and counterproductive. Unlike a number of learners in other studies [2], [57], [60], [74], who preferred class instructions to be given in the L1, some students in G4 disagreed with the teacher use of CS in this respect claiming that teacher CS in this situation was not useful. They felt that English in those situations was simple and had become class routine. Some students in G1 and G4 said that CS for conveying the meaning of business terms occurred too frequently, as they could often guess the meaning when it came to business terms. They outlined the negatives when CS was used extensively: an impediment to language learning and negative impact on the development of autonomous learning.

#### 1) Impediment to Language Learning

According to the students the negative consequences of CS include the impact on the opportunity to practise communicative skills and their cognitive reliance on the L1 for L2 processing.

Most students in all five groups argued that CS should be restricted to the teaching of business concepts and some aspects of English language only. Some of the students in G2 preferred other language skills such as listening and speaking skills to be taught entirely in the L2. If this did not occur, they would not have the necessary opportunities to practise communicative skills which may hinder their progress (G2). Though the students in this study shared the view of the students in studies by [50] and [74] that CS should be limited, their concerns were slightly different. While the students in [50] and [74] were worried about the negative impact on their ability to adequately acquire L2 phonetic rules, the students in this study saw extensive use of CS as an impediment to practising communicative skills.

Some of the students in this study perceived that an abundance of teacher CS would trigger cognitive reliance on the L1 for L2 learning and that this may impact on their ability to cognitively process information in the L2. One student in G4 commented that his teacher's current CS led him not to make a concerted effort to comprehend the class in the L2 and



expressed his concern over his ability to process information in the L2:

“At times I think the teacher uses too much Vietnamese which might trigger our dependence on his translation. As I am aware of his pattern in teaching business terms, I just count on the reiteration in Vietnamese instead of endeavouring to understand his English explanations.”

This finding is similar to a view that was discussed by some students in the studies by [61], [74], [88], and [89]. One student in G1 suggested that explanations in the L2 and, more importantly, opportunities for students to self-discover meaning should precede their teachers' provision of the L1 translation, in order that students could digest their teachers' input or process the information provided, otherwise he would become dependent on his teacher CS for his L2 learning of business terms:

“I am a bit concerned with my teacher's current practice as he sometimes provides Vietnamese for business terms preceding his English explanations, which I usually ignore. I would suggest that he explain those terms in English and allow us some time to discover the meanings and he should only provide translations when all alternative resources have been exhausted.”

## 2) Barrier to Learning Autonomy

A minority of students indicated their preference for limited use of the L1, arguing that extensive use of teacher CS had a negative impact on their motivation for learning. One student in G4 observed that a minimal amount of teacher CS (in English grammar teaching) would challenge and push her harder, as she would have to pay closer attention to the class. She commented that on some occasions she did not think CS was necessary and, like the students in the [74] study, it would adversely affected her motivation for learning due to a lack of challenge, as she had no immediate need to process information in the L2. A student in G1 said that teacher CS should be strictly limited to particularly challenging teaching points in order to stimulate his independent learning. Another student in G1 held that his ability to take the initiative in learning might be affected by his teacher's frequent CS, arguing that he did not think he was proactive enough or well-prepared prior to every class, and these habits were compounded by his teacher's effort to make the class comprehensible through the use of CS. This student suggested that the students should be provided with in-class resources to discover the meaning of new concepts for themselves or by using collaborative learning strategies, such as pair or group work, to minimise the frequent use of CS.

Other students also expressed their concern about their teacher's extensive use of CS and suggested they should be involved in decisions regarding the extent of the teachers' use of the L1. One student in G1 stated that students' voices about the necessity of teacher CS should be heard and, at some point in their L2 learning process, CS could be omitted altogether. One student in G4 said that if she were the teacher she would not provide immediate translations for almost every business

term or question in the listening and reading tasks as her teacher currently did, but instead would consult with her students:

“I think the teacher should ask whether we really need Vietnamese translations for business terms.”

## V. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, CS was clearly evident in different aspects of teaching and was favoured by the students, although they highlighted that this practice should be limited. The findings of this study suggest that language teachers should not suppress the use of CS or endeavour to use the L2 entirely. Rather, use of CS should be encouraged, provided that most of the interaction between teachers and learners is in the L2, and that a variety of strategies are used along with CS. To assist the appropriate use of CS practices, teachers should be encouraged to develop personalised and localised strategies for CS use, based on their own evidence and reflections together with improved theoretical understanding, which align with their own beliefs, those of their students and the specific factors of their teaching contexts.

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