



TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND USE OF ENGLISH HEDGES IN CLASSROOM FOR DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS' PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

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Abstract:

English hedges are common in native speakers' communication, without hedges speakers may be perceived as unnatural or too direct. It has been thought that teacher talk is a means which can facilitate EFL learners' awareness and use of English hedges. The questionnaire was used to investigate teachers' perceptions of hedges and the significance of hedging in classroom instruction for developing learners' pragmatic competence. The findings of the current study show that teachers have positive perceptions of the facilitative roles and pragmatic functions of English hedges. They believe the significance of hedging in classroom instruction; however, they think that it is difficult to develop students' pragmatic competence via teacher talk because there is a lack of context in classroom for hedging and whether or not teachers hedge in instructional language depends on teaching content and students' proficiency level.

Keywords: instructional language, hedges, pragmatic competence, EFL

1. Introduction

It is known that one of the aspects of pragmatic competence is hedging. Vagueness can be found in everyday English and hedges can be used to convey vagueness. Hedges can be used to soften claims, requests, commands, performatives and criticism or they may also act as a politeness strategy (Nugroho, 2002). Without hedges speakers may be perceived as foreign, too direct and impolite (Channell, 1994). As a result, English hedges are of significance in native speakers' communication; therefore, it is useful for non-native speakers to learn those pragmatic functions in English hedges. Vietnamese-

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speaking students, especially students in the Mekong Delta, have lacked opportunities to be exposed to the English language environment. Thus, it has been thought that teacher talk is a means to facilitate the development of EFL learners' pragmatic competence.

Teacher talk refers to the language teachers use in classroom, and is of crucial importance for classroom organization and management as well as for the process of acquisition (Nunan, 1995). In terms of the target language acquisition, teacher talk may be the major source of comprehensible input to students. There has been the growing body of research on teacher talk, such as the modification of teacher talk (Tsui, 1995), teacher talk features in second language learning classroom (Chaudron, 1988). However, there have been few studies on teacher talk facilitating learners' pragmatic competence development, especially in EFL classroom. The current study aims to fill this gap by investigating a case of teachers' perceptions and use of English hedges in classroom for EFL learners' pragmatic competence development.

2. Literature review

2.1 The concept of hedges

The concept of hedges was defined as "*words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy*" (Lakoff, 1972) because fuzziness is a property of any language, "natural language sentences will be very often be neither true, nor false, nor nonsensical, but rather true to a certain extent, and false to a certain extent, true in certain respects and false in certain respects" (Lakoff, 1973, p.462). Sharing the views, it is believed that no claiming precision seems to be appropriate in all situations and naturally, the writer or the speaker sometimes want to be vague (Myers, 1989). From the perspective of pragmatic features of hedges, in regard to politeness hedges are used as a means of achieving distance between a speaker and what is said (Sketon, 1988) and as a means through which linguistic politeness can be manifested (Willamová, 2005). To contribute to cooperative interaction in English, speakers may produce hedges called "cautious notes" (Yule, 1996).

In other words, hedges are phrases that eliminate or at least mitigate one of Grice's (1975) maxims, and hedges are evidence of individuals' awareness of observance of the cooperative principles and conversational maxims (Pham, 2014, p.32).

2.2 Types of hedges

Hedges can be divided into two kinds, called *approximators* and *shields* (Prince, Fraser & Bosk, 1982, cited in Fraser, 2010). From their distinction between these two types,

approximators have effect on the original truth condition of the proposition, whereas shields indicate speakers' lack of full commitment to the truth value of the proposition. In addition to the distinction, sub-classes of these two types are referred. Approximators include adaptors and rounders. Adaptors are language devices which call the degree of truth of the original proposition, for example, *sort of, kind of, somewhat, really, almost, quite, entirely, a little bit, to some extent, more or less*, etc. Rounders are expressions used to indicate the inexact correctness of terms. The examples of rounders are as follows: *approximately, essentially, about, something around, something between ... and..., roughly*, etc.

The two sub-classes of shields are *plausibility shields and attribution shields*. Plausibility shields are expressions which are used to show speakers' own attitude toward a proposition, the examples are like *I think, I guess, I believe, I assume, I suppose, I'm afraid, I take it, seem, probably, as far as I can tell, right now, I don't see that*. Attribution shields are language devices which are used to express speakers' uncertainty toward a proposition to someone, for example, *according to, it is reported, as is well known, the possibility will be, at least to X's knowledge, someone suggests that, presumably*, etc.

2.3 Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence is considered one of the key components of communicative competence (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981) and it is believed to contribute to successful communication (Fraser, 2010). Pragmatic competence has been defined in a number of different ways like "an individuals' knowledge of the pragmatic system of a given language" (Levison, 1983, p.35). Furthermore, pragmatic competence is defined as a variety of abilities in the use and interpretation of language in context – these include a speaker's ability to use language for different purposes, to adapt language according to the needs or expectation of the listener or situation, and the speaker's ability to follow the accepted rules, the maxims (Bialystok, 1993, cited in Brock & Nagasaka, 2005). Furthermore, pragmatic competence is important to second/foreign language learners in that they can learn speaking rules of social communication, and understanding the social rules of speaking, the role of contextual features, and the importance related to appropriateness and expected norms, generally improves languages for those who have had acquisition of another language and facilitate learners to become pragmatically proficient (LoCastro, 2012). Therefore, the current study is based on the definition of pragmatic competence in that *pragmatic competence is a speaker's ability to communicate and interpret an intended meaning in socially appropriate ways to achieve communicative goals* (Brock & Nagasaka, 2005; Fraser, 2010; LoCastro, 2012).

There are two components of pragmatic competence, namely “knowledge of a pragmatic system” and “knowledge of appropriate use” Liu (2004, p.14). In other words, pragmatic competence is subdivided into pragmalinguistic competence and socio-pragmatic competence which are vital in EFL learners’ pragmatic competence development (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983).

2.4 Teacher talk

Teachers’ instructional language is of significance in classroom teaching, using appropriate classroom language will have positive influences to learning process (Prince, 2003), and the more exposure of foreign language input facilitates learners’ language proficiency (Harmer, 1991). Teacher-student interaction in classroom is a kind of specific interaction, and students can acquire language through interaction with teacher, or even other students (Tsui, 1995). As can be seen, instructional language has impacts on students’ learning achievement.

From the perspective of learners’ pragmatic development, teachers’ stress or intonation can be an effective way to enhance classroom input to direct learners’ attention to form without explicit teaching (Sharwood-Smith, 1991, 1993), and learners’ pragmatic development can be fostered by teachers’ providing appropriate, adequate and rich input (Krashen, 1982). In this regard, it is believed that teachers who have pragmatic knowledge of L2 are the main source of input because they provide a great deal of language input concerning L2 pragmatic such as politeness rules, necessity of being aware of discourse markers and pertinent contextual features (LoCastro, 2012).

2.5 The relationship of hedges and pragmatic competence development

Whenever a listener can interpret a speaker’s intended meaning, the communication can be smoothly-continued. Therefore, contextual meaning which belongs to pragmatic competence can facilitate successful interaction; conversation participants who lack this kind of competence, may utter perfectly grammatical speech which, however, fails to achieve communicative goals (Fraser, 2010).

From the respect of politeness, the pragmatic functions of hedges can be analyzed in negatively polite discourse, the so-called subjectivity markers (*I think, I hope, I guess, I suppose, I don’t think, I wouldn’t say*), downgraders (*just, just in case, a little*), performative hedges (also called “introductory”) play an important role in minimizing face-loss and imposing (Wilamová, 2005).

These kinds of hedges belong to speakers’ orientation, with subjectivity markers, speakers indicate that what is uttered is personal belief, opinion and that there is a lack of certainty or decision; whereas downgraders, less-imposing markers may convey the

speaker's self-protection from inefficient knowledge to which the interlocutor's respect; and performative hedges make requests, suggestions or apologies be attenuated, which serve the speaker's illocutionary goal as well as give a hearer time to formulate his/her own expressions. As can be seen, hedges are used to provide conditions for successful communication.

From what mentioned above, it is obvious that, in communication, hedges are closely related to pragmatic competence, language users' efficient awareness, appropriate employment and accurate interpretation of hedges can contribute to their own pragmatic competence development.

3. Research methodology

This study aims to investigate EFL university teachers' perceptions and use of English hedges in classroom for developing learners' pragmatic competence development. The participants of this current study are 25 teachers of English from a university in the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam.

The questionnaire was designed based on the theoretical foundation of English hedges and pragmatic competence as the relevant literature review mentioned above. The questionnaire was adapted from the questionnaire which Knot (2013) used in his research, and from Fraser's classification of hedges (2010). All the items of the questionnaire were categorized into the following clusters: (1) Perceptions of the facilitative roles of English hedges, (2) Perceptions of types of English hedges, (3) Perceptions of the significance of hedging in EFL classroom and its relationship with pragmatic competence development and (4) Teachers' use of hedging expressions in classroom instruction.

4. Findings

4.1 Teachers' perceptions of English hedges

A. Teachers' perceptions of the facilitative roles of English hedges

There are eleven statements (from 1 to 11) used to investigate the participants' views on the facilitative roles of English hedges.

Table 1: Teachers' perceptions of the facilitative roles of English hedges

Statement *	Strongly disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly agree n (%)	M	SD
1	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	3 (12.0)	17 (68.0)	3 (12.0)	3.80	.86
2	1 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (8.0)	15 (60.0)	7 (28.0)	4.08	.86
3	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (12.0)	13 (52.0)	9 (36.0)	4.24	.66
4	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	13 (52.0)	9 (36.0)	4.12	.97
5	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	20 (80.0)	5 (20.0)	4.20	.40
6	1 (4.0)	2 (8.0)	4 (16.0)	14 (56.0)	4 (16.0)	3.72	.97
7	0 (0.0)	5 (20.0)	5 (20.0)	10 (40.0)	5 (20.0)	3.60	1.04
8	0 (0.0)	3 (12.0)	7 (28.0)	14 (56.0)	1 (4.0)	3.52	0.77
9	0 (0.0)	4 (16.0)	5 (20.0)	14 (56.0)	2 (8.0)	3.56	.86
10	0 (0.0)	1 (4.0)	4 (16.0)	14 (56.0)	6 (24.0)	4.00	.76
11	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.0)	19 (76.0)	5 (20.0)	4.16	.47
Meancluster1						3.90	.37

Statement *

1. Hedges can be used to convey vagueness.
2. Hedging is one way of conveying interpersonal messages in spoken interaction.
3. Hedges are used to soften claims, requests, commands, performatives and criticism.
4. Hedges can be used to express a speaker's uncertainty.
5. Hedges may also act as a politeness strategy.
6. Hedges can facilitate communication.
7. Hedges necessarily contribute to the speaker's spoken fluency.
8. Without hedges speakers sound rather formal, too direct and abrupt.
9. Without hedges conversations are still coherent and interpretable.
10. Using hedges appropriately belongs to pragmatic competence.
11. Pragmatic competence is important to EFL learners.

Table 1 shows that the mean score of the participants' perceptions of the facilitative roles of English hedges are at high level ($M= 3.90$; $SD =.37$). To be specific, most of the participants (80%) were aware that hedging is one aspect of pragmatic competence and this competence is important to EFL learners (96%). Concerning the participants' views on the facilitative roles of English hedges, all the participants (100%)

showed agreement with the most common role is that hedges are used as a polite strategy. Also, there was a popular agreement (88%) that hedges can be used to convey interpersonal messages in spoken interaction, to be softeners in communication context and to express speakers' uncertainty. In additions, a large number of participants agreed that hedges can be used to convey vagueness with 80% showing agreement, and hedges can facilitate communication (accounting for 72%).

Furthermore, the results in Table 4.1 reveal that more than half of the participants (60%) believed that hedges necessarily contribute to speakers' spoken fluency and that without hedges speakers sound rather formal, too direct and abrupt; however, to the former, 20% disagreed and 20% had neutral views; to the latter, 12% disagreed and 28% had neutral views. Although the participants emphasized the roles of English hedges in communication, 64% believed that without hedges conversations are still coherent and interpretable.

The data show that the teachers were aware of the typical roles of English hedges in communication.

B. Teachers' perceptions of types of English hedges

Typically, the examples of some utterances with hedging expressions (14 items) were included in the questionnaire in order to investigate the participants' perceptions of types of hedges. The results show that most of the participants were aware of the language devices used as hedges: 96% for "Perhaps", "I believe"; 88% for "I suppose"; 80% for "Could I", "sort of". However, their perceptions of the functions of hedges were significantly different. The results show that the highest percentage for the right function of "I suppose" is 76%, and 68% for "Could I", 56% for "Perhaps" and "sort of".

4.2 Teachers' perceptions of the significance of hedging in classroom instruction and its relationship with pragmatic competence development

A. Teachers' perceptions of classroom activities in which hedges can be used

Table 2: Teachers' perceptions of classroom activities in which hedges can be used

Statement *	Strongly disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly agree n (%)	M	SD
26a	0 (0.0)	4 (16.0)	7 (28.0)	14 (56.0)	0 (0.0)	3.4	.76
26b	0 (.0)	4 (16.0)	10 (40.0)	11 (44.0)	0 (0.0)	3.28	.73
26c	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	14 (56.0)	8 (32.0)	4.08	.95
26d	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	4 (16.0)	15 (60.0)	4 (16.0)	3.80	.91
Meancluster2.1						3.64	.72

Statements *

26. In classroom, hedges can be used in...

- a) explaining lessons;
- b) giving instructions;
- c) giving feedback;
- d) correcting errors;

As can be seen from Table 2, a majority of the participants (88%) agreed that hedges can be used in giving feedback in classroom instruction; three-quarters of them believed that hedges can be used in error treatment, while 16% gave a neutral response. However, over half (56%) thought that hedges can be used in explaining lessons, 16% disagreed and 28% were neutral. Besides, nearly half (44%) agreed that hedges can be used in giving instructions, while 40% showed neutral views and 16% disagreed.

4.3 Teachers' perceptions of functions of hedges in classroom instruction

Table 3: Teachers' perceptions of functions of hedges in classroom instruction

Statement *	Strongly disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly agree n (%)	M	SD
27a	0 (0.0)	3 (12.0)	1 (4.0)	16 (64.0)	5 (20.0)	3.92	.86
27b	0 (0.0)	2 (8.0)	2 (8.0)	14 (56.0)	7 (28.0)	4.04	.84
27c	0 (0.0)	1 (4.0)	5 (20.0)	14 (56.0)	5 (20.0)	3.92	.75
27d	1 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	16 (64.0)	8 (32.0)	4.20	.81
Meancluster2.2						4.02	.71

Statements *

27. In classroom, hedges can be used ...

- a) to sound polite;
- b) to avoid face threatening acts;
- c) to strengthen cooperation;
- d) to soften attitude.

The data in Table 3 show that a large number of the participants (96%) showed agreement with the common function that hedges can be used to soften attitude. Furthermore, 84% of them agreed that hedges can be used to sound polite or to avoid threatening acts and over three-quarters of the participants (76%) thought that hedges can be used to strengthen cooperation.

A. Teachers' perceptions of the significance of hedging in classroom instruction and its relationship with pragmatic competence development

The data in Table 4 below show that the mean score of the participant's perceptions is at high level ($M=3.79$; $SD=.61$), and the *One-Sample T test* was performed on the mean score of the participants' perceptions of these categories to examine whether the mean score has significant difference from 4 – the accepted mean for high level in general. The result showed that the sample mean was not significantly different from 4.0 ($t = -1.68$, $df = 24$, $p = .10$). The result supports the conclusion that the mean score of the teachers' perceptions of the significance of hedging in classroom instruction and its relationship to pragmatic competence was relatively high.

Table 4: Teachers' perceptions of the significance of hedging in classroom instruction and its relationship with pragmatic competence development

Statement *	Strongly disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly agree n (%)	M	SD
28	1 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.0)	16 (64.0)	7 (28.0)	4.12	.83
29	0 (0.0)	4 (16.0)	6 (24.0)	12 (48.0)	3 (12.0)	3.56	.91
30	0 (0.0)	4 (16.0)	6 (24.0)	15 (60.0)	0 (0.0)	3.44	.76
31	1 (4.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (8.0)	17 (68.0)	5 (20.0)	4.00	.81
32	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	3 (12.0)	16 (64.0)	4 (16.0)	3.84	.89
Meancluster2.3						3.79	.61

Statements *

28. It is important to use English hedges in classroom instruction.

29. Teachers' hedging in their instructional language can raise learners' awareness of English hedges.

30. Learners can imitate the hedges teachers use and learn to use them.

31. Teachers' hedging help learners recognize the roles of English hedges.

32. It is difficult to develop students' pragmatic competence via teacher talk

Almost all of the participants (92%) showed their agreement with the significance of hedging in classroom instruction. A large number of them (88%) believed that teachers' hedging can help learners recognize the roles of English hedges; 60% agreed that teachers' hedging in classroom instruction can help learners be aware of English hedges, imitate the hedges teachers use and learn to use the hedges, while 16% with disagreement and 24% with a neutral response to this statement. However, a

majority of them (80%) thought that it was difficult to develop students' pragmatic competence via teacher talk.

B. Factors influencing teachers' hedging in classroom instruction

Table 5: Factors influencing teachers' hedging in classroom instruction

Statement *	Strongly disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly agree n (%)	M	SD
33	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	15 (60.0)	7 (28.0)	4.04	.93
34	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	4 (16.0)	16 (64.0)	3 (12.0)	3.76	.87
35	1 (4.0)	1 (4.0)	8 (32.0)	13 (52.0)	2 (8.0)	3.56	.86
36	3 (12.0)	14 (56.0)	4 (16.0)	4 (16.0)	0 (0.0)	2.36	.90
Meancluster2.4						3.43	.62

Statements *

33. In EFL classroom, there is not much context for using English hedges.

34. Whether teachers use hedges in classroom depends much on content of the lesson.

35. Whether teachers use hedges in classroom depends much on students' English proficiency.

36. Non-native teachers are not used to hedging in classroom instruction.

As can be seen in Table 4.5, a large number of the participants thought that there is not much context for using English hedges in EFL classroom, more than three-quarters of them agreed with whether teachers can hedge in classroom instruction depends on the content of the lesson, while 16% had a neutral response and 8% showed disagreement. Besides, over half of agreed that students' English proficiency can influence whether teachers hedge in classroom instruction. Whereas, only 16 % thought that non-native teachers are not used to hedging in classroom instruction, 68% showed disagreement and 16% were neutral.

The results show that the teachers were aware of the significance of hedging in classroom instruction as well as its relationship with students' pragmatic competence development; however, they thought that it was not easy to help students develop their pragmatic competence by teacher talk because of several the relevant factors like context, content of the lesson, students' English proficiency.

4.3 Hedging expressions used by teachers in classroom instruction

A number of hedging expressions are included in the questionnaire (12 items) in order to identify the teachers' frequent use of these expressions. The results show that the highest frequent use of the hedging expressions are introductory phrases "I think...", "I believe...", modal verbs "may, might, could, must...", "Anyway" and "It's possible that...".

5. Discussions and implications

A. Teachers' perceptions of English hedges

A large majority of the teachers were aware of the facilitative roles of English hedges in communication in terms of a polite strategy, means of conveying interpersonal messages. More than half of the teachers believed that hedges necessarily contribute to speakers' fluency and that without hedges speakers sound rather formal, direct and abrupt. This belief is in line with the views on pragmatic functions of hedges in that hedges can be used as a polite strategy as in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, negative politeness is connected with respect other people's privacy. Although the participants stressed the roles of hedges in communication, more than half of them believed that without hedges conversations are still coherent and interpretable. Furthermore, though aware of the utterances with hedges, most of them were not certain about types of the hedges mentioned in the questionnaire. It is predicted that they may be unfamiliar to some hedging markers, however, when they were speaking or listening to native speakers, they could recognize the common hedges like "I think, I believe, I guess" and they could have ideas on the functions with context; accordingly, they could interpret speakers' meaning.

B. Teachers' perceptions of the significance of hedging in classroom instruction and its relationship with pragmatic competence development

The teachers believed that pragmatic competence was significant to EFL learners because they need to communicate in reality and this ability would help them to use the language appropriately, naturally and successfully. In addition, the respondents thought that it was important for EFL learners to be able to use hedges in order to communicate effectively. This belief supports the view on pragmatic competence that it contributes to successful communication; language learners should acquire this kind of competence (Kasper, 1997; Brock & Nagasaka, 2005; Fraser, 2010).

Almost all of the teachers thought that it was important to use English hedges in classroom instruction because they believed that teachers' hedging in classroom instruction could help learners be aware of the roles of English hedges and help to raise

learners' awareness of hedges, then they could imitate and learn to use hedges. This belief is in line with the view that teacher talk is of crucial importance for classroom organization and management as well as for the process of acquisition (Nunan, 1995), and learners' pragmatic development can be fostered by teachers' providing appropriate, adequate and rich input (Krashen, 1982).

Most of the teachers believed that in classroom instruction hedges can be used for the purposes of softening attitude, expressing politeness or avoiding threatening acts firming cooperation. As can be seen with the classroom context, hedges can be used in interaction. And the interviewed teachers also claimed that they could use hedges for the mentioned purposes. This belief supports Nugroho's (2002) views on pragmatic functions of hedges in the way that hedges are considered the softeners for making statements, requests, commands, performatives, criticism, and speakers use hedging devices to cooperate in conversation with the aim of lessening face threatening acts, exchanging sensitive topics and encouraging interaction.

A majority of the teachers believed that it was difficult to develop students' pragmatic competence via teacher talk. This belief fails to support Li's (2016) view on teachers' hedging facilitating students' pragmatic competence development in that teachers' negotiation is expanded in a simulated communication environment and the turns of classroom discourse are extended, so the students tend to maximize opportunities for exchanging information, in the process students gradually become aware of and be able to use hedges.

C. Implications for developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence

The results of the current study reveal that the teachers have positive perceptions of the roles of English hedges in communication as well as the necessity for developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence on the respect of hedging. However, there is still uncertainty of whether teachers' hedging in classroom context has any significant impacts to learners' pragmatic competence development because it has been governed by context for hedging in classroom, teaching content and learners' English proficiency; practically, it is obvious that there has been limitation in frequency of hedging and quantity of hedging expressions. Therefore, in this section some implications for developing EFL learners' pragmatic competence through teacher talk will be suggested.

Firstly, it is recommended that EFL teachers necessarily apply hedges in teacher talk because Vietnamese students learn English as a foreign language so they lack language environment for using the target language appropriately and most of the context for their listening and speaking English is classroom context and if teachers can provide a rich input of hedges, it will be facilitate their pragmatic competence development, which can help them communicate naturally and successfully.

Secondly, teacher-student interaction is predominant in classroom context, teachers have to explain lessons, give requests, give instructions, correct errors or give feedback to students, and good teacher-student interaction will facilitate negotiation of meaning and learning motivation. Therefore, moderate statements with hedges in giving feedback or treating errors will be more effective. As can be seen that classroom also provides context - specific context for teachers' hedging and this current study highly recommends teachers' applying hedges in their talk.

More importantly, it is teachers that can bring hedging in instructional language into practice. Thus, teachers have positive perceptions of the significance of hedging in particular and developing learners' pragmatic competence in general and apply in their practice. It is possible that there have been teachers who do not pay much attention to these issues, accordingly, raising awareness of using hedges in instruction to EFL teachers should be concerned and it is thought that talks on this kind of topics can be beneficial.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings of the current study that the teachers were aware of English hedges, in particular the facilitative roles of English hedges in communication and types of English hedges as well as functions of common hedges in social interaction and in classroom context. As to types of English hedges, most of the participants could identify some typical types of English hedges. They were also aware of the significance of hedging in classroom instruction which can help students be aware of the roles of English hedges. The teachers thought that it was not easy to develop students' pragmatic competence via teacher talk because they mentioned a lack of context in classroom in conjunction with whether teachers hedge in instructional language depend on the content of the lesson as well as students' proficiency level. From the findings, this study suggests that teachers should further use hedges in classroom instruction to facilitate students' pragmatic competence development.

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