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Strategies of oral communication of deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) non-native English users

Ewa Domagała-Zyśk ^a and Anna Podlewska ^b

^aInstitute of Education, Department of Social Sciences, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland; ^bDepartment of Foreign Languages, Medical University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse oral communication strategies in English as a foreign language (EFL) of deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) students. The paper is based on an action research case study concerning oral communication strategies of this group of students with special educational needs. The results demonstrate that when they communicate orally in the target foreign language, D/HH students use the same verbal, nonverbal, linguistic, and non-linguistic stimuli as their hearing peers, alongside certain characteristic communication strategies. The paper relates these students' employment of various communication strategies to their greater autonomy, and emphasises the need to identify and promote beneficial communication strategies during EFL classes for the D/HH.

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Introduction

Communication with other people is a primary source of human development. Clear, articulate, coherent communication skills in national and foreign languages allow individuals who have managed to master them to more effectively negotiate the world in which they live. Traditional ways of communication including oral and written means are now enriched with new ones: it is now possible to thank, ask for, apologise, persuade, explain, and so on, with the use of e-mails, text messages, blogs, vlogs, social media posts, tweets, etc. At present, discourse about communication also acknowledges the need to interact in modern foreign languages as well as the fact that English has come to be accepted as an international *lingua franca*.

Current academic syllabi identify the expected educational outcomes of learning a modern foreign language as including, among other things, the ability to use the language effectively for purposes of practical communication and robust foundational knowledge of the language (e.g. being able to identify the most useful academic and specialist vocabulary, collocations and grammatical structures). These are the skills commonly required for further study, professional development and work (Ochse 2013). The place of modern foreign languages in the tertiary curriculum is thus to a great extent specified in terms of their occupational applicability.

Deaf and hard of hard-of-hearing (D/HH) people have numerous special educational needs in the context of foreign language communication development. They communicate in various ways: some use signing while others use speech, and often in addition to their main communication preference, they use other options such that signers use speech and speakers use sign language(s) to a certain extent. Many individuals in the D/HH population also participate in international and cross-cultural communication using foreign spoken and signed languages (cf. Domagała-Zyśk 2016a), though in the case of spoken languages this can be doubly difficult when compared to hearing learners of foreign spoken languages, as the D/HH individual must overcome additional barriers.

The aim of this paper is to capture and analyse oral communication strategies in English as a foreign language (EFL) of D/HH students from Poland, using an action research case study. The paper takes as its point of departure the description of some features of D/HH students' oral communication in foreign languages. Then the second section focuses on teaching strategies used during foreign language classes for D/HH students. The third section presents an action research case study of oral communication strategies used during EFL classes. The last part involves a discussion of the results and recommendations for teachers of D/HH students.

D/HH learners' oral communication in a foreign language

In the majority of European countries, D/HH students are learning foreign languages on a par with their hearing peers. At the end of secondary school, they take their final foreign language exams, which are based on the same curriculum as those administered to hearing students but have an adapted format. In order to provide educators and novice foreign language teachers with the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary to support D/HH students, researchers and experienced teachers from several countries formed the International Research Group on Teaching English as a Foreign Language to the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing (http://www.kul.pl/english-for-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing_art_74431.html). Its research topics are varied and include teaching and learning strategies (Domagała-Zyśk 2013a, 2016a, 2016b), reading comprehension (Sedláčková and Fonioková 2013; Sedláčková 2016), sign languages and deaf identity in the process of foreign language acquisition (Pritchard 2013; Bajkó and Kontra 2008; Kontra and Csizér 2013), the use of cued speech (Podlewska 2014, 2016), English for vocational purposes (Ochse 2013) and IT-assisted learning strategies (Domagała-Zyśk 2013b; Nabiałek 2013; Podlewska and Keller 2014; Podlewska 2016).

D/HH students experience a variety of challenges while learning foreign languages. They usually have some problems in learning foreign vocabulary in terms of getting to know a word, remembering it, differentiating it from other words, and using it appropriately in different contexts (Bedoin 2011, Domagała-Zyśk 2015; Domagała-Zyśk 2013a; Kontra, Csizér, and Piniel 2014). This is mainly connected with their difficulties in mastering their national spoken language. Psycholinguistic studies show that D/HH children who possess the same level of intellectual potential as their hearing peers usually achieve slightly lower results in vocabulary tests (Fagan and Pisoni 2010), have a smaller repertoire of vocabulary (Quellet, Le Normand, and Cohen 2001), and experience difficulties with remembering vocabulary (Marschark and Everhart 1999). This

applies to students of any age and is the same for national and foreign language acquisition (Domagała-Zyśk 2013c).

It is also important to recognise the considerable heterogeneity of D/HH students. There are wide individual differences among them with respect to their hearing loss with respect to its type, degree, laterality, stability, cause, and the age at which it occurred. In general, students with hearing impairment up to the severe level are capable of developing spoken communication in their native language via audition with amplification or assistive devices. Most students in the severe-to-profound range require alternative methods of speech perception and production. These alternative methods may include speech-reading, cued speech, or visual phonics. It is the teacher's responsibility to also find out whether the student has additional special educational needs. Medical, emotional, or cognitive conditions may add to the needs of D/HH students and can influence the teacher's choice of strategies. The above mentioned heterogeneity is reflected in the variety of communication options that they employ. Some of them communicate orally, some use their national sign language, and others use cued speech. Most tend to switch frequently between two or more of these strategies.

The chief aim of learning a foreign language for most students is to be able to speak it and communicate in it (Podlewska 2014). This can be done mainly in a written or oral form, but many D/HH students are likely to creatively explore other possibilities as well, such as using webcams on electronic devices to chat, or incorporating national or international signs to foster understanding. D/HH people who use speech rather than signing as their main communication preference are more likely to want to learn and practise speaking the foreign language.

One of the largest studies on D/HH people's oral EFL communication was conducted by Domagała-Zyśk (2013a). Her group consisted of 35 university students from KUL university in Poland with profound (N = 19, 54%) or severe (N = 16, 46%) hearing losses. On the basis of extensive document analysis (N = 1574) and more than 4,000 hours of direct observation from 2000 to 2012, she concludes that most D/HH participants in the intervention group (29 persons, 82%) wanted and were able to speak in English. Their speaking skills in this foreign language were closely related to their speaking skills in their native language (Polish). Their main problems were using stress correctly in words and sentences, pronouncing sounds that are not found in their native language, and speech-reading English utterances. Their achievements in speaking did not depend on their level of hearing loss or other demographic variables. Instead, the best predictor was their level of speech intelligibility in their native language. It can be supposed that this ability depends upon the extent of any conditions associated with their hearing loss and the type and intensity of the speech therapy they received. Six students (three with profound and three with severe hearing losses) out of the 35 achieved a communicative level of language proficiency, which means they were able to maintain spoken communication in English, given certain conditions (e.g. adequate lighting, slow speech, repetition, and the option of writing if necessary). One of these 35 students decided to study at the English Philology faculty and received a master's degree. Thirteen other participants (37%) were able to recognise foreign speech and construct multi-sentence utterances in a familiar context; 10 others (28%) were able to speech-read and enunciate some phrases and expressions in a foreign language in a familiar context. These results

show that many D/HH learners want to learn to speak a foreign language as well as write it, so this possibility should be provided for them.

A key factor in oral communication in a foreign language is speech intelligibility. Domagała-Zyśk and Podlewska (2012) conducted research on this issue. A series of oral presentations by their 8 D/HH students were collected. The recordings were later evaluated by native English speakers, who assessed the level of intelligibility at 52% and the level of general content understanding at 62%, with individual results ranging from 36 to 81%. These results suggest that overall, the EFL speech intelligibility of D/HH people makes it possible for them to be understood and use English actively for oral communication.

There are several well-known oral communication strategies for foreign language use (cf. Dörnyei 1995, cited in Brown 2000, 128), generally divided into avoidance and compensatory ones. These strategies are employed by both hearing and D/HH students. When using avoidance strategies, the individual might abandon a message or avoid a topic that poses difficulties for them, or may opt not to undertake the conversation at all. If the person employs a strategy to compensate for their difficulties, they might resort to circumlocution, approximation, word coinage, prefabricated patterns, literal translation, foreignising, appealing for help and/or code-switching. They might also apply non-linguistic strategies such as using non-linguistic signals (like mimics, gestures, laughter), or taking thinking time.

Teaching oral communication in EFL to D/HH students at KUL

Surdoglottodidactics, the art and practice of teaching foreign languages to D/HH students, started in Western and Central Europe around the year 2000 (Domagała-Zyśk 2001, Bajko and Kontra 2008; Ochse 2008). It was then that EFL classes at KUL University (Lublin, Poland, where both authors work) began, and since then, more than 60 students have achieved foreign language competences that made it possible for them to graduate and use English in their work, everyday life (4 students emigrated to the UK), and lifelong learning.

Both oral and written forms of English were used within the teaching and learning strategies, to differing extents depending on the students' competencies in their national language. The method of instruction is described in detail in papers that deal with teaching strategies for writing (Domagała-Zyśk 2013a), expanding vocabulary (Domagała-Zyśk 2016b), and using cued speech to support the development of language skills (Podlewska 2014, 2016).

A wide range of diversified teaching and learning strategies for promoting oral communication are used during these classes; they are characterised in brief here to show the methodological approach but also to share this evidence-based good practice with other educators who work with deaf learners:

- **Extensive use of lip speaking and lip reading.** The organisation of EFL classes for D/HH students enables them to lip read in good acoustic and lighting conditions. Classes are held in small groups of 2–3 students and they might be conducted on one-to-one basis if necessary. The teacher serves as a language model and

pronounces the words and sentences clearly, without exaggeration. Even if the D/HH students have problems while listening to the tapes or watching films, language input provided by the teacher (especially when combined with facial expressions or gestures) might be recognised and used for wider language understanding.

- **International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).** Visualisation is the key strategy during foreign language classes for D/HH students, and the IPA might serve as a vital tool that allows them to 'see' the language. The teacher could provide transcriptions for the unknown words, especially those commonly used in oral communication. Modern handbooks prepared in accordance with the model of Universal Learning Design usually provide IPA transcriptions of new words, which may be helpful for teachers.
- **Cued speech.** Devised in 1966 by Dr R. Orin Cornett, cued speech is a manual supplement to lip-reading, incorporating the use of various handshapes and positions near the mouth to convey consonant and vowel sounds. The combination of the lip-pattern, handshape and location is intended to make each sound of a spoken language recognisable. Thus, cued speech aims to give deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals phonological access to written words and enable them to code and decode words based on how they sound. Since its invention, cued speech has been adapted to more than 63 languages and major dialects (LaSasso 2010). The system in its original form and the subsequent adaptations employ a different number of handshapes, locations, movements, and supplementary aspects of the cues. D/HH cuers' phonological, lexical and syntactic repertoire largely depends on their social background and the richness of language used by the surrounding hearing cuers with whom they interact regularly, including e.g. parents and educators. In the EFL classroom, it is the teacher who serves as a model for the English language and adequate cueing, which is used as a tool for developing both receptive and expressive speech skills in English.
- **Using supportive technology for listening.** D/HH learners can often make use of residual hearing, so it is vital to equip the classroom with an induction loop and use microphone or FM systems if they are helpful to students. It is possible to use listening exercises, where listening may be supplemented by written transcripts or tapescripts of the teacher's lip-speaking. Pronunciation exercises combined with vowel and consonant visualisation techniques support the students' listening and language recognition skills and teach them how to become better at acquiring new words.
- **Using foreign language in practice.** One of the most significant motivating factors for learning foreign language communication is the desire to engage in real-life conversations with native English speakers or people who do not know the students' national language. To create the possibilities for learners to enjoy such opportunities, two international projects ('English as a tool of international communication' in 2012 and 'Multilingual' in 2015) were undertaken and D/HH students gained experience during numerous trips abroad. Being able to convey information via English in interactions with native speakers and others motivates them to use the language even more frequently, both in and out of class.

- **Communication personalisation.** This strategy involves using as much of personally meaningful content as possible, e.g. discussing students' everyday experiences or choosing conversation topics relevant to their interests. The main rationale behind this strategy is to appreciate the students' efforts to use a foreign language for everyday communication. When they need and want to talk about their personal experiences, it is much more motivating for them to ask their teacher for some new vocabulary with which to describe their experience, and thus learn new words and expressions. A teacher is usually the primary conversational partner for the students, which is why it is important for the teacher to be open to both asking and answering questions. When using the personalisation strategy, it is advisable to base it on Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the zone of proximal development. This is defined as 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky 1978, 86). For EFL teachers who play the role of 'enablers' (Tatar 1998), this means they should concentrate not only on a student's abilities, but also on their potential, and thus be one step ahead, organising tasks that can be performed with the teacher's support.
- **Communication emotionalisation.** This strategy is about creating a positive and safe emotional climate of learning. When a student feels safe, they are more eager to show their full potential. D/HH students usually experience more emotional strain than their peers (Domagała-Zyśk 2013b): they feel frustrated when they are not able to communicate freely, they usually have to fight for their rights, and they feel excluded. These emotions also influence their learning capability. Foreign language classes are often taught in small groups and this makes possible the establishment of a more personal student-teacher relationship. If D/HH students learn in a mainstream group, they are usually excluded from peer gossip, so often the only way to get information is to ask the teacher directly. Questions from the learner like 'How old is your daughter?' or 'Were you born in Lublin?' should therefore be treated not as a sign of nosiness, but as an instance of and opportunity for communicative language. When students feel emotionally safe, they are motivated to use language, and their progress is more dynamic (Domagała-Zyśk 2013b).

Data and method

Teaching foreign languages to D/HH students is a relatively new area of educational research, but various studies have been conducted, bringing to light a number of teaching strategies and recommendations (cf. Domagała-Zyśk 2013b; Domagała-Zyśk and Kontra 2016, for a review). Action research (Cohen and Manion 1996) is the most often used type of research as it combines the roles of a reflexive language teacher and a researcher.

The aim of the present research is to identify and describe the oral communication strategies of D/HH learners of English, which may offer insight into the efficacy of the teaching methods described above. The empirical database for this study is derived from

observations and transcripts from English classes for D/HH learners conducted by the authors at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL). The case study group consisted of 9 students (6 female, 3 male) who learned English for at least 9 consecutive years at primary and secondary school prior to their enrolment, and their level of English was B1 at the time of the study. They had been attending the classes for one semester (3 students), 3 semesters (1 student), and five semesters (5 students).

The participants were aged 20–26. For half of them, the class was an obligatory subject, while the other half chose English as an elective. All of them had a hearing loss exceeding 70 dB, and all but one had hearing families. They all graduated from mainstream secondary schools and used spoken Polish as their main means of communication. One student was from a deaf family and used Polish Sign Language, and two others could use this language at a basic level, but they rarely used it in class. Participants were informed about the aim of the study and agreed to take part in it.

The research procedure consisted of a series of 18 oral interactions in English (two for each participant) between participants and their teacher, collected in the winter semester of 2017. Each conversation lasted for at least 15 minutes. All the conversations were transcribed and analysed according to the research protocol to address the main research question: *What are the D/HH students' oral communication strategies in English as a foreign language?*

Results

The general observation after analysing 18 documents was that the participants' oral communication was effective. All but one of them were able to conduct meaningful conversations according to their language level, using generally appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures. One of the participants had difficulties with the oral communication due to an additional issue (stammering), but still spoke well in English. A high level of motivation to speak was also observed among all of the participants. As has been noted elsewhere (e.g. Domagała-Zyśk 2013a), a key factor for this effective communication is the students' conviction that they are accepted, understood and encouraged to use the foreign language.

When they communicated orally in the target foreign language, the D/HH students tended to employ numerous verbal, nonverbal, linguistic and non-linguistic strategies in order to convey the information. These included literal translation, all-purpose words, foreignisation, appeals for help, strategic conversational gaps or delays to allow for processing time, and non-linguistic signals (cf. Dörnyei, 1995, cited in Brown 2000, 128). The following three case studies illustrate how participants used these strategies. In each of the three case studies, several lines are indented and numbered as these are the examples discussed in the text under each extract.

A:

The lesson plan is based around reading and listening to a text about company formation and management. The class is attended by a first year law student. Prior to this class, Polish commercial companies and partnerships had been discussed. The class starts with a 10-minute vocabulary review exercise. The teacher places a pile of index cards with names of Polish companies face down on the table and turns over the top card, making sure that the student does not see what is on the card. The teacher then

translates the name of the company into English and asks the student to backtranslate the name into Polish. Then the teacher and student change roles.

Teacher (T) *Do you remember the names of Polish companies?*

Student (S) *Repeat, please.*

T *Do you remember {pause} the names of {pause} Polish commercial companies and partnerships?*

S *I don't understand.*

The teacher repeats the question, pointing to a previously prepared infographic.

S *Jasne! ('Of course!') Yes, I know.*

T *Let's play back-translation, then.*

The student is familiar with the procedure.

S *Ok.*

T *Would you like to go first?*

1. S makes a puzzled facial expression.

S *Say again.*

The teacher rephrases the question.

T *Do you want to start?*

S *No. You can start.*

The teacher turns the top card over.

T *Limited liability partnership or professional partnership.*

2. S: *Ojejku! Jak to było? ('Oh dear! What's the word?') Spółka z ograniczoną odpowiedzialnością? ('Limited liability company?')*

T *Spółka z ograniczoną odpowiedzialnością translates into English as limited liability company. Try again.*

3. S: *I know. I remember. I repeat everything at home but I had little time. Ojej. ('Gee.') Spółka partnerska. ('Limited liability partnership/professional partnership.') I'm sorry. I had the kolokwium ('test') in Constitutional Law.*

Interaction A demonstrates several instances of codeswitching¹ as well as nonlinguistic signals and literal translation. The use of the Polish exclamation in utterance (2) indicates that it is more natural for the student to express emotion in her national language which has an advantage over English. The codeswitches in utterances (2) and (3) seem to serve as fillers to avoid a prolonged pause. The student also switches into Polish when she is at a loss for words. She slips in the word *kolokwium* to fill in missing knowledge. In addition, utterance (3) involves a literal translation of a Polish lexical item into English. In Polish, the verb *powtarzać* can mean either 'to repeat' or 'to revise' (for a class or exam), depending on the context. The English verb *revise* might not be in the student's

vocabulary, leading her to use *repeat*, the only English equivalent of *powtarzać* she is familiar with. In this example the student also used her facial expression (1) to express confusion and ask for further explanation.

B:

The teacher is about to play an online vlog entry in which Jay Adelson, a successful entrepreneur and CEO, explains what a Board of Directors does. She points to the interactive whiteboard which displays the first frame of the video with its title *Board of Directors*.

T *You are going to watch a video.*

S *Ok.*

The teacher points to the title and asks,

T *What is a Board of Directors?*

1. S: *I know.*

T *Can you explain?*

2. S: *I know. To było.* ('We've already covered it in class.')

3. S: *Is it [the video] online?*

T *Yes, it is. Before we watch, can you tell me what a Board of Directors is?*

4. S: *Yes.*

5. Prolonged silence.

6. S: *Muszę odpowiedzieć?* ('Do I have to answer?')

The teacher then explains in Polish that the student does not have to address any questions if she does not want to and adds that the reason for asking the question is to make the video easier to follow. The student does not seem to understand the difference between one- and two-tier corporate governance systems and is reluctant to address this issue. The teacher then offers a multiple-choice question to encourage a response: 'Which corporate body combines management and supervisory functions from among (A) Board of Directors, (B) Management Board, (C) Supervisory Board, or (D) Companies House?' The student chooses (B) Management Board instead of the correct answer, (A) Board of Directors.

T *Are you sure?*

S *No, but I think it's (B) Management Board.*

T *Well, the Management Board has management functions only. It does not have supervisory functions.*

In an attempt to build from what the student already knows, the teacher points to an infographic that shows the differences between one- and two-tier corporate governance systems.

T *Which corporate bodies have supervisory functions?*

S *Supervisory Board.*

T *Is the Supervisory Body the only corporate body that has supervisory functions?*

- S *No.*
 T *What other corporate body has them?*
 S *Board of Directors.*
 T *Does the Board of Directors have management functions as well?*
 S *Yes.*
 T *Yes, that's right! So, which corporate body combines management and supervisory functions?*
 S *Board of Directors.*
 T *You're right!*

The teacher then explains in Polish that under the English model a company is governed by one corporate body, the Board of Directors, that undertakes both management and supervisory functions (the one-tier model), and she further clarifies that under the Polish model two separate bodies operate independently: the Management Board and the Supervisory Board (the two-tier model). The student then observes:

- S *'Management Board' is like 'Zarząd'.*
 T *That's right! And 'Supervisory Board' is like 'Rada Nadzorcza'.*
 S *Translate 'Board of Directors'.*
 T *'Board of Directors' can be translated into Polish as 'Rada Dyrektorów' and it's a 2-in-1 corporate body.*

The student seems puzzled again, so the teacher writes the following on the board: Management Board (*Zarząd*) + Supervisory Board (*Rada Nadzorcza*) = Board of Directors (*Rada Dyrektorów*)

- T *Do you understand?*
 S *Yes. In Poland we have companies with Management Board and Supervisory Board and in America and in England they have Board of Directors. Yes?*
 T *That's right! Well done!*

Let's watch the video

Interaction B provides several examples of topic avoidance strategies. In (1), (2), and (4), the student feigns understanding. In (3) she tries to change the subject, whereas in (5) she simply does not respond. Utterance (6) is a direct appeal to the teacher to abandon the topic.

These attempts at avoiding the topic may be due to the fact that the student finds her thoughts too difficult to express fluently in English. She is highly ambitious and the lack of words or structure leave her feel disempowered. In other words, because she does not believe in her own ability to accomplish the task, she chooses to abandon it entirely. The student might also be tired as prior to her EFL class she is usually required to attend to other academic subjects for extended periods of time. The fatigue may also result in part from the continuous strain of lip-reading. In any case, it should not be interpreted as lack of motivation or interest.

C:

The student has just finished watching a short film in which images are created out of English words, using solely the letters contained within those words. The teacher asks the student to remember as many of the word images as he can.

T *Write the words down. You've got two minutes.*

1. S: *I don't understand. Nie rozumiem* ('I don't understand').
2. The teacher cues her rephrased instruction and the student cues his response.

T *Write down the words you remember.*

S *What?*

The teacher signs 'write' in Polish Sign Language and repeats the instruction using cueing.

T *Write. Write down the words you remember.*

3. The student writes down *right* followed by a question mark. The teacher explains in spoken Polish that in English even though *write* and *right* are spelled differently, the pronunciation is the same. She points with her left hand to the word *write* and cues with her right hand, and then repeats the procedure for the word *right*. The student writes down *write = right* and asks a question in Polish.
4. S: *To samo?* ('The same?')
5. The teacher nods. The student writes and then cues the two English and two Polish homophones 'write' and 'right', 'może' and 'morze' ('maybe', 'sea') in response.

The teacher cues.

T *Write down the words you remember.*

Once the student has finished, the teacher cues a question.

T *What words do you remember?*

The student cues his first vocabulary item using the handshapes and placements employed by the Polish cued speech adaptation.

6. S: *Tsunami. Wielka fala.* ('A huge wave.')

The teacher cues the word *tsunami*, employing the British inventory of cues. Then she explains in Polish that even though *tsunami* has the same spelling in Polish and English, the pronunciation is slightly different. To further emphasize the difference, the teacher writes the word using the IPA.

Towards the end of class, the student signs 'see you in a week' using Polish Sign Language and mouthing the phrase in English.

7. After a while he realises that due to a bank holiday there will be no class the following week and cues and gestures 'see you in two weeks'. The words 'see', 'you', 'in', and 'weeks' are cued whereas the 'two' is gestured by holding up two fingers, with a palm-outward orientation (as in the 'victory sign').

This example reveals several instances of code-switching as well as alternations of the language encoding system. Utterances (1), (4) and (6) are code-switches that seem to be used for clarity, to avoid vagueness or ambiguity. The student is aware of the fact that

his speech production skills in Polish are better developed than those of his English and wants to make sure that the teacher understands what is being communicated. In (2), the switch from spoken to cued English is triggered by the teacher. The student willingly cues prefabricated patterns and frequently occurring vocabulary items such as question words. The switch to cued Polish in (5) is indicative of the student understanding the relationship between the English phonemes and orthography, and being aware that homophones can be found in both languages. The switch was probably used to venture a guess and seek confirmation from the teacher. Switching to writing in (3) also serves the purpose of disambiguation. In (7), mouthing of the phrase 'see you in a week' in English concurrent with signing it in Polish Sign Language can be seen as a form of language play rather than a communication strategy. The student is aware of the fact that his teacher is not fluent in signing and he enjoys translating various memorised stock phrases from English into Polish Sign Language and by so doing swapping roles with the teacher and feeling self-confident. Example (7) illustrates an emblem, or conventionalised gesture occurring with cued speech. The victory sign might have been used not only to indicate number two but also to affirm the student's belief in his own ability to cue in English and remember the date of his next EFL class.

Discussion

Within the community of teachers and scholars working in the field of special educational needs, the research and policy tends to focus on teachers implementing evidence-based instructional practices that are perceived as interventions to improve student achievement (Cook and Cook 2011; Vostal and Ward 2015). The research presented in this paper endeavours to meet these requirements with an operationally defined procedure and target population for whom these practices seem to be largely successful. However, taking into account the extreme heterogeneity of the D/HH population, practitioners must be ready to adapt the strategies to the specific needs of their students and the particular context of their learning process (Cook, Tankersley, and Harjusola-Webb 2008).

The research shows that codeswitching is one of the compensatory strategies most commonly employed by bilingual or multilingual students in the hope that their interlocutor will be able to guess what they are trying to communicate. As Brown points out,

the context of communication coupled with some of the universals of nonverbal expression sometimes enables learners to communicate an idea in their own language to someone unfamiliar with that language. Such marvels of communication are a tribute to the universality of human experience and a balm for those who feel the utter despair of attempting to communicate in a foreign tongue (2000, 130).

In addition to codeswitching, D/HH students often resort to what might be termed as 'language-encoding-system-switching' within the target language and between languages. There are three basic ways of expressing language, or three language channels: spoken, written and signed. Traditionally spoken languages such as Polish or English have two language channels, spoken (spoken Polish, spoken English) and written (written Polish, written English), while many signed languages have only one commonly used channel, signed (e.g. American Sign Language, British Sign Language, Polish Sign

Language). Generally, spoken languages are encoded through the modality of sound but may also be encoded through the modality of texture (Tadoma, tactile manual cues) or visually via phonetic alphabets or libimanual cues. Cerney explains that '[t]he point where language channel and modality converge is called Language Encoding Systems' (2004, 14). D/HH learners might switch from speaking the target language to cueing, fingerspelling, signing or even writing a lexical item, phrase or whole sentences either because of their phonological difficulty or for emphasis.

Yet another strategy commonly used by D/HH students is feigned understanding. If they are unable to comprehend the meaning of a certain notion, piece of instruction, or lexical item, D/HH students may pretend that everything is understood instead of asking for repetition or further clarification. This strategy of ostensible avoidance should probably be classified as making use of thinking time, as it allows the learner to come back to the topic later. Another purpose of avoidance is to move the conversation forward so that the missing information might be guessed or picked up along the way. It eases the strain of having to ask for an explanation a number of times and helps to circumvent the frustration connected with not being able to get the gist of what is being communicated.

Concluding remarks

While many D/HH students recognise that advanced proficiency in a foreign language might potentially increase their employability, they also value the learning for personal, social and cultural reasons. Experiences such as exchange visits, participation in international conferences, trips abroad and other forms of social contact across national boundaries offer great potential for boosting self-esteem in D/HH students and increasing their motivation. In addition, through studying a foreign language and making linguistic comparisons, D/HH students enhance their understanding of their national language(s).

The present study suffers from the drawback of having very limited generalisability. Nevertheless, it does identify potentially useful communication strategies employed by D/HH EFL learners, including abandoning a message or avoiding a topic, circumlocution, approximation, the use of all-purpose words, word coinage, using prefabricated patterns, literal translation, foreignising, appealing for help, code-switching, using non-linguistic signals (like mimics, gestures, laugh), appealing for help or using thinking time. These strategies help students resolve communication difficulties and thus may constitute the key to student success in foreign language learning. In making a language classroom an effective milieu for learning, teachers should integrate strategy awareness and practice into their pedagogy. The authors are aware that this paper brings up many complex issues and questions that can benefit from more investigation. Further studies are needed e.g. to investigate the communication strategies of D/HH EFL learners who are fluent in more than one foreign language or of those who, due to emigration, must use foreign languages on an everyday basis in their new life. Further research should also touch upon the issue of different forms of oral and written online communication of D/HH persons.

Note

1. Some authors use the term borrowing when referring to mixing in single morphemes or lexemes from the L1 or L3 when using the L2, while intra-sentential codeswitching is sometimes termed code-mixing. In addition, codeswitching may be spelled with a hyphen or as two separate words. In this paper, codeswitching as one word is used to refer to borrowing as well as alternations occurring within the boundaries of a single sentence and at the boundaries of two or more sentences.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Ewa Domagała-Zyśk is an Associate Professor at the Pedagogy Department of John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, and has been teaching English as a foreign language to deaf and hard-of-hearing students and adults since 1999. Her research in this field led to the formation of a new methodological model called surdoglottodidactics, described in *Wielojęzyczni. Studenci niesłyszący i słabosłyszący w procesie uczenia się i nauczania języka obcego* [Multilingual: Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Students in the Process of Teaching and Learning a Foreign Language] (2013). She is also the editor of *English as a Foreign Language for Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Persons in Europe* (2013).

Anna Podlewska is a senior lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages at the Medical University of Lublin. She is also affiliated with the Institute of Pedagogy and the Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. An experienced teacher, material writer and teacher trainer she has taught different age groups at all proficiency levels. Her experience involves teaching medical and business English. Her research interests focus on the use of cued speech to support language skills development in English language instruction for students with hearing impairments. Recent publications include a chapter in the volume *English as a Foreign Language for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Persons: Challenges and Strategies*.

ORCID

Ewa Domagała-Zyśk  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2227-7102>

Anna Podlewska  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8380-6197>

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