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**Compensation Strategies for Speaking English Adopted  
by Engineering Students of Tamil Nadu**  
**A Study**

**A. Chandra Bose, Ph.D.**

# Compensation Strategies for Speaking English Adopted by Engineering Students of Tamil Nadu A Study

A. Chandra Bose, Ph.D.

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## Introduction

Ability to speak English (L2) enables one to communicate with people of different mother tongues. However, a monolingual person cannot express his/her views in a language other than the mother tongue. In this crucial situation, a person must learn an additional language to survive in the cyber world. Realizing this need of the hour may have helped students paying greater attention to the learning of English. However not all could master the communication skills. In order to make up for the inability to speak fluently students follow certain compensation strategies.

Oxford (1990:47) defines compensation strategies as those that “enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production despite limitation in knowledge. Compensation strategies are intended to make up for an inadequate repertoire of grammar and especially, of vocabulary”.

Learning English is not an easy task; it is a laborious task. Students and teachers have encountered a lot of problems while learning/teaching English Language. Compensation strategies help smoothen this laborious task.

## 1. Objective and Procedures

This paper tries to identify the different strategies adopted by the engineering students while speaking English.

The researcher asked students to speak in any topic which they like most. The allotted time was five minutes for each student. The researcher analyzed the recorded speeches of the students. The informants, who were both boys and girls, were two-hundred in number. Among the informants, a comparative study of the performance of boys and girl was made. The data were analyzed in quantitative as well as qualitative methods.

It was found that lots of strategies were adopted by the engineering students of Tamilnadu while speaking English. Some of the frequently adopted strategies by the students were discussed further in this paper.

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## 2. Repetitions

Some of the students keep on repeating a word, phrase or even a small sentence when they speak. This apparently meaningless repetition not only disturbs the flow of speech but also shows the incompetence in their English language proficiency. Following are the words/phrases which are repeated in the students' speech.

1. \* Now a day ...**now a days un**.....unemployment is the major problem in India.
2. \* I am talking **talking** about the HIV.
3. \* My role-model is ABJ Abdul Kalam ....**my role model is kalam** president of India.
4. \*English language **is the is the** very important language.
- 5.\* I **will will** kill the terrorist.

**Table 2.1** Frequency of repetitions in the students' speech

No. of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
No Repetition	74	37
1	50	25
2	41	20.5
3	35	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

## Inferences

The above table shows that among two hundred students 37% spoke without any repetition in their speech. The remaining 63% spoke using repetition strategy in their speech. Among the 63%, 17.5% repeated words, phrases or sentences three times, 20.5% of the students repeated two times and 25% of them once. The sex variable indicates 38.5% of boys and 24.5% of girls adopted this strategy.

From the available data, it is understood that the students under study have the tendency to repeat words, phrases and even sentences in their speech. The reason could be lack of word power, ignorance of the sentence structure and also incompetence of the language skills, etc.

## 3. Fillers

Most of the students adopted the strategy of using fillers when they speak. The fillers are sounds like (*mmm, umm, and aaaa*) and words like (*and, so, ok, well, and yes*). The following are the evidences of the usage of such fillers in the students' speech.

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- 1.\* T. V. *ummm* causes many problems *mmmm* it collapses our culture.
2. \* I went to Delhi *mmmmm* Mumbai *mmmmm*...*yes* Pune *mmm* patina.
3. \* Engineers *mmm ok* engineers are the billers *ummm* of India *ok* in the world.
- 4\* English *umm English and yes* English is the best language.

**Table 3.1 Frequency of fillers in the students' speech**

No. of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
No Fillers	109	54.5
1	34	17
2	38	19
3	19	9.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

### Inferences

The above table displays that among two hundred students 54.5% spoke without using fillers in their speech and the remaining 45.5% used fillers. Among the 45.5% of the students, 9.5% used fillers three times in their speech; 19% used two times and 17% of them once.

The gender variable says that 25.5% of boys and 20% of girls availed this strategy. From the available data, it is understood that the students used sounds like *umm*, *mmm* and *aaa* and the words *and*, *so*, *ok*, *well* and *yes* in between their speech. Those fillers give the opportunities to recall the correct words, phrases or the sentences that the students' look for completing their speech production.

### 4. Using Only Content Words

Some of the students under study spoke only content words without any grammatical and syntactical structure in their speech. The following are the samples of the use of content words in the students' speech.

- 1.\* I.....Chennai *mmmmm* tour bus.
- 2.\* Temple..... very nice .....colour looking *mmm* I visited place.
- 3.\* India country poor people go abroad job.

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4. \* Engineer money earns machine future.

5 \* English our country kill Indian languages Tamil also.

**Table 4.1 Frequency of using content words only in the students' speech**

No. of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
No Error	142	71
1	34	17
2	13	6.5
3	11	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

### Inferences

The above table indicates that among two hundred students 71% did not adopt this strategy in their speech. The remaining 29% of the students spoke by using only content words in their speech. From the 29% of the students, 5.5% used only content words three times in their speech, 6.5% of the students used two times and 17% of them once. The gender variable shows that 21% of boys and 8% of girls adopted this strategy. The reason could be the lack of grammatical and syntactical knowledge.

### 5. Word Coinage

Some of the students under study created non-existing, and run-on words when they spoke. This shows their poor vocabulary power. The following are the evidences for the word coinage in the students' speech.

1. \*My dad *cellphoned* me yesterday.

2.\* The *walkings* and *joggings* are thrilled us.

3.\* My college *figarus* are homely.

4.\* My friend brought *bittu* with him in the examination hall.

**Table 5.1 Frequency of word coinage in the students' speech**

No. of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
No Word Coinage	155	77.5
1	32	16
2	13	6.5

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<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>
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## Inferences

The above table displays that among two hundred students 77.5% spoke without using any non-existing words in their speech. The remaining 22.5% of the students used non-existing words in their speech.

Among the 22.5% of the students, 6.5% adopted word coinage strategy for two apt words in their speech and 16% of the students used once. The gender variable says that 15.5% of boys and 7% of girls have adopted this strategy.

From the available data, it is clearly understood that the students created their own words which are non-existing in the English vocabulary. The reason could be the overgeneralization of certain available rules of the English language.

For example the word ‘cell phone’ is the noun but the students used it as a verb form and created a new word “cell-phon-ed” by adding -ed. This kind of word is not available in the English language; however, the modern English invites and accepts such innovative words. Another example ‘walkings and joggings’ are also non-existing words. Students added the suffix –s to the verbs and created plural forms.

## 6. Retrieval

Some of the students under study employed the retrieval strategy when they spoke. Retrieval is the process which is adopted by the students to correct them whenever they feel the words, phrase or even sentences they use wrong. Some of the examples are given below.

- 1.\* *Can you .....(retrieval) may I come in sir?*
- 2.\* *My mother have..... (retrieval) has a kind face.*
- 3.\* *Nobody likes .....(retrieval).like me in the class.*
- 4.\* *Who is coming...(retrieval) who will coming to the dinner tonight?*
5. \**A table is wanted...( retrieval )... (sorry) a lady wants table with cover.*

**Table 6.1 Frequency of retrievals in the students’ speech**

No. of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
No Retrievals	94	47

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1	73	36.5
2	22	11
3	6	3
4	5	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

## Inferences

The above table shows that among two hundred students 47% spoke without using retrieval strategy in their speech. The remaining 53% spoke using retrieval strategy. Among the 53% of the students, 2.5% retrieved some words, phrases or sentences four times in their speech, 3% of them used three times, 11% of the students used two times and 36.5% of them once.

The gender variable indicates that 31% of boys and 22% of girls availed this strategy. From the above samples, it is widely accepted that the students employed retrieval strategy whenever they felt that their usages were wrong.

The retrieval strategy gives the positive attitude towards the learning pace but sometimes it leads to incorrect usages. For example, the fourth sentence ‘*Who is coming to the dinner tonight?*’ is the correct construction, but after using retrieval the students have spoken incorrect form ‘*Who will coming to the dinner tonight?*’

## 7. Drawling Sounds

Some of the students under study adopted the strategy of drawling certain words when they spoke. Drawling is the process of lengthening certain syllables when they search another word or structure of the English language. It often refers to the process of saying or speaking in a slow manner, usually prolonging the vowels. Some of the examples of such contexts are given here.

1\* I am not happy *whereeeever* I go without my cell phone.

2.\* This country has *soooo* much of religion.

3. \* *Heeee isss* not a good of mine.

4. \* I *ammm* a student of this college.

5. I met my friend *annnnd* we went to cinema.

**Table 7.1 Frequency of drawling sounds in the students’ speech**

No. of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
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No Drawing	112	56
1	58	29
2	30	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

### Inferences

The above table bespeaks that among two hundred students 56% spoke without drawing sounds. The remaining 44% of the students used drawling sound in their speech. Among the 44% of the students, 15% adopted this strategy two times in their speech and 29% of the students used once.

The gender variable says that 18% of boys and 26% of girls adopted this strategy. It can be seen that the students have lengthened the syllables like ‘*whereeeever*’, ‘*soooo*’, ‘*Heeee*’, ‘*iss*’, ‘*ammm*’ ‘*annnnd*’, *etc.*, which gave them extra time and space for thinking the next word as given in the examples.

### 8. Code Switching

Some of the students under study switched over to their mother tongue in certain contexts in order to communicate a desired matter or wherever they find gap in the mental lexicon for expressing their view in the English language. Some of the samples are:

- 1\* I have visited many place in Chennai but now *marantupo:cci*.
- 2\* The elephant blocked the road *aiyo* I afraid
3. \*Unemployment is a big problem *atuthu* population is also a problem.
- 4.\* I met this *thambi* yesterday.
5. \*We went botanical garden and we collected a lot information. *pothum* sir.

**Table 8.1 Frequency of code switching in the students’ speech**

No of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
No Code Switching	135	67.5
1	44	22
2	21	10.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

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The above table shows that among two hundred students 67.5% spoke without any code switching in their speech. The remaining 32.5% of the students have spoken by using code switching strategy in their speech. Among the 32.5% of the students, 10.5% switched over two times, 22% used once.

The gender variable says that 19% of boys and 13.5% of girls availed this strategy. From the available data, it is understood that some of the students tend to use mother tongue words when they are not able to get suitable words or phrase in the English language.

The Tamil words ‘*marantupo:cci*’, ‘*aiyo*’, ‘*atuthu*’, ‘*thambi*’ and ‘*pothum*’ are the examples of the usage of mother tongue words in the English language conversation of the students. This is an inevitable process of second language learning which is designed as interlanguage interference.

### 9. Mumbling

Some of the students under study have employed the strategy of mumbling when they spoke. Instead of showing incompetency, the students tend to mumble certain words or phrases when they were not sure of their utterances in the English language. The following are the evidences for such context.

- 1.\* I am sure..... (mumbling).....very good company.
- 2.\* I once again ..... (mumbling) ....order you visit with me to college.
3. \* When I walking ..... (mumbling)... through ground the rubber.  
ball... (.mumbling)..... hit *hitted* in my right eye.

**Table 9.1 Frequency of mumbblings in the students’ speech**

No of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
No Mumbling	85	42.5
1	54	27
2	28	14
3	23	11.5
4	5	2.5
5	5	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

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The above table indicates that among two hundred students 42.5% spoke without mumbling in their speech. The remaining 57.5% of the students have spoken using mumbling strategy. From the 57.5% of the students, 2.5% mumbled words, phrase five times, 2.5% of the students used four times, 11.5% availed three times, 14% two times and 27% once.

The gender variable says that 33.5% of boys and 24% of girls have adopted this strategy. From the available data, the students availed the mumbling strategy when they were not getting suitable words or phrases when they were speaking. Such students might have thought that if one reduces sounds, the listener will not understand the meaning and also cannot identify the incompetency of the speaker. This leads to negative attitude in the students' learning.

### 10. Asking for Help

Some of the students under study adopted the strategy of asking for help from the classmates, class teacher or even to the researcher for completing their task. This strategy showed their inability and also indifference towards learning the English language. The following are the samples of such state of affairs in the students' speech.

- 1.\* The most important problem in India many people are unemployed because *sir what to say because because not getting good salary and good job okva sir?*
2. \* My role model is our president. He is very intelligent and great person. He is sincere in his duty *sir please theriyila enough sir.*
3. \* English is a good language ..... *sir please record later.*
4. \* I am going to speak about Engineers in future. Engineers have real power to make small things that is nanotechnology *mmmmmm sir give me some ideas.....Ok they are like God .....for creating things.*

**Table 10.1 Frequency of asking helps in the students' speech**

No. of Times	No. of Students	Percentages
<b>Not asking help</b>	102	51
1	82	41
2	7	3.5
3	9	4.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

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The above table shows that among two hundred students 51% spoke without asking any help from the teacher as well as the researcher while speaking. The remaining 49% of the students have spoken with the help of others while speaking. From the 49% of the students, 4.5% asked help from the researcher and teacher three times, 3.5% asked help two times, 41% of the students have expected help from others once.

The gender variables 25% of boys and 24% of girls adopted this strategy. From the available data, it is understood that some of the students have got language phobia when they speak the second language like English. They have availed this strategy when they were not happy with their utterances in the English language. It is to be noted that the students were struggling with words, phrases and even some concepts, they said ‘*sir please theriyila enough sir*’. This indicates that their communicative inability and their negative attitude toward speaking the second language.

### 11. Remedial Measures

1. Listening to the correct sounds, stress patterns, intonations etc produced by the native speakers will help the students produce the same when they are speaking.
2. Students should be highly motivated to interact in English with the classmates, teachers and others wherever it is possible.
3. Teachers of English should create different types of situations and ask the students to speak accordingly. This will help eradicate the language phobia of the students.
4. The teacher can use small video camera for capturing the students’ individual talk and analyze it and give some tips for overcoming those problems.
5. Students may practice in front of the mirror, friends or family members; they will offer support and encouragements, which will boost up the students’ self-confidence to speak in front of anybody.
6. Student may be directed to speak loudly and clearly in order to avoid nervousness.
7. Students may be advised to relax and remember to maintain good body postures, eye-contact, hand movements, etc.

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