

COMPENSATORY COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING (EFL) AT THE SENIOR LEVEL AT SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This article reveals the essence of compensatory competence as a component of communicative competence, its importance and methods of development in teaching foreign language speaking at the senior level at school.

When teaching foreign language speaking EFL teachers should focus on the compensatory competence development, since it is the compensatory competence that teaches to compensate failures in communication, seek new communication solutions, change ones communicative behavior in accordance to the situation and achieve communication-goals. One way to overcome the problems is using compensatory strategies which are used to compensate for breakdowns in oral interaction.

The article deals with experimental work on the compensatory competence development in teaching foreign language speaking (EFL) at the senior level at school. The main method of compensatory competence development is teaching to use compensatory strategies: reduction or avoidance strategies and achievement strategies (see Celce-Murcia M., Dörnyei Z., Thurrell S., 1995). The results reveal that in terms of compensatory strategies effective use there is a significant increase in the level of productivity in oral interaction. Therefore, it can be concluded that teaching compensatory strategies promote students' communication skills. Research materials may be used by methodologists and EFL teachers in teaching foreign language speaking at the senior level at school.

Key words: communicative competence, compensatory competence, compensatory strategy, foreign language speaking.

INTRODUCTION

Analysis of pedagogical, scientific literature and foreign innovative experience, dedicated to the communicative approach to language teaching, indicates that to the compensatory component of communicative competence is paid less attention than to other components. The process of compensatory competence development remains poorly developed, and the problem remains urgent and important for EFL teachers. This article views compensatory competence development in teaching foreign language speaking at the senior level at school for several reasons. First, compensatory strategies training may promote learners' awareness to use their linguistic resources to minimize communication problems. Second, communication strategy training bridges the gap between classroom and real-life communication. Finally, communication strategy training contributes to the students' self-confidence, and motivation to communicate.

METHODS

One of the main objectives of foreign language teaching is communicative competence components development (linguistic, discourse, socio- linguistic, socio- cultural, compensatory).

Bim (2002) defines compensatory competence as 'the ability to cope with difficulties in terms of language gaps in the process of receiving and transmitting information'. In other words, compensatory

Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods
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competence refers to the ability to get one's meaning across successfully to communicative partners, especially when problems arise in the communication process.

As Celce-Murcia M., Dörnyei Z., Thurrell S (1995) we conceptualize compensatory competence development in teaching foreign language speaking as knowledge of compensatory strategies and how to use them.

Based on the Celce-Murcia M., Dörnyei Z., Thurrell S (1995) compensatory strategies typology, we chose to train the following strategies use for developing compensatory competence in teaching foreign language speaking at the senior level at school (see Table 1):

Avoidance or reduction strategies involve tailoring one's message to one's resources by either replacing messages, avoiding topics, or, as an extreme case, abandoning one's message altogether.

Achievement strategies involve manipulating available language to reach a communicative goal and this may entail compensating for linguistic deficiencies.

Table 1. Suggested compensatory strategies to train at the senior level at school

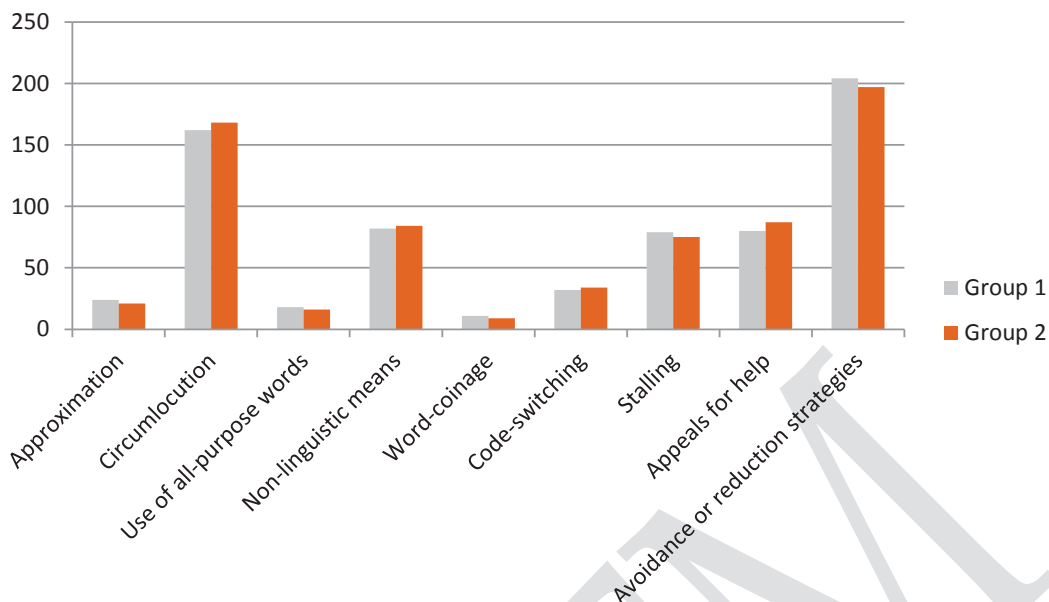
Strategies	Substrategies	Compensatory skills
Avoidance or reduction strategies	Message replacement	Leaving a message unfinished because of language difficulties.
	Topic avoidance	Avoiding topic areas or concepts that pose language difficulties.
Achievement strategies	Circumlocution	Describing or exemplifying the target object of action.
	Approximation	Using an alternative term which expresses the meaning of the target lexical item as closely, as possible.
	Use of all-purpose words	Extending a general, empty lexical item to contexts where specific words are lacking.
	Word-coinage	Creating a nonexisting L2 word based on a supposed rule.
	Non-linguistic means	Use of mime, gesture, facial expression, or sound imitation.
	Code-switching	Using a L 1 word with L 1 pronunciation or a L3 word with L3 pronunciation while speaking in L2.
	Stalling or time-gaining strategies	Using fillers or hesitation devices to fill pauses and to gain time to think.
	Appeals for help	Asking for aid from the interlocutor either directly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research is largely experimental involving 61 students of Intermediate level (31 students in Group 1 and 30 students Group 2) of Secondary School №55 in Kazan. Experimental work was carried out in three stages (diagnostic, formative and control). In the diagnostic stage, first, the students were interviewed, then, the students were asked to make a story based on pictures in order to elicit compensatory strategies knowledge and use. The results are described in Table 2.

Table 2. The features of compensatory strategies the students produced before training

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Examples of compensatory strategies eliciting:





- 1) Message abandonment:
 ... the man i::s wearing a a:: jacket and a::: shirt with a black a:::: ... and short trousers ... like a uniform ...". (Tie)
- 2) Approximation:
 "... and well he's wearing a ... a::: hat? ...". (Cap).
- 3) Circumlocution:
 "... it's like ja- jacket ... long jacket for the::: cold weather..." (Raintcoat).
- 4) Code-switching:
 "... his ... e:::h shirt has mm .. galstuk (*laugh*).. I don't know ...". (Tie).

Analysis of the results indicates that the main substrategies used by the students were circumlocution and avoidance strategies. There were statement omissions in description of key objects the notions of which students were unaware. In this case, they preferred not to mention any of these things, or simply enumerated the objects that were known to them. Whereas the omitted objects were essential part of the narrative, and without which it lost its coherence and logic. If asked a question that students could not find the answer, they just kept silent. Therefore, we believe that the students did not cope with the communication task in this case.





In the formative stage, the students of Group 1 were taught to be aware and to be able to use the targeted compensatory strategies with the help of authors selected set of exercises additionally to the school textbook. While students in Group 2 continued to study using the school textbook only.

Examples of authors selected set of exercises:
 Circumlocution training

1. This person usually doesn't wear a uniform. This person works outside. This person uses tools. For

example, this person uses a  and a . This person also uses . And these people usually wear a  when they are working.

2. This person wears a uniform. This person works outside and also inside. This person often carries

a . This person sometimes uses  and . Sometimes this person wears a  to put their gun away.

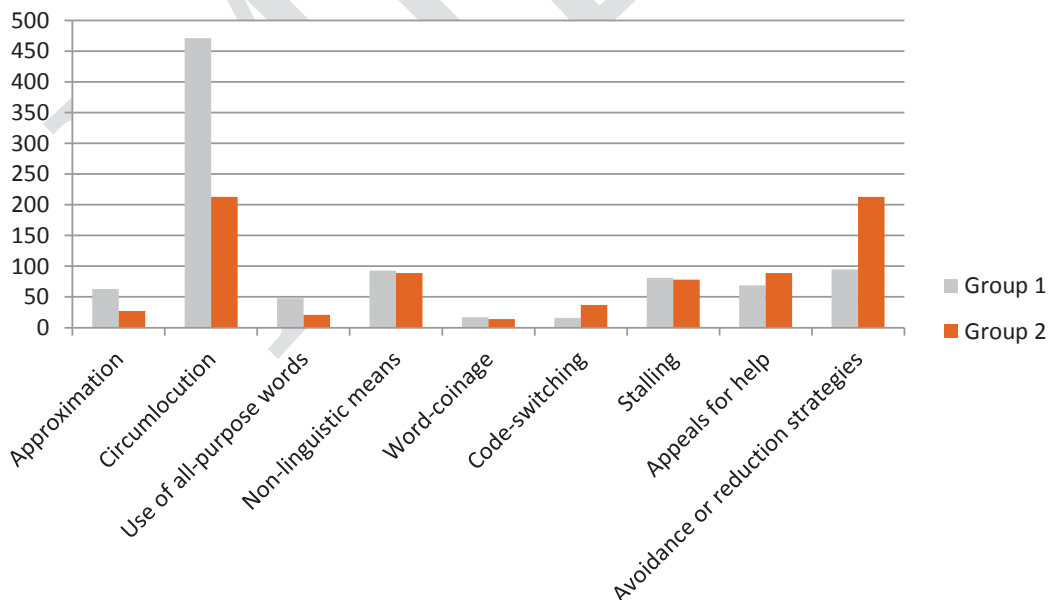
Avoidance strategies training.

Avoiding giving information

The teacher addresses a student with a question that asks for specific information, for example, 'How old are you?' The student must respond in two or three sentences without actually giving that particular information. A possible answer might be, for example, 'Well, that's an interesting question. Isn't it strange how people always feel that they need to know the age of a person? I don't really think that age is important at all. . . .' The longer the answer, the better. It is possibly beneficial to allow the students some preparation time on the first occasion they attempt this exercise, after which it should be spontaneous.

In the control stage, the students of Group 1 and Group 2 were interviewed and asked to make a story based on pictures again in order to elicit compensatory strategies knowledge and use after training. The results are described in Table 3.

Table 3. The features of compensatory strategies the students produced after training



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Analysis of the data leads to the conclusion that as a result of the training Group 1 students used avoidance strategies much less than Group 2 students, and more often used achievement strategies, which allowed them to cope with language gaps in communication. Strategies repertoire of Group 1 as a result of the training has expanded considerably, while the repertoire of Group 2 stayed about the same level as at the beginning of the experiment.

CONCLUSIONS

Quantitative indicators allow us to make conclusions about the positive dynamics of compensatory competence development in teaching foreign language speaking at the senior level at school, which proves the effectiveness of the work carried out by us.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that the more compensatory strategies students have, the more opportunities they have to solve communication problems. Therefore, explicit instruction on the use of compensatory strategies is necessary to help the students to improve their oral interaction in the process of foreign language speaking.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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