



Initiation of Self and Other Repair in Classroom-Task Conversations Between University Students: An Interpretative Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The study aimed to reveal the repair actions in conversations between the second language learners of English at a private university. The method used in this study was Interpretative Qualitative Method. The participants were ten students of the English Education Study Program in the second semester. The result of the study shows that the students of the English Department, in their ongoing conversation, showed normality in speaking as a second language learner. They could produce repair initiations, self-repair and other repair to maintain their flow of conversation, even though the repair initiations were low in use since there were only a few repairs found from many possibilities of repair from the trouble sources in their conversations.

Keywords: *Repair; Repair Initiations; Trouble Source; Conversation Analysis*

Introduction

Communication deals with the process of giving information to other people (Hasan et al., 2022). It is where the message is transferred from the speaker to the listener. The speaker needs a particular ability to transfer the message so that the receiver can receive it as entirely as it is conveyed (Ting et al., 2017). This ability is communicative competence and what is generally known as speaking ability. The speaking ability means the speaker's proficiency or ability to communicate or to choose and use the language appropriately in context appropriately and correctly in terms of the use of language rules in the context so that the receiver can understand and respond to the message transferred (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005; Thi et al., 2013).

Almost all people in the world need to build communication among themselves. Today English is used worldwide (Brown, 2007). English is used in many countries either as a first or second language. Indonesia is a county where the people have to learn to use English. Communicating in English, the

ability to interpret and produce meaning, is an important goal for learning English, especially for those who need to fulfil roles in an English-speaking environment (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2015). To use language effectively in varied situations, a person must possess both linguistic and communicative competence, i.e., the use of language appropriate to a given situation (Hasan et al., 2022). Communicative competence may be needed, whether one is writing or speaking and whether one is delivering a speech or conversing.

Communicative competence is something that someone needs to learn to acquire. Learners must actively work on communicating to develop communication skills and must practice intensively. Those learners who engage in the regular use of their second language and receive the greater quantity of input will most likely demonstrate a greater ability to use their second language (Lane et al., 2022).

Learners should also be provided with as much speaking time as possible. They need to practice the language by communicating in every situation. Indeed, in learning, mainly to communicate, the learners need to use the language by sharing it with others through interactions where they can have a standard body of knowledge. Conversations are considered a significant consideration in obtaining active ability in speaking. It indicates a two-way exchange of information that involves speaker-listener interaction; two or more people exchange information, views and feelings (Lane et al., 2022).

A conversation sometimes falters when learners do not know it is their turn to speak or do not know the strategies native speakers use to indicate they are following the conversations. The students learning English must also learn the underlying cultural rules that guide the conversation in their speaking environment. This strategic competence has been described as the use of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to enhance communication effectiveness and compensate for communication breakdowns due to performance variables or insufficient competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Repairs have been defined as the traces of metalinguistic activities present in oral exchanges that reveal that the speakers are trying to solve language problems that might affect the normal flow of communication (Masat & Unamono, 2001). The conversation could only be converted if universal interactional resources exist for making meaning, such as turn-taking or repair. Repair is thus the engine that drives interlanguage development forward (Waring, 2001).

There are many influential factors in second language learning; for example, learner characteristics such as age, personality and intelligence are the critical dimension in language learning. The second-semester students are in the critical stage of learning English, where many come from different backgrounds with varied competence in using English. The extent to which conversation occurs is often affected by differences in background knowledge, cultural expectations and personality.

The conversation also occurs through interactions where learning takes place, not only because learners generate language input and output but also because the fact that using a language code they have not mastered forces them to reflect upon language and use it to maintain the flow of their conversation (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2015). One of the traces of metalinguistic reflection is the use of side sequences in solving interactional problems (Waring, 2001). In seeking the students' ability, we can observe whether learning occurs every time the language forms that cause communication problems are repaired and re-incorporated into the learner's discourse.

Repair activities are related to the target language's form, meaning, or resolution of the task they are carrying out. When learners interact with a peer, repairs enable them to construct more accurate conversations and favour fluency and grip with the task they are carrying out in the conversations. Understanding this phenomenon might help us better understand how learners attempt to reach a common understanding while interacting to learn a foreign language (Aleksius & Saukah, 2018).

This study attempts to analyze the speech of English as a foreign language learners of English Department. The study focuses on repair acts performed by the students when they are engaging in conversations and examines the understanding problems the EFL learners face during conversation and how they cooperate in resolving the problems together in an ongoing discourse. The problems of the study are: (1). Who does the repair act in the conversation? The repair acts can be done by the speaker her/himself (self-initiated repair) or by other speakers (s) (other-initiated repair) (2). What types of trouble sources occur in the conversation of the second-semester students? Source of repair can take different forms, such as grammatical construction deficiency, hesitated speech production, unintelligible word production, and so on. (3). What are the repair acts that occurred in the conversation of the second-semester students? Repair acts by the same speaker can take the form of repetition, while repair acts by other speaker (s) may take the forms of questions, clarification requests, and so on.

Research Method

The study was conducted at the English Study Program of a private university. The objective of this study was to interpret the repair actions in the conversations of the second-semester students; therefore, the suitable method used in this study is the Interpretative Qualitative method.

According to (Wiesner, 2022), interpretation comes from our way of looking at interactions. The task of interpretivism is to elaborate on what lies beyond epistemology and beyond the idea that there are particular, abstract criteria for judging the quality of research, mainly because interpretivism sees criteria not as abstract standards, but as an open-ended, evolving list of traits that characterize what we think research should do and be like (Tuffour, 2017; Wiesner, 2022).

The total numbers of participants involved in this study were ten students in the second semester of the English Department of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences. The researcher chose these students purposively. The researcher had to make sure that the chosen participants are able to speak English in order to be able to converse with their peers and able to successfully complete the task.

The data for the study was taken from the conversations of the EFL learners recorded when they performed the free conversation. Each pair was given 15 minutes to conduct the free conversations in which they chose topics. The reason for choosing a free conversation about the topic of their own choice is that the students are expected to be able to be more familiar with the content of their talk. Psathas, (2009) and Tuomenoksa et al., (2022) noted that content that is familiar for the participants is easier to comprehend than content which is unfamiliar for them or the content that they have insufficient background knowledge.

The conversations were recorded for each pair of students every time they did the task. They did the recording themselves for the entirety of the task performance using an MP3 recorder. Each group was recorded separately, and the writer had to show them how to use the recorder button so that they would not find any problems when the conversations proceeded. The recorder was positioned in such a way that it could capture the speech of every participant in each conversation. The recorded data was transcribed in detail using conversations adapted from (Waring, 2001).

The analysis in this study focused on the repair activities of the EFL learners engaging in conversation. The writer used Conversation Analysis (CA), as Markee (2000) proposed, to analyze the data. Conversation Analysis is relevant in this study because it provides an "empirical framework for analyzing in detail the participants jointly construct their interaction" (Stubbe et al., 2003). This is expected to enable the writer to describe recurring conversation patterns and find out the orderliness or system of the interaction, particularly the repair organizations. The analysis of CA focuses on specific events, which, according to Psathas (2009), concern the discovery, description, and analysis of what

participants do at a particular moment of interest to the researcher. The area of interest in this study is repair acts performed by the students during their engagement in a free conversation task.

CA is also chosen as an appropriate method of data analysis for the present study because its aim is to reveal the tacit organized reasoning procedures which inform the production of talk (Roth, 2000). According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), the ways the utterances are designed are informed by some procedures, methods and resources tied to the contexts in which they are produced and available to the participants. This study will explain the procedures and resources available and employed by EFL learners in producing their talk and making sense of other people's talk in the conversation.

Markee (2000) has articulated the arguments for using CA in SLA studies. He claims that CA can make contributions to this field because it provides a method for studying in detail how students use talk as a tool the learn on a moment-by-moment basis, which according to him an area that SLA researchers have primarily ignored.

As mentioned above, the corpus of data for analysis consists of conversations that occurred during the audio taping. In line with the aim of the study, the writer focused on instances in the conversations that reflect the collaborative actions in constructing repair. To discover the collaborative phenomena in the learners' conversation, the writer employed a method of instances (Psathas, 2009). That means that the writer will focus on specific singular events in the conversations and attempt to adequately describe them relative to the interest of this study, i.e., the collaborative repair process in the conversations. The separate events are combined to derive an overall understanding and potential generalizations (Oelschlaeger & Damico, 1998).

The conversational units treated as instances of collaborative practice within a conversation will be coded from "extended sequence" (Psathas, 2009). This will be achieved by reading the data transcripts repeatedly in conjunction with the taped data. To determine the extended sequence of the collaborative practices, the writer uses the modified version of "the gross characterization of direction-giving interaction" of (Psathas, 2009).

The following is the guideline for the characterization of the instances of the extended sequential structures in the conversations adapted from Psathas (2009):

1. The turns are sequentially organized.
2. The current speaker solicits the turns from the next speaker.
3. The sequence consists of the next turn(s) in which the collaboration is begun.
4. Furthermore, the next turn(s) in which the speakers co-participate actively with a display of understanding, acceptance, or requests for elaboration, repetition, clarification, and so on, which are coordinated parts of the sequence and not new topics.
5. There is marked editing of the sequence with such possible ending moves as an acknowledgement/acceptance/understanding display by a speaker and a move to the next topic or a closing or a request for confirmation by the information-giver and a confirmation/acknowledgement/appreciation by the recipient and a move to next topic or a closing.

Findings and Interpretation

The study aimed to investigate how students of English majors would cope cognitively with difficulties encountered in their conversations. Therefore, based on the transcription data and the repair process, the writer identified two repair initiations that the participants did to cope with difficulties in

using English in their conversation: self-initiated organization of repair and other-initiated organization of repair. Results also showed a preference for other-initiated repair over self-initiated repair. From the analysis, there were 24 instances of repair acts comprising nine instances of self-initiated repair and 15 instances of other-initiated repair. In this article, the writer will only present an example from each type of repair act.

For both repair imitations, the writer found that self-initiated repair is to hold the floor so that the speaker can search for a particular construction word and delay the production of the next lexical item. The use of other-initiated repairs is to keep the ongoing conversation by initiating clarification or confirmation and help to go more insight and understanding of the unintelligible speech production of the speaker.

Self-Initiated Organization of Repair

Self-initiated repair occurs on the same turn when the procedure of the talk containing the trouble source is also the person who indicates that trouble is being experienced.

From a cyclical review of the data transcript, it is revealed that two types of self-initiated repair organization characterizing the EFL learners' conversation are identified to be included in this analysis. The repairs are (a) grammatical repair; and (b) lexical repair.

Grammatical Self-initiated repair. The first type of repair organization deals with the grammatical construction of the utterance. In this case, the speaker him/herself in the repair trajectory can notice a deficient grammatical construction produced by him/herself in an ongoing utterance and can initiate a repair completion.

The most common type of grammatical repair done by the participants involves the repair done by the third-person singular pronoun "he or she". The following instance illustrates how these repair actions take place.

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446. L1: Because ah: ah in ah maybe in the other job we can ah put the
447. woman in ah in the same job but in ah in the religion of catholic ah:: uhm maybe
448. ah, the woman not be ah not be the ah second ah the human but ah but
449. ah:: they consider the man is ah leader ah and ah this is very suit for the ah;;
450. for ah //many people//
451. L2: //I see, I see// I see your opinion. In your opinion, ah: you think that ah:
452. The men must be the lie- must be the leader for the because ah by the
453. Tradition they were given the position to lead and the woman to follow them
454. Yeah, because uhm: our saviour Jesus Christ they are ah:: he is a man
455. //not a woman// oh that's your opinion?
456. L1://yeah//yeah
-

Excerpt 1. Grammatical Self-initiated Repair

In this instance, L1 (Learner 1) produced an incorrect pronoun 'they' for 'Jesus Christ' in his turn in line 454, which also became the trouble source. He immediately realized his mistake and initiated a repair by repairing the incorrect use of the pronoun, directing himself not to use 'they' but 'he' on the next word he produced.

L1 took his time to think about the correct pronoun by producing a length of quasi-lexical item 'ah' as his strategy or repair act to find the correct pronoun that he finally produced. Between the start of

the repair and the completion of the repair, there are frequently gaps. These gaps give room for self-initiation, reinforcing the desire for self-repair (Okoye, 2019). The self-initiated repair structures have been classified as expansion of the turn, hesitation, repetition of the previous word(s), replacement of a word or structure, abort and restart, abort and abandon, insertion, deletion, meta-repair and modify order (Emrani & Hooshmand, 2019).

Lexical self-initiated repair. The next majority of repair actions observed in the learners' conversation deal with the problem of lexical retrieval to continue ongoing utterance. This problem can be understood as a logical consequence of their status as learners of English as a foreign language. Therefore, it would be expected that the learners would not command an adequate English lexicon and that this lack of knowledge is evident in their conversation activity.

The following instance will illustrate how the learners repair his/her problem of lack of mastery of English lexicons.

109. L1://ah:// didn't you follow? He didn't
110. you followed about our meeting to discuss how to:: receive the new
111. Student in our: actually in our university?
112. L2: I will be I will be follow ah:: I will be for-1 will be follow it uahm:: (++)
113. **L1: I thi::nk that meeting is very inte-is very important for us because that is our**
114. **(hhh) that is our (++) that is our activities, and we must do it because it is**
115. **Very very it is very, very //useful// and important for us.**

Excerpt 2. Lexical Self-initiated Repair

In line 113, L1 tends to express his thoughts about receiving new students in their university. The trouble occurred when he did not produce a word completely in 'is very intr-'. The reason might be that he had thought of a more appropriate word that suited his aim. So, he initiated a repair by repairing the cut-off word with the word 'important' and the repetition of 'is very' is to conduct the repair completion. To solve comprehension issue, which may be caused by their lack of language experience, repetition or partial repetition tactics are used to grasp new lexical elements (Aleksius & Saukah, 2018).

Other-Initiated Organization of Repair

Other initiated repair issues from identifying a trouble source by the other speaker. The analysis of each instance of repair sequence will follow Markee's sequential repair organization (Markee, 2000, p. 102), particularly the so-called second position repair. This type of repair occurs in turn next to the turn where are trouble source is and is initiated by others through the so-called "*next turn repair initiators (NTRIs)*" (Marke, 2000: 102, italics are from the original). The repair work, then, could follow in the next turn, either by the current speaker (self) or by another speaker, or it may extend to several turns and may result in either self or other completion of the trouble.

From a cyclical review of the data transcript, it is revealed that two types of repair organization characterizing the ELF learners' conversation are identified to be included in this analysis. The repair is (a) lexical repair; and (b) message clarification repair. These will be discussed in turn in the following subsection.

Lexical repair of other-initiated repair. The next majority of repair actions observed in the learners' conversations deal with the problem of lexical retrieval to continue an ongoing utterance. This problem can be understood as a logical consequence of their status as learners of English as a foreign

language. Therefore, it would be expected that the learners would need to command an adequate English lexicon and that lack of knowledge is evident in their conversation activity.

The following instance will illustrate how the learners collaborate in repairing each other's problem of lack of mastery of English lexicons.

456. L1://yeah//yeah
457. **L2: and ah: Jesus is ah:: choose his ah his ah his::=**
458. **L1: following**
459. **L2: Follower (+) The twelve followers, all of them are men, not women, yes I see your**
460. **Opinion and yeah I will ah I will fill your opinion in my ah writing**
461. //I think I'll write//

Excerpt 3. Lexical Other-initiated Repair

In this instance, L2 (Learner 2) produced a trouble source in line 457, where he needed help finding the precise lexicon. He repeated the same possessive pronoun, and it can be interpreted that he was appealing for help. The gaps of the repeated word, which give room for self-initiation and self-repair to happen, highlight the preference for self-repair in this situation. As Okoye (2019) similarly found that other-initiation and other-repair took place in that transition space where self-repair did not. Therefore, L1 initiated a repair by giving the lexicon 'follower'. L2 accepted the repair act on this next turn, where he produced the lexicon 'follower' and created a repair completion by adding 'the twelve followers' to make it more understandable when he tries to explain that in Christian beliefs, Jesus Christ chose twelve followers.

Message Clarification other-initiated repair. The next type of repair organization I will describe in this section deals with the learners' engagement with the problem of perception or understanding of the message in a speaker's utterance. The speakers do this kind of repair organization for different reasons, such as to achieve a common understanding of a concept or notion being materialized in the talk or to resolve a mishearing problem. Schiffrin (1993) proposed a taxonomy of communicative types suitable for categorizing repair action in this analysis. The communicative types are (a) information-seeking: which is used when a speaker lacks knowledge and attempts to gain it by posing a question to the hearer; (b) clarification-seeking: which occurs when a hearer has not heard or understood all or parts or previous utterance and asks the-speaker to clarify it; and (c) information-checking: used to check whether the hearer has adequately processed a referent or proposition in the ongoing talk. By posing the information-checking question, the speaker allows the hearer to acknowledge the reception of the proposition or referent. The repair sequence will take several turns to accomplish the repair organization. The following instance will illustrate how this repair organization is operationalized in the EFL learners' conversation.

382. L1: can://can you ah:: can you ah://
383. L2: //uhm uhm uhma//
384. **L1: explain a few a few about a few about ah gender**
385. **L2: gender?**
386. **L1: yeah**
387. **L2: oh yeah uhm gender is ah:: means ahh:: means ah:: the men ah:: stay in the same place with**
388. The woman, so they are the same in uhm in all their work, and yeah, like that means
389. like that yeah

Example 4. Message Clarification Other-initiated Repair

In this instance, the trouble source occurred in L1's turn in line 384. L2 initiated a repair by creating a confirmation request 'gender'. L2 might have a problem hearing L1's utterance; therefore, he tried to convince himself by requesting confirmation. The repair initiation was accepted by L1 by answering 'yeah' and proceed to explain the meaning of gender. Although, L2's explanation about gender might not be clear enough, however, the repair kept the conversation going. Aleksius & Saukah (2018) also found that one type of other-initiated repair, among others, is asking for definition and explanation to avoid problems in understanding. They stated that EFL students should master this technique since it allows them to seek for clarification without immediately expressing their lack of comprehension while also preventing misconceptions by restating the prior speaker's thoughts.

Conclusion

Based on the result of the study, the writer concluded that second-semester students of the English Department, in their ongoing conversations, showed normality in speaking as second language learners. The writer found that they can produce repair initiations, self-repair and another repair to maintain their flow of conversations, even though the repair initiations are low since there were only a few repairs found from many possibilities of repair of the trouble source in the conversation. For both repair initiation, the writer found that the use of self-initiated repair is to hold the floor in order that the speaker can search for a particular of the next lexical item; the use of other initiated repair is to keep the ongoing conversation and help to give more insight and understanding on the unintelligible speech production of the speaker.

The trouble sources of the self-initiation of grammatical repair occur by the trouble source of Pronouns, Pronoun-Verb Combinations, Indefinite Articles, and Comparisons; meanwhile, the self-initiation of lexical repair occurs by the trouble source of hesitated speech production. The other initiation of lexical and message clarification repair occurs by the trouble source of hesitated speech and unintelligible word production. The self-repair acts occurred through Quasi-lexical fillers, cut-off words, pauses and repetitions, while other repair acts occurred through clarification requests, help and confirmation checks.

The categories of repair found in the current study give insights regarding learners' understanding of the target language, their areas of difficulties, as well as their language acquisition techniques and attitudes. However, analysis of the self and other initiated repair in conversations between these university students revealed only little information on their competency in English as their foreign language. The repair was initiated only as a strategy when they were uncertain about the grammaticality or lexicality of what they had said.

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