

REPAIR STRATEGIES IN STUDENT-STUDENT INTERACTIONS DURING ENGLISH SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the types and organization of repair strategies used in student-student interactions during English speaking activities, focusing on how these strategies contribute to communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The study uses a qualitative approach grounded in Conversation Analysis (CA), analyzing naturally occurring dialogues among university-level EFL learners. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and engaged in structured speaking tasks designed to encourage spontaneous peer interactions. Data collection involved audio recordings of these interactions, which were transcribed verbatim to capture linguistic features such as pauses, repetitions, hesitations, and reformulations. The analysis revealed two main types of repair: self-initiated and other-initiated. Self-repair emerged as the dominant strategy, involving rephrasing, hesitation, and repetition, reflecting learners' cognitive engagement and active monitoring of language output. Other-initiated repair, although less frequent, highlighted the collaborative nature of peer discourse through clarification requests and content-related questions. This study's novelty lies in its focus on peer-to-peer interactions, offering a learner-centered perspective often overlooked in teacher-led studies. The findings emphasize that repair strategies are not merely corrective actions but essential for co-constructing meaning, enhancing linguistic fluency, and fostering sociopragmatic awareness. The study has significant implications for global language education, suggesting that peer-based speaking activities can promote autonomous language use, encourage collaboration, and improve communicative competence. Future research should explore how variables such as cultural background, language proficiency, and digital platforms influence the development and use of repair strategies in diverse EFL settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In second language acquisition, conversation is a fundamental tool for developing communicative competence, particularly in English language learning contexts. An essential

aspect of conversation is the use of repair strategies, which are methods employed by speakers to address problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding during interaction. These strategies fall into two primary categories: self-initiated repair, where speakers address their own mistakes, and other-initiated repair, where conversation partners prompt clarification or correction. Both types of repairs serve to resolve communication breakdowns and ensure mutual understanding, thus facilitating the flow of dialogue and contributing to learners' language development (Laila et al., 2023; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2003).

Self-initiated repair strategies are particularly prominent in educational settings. Learners commonly employ techniques such as hesitation, pausing, word searching, code-switching, repetition of personal pronouns, and immediate changes to sentences or vocabulary (Laila et al., 2023). In classrooms, both teachers and students engage in repair strategies like reformulation and clarification to enhance communication and improve learning outcomes for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2003). Research has shown that students in EFL classrooms often use self-repair strategies, including partial repetition and correction, to resolve challenges in understanding and to maintain the flow of conversation (Fotovatnia & Dorri, 2013). This emphasizes the crucial role repair strategies play in supporting language learners' interactional competence and conversational fluency.

In addition to self-initiated repairs, other-initiated repair strategies are critical for sustaining conversational flow. These strategies include requests for clarification, partial repetition, and signals indicating misunderstanding (Aleksius, 2021; Aleksius & Saukah, 2018). Studies focusing on classroom discourse have highlighted that teachers frequently initiate repairs to guide students toward better comprehension, fostering a deeper understanding of the language (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2003). Similarly, other-initiated repairs often emerge when students struggle to express themselves or when miscommunication occurs, reflecting the collaborative nature of repair processes in conversation (Novitasari & Imperiani, 2020). These exchanges demonstrate how repair strategies serve as a shared responsibility between conversational partners, allowing them to jointly overcome communicative obstacles and clarify meanings.

The importance of repair strategies becomes even more apparent in both spontaneous and structured conversations, where speakers employ various alignment techniques to ensure clarity and maintain the coherence of dialogue (Dideriksen et al., 2019). Effective use of repair strategies not only addresses immediate breakdowns in communication but also fosters the negotiation of meaning, allowing for a more efficient and dynamic exchange of information. In language learning environments, this negotiation is vital for developing both linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence.

Given the significance of repair strategies in conversation, it is essential for EFL students to be educated about their use. Teacher training that emphasizes repair strategies can significantly enhance students' speaking skills and overall communicative effectiveness (Aleksius & Saukah, 2018). It is equally important to recognize that the choice of repair strategy can influence the success of communication recovery, as some strategies may be more effective than others in resolving misunderstandings (Braggaar et al., 2024). As such, fostering an environment in which students actively engage with repair strategies is key to improving their interactional competence and language acquisition.

While much of the existing research on repair strategies has focused on teacher-student interactions, there is a gap in the literature regarding student-student exchanges during speaking activities. Peer-to-peer interactions provide a unique and naturalistic context for studying repair strategies, as they reflect authentic communication situations where learners must navigate misunderstandings and provide corrective feedback to one another. Research has shown that peer interactions play a crucial role in cognitive processes related to language development, as students learn from each other's corrections and perspectives, which often leads to improved retention and understanding of language forms (Liu et al., 2024). Moreover,

peer exchanges offer a collaborative environment where learners engage in meaningful discourse, supporting each other's language development through self-initiated repair strategies (Fotovatnia & Dorri, 2013).

Peer-to-peer interactions are particularly beneficial because of the familiarity and comfort between students, which enables them to engage more freely with the language without the constraints of teacher evaluation. However, this familiarity can both enhance and hinder language retention, depending on individual learner characteristics and their previous language experiences (Liu et al., 2024). Research suggests that strategies for promoting active participation in student-student dialogues are essential, particularly when one student tends to dominate the conversation (Kayi-Aydar, 2013). Such strategies ensure balanced interactions, maximizing the language learning benefits of peer engagement.

Moreover, the naturalistic setting of peer interactions offers valuable opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning and apply repair strategies in a more authentic communicative context. Interactions within shared language environments enable learners to develop not only linguistic competence but also social and pragmatic skills, such as understanding social nuances and intercultural communication (Piker, 2013). These exchanges, therefore, provide a holistic approach to language learning, where both linguistic accuracy and interpersonal communication skills are nurtured.

Despite the evident benefits of peer interactions, challenges remain, particularly in diverse classroom environments. Carhill-Poza (2018) highlights that immigrant youth often lack opportunities for effective peer interactions, which are crucial for developing advanced language skills. Addressing these challenges is essential for educators aiming to foster supportive and inclusive language learning environments.

In light of these considerations, exploring repair strategies in student-student interactions offers valuable insights into the complexities of language learning. This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on the repair strategies employed by students during English speaking activities. The research aims to explore how learners initiate and respond to repairable issues in conversation, contributing to our understanding of the interactional processes that support language acquisition. By examining these dynamics, this study seeks to enhance our knowledge of the role repair strategies play in fostering communicative competence.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What types of repair strategies do learners use during speaking activities?
2. How are repair sequences organized in student-student interactions?

This research will specifically investigate the self-initiated and other-initiated repair strategies used by learners, while also exploring the patterns and timing of repairs within the flow of conversation. By doing so, this study aims to provide valuable insights into how students use repair strategies to enhance their language skills and achieve mutual understanding during peer interactions.

2. METHODS

This study employs Conversation Analysis (CA) as the primary approach to examine repair strategies in student-student interactions during English speaking activities. CA focuses on the detailed organization of talk in interaction, particularly during instances where misunderstandings or communication breakdowns occur. The aim is to analyze how students manage these breakdowns through self-initiated and other-initiated repair strategies, ensuring that communication is restored and mutual understanding is achieved. By using CA, the study identifies patterns in the initiation, placement, and resolution of repair sequences within peer dialogues.

2.1 Instruments

Data for this study were collected using audio recordings of student-student interactions during English speaking activities. These recordings capture the natural flow of conversation, including pauses, hesitations, and overlaps, which are crucial for analyzing repair strategies. The interactions were then transcribed verbatim, maintaining all the conversational nuances that are important for understanding the dynamics of repair. For instance, in the transcript excerpt below, we see an example of repair strategies:

Student A: "Okay, so, for our class trip, I'm thinking... we should go to Bali! It's famous, we can go to the beach, visit temples... it's like, really cool."

Student B: "Bali? Hmm, I agree it's cool, but... uhm... isn't Bali very far? And the plane tickets would be super expensive, right? I'm worried about the budget."

Student A: "Yeah, you're right about the plane tickets. So, if not Bali, what about Bandung? It's closer. We can go to Tangkuban Perahu or Kawah Putih. It's like nature, right?"

In this exchange, we see both speakers engage in conversation, with Student B prompting a shift in ideas due to the issue of cost, illustrating the negotiation of meaning and repair of potential breakdowns.

2.2 Data Analysis

The analysis will focus on identifying and classifying the types of repair strategies used by students, specifically distinguishing between self-repair and other-repair:

Self-Repair: Instances where a speaker recognizes a communication breakdown in their own speech and corrects themselves. This may include rephrasing, clarifying previous statements, or searching for alternative vocabulary.

Example from the transcript: Student A's response after realizing the issue of distance and cost with Bali: "Yeah, you're right about the plane tickets. So, if not Bali, what about Bandung?"

Other-Repair: Instances where one participant (usually the listener) intervenes to help the other clarify or correct their statement, often to resolve misunderstandings or to prompt for more information.

Example from the transcript: Student B questioning the suitability of Bali due to cost concerns: "Bali? Hmm, I agree it's cool, but... uhm... isn't Bali very far?"

Additionally, the analysis will explore the sequential organization of these repair strategies, examining their placement in the conversation. This involves assessing whether repairs are initiated immediately after a breakdown or if there is a delay. The timing and sequence of repairs provide insights into how students manage and navigate communication challenges within the conversation. For instance, in this case, Student B's intervention comes right after Student A's initial suggestion, reflecting a responsive and collaborative conversational repair process.

By systematically classifying the types of repair and analyzing their placement, this study seeks to uncover the strategies students use to maintain conversational flow and enhance mutual understanding during peer interactions.

3. RESULT

This section presents the results of the analysis, focusing on the types of repair strategies used by learners during English-speaking activities and the organization of repair sequences in student-student interactions. The analysis identifies two primary types of repair strategies self-repair and other-repair and explores how these strategies are employed to address communication breakdowns, clarify meaning, and maintain the flow of conversation. Furthermore, the study examines how repairs are organized and placed within the conversation, highlighting their role in ensuring mutual understanding and conversational fluency.

3.1 Types of Repair Strategies Employed by Learners

The analysis of student-student interactions revealed that both self-repair and other-repair were employed by participants to address communication breakdowns. These strategies facilitated the resolution of misunderstandings and contributed to the smooth flow of conversation.

3.1.1 Self-repair

Self-repair occurred when the speaker recognized a breakdown in their own utterance and took corrective action. This type of repair was the most prevalent, highlighting its significance in maintaining conversational coherence. The forms of self-repair identified include:

a. Rephrasing or rewording

Speakers frequently reformulated their utterances to clarify or correct previously expressed ideas. This was often done when speakers felt that their initial statements might have caused confusion or when they sought to enhance their clarity. For example, in the following interaction, Student A rewords their statement about the class trip destination:

Student A: "Yeah, you're right about the plane tickets. So, if not Bali, what about Bandung?"

b. Hesitation and pauses

Hesitation markers (e.g., "uhm," "hmm") and pauses were frequently used as self-repair strategies. These provided speakers with additional time to think about their next words or to adjust their communication. Such hesitation reflects the cognitive process of repairing an utterance in real-time:

Student B: "Hmm... isn't Bali very far? And the plane tickets would be super expensive, right?"

c. Repetition

Repetition was used by speakers to emphasize key information, maintain fluency, or correct prior utterances. This strategy helped speakers manage hesitation and clarify meaning. For example:

Student B: "Second, maybe we can go to a waterfall? Like, Curug Dago. It's... uh, beautiful, very natural."

Here, repetition of descriptive terms ("beautiful, very natural") allowed the speaker to elaborate while maintaining the conversational flow. Repetition also appeared in confirmation, as shown when Student A restated the agreed plan to ensure mutual understanding.

3.1.2 Other-repair

Other-repair was initiated by one participant (in this case, Student B) to address a potential misunderstanding or clarify the speaker's intent. These types of repairs served to promote mutual understanding and guide the conversation towards more accurate communication. Notably, other-repair was more prevalent when students noticed discrepancies in their partner's speech or proposed ideas that required further elaboration. For example:

Student B: "Bali? Hmm, I agree it's cool, but... uhm... isn't Bali very far?"

Here, Student B intervened to prompt a reevaluation of the suggested destination, focusing on the distance and the associated costs. This form of repair reflects an effort to maintain the coherence of the conversation by addressing uncertainties as they arise.

3.2 Organization and Placement of Repair Sequences

The analysis also revealed patterns in the sequencing and placement of repairs within the interaction, shedding light on how students navigated conversational trouble and maintained the flow of dialogue. The sequential organization of repair sequences followed a distinct pattern, with repairs generally occurring immediately after the potential breakdown in communication.

3.2.1 Immediate Repair

In the majority of cases, repairs were initiated promptly after the problematic utterance. This immediate response was critical in resolving communication breakdowns and maintaining conversational fluency. The repairs often occurred within the first turn after the issue was identified, demonstrating a responsive and collaborative approach to conversation. For example, after Student A suggested Bali as the destination, Student B immediately raised a concern regarding the distance and the cost:

Student B: "Bali? Hmm, I agree it's cool, but... uhm... isn't Bali very far?"

In this case, the repair immediately followed the initial proposal, reflecting a swift response to the potential issue of miscommunication.

3.2.2 Delayed Repair

Although most repairs were immediate, some instances involved a slight delay. This was particularly noticeable when speakers hesitated or reflected on the conversation before providing a response. Delayed repairs often occurred when students took time to rethink their responses or consider alternative ideas. For instance, after Student A

proposed a shift in destination to Bandung, Student B took a moment to reflect on the options before offering a new suggestion:

Student B: "Bandung is good. I like the weather there. But... um... Tangkuban Perahu might be too crowded. What if we go to a theme park in Bandung, like Trans Studio?"

This delay allowed Student B to refine their suggestion, indicating that repairs are not always immediate and may involve a more thoughtful or strategic reconsideration of the conversation.

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that both self-repair and other-repair strategies play in maintaining effective communication in student-student interactions. Self-repair was the predominant strategy, particularly manifested through rephrasing, hesitation, and repetition. These strategies were employed by the speakers to address and correct their own utterances, thereby ensuring the clarity and accuracy of their message.

Other-repair, although less frequent, was also a vital mechanism within the interactions. This strategy was typically employed by the listener to address potential misunderstandings or ambiguities in the speaker's utterances. By initiating repair, the listener played a key role in negotiating meaning and resolving communication breakdowns, thereby facilitating mutual understanding.

The sequential analysis of repair sequences revealed a predominant tendency for repairs to occur immediately following a problematic utterance. This immediate response suggests that real-time corrective actions are crucial for maintaining the flow of conversation and ensuring the efficient transmission of information. However, a minor delay in repair initiation was observed in certain instances, especially when speakers required additional time to reassess their responses or offer alternative suggestions.

Collectively, these findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of repair strategies in peer-to-peer interactions within language learning contexts. They illustrate how self-repair and other-repair work in tandem to address communication challenges and foster a cooperative environment for language development. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of repair strategies in the negotiation of meaning and the overall success of conversation, emphasizing their role in facilitating linguistic and pragmatic competence in language learners.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Types of Repair Strategies in Student-Student Interactions

The key finding in response to the first research question is that self-initiated repair is the predominant strategy used by EFL learners during student-student interactions. Self-repair took the form of rephrasing, hesitation, and repetition, indicating that learners engaged in real-time monitoring and active management of their speech production (Fotovatnia & Dorri, 2013; Graziano & Gullberg, 2018). For instance, learners adjusted their utterances to accommodate contextual concerns such as financial feasibility when suggesting travel destinations (Qiao et al., 2020; Korotaev et al., 2020). Hesitations, including fillers such as “uhm” or “hmm,” served dual purposes—cognitive planning and signaling upcoming revisions—demonstrating a dynamic interplay between thought and verbal expression (Järvinen et al., 2025; Jabeen & Wagner, 2023). Repetition supported clarity and reinforced key ideas, thus enhancing learners' autonomous control over discourse flow (Bibault et al., 2018; Zhang & Balog, 2020).

Gestural support was also found to reinforce verbal self-repair. Learners employed non-verbal cues in tandem with speech to clarify meanings and intentions during moments of disfluency (Graziano & Gullberg, 2018; Xie et al., 2023). This multimodal coordination highlights the embodied nature of interactional competence and supports the assertion that EFL communication is not solely linguistic but integrated with non-verbal elements (Hatano, 2024; Schmid & Fägersten, 2010).

Although less frequently employed, other-initiated repair played a pivotal role in collaborative meaning-making. Learners used clarification requests and content-specific questions to actively shape peer discourse, enhancing mutual intelligibility (Aleksius & Saukah, 2018). For example, questions like “Isn’t Bali very far?” prompted re-evaluation of proposed ideas and fostered contextual refinement.

The academic significance of these findings lies in their alignment with and extension of prior studies that underscore the role of repair as a measure of interactional competence (Dieter et al., 2019; Kallio et al., 2022). The novelty of this study emerges from its focus on peer discourse, rather than the widely examined teacher-led settings. This shift to learner-centered interaction offers fresh insights into how EFL students construct and negotiate meaning autonomously.

Pedagogically, these findings support the design of peer-based speaking activities that cultivate pragmatic competence and discourse management. Peer familiarity was shown to encourage risk-taking and authentic language use (Liu et al., 2024), while providing balanced engagement and fostering learner agency (Wu et al., 2023; Sippel & Jackson, 2015; Meletiadou, 2021).

However, gaps persist regarding the influence of individual learner variables on repair strategy deployment. Previous studies suggest that higher-proficiency students may dominate peer discourse, restricting opportunities for equal participation (Sippel, 2021; Alamsyah et al., 2021). Thus, future research should explore scaffolding methods to ensure inclusive peer interaction. It is also essential to examine how cultural background and learner motivation affect the choice and success of repair strategies across different educational contexts.

4.2 Organization and Timing of Repair Sequences

The second research question focused on how repair sequences are organized. Key findings reveal that learners exhibited a strong preference for immediate repair following communicative lapses, indicating a high level of conversational awareness and responsiveness (Daly et al., 1987; Dingemanse et al., 2015). Most repairs were initiated directly after the problematic utterance, allowing learners to quickly restore coherence. This supports previous claims that immediacy in repair reflects real-time monitoring and heightened sensitivity to communicative flow.

Delayed repairs, though less frequent, also served important functions. These typically followed moments of hesitation and were marked by deeper cognitive processing and consideration of pragmatic appropriateness (Dideriksen et al., 2019; Winn & Teece, 2022). The coexistence of immediate and delayed repairs suggests a dual mechanism for managing discourse: one reactive and fluid, the other reflective and strategic.

This organizational behavior demonstrates that learners were not only capable of identifying and correcting communicative disruptions but were also sensitive to the sequential structure of conversation. The interactional timing of these repairs highlights learners’ growing fluency and pragmatic competence, supporting the theoretical framework of conversation analysis in capturing micro-level interactional patterns.

The novelty in this discussion lies in documenting how EFL learners autonomously manage repair sequences in naturalistic peer conversations. Unlike

teacher-led exchanges, these peer interactions allow for a more authentic demonstration of learners' strategic capabilities in managing spoken interaction.

The implications for language instruction are significant. Educators should emphasize the development of real-time conversational management skills through task-based and peer-mediated activities. Such tasks should provide room for both immediate responses and thoughtful reflection, thus fostering diverse repair strategies.

Nonetheless, this study also reveals gaps in understanding the longitudinal impact of such peer-based repair sequences. There is limited empirical research tracking how sustained engagement with repair over time influences broader language acquisition. Additionally, the role of digital platforms in mediating these repair strategies remains largely unexamined.

Future studies are recommended to investigate how task type, mode of delivery (face-to-face or online), and individual learner traits (such as anxiety or extroversion) shape the temporal organization of repairs. Cross-cultural research could also yield insights into how timing norms differ across sociolinguistic settings (Septiana et al., 2016; Al-Dokom & Al-Qeyam, 2024).

5. CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the nuanced use of repair strategies, specifically self-initiated and other-initiated repairs, in student-student interactions during English speaking activities. The key findings demonstrate that self-repair, characterized by rephrasing, hesitation, and repetition, predominates in peer discourse and reflects learners' active cognitive engagement and developing interactional competence. Although less common, other-initiated repair plays a crucial role in supporting mutual understanding by prompting clarification and guiding the conversation toward coherence. The novelty of this study lies in its exclusive focus on peer interaction rather than teacher-led dialogue, offering an authentic perspective on how learners autonomously manage communication breakdowns. This learner-centered lens enriches the understanding of conversational repair in EFL contexts and highlights the importance of peer-mediated tasks in fostering pragmatic development, discourse management, and communicative autonomy. The implications for pedagogy are significant, suggesting that incorporating structured peer speaking activities can enhance learners' ability to negotiate meaning, take initiative in communication, and build sociopragmatic awareness. For future research, it is recommended to examine how individual learner variables such as language proficiency, cultural background, and digital communication settings influence the use and effectiveness of repair strategies across a variety of interactional contexts.

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