Self-Repairs by L2 Speakers in Real Communication Context

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ABSTRACT

Language errors have long been a research focus among second language (L2) scholars as many would agree that these errors are indicators that the learners are making progress in learning their target language. In oral L2 communication, repairs on any erroneous utterances could be initiated by the speakers themselves or the interlocutors. Known as self-repairs and other-initiated repairs respectively, they are usually intended for clarity of the conveyed message. Although examining both types of repairs could offer a more holistic view of interactional dynamics, the current study focused only of self-repairs made by speakers of job interviews where the current study was localised. This is because, in high-stake interactions such as job interviews, other-initiated repairs hardly occur since L2 speakers would be more concerned of their own language use rather than repairing others' utterances. The data were obtained from observations made on oral interactions between 19 candidates and eight interview panellists of academic staff recruitment interviews at one public university in the east coast of Malaysia. The oral data were transcribed and analysed using Nvivo software (version 12) to identify the types of self-repairs made by the candidates based on Kormos, Levelt and van Hest's conceptualization of self-repair. The findings showed that Appropriateness is the candidates' greatest concern reflected through Message Replacement, Insertion Repair and Abandonment with a total percentage of 37.1%. This is followed by linguistic accuracy involving Error Repairs and Back-to-error Repairs which recorded 17.2% and 15.8%, respectively. Information accuracy was also emphasized by the candidates through Message Replacement and Fact Repair which occurred at 11.4% and 12.7% respectively. Finally, repeating the same information as part of Information Repair was recorded at 5.8%; the same percentage of Appropriateness-Abandonment. Since all respondents were Malaysian graduates who were exposed to English language teaching in Malaysia both at school and tertiary levels, the occurrences of Back-to-error Repairs indicate the need for researchers and teachers' involvement in assisting L2 learners to deal with their erroneous L2 expressions.

Keywords: communication strategies, error repair, language repair, L2 learners, self-repair

INTRODUCTION

Language errors, be them in the first or second language, are common and even expected among the speakers. In second language (L2) or foreign language learning, language errors indicate that the learners are making progress in their language competency, hence, should be taken positively by both learners and educators (Atmaca, 2016). While many factors have been identified to cause L2 errors, the learners' first language (L1) influence on the target language is commonly cited as the cause of what is termed as 'transfer error' (Corder, 1981).

When errors are committed in oral interactions, it is natural for the speakers or the interlocutors to make repairs to the utterances so as to ensure the intended message is successfully delivered. Here, language repair functions as a communication strategy used to modify, organize, and maintain communication (Rabab'ah, 2013). This view indicates that language repairs are done not just because of erroneous expressions but also for other reasons such as language appropriateness or correcting the earlier-given facts. Being referred to as a communication strategy (Rabab'ah, 2013), language repair is not just a mere repair on a speaker's utterances but rather holds a significant function in L2 communication i.e. to tackle

any communication problems that might occur in oral interactions as asserted by Dornyei and Scott (1997). In line Dornyei and Scott's (1997) perspective that language repair is one type of communication strategy, Schegloff (2000) asserts that 'repair strategy' is a way to address difficulties or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding that can happen in interactions. Similarly, Beshir (2022) who views language repairs from error-correction perspective, defines language repairs, as the "actions taken on learners' erroneous utterances".

The above literature indicates that language repairs are mostly intended to enhance clarity of the conveyed message. They could be initiated by either the speakers themselves or the interlocutors; known as self-repairs and other-initiated repairs respectively. Although examining both types of repairs could offer a more holistic view of interactional dynamics, the current study focused only of self-repairs made by speakers of job interviews where the current study was localised. This is because, in high-stake interactions such as job interviews, other-initiated repairs hardly occur since L2 speakers would be more concerned of their own language use rather than repairing others' utterances. As such, the current study focused only on self-repairs made by interview candidates in their interactions with the panellist of real academic staff recruitment interviews at one public university in the east coast of Malaysia.

While many studies have been conducted to analyze language repairs in classroom context, the current study deviates from past literature by obtaining the data from real communication context; academic staff recruitment interviews. The findings from this study, therefore, would reflect the respondents' real L2 communicative competence. Like other interview candidates, the respondents of the current study were believed to give their best during the interviews process. Hence, the research findings would reflect the general output of English language teaching practice in Malaysia, both at school and tertiary levels.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine language repairs made by L2 speakers on their own utterances as well as to identify the types of repairs they made. The following are the research questions to be addressed in this study:

1. To what extent were self-repairs made by L2 speakers in real communication context?

2. What are the types of self-repairs made by L2 speakers in real communication context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Repair in L2 Communication

As stated earlier, language repair is one type of communication strategy used to modify, organize, and maintain communication (Rabab'ah, 2013). Being communication strategies, language repairs are viewed by Dornyei and Scott (1997) as efforts made to tackle any communication problems that occur in oral interactions. Similarly, Schegloff (2000: 207), sees language repairs as more than error corrections and defines them as 'practices for dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding the talk in conversations (and in other forms of talk in interaction)'.

As mentioned earlier, when problems or troubles occur in oral communication, repairs could be done by either the speaker themselves or the interlocutor. Schegloff (2000) and Wong & Waring (2010) categorize such repairs into four types namely self-initiation self-repair, other-initiation self-repair, other initiation other repairs, self-initiation-other repair. Self-initiation self-repair is the condition when the problems are initiated by L2 speakers and they themselves make a repair to their utterances. As stated by Van Hest (1998) cited in Wang (2003: 37), "*If the speakers' monitoring device meets with a troublesome item, speakers can decide to correct this item on their own initiative, without intervention from their interlocutors"*.

Meanwhile, other-initiation self-repair occurs when an interlocutor initiates erroneous expressions before they are repaired by L2 speaker. In other-initiation other repair, the problems are caused by the interlocutor who later makes repair on the utterances. Finally, self-initiation-other repair is the

condition when problems initiated by L2 speaker are repaired by the interlocutor. Among the four types of self-repair, the first type, i.e. self-initiation self- repair becomes the focus of the current study as it reflects the L2 speakers' active concern about their L2 oral production by adjusting the speech towards the standard form (Williams, 2022). Furthermore, in high-stake interactions such as job interviews, other-initiated repairs hardly occur since L2 speakers a prone to make repairs on their own utterances rather than others'. For the purpose of this study, the term 'self- repair' is used to refer to 'self-initiation self-repair'. This is the condition where the speakers themselves make corrections on their own utterances during interactions.

Past Studies on Language Repair

Previous studies on self-repair in L2 context tended to focus on strategies or techniques employed by L2 speakers in the context of classroom interactions. Cho and Larke (2010) for instance, identified nine types of repair strategies applied in a classroom by young L2 learners which include unspecified interrogatives, partial repeat, partial repeat plus question words, comprehension checks, requests for repetition, definition requests, translation requests, explanation requests, and nonverbal strategies. Similarly, Beshir (2022) focused specifically on self-repair strategies by L2 students, also in classroom interactions. His data analysis was based on consolidated classifications of self-repair strategies by Kormos (2000); Levelt, (1983); and van Hest, 1996) namely Same Information Repair (Repeat), Different Information Repair (Message Replacement and Fact Repair), Appropriateness Repair (Abandonment, Replacement, and Insertion Repair), Error Repair and Back-to-error Repair.

In Same Information Repair (Repeat) in which the speakers repeat the same information in their utterances, repairs are usually intended to clarify meaning or correct misunderstandings related to the same information. An example of this is "He left at six—six in the evening, not morning.". In Different Information Repair, the speaker presents different information from that which is currently being presented due to some problems in the earlier utterances. In Appropriateness Repair, the speaker feels that the statement needs to be clarified. As for Error Repair where trouble occurs at the level of formulating the message, repairs are made to ensure that the correct message is delivered. Finally, in Back-to-error Repair, the speakers attempted to make corrections to the earlier statements but are unsuccessful to do so.

These four main categories of repairs namely Information Repair, Appropriateness Repair, Error Repair and Back-to-error Repair were adopted by Beshir (2022) in his study to examine whether or not students used self-repair strategies to tackle communication problems they faced in classroom interactions. The study was conducted at Woldia College of Teacher Education, Ethopia where Amharic is the official language. The participants of the study were second-year English major students, ranged from seventeen to twenty years old who had learnt English as a subject beginning from grade one in their primary school. English was also used as a medium of instruction starting from grade seven, giving them ten-year exposure of English in school before taking up communicative English Skills I and II courses at the college.

The data were taken from students' presentations, which was part of their college work. Prior to that, the students were divided into groups of five or six and were given one day preparation on some selected topics manageable by the students. On the presentation day, the group representative presented what they discussed for seven to ten minutes. These presentations were audio recorded and lasted a total of 52 minutes. The oral data were then transcribed for analysis based on Kormos (2000), Levelt (1983) and van Hest (1996).

The results showed that task given was successful in eliciting spontaneous self- repair from speakers with a total of 653 expressions uttered by the six presenters. In total, 130 self- repair strategies were identified in the data. The findings showed that that Same Information repair through repetition recorded 48 cases (36.9%); Appropriateness Repair category (replacement, insertion, and abandonment) recorded 46 cases (35.4%) with 30, 6 and 10 cases respectively; Error Repair recorded 32 cases (24.6%); and Back-to-error Repair recorded 4 times (3.1%). Analysis on the

utterances indicates that language repair strategies were widely employed by their respondents with evidences of some difficulties with syntactic and lexical errors.

Another study on self-repair based on the same categorizations was conducted by Emran and Hooshmand (2019) which also involved classroom interactions. The respondents consisted of 40 advanced EFL learners at three different language institutes in Isfahan, Iran. They spoke Persiana as their first language and English as the foreign language. Data collection procedures involved observing and videotaping 36 classroom conversations before follow-up interviews were conducted. The observations lasted for a total of 72 hours at three research locations while the interviews totaled to 150 minutes. Conversation analysis (CA) approach was employed as the theoretical framework for this study. Based on qualitative analysis of the students' utterances, it was found that Iranian EFL learners practised four self-initiated self-repair structures, namely, replacement, insertion, deleting and abandonment. The results also showed that the most frequent self-initiated self-repair structure employed by the participants is replacement.

A more recent study on self-repair was conducted by Alharbi (2023) who reported on the self-repair strategies employed by the Arab speakers of English and describe the linguistic features of self-repair produced by them in the same turn of speaking. The data were obtained from an open source (YouTube) that provided videos on Arab learners taking part in a speaking task. The total hours of the videos were close to two hours. The videos contained question and answer session between the Arab speakers and speaking assessors who were not necessarily Arab speakers.

The conversations in the videos were later transcribed followed with identification of instances of self-repair based on the same framework by Kormos (2000), Levelt (1983) and van Hest (1996). The results showed that all the four types of self-repair strategies emerged in Alharbi's data namely repetition followed by replacement, insertion, abandonment and deletion.

Based on the above studies, it can be concluded that self-repairs occurred extensively among L2 speakers worldwide, making further research on them a worthwhile effort.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was conducted at one public university in the east coast of Malaysia which predominantly represents Malay students and staff. English which takes place as a second language in this country, is used as medium of instructions at the university. The research context was a real recruitment interviews intended for selecting academic staff for three faculties namely the Faculty of Art and Design (FSSR), the Faculty of Information Management (IM), and the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS).

The participants consisted of 19 Malay ESL speakers who attended a recruitment process which comprised two stages: (i) mock teaching and (ii) the final interview. As the mock teaching stage did not involve much interactions between the candidates and the panellists, data were collected exclusively from the final interviews, where English proficiency was among the main selection criteria.

For some technical reasons, interviews were conducted both physically and online. One FSSR candidate attended in person, while five others were interviewed via Cisco Webex. All five IM candidates were interviewed online, whereas ACIS interviews involved five candidates attending face-to-face interviews while the other three attended online. The interview panellists consisted of eight members: the campus Rector, the Deputy Rector of Academic Affairs, and the Heads of the three faculties, who were physically present in the meeting room, alongside three Deans from the university main campus in Shah Alam, Malaysia, who participated virtually. Focusing on the candidates' self-repairs on their own utterances during their interactions with the interviewers, the findings of the current study would offer important insights of the types of repairs made by L2 speakers when interacting in the real communicative context.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee and the campus Rector. Following this, arrangements were made with the Assistant Registrar to allow the researcher to observe all scheduled interviews. Informed consent was secured from both candidates and panellists before participation.

During the sessions, one researcher was seated at the end of the interview table alongside the panellists to minimise disruption while enabling close observation of candidates' performance. With the technician's assistance, all interviews were video-recorded for subsequent analysis. Capturing L2 oral interactions between 19 candidates and the panellists, the video recordings became the data source of the study, providing the empirical basis for examining language repairs made by the candidates on their own utterances. To maintain confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to them. Candidates were coded as "C1" to "C19," while panellists were coded as "P1" to "P8."

Data Analysis and Issues of Reliability and Validity

The analysis centred on identifying and categorising language repairs made by ESL candidates. Video data were first imported into NVivo software (version 12), which facilitated systematic organisation and coding. The coding process began with repeated viewing of the recordings to locate the instances of language repairs made by the interview candidates, which were subsequently transcribed. Transcriptions were refined through careful replay in short segments to ensure accuracy and completeness. Following transcription, a thematic analysis was conducted, guided by the four categorizations of self-repair by Kormos (2000); Levelt, (1983); and van Hest (1996).

Reliability of data analysis was enhanced by using NVivo software to manage and classify self-repair categories systematically. Validity issue was also taken care of through interrater verification. In line with Liao et al. (2010), two independent inter-raters were asked to review the classifications, hence, strengthening the credibility of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Language Repair

The research findings after categorization of language repairs based on Kormos (2000), Levelt (1983) and van Hest (1996) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Types and Frequency of Language Repair

Types of Repair		**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**	**Total %**
Information Repair	Same Information - Repeat	4	5.8	29.9
	Different Information - Message Replacement	8	11.4	
	Different Information – Fact Repair	9	12.7	
Appropriateness Repair	Abandonment	4	5.8	37.1
	Replacement	16	22.7	
	Insertion Repair	6	8.6	
Error Repair		12	17.2	33
Back-to-error Repair		11	15.8	
TOTAL		70	100	

As seen in Table 1, the types of language repair are placed in four main categories namely Information Repair, Appropriateness Repair, Error Repair and Back-to-error Repair which reflect the aspects of language that speakers were concerned during interactions.

In Information Repair category which involves amendments in some earlier given information in the interactions, Different Information – Fact Repair, Different Information- Message Replacement and Same Information -Repeat occurred 9 (12.7%), 8 (11.4%), and 4 (5.8%) times, respectively. The examples of utterances involving these types of language repair are given in Table 2:

Table 2: Examples of Information Repair

Types of Self- Repair		**No.**	**Examples**
Information Repair	Same Information - Repeat	1.	C5: Err...to be hone...to be honest, aaa...I aaa...good with...with**...**Unisel but (use hand gestures while explaining)
		2.	C5: That grant we...I have **ten thou...10K** for each grant so that **I...I** think that was a the I can bring that to the...aaa...the "ni" lah expand for the future later
	Different Information - Message Replacement	1.	C1: I'm already encouraged my students which is aaa to takes subject of illustration which is aaa on that time **we already not** aaa **they not yet** taking subject for...subject digital of illustration
		2.	C5: **I will** aaa...I...**I already** aaa...approached my super...future supervisor
	Different Information – Fact Repair	1.	C1: I just finished defense proposal on 26 January emm...**last month** err...**last week**
		2.	: C7: And then, aaa...aaa...which is it is my err...**during my masters years, the right after my masters finish,** I worked as a marketing executive

As seen in example 1 of Information Repair-Same Information- Repeat which occurred four times, C5 firstly uttered ‘to be hone’ before she repeated her utterance; this time with a complete phrase ‘ ...to be honest’. Meanwhile, in giving the amount of her research grant as seen in example 2, the same candidate (C5) firstly uttered ‘ten thou’ to refer to ten thousand before she suddenly changed it to ‘10K’ which has the same meaning and is commonly used in informal communication context among Malaysians. This type of repair appeared the least among Information Repair, most possibly because the candidates had been very careful with their words in the interviews which is considered as a high-stake communication context.

In Information Repair, there was about the same number of occurrences in Different Information subtypes namely Message Replacement and Fact Repair which occurred 9 and 8 times, respectively. In describing the subjects taken by her former students when C1 was a part-time lecturer, the candidate used the wrong pronoun ‘we’ to refer to the students before she corrected it to ‘they’. Another Message Replacement was made by C5 while explaining that she had met her potential supervisor for her doctoral studies. Initially she used simple future tense ‘I will’ before she corrected it to ‘I already aaa.. approached (her future supervisor)’ (simple past tense).

Finally, in Information Repair- Different Information-Fact Repair, it can be seen that C1 made a mistake by uttering ‘last month’ instead of ‘last week’ when giving the date of her proposal defense. Similarly in

mentioning the time she started working as marketing executive, C7 firstly stated during her master's degree but later corrected the information by saying it was after she completed her master's degree.

From the above findings, it can be concluded that the speakers strove for both accuracy and precision in conveying information by making a necessary repair to clarify the same information through repetitions as well as message replacement and fact repair.

Aside from Information Repair, another main category of repair is Appropriateness Repair which indicates the candidates' efforts to align their utterances with what is expected to occur in social and discourse context. This was done through Abandonment (4 or 5.85%), Replacement (16 or 22.7%) and Insertion Repair (6 or 8.6%). Examples of utterances involving Appropriateness repair are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Examples of Appropriateness Repair

Types of Self-Repair		**No.**	**Examples**
Appropriateness Repair	Abandonment	1.	C5: And then, emm...**I start,** aaa...**I have** my Diploma in aaa...in Art and Design from faculty of Malacca
		2.	C5: Aaa....we have a another one aaa...aaa...for [this year]. But **still on**, aaa...**still we don't** have any exhibit...any exhibition soon
	Replacement	1.	C5: So, around one and half year, where that I go aaa...travel to Sarawak**, to give...to share** my knowledge
		2.	C8: especially my students because I want aaa...them to remember me as someone **who can aspire...inspire** them in any activities or any field they are involved
	Insertion Repair	1.	C2: I am from aaa **Perak, Batu Kurau, Perak**
		2.	C4: As for me, emm...for me, I like to make a **cloud...graphic cloud...graphic design cloud**

In Appropriateness- Abandonment Repair, C5 who was describing her background initially uttered 'I start' before encountered a difficulty to continue with her words. The candidate then abandoned her earlier words and started all over again by saying 'I have my Diploma in Art and Design'. In another interaction with the panellist, the same candidate was trying to explain that she was yet to be involved in Art competition. She firstly uttered 'but still on, aaa,,' before abandoning her words and started a new sentence "still we don't have any exhibition'.

The other type of Appropriateness Repair is Replacement Repair which appeared as the most frequent language repair (16 @ 22.7%) not only among Appropriateness Repair but also all types of repairs identified in the current study. This type of repair indicates that the speakers attempted to adjust their language for better alignment with contextual appropriateness. In the first example, C5 was explaining about her teaching experience in Sarawak whereby her intention was to share knowledge with her students. Prior to mentioning this, she used the term to 'give (knowledge)' which was rather an inappropriate term in this particular discourse context before she changed to 'to share (knowledge)'. In another example of Appropriateness - Replacement Repair, C8 changed the term 'aspire' into 'inspire'. The latter word conveyed her intended message more accurately.

The third type of Appropriateness Repair is Insertion Repair in which the speakers insert additional elements to their sentences to improve clarity or politeness. This is seen Table 3 whereby C2 inserted Batu Kurau after mentioning Perak as her home state, reflecting her intention to be more specific about her origin. A similar example is seen in C4 utterance who inserted the words 'graphic design' to her earlier utterance, resulting in more accurate term of 'graphic design cloud'.

From the above examples, it can be seen that appropriateness-oriented repairs are prominent in oral interactions which totaled up to 37.1% as opposed to 29.9% of repairs related to information accuracy. This finding underscores the importance of being appropriate to result in successful spoken interactions by taking communication context and social factors into consideration.

In the category of Error Repair**,** which refers to successful corrections of linguistic form, a total of 12 instances (17.2%) were recorded. This type of repair reflects the speakers' effort to produce grammatically correct sentences. As seen in Table 4, C2 revised her grammatically wrong utterance from 'I'm have' to 'I have to do it'. Similarly, C4 who initially uttered 'I can listen for', changed the preposition 'for' to 'to', resulting in a grammatically correct sentence 'I can listen to other's opinion'.

Table 4: Examples of Error Repair

Examples		
Error Repair	1.	C2: Still, **I'm have...I have** to do it for a to...to aaa...to contribute aaa...in my aaa...department
	2.	C4: I prefer to work in team, because in that way, **I can listen for aaa...I can listen to** other's opinion (use hand gestures while explaining)

Finally, Back-to-error Repair**,** which refers to unsuccessful attempts to repair erroneous utterances, was observed in 11 instances (15.8%). Examples of this repair are given in Table 5.

Table 5: Examples of Back-to-error Repair

Examples		
Back-to-error Repair	1.	C4: This one of the project that **I am most** emm...**that I most like**
	2.	C1: So, if they...they not doing their work, **I'm personally contact...contacting** them to submitted their work

In cases depicted in Table 5, the speakers attempted to repair their erroneous utterances but turned out to be reverting to the original or other incorrect form. This is seen in C4's utterances who uttered 'This one of the project that I am most emm...that I most like' when she was talking about her previous project. Soon after, the candidate attempted to repair her earlier phrase by replacing "I am most' with 'I most like' which is also grammatically incorrect. Similarly, when explaining about how she would deal with problematic students, another candidate (C1) who later realized her sentence 'I am personally contact (the students)' was incorrect, attempted to repair the sentence by replacing the word 'contact' with 'contacting'. Unfortunately, since the word 'contacting' is inappropriate to be used in this context, the repair made by C1 was considered unsuccessful. In total, Back-to-error Repair emerged at 15.8%, giving repairs related to linguistic errors a total of 33% when combined with Error Repair which occurred at 17.2%.

Based on the above findings, it is clear that appropriateness is highly considered by L2 speakers and hence, received the highest percentage self-repair amounting to 33%. This is followed by language accuracy that prompted the candidates to attempt repairing their errors (33%). Meanwhile, repairs related to providing information appeared to be the lowest with 29.9%.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the results of the current study indicate L2 speakers' concern with their language production, resulting in various language repairs initiated by them. To ensure successful use of the target language among L2 speakers, their efforts should not be taken lightly. The number of self-repairs ranging from 29.9% to 33% reflects L2 speakers' serious effort to enhance their competency in using the target language. As such, researchers and educators should help learners to make successful repairs on all types of errors caused by

various problems. As argued by Kasper (1985: 200), "studies of repair in the foreign language classroom should include all repair activities rather than focusing on one specific repair type (1985, p.200).

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