

(Un)Successful Error Repairs in L2 Communication

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ABSTRACT

Language errors in second language (L2) communication indicate that the learners are making progress in learning their target language. When these errors are committed, it is common for L2 speakers to make repairs on their utterances to ensure their intended messages are successfully delivered. While self-repair signals speakers' positive attitude in L2 learning process, repairing own language errors can be challenging since this requires close monitoring of the target language use while applying the linguistic rules correctly. In order to gain insights on L2 speakers' struggle in using the target language, the current study was set to examine the types of language errors incurred by 19 speakers of English as a second language (ESL) and whether they were successful in repairing such errors. In order to obtain real data, observations were made on the candidates' interactions with eight panellists during academic staff recruitment interviews, focusing on language errors and repairs made by the candidates. Data analysis started by categorizing the types of language errors in candidates' utterances before repairs on these errors were examined to see if the candidates were successful or otherwise in repairing their own errors; these were referred to as error-repair and back-to-error repair, respectively as termed by Kormos, Levelt and van Hest. The findings indicated that all 34 errors were related to language forms which could be further categorized into nine sub errors namely verb-form, word-form, prepositional, modal verb-usage, word choice, pronoun, syntactic, verb-tense and article errors. Among 15 successfully repaired errors, verb-form errors were the most frequent with six instances, followed by four prepositional errors and two word-choice errors while modal verb-usage, prepositional and pronoun errors occurred only once. As for unsuccessful or back-to error-repairs which occurred 19 times, syntactic errors were the most frequent, with six occurrences followed by verb-form and verb-tense errors, both with four occurrences. Other unsuccessful repairs involved prepositional error which occurred twice while article, word-choice and pronoun errors occurred only once. While the findings show L2 speakers' poor control over syntactic and verb-form and verb-tense of English, they provide insights on the language features that require greater emphasis in English language teaching in Malaysia.

Keywords: Error Repair, ESL Speakers, Language Error, L2 Learners, Self-Repair

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that language learners face linguistic complications and various challenges in learning second language (L2) (Haq et al. (2022)). While these learners are prone to make errors in the learning process, L2 errors should be viewed positively by learners and educators since they indicate that the learners are making progress in learning their target language (Atmaca, 2016). Among many possible reasons that cause L2 error, learners' first language (L1) influence on the target language termed as 'transfer error' (Corder, 1981) is commonly cited. Despite this however, many also cited the intrinsic difficulty of the target language subsystem is also the cause of the problem rather than the cross-lingual influence alone (Zembytska et al., 2022).

When L2 errors are committed, it is common for L2 speakers to make repairs on their utterances to ensure their intended messages are successfully delivered. According to Schegloff (2000), 'repair strategy' helps to

tackle difficulties or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding that can happen in interactions. Similarly, Beshir (2022) defines language repairs, as the “actions taken on learners’ erroneous utterances”. Despite the speakers’ positive attitude in L2 learning process reflected through the act of repairing their own language errors, repairing own erroneous utterances is actually challenging since this requires close monitoring of the target language use while applying the linguistic rules correctly.

In oral interactions which involve two or more speakers, language errors could be initiated by the speakers themselves or by others (interlocutors). A repair made by interlocutors on errors initiated by them is called other initiation-other repair while a repair made by the speakers on their own language errors is referred to as self-initiation self-repair. Based on Schegloff (2000) and Wong & Waring’s (2010) categorization of repairs, there are four types of language repair namely self-initiation self-repair, other-initiation self-repair, other initiation other repair, self-initiation-other repair.

Although examining all types of repairs offers a more comprehensive view on L2 oral interactions, the current study focused only of self-initiation self-repair among L2 speakers due to the nature of the research context which involved interactions in high-stake i.e real job interviews. In this context, power distance between candidates and panellists is obvious. Being the interview candidates, the respondents would be more concerned of their own language use instead of the panellists’, causing other-initiated repairs to hardly occur in the interactions.

Based on Kormos (2000), Levelt (1983) and van Hest’s (1996) perspective of self-repair, aside from language errors, self-repair could also be made to correct wrongly delivered information and fact or to increase appropriateness level in oral communication. Among all these reasons, the current study focused only on language error repairs done by the speakers themselves. In particular, this study aimed to identify the types of language errors that were successfully and unsuccessfully repaired by L2 speakers themselves. The findings would provide insights on the aspects of English language teaching the needs further emphasis so as to enhance L2 learners’ competency in using the target language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Errors in Second Language Learning

As stated earlier, it is common for L2 learners to face linguistic complications and challenges in learning second language (L2) (Haq et al. (2022). A review on past literature shows that there has been extensive research on L2 errors, particularly in the written communication. For instance, a study by Maitlo et al. (2023) showed some common language errors which included errors in punctuations, spellings, prepositions and tense aside from adverb, subject verb agreement, pluralization, pronoun, conjunction, articles and adjectives (Haq et al. 2022). While these types of errors usually occur in L2 learners’ writing tasks, morphological and syntactic errors as well as lexical and phonological errors were identified in oral communication (Zembytska et al., 2022). While these errors are expected in L2 speakers’ oral data, the extent to which the speakers were able to successfully repair their own erroneous utterances was yet to be examined.

Language Repair

Similar to research on errors in L2 communication, research on language repairs has attracted many researchers and scholar. Language repairs, as defined by Schegloff (2000: 207), are ‘practices for dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding the talk in conversations (and in other forms of talk in interaction)’. It should be noted that both language errors and repairs could be done by the speakers themselves or by others (the interlocutors). Other-initiation self-repair for instance, occurs when erroneous utterances are initiated by others and then repaired by L2 speakers. In other-initiation other repair, erroneous utterances are initiated by others (the interlocutors) who later make repair on their own utterances. Meanwhile, self-initiation-other repair is the condition when erroneous utterances initiated by L2 speaker are repaired by the interlocutor. Finally, self-initiation self-repair which becomes the focus of the current study refers to the condition when the speakers repair their own erroneous utterances. This type of repair reflects L2 speakers’ active concern about their L2 oral

production by adjusting the speech towards the standard form (Williams, 2022). Hence, findings on this type of repair would provide insights to what extent L2 speakers are able to function in the target language.

While past studies on self-repair tended to focus on strategies or techniques employed by L2 speakers in the context of classroom interactions (Cho and Larke, 2010; Beshir, 2022), the current study deviates from current literature by examining self-repair in real communicative context. Using Kormos (2000), Levelt, (1983) and van Hest's (1996) conceptualization to categorize the types of self-repairs that resulted in identifications of 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 this study the last two types of repairs (i.e Error Repair and Back-to-error Repair) were analysed in detail in order to achieve the research objective.

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine self-repairs on language errors made by L2 speakers, the researchers carried out observations on oral interactions between 19 candidates and eight panellists of real interviews conducted at one public university in the east coast of Malaysia. The purpose of the interview was to make selection for academic staff for three faculties at the university namely the Faculty of Art and Design (FSSR), the Faculty of Information Management (IM), and the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS). In the interview, the candidates were asked to carry out a mock teaching before they were invited for the real interview process which involved oral interactions with the interview panellists.

These interviews were conducted physically and online, whichever was considered more convenient for the candidates and the faculty. For instance, five FSSR candidates were interviewed via Cisco Webex while only one attended the interview in person. Similarly, all the five IM candidates were interviewed online. Meanwhile, three ACIS candidates attended online and the other five were interviewed face-to-face. The interview panellists consisted of eight members: the campus Rector, the Deputy Rector of Academic Affairs, the Heads of the three faculties as well as the Deans of the faculties. While the campus Rector, the Deputy Rector and the Heads of the faculties were physically present in the meeting room during the interviews, the three Deans from the university main campus in Shah Alam, Malaysia participated virtually.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection began with obtaining approval from the Research Ethics Committee and the campus Rector before arrangements were made with the Assistant Registrar to allow one researcher to observe and video-record the interview sessions. The purpose of video-recording the sessions was to facilitate data analysis process later on. Additionally, informed consent was secured from both candidates and panellists before the researcher started the observations.

In total, 19 candidates were interviewed. Although the recordings covered complete interactions between the candidates and the interview panellists, analysis was confined to the candidates' language errors and repairs. To maintain confidentiality of the candidates and the panellists, pseudonyms were assigned to each of them. Candidates were coded as "C1" to "C19," while panellists were coded as "P1" to "P8."

Data Analysis and Issues of Reliability and Validity

As stated earlier, the purpose of recording the interview sessions was to facilitate the researchers in data analysis. This started by importing the video data into NVivo software (version 12) which helped the researchers to do systematic organisation and coding of the research data. The coding process began with viewing of the recordings repeatedly to identify the instances of the candidates' utterances that contained language errors and repairs. These utterances were then transcribed and examined to identify the types of language errors occurred and whether these errors were correctly repaired. The results obtained were verified by two independent inter-raters, which according to Liao et al. (2010), is a sufficient number to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The use of NVivo software to manage and classify language errors

helped to enhance the reliability of data analysis while validity issue was addressed through interrater verifications.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the categorizations of language errors with the help of Nvivo software, the types of language errors identified and their frequency count are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of Language Errors and Frequency Count

Types of Language Errors		Frequency count
1.	Verb-form	10
2.	Prepositional	6
3.	Syntactic	6
4.	Verb-tense	4
5.	Word-choice	3
6.	Pronoun	2
7.	Modal verb-usage	1
8.	Word-form	1
9.	Article	1
TOTAL		34

As shown in Table 1, errors related to verb-forms occurred in the highest frequency amounting to 10 occurrences followed by prepositional and syntactic errors which occurred six times in the interactions. Verb-tense error was the third with four occurrences followed by word-choice and pronoun errors which occurred three and two times respectively. The least frequent errors were modal verb-usage, word-form and article errors which occurred only once.

Further breakdown of these errors based on successful and unsuccessful repairs are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Types of Language Errors and Frequency Count of Successful and Unsuccessful Repairs

Types of Language Errors		Total Frequency Count	Successful Repair	Unsuccessful Repair
1.	Verb-form	10	6	4
2.	Prepositional	6	4	2
3.	Syntactic	6	-	6
4.	Verb-tense	4	-	4
5.	Word-choice	3	2	1
6.	Pronoun	2	1	1
7.	Modal verb-usage	1	1	-

8.	Word-form	1	1	-
9.	Article	1	-	1
TOTAL		34	15	19

Table 2 shows that among 15 successfully repaired errors, verb-form errors occurred most frequently with six instances, followed by four prepositional errors and two word-choice errors while modal verb-usage, prepositional and pronoun errors occurred only once. As for unsuccessful or back-to error-repairs which occurred 19 times, syntactic errors were the most frequent type of error with six occurrences followed by verb-form and verb-tense errors, both with four occurrences. Other unsuccessful repairs involved prepositional error which occurred twice while article, word-choice and pronoun errors occurred only once. The examined erroneous utterances which were successfully and unsuccessfully repaired are shown in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Successful L2 Error Repairs

Table 3 shows erroneous utterances that were successfully repaired. Explanations on how the candidates repaired the erroneous utterances are given in the last column of Table 3.

Table 3: Types of errors successfully repaired by L2 speakers

Erroneous Utterances with Successful Repairs			Types of Language Errors Successfully Repaired	Explanations
Utterances	1.	C2: Still, I'm have...I have to do it for a to...to aaa...to contribute aaa...in my aaa...department	verb-form error	Repaired from 'I'm have' to 'I have'.
	2.	C3: I believe in my knowledge [in] creative...creative industry, I may help and given...give some benefits to students	verb-form error	Repaired from 'I may help and given some benefits to students' to 'I may help and give some benefits to students'.
	3.	C2: Still, I'm have...I have to do it for a to...to aaa...to contribute aaa...in my aaa...department	verb-form error	Repaired from 'I'm have' to 'I have'.
	4.	C2: Still, I'm have...I have to do it for a to...to aaa...to contribute aaa...in my aaa...department	verb-form error & prepositional error	1. Repaired from 'I'm have' to 'I have' 2. Repaired from 'I have to do it for contribute' to 'I have to do it to contribute in my department'.
	5.	C4: I prefer to work in team, because in that way, I can listen for aaa...I can listen to others' opinion (use hand gestures	prepositional error	Repaired 'I can listen for others' opinion' to 'I can listen to others' opinion'.

		while explaining)		
6.	C5: So that program aaa...I join to aaa...I...I...I... I mustI have must aaa... I must have aaa...business relationship	modal verb-usage error	Repaired 'I have must' to 'I must have'.	
7.	C11: My first degree aaa...is in aaa...Information Technology majoring in Information System Engineering aaa... at...aaa...from MMU Melaka	prepositional error	Repaired from '... at MMU Melaka' to '... from MMU Melaka'	
8.	C11: [I] continue my aaa...Masters studies and after aaa...finish[ed] aaa...my studies, I'm offer...I'm.. I got the offer to continue my Ph.D. from Faculty IM	verb-form error	Repaired from 'I'm offer' to 'I' got the offer'	
9.	C11: Okay aaa...I think aaa...if I am given the change err... the chance to be as a lecturer in this faculty aaa...and UiTM	word-choice error	Repaired from 'the change' to 'the chance'.	
10.	C9: I [was given an] opportunity or chance to working.. to work as a lecturer here...there	verb-form error & prepositional error	1. Repaired from 'chance to working' to 'chance to work'. 2.Repaired from 'here' to 'there'.	
11.	C11: Okay aaa...another aaa...my contribution to our university which is aaa... I'm also a very interesting err... very interested aaa...to trying aaa...the new project on innovation, inration or design of the our which is aaa...can contribute with the others company are so	word-form error	Repaired from 'I am also very interesting' to 'I am also very interested'.	
12.	C9: I also learn at, I also teach at USIM	word-choice error	Repaired from 'I also learn at USIM' to 'I also teach at USIM'.	
13.	C10: We can tell the parents that if the... if they didn't see any potential in theirself...in their children.. (use hand gestures while explaining)	pronoun error	Repaired from 'theirself' to 'their children'.	

Unsuccessful L2 Error Repairs

Table 4 shows erroneous utterances that were unsuccessfully repaired by L2 speakers themselves. The last column of Table 4 contains L2 speakers' possible intended expressions which are suggested for repair purposes.

Table 4: Types of errors unsuccessfully repaired by L2 speakers

Erroneous Utterances with Unsuccessful Repairs			Types of Language Errors Unsuccessfully Repaired	Possible intended expressions
Erroneous Utterances	1.	C4: This [is] one of the [projects] that I am most emm... that I most like	syntactic error	I like the most
	2.	C1: So, if they...they not doing their work, I'm personally contact...contacting them to [submit] their work	verb form error	I personally contacted
	3.	C1: But, besides teaching, aaa I'm currently... I'm aaa... like to share a knowledge with students to encourage them aaa to involve in aaa international exhibition also	verb form error	I like to share
	4.	C1: Okay aaa I like...I'm join for Asian Digital Art Society	verb form error & prepositional error	I join/joined Asian Digital Art Society
	5.	C4: So usually, by the earliest semester , the earl...emm... by the earliest start of semester for the first three weeks	syntactic error	At the beginning of the semester)
	6.	C5: After I graduate my degree, I start with aaa... work as a graphic designer at a Chamberawe International as a advertising agency	verb tense error & syntactic error	1.After I graduated with my degree, I started... 2.I [started] working as...
	7.	C11: And then, aaa... during the aaa...I'm working I continue my study aaa... I'm continue my aaa... Masters study and after aaa...finish aaa...my study, I'm offer...I'm I got the offer to continue my Ph.D. from Faculty IM	Combination of verb tense error & syntactic error	While working, I continued my Master's studies
	8.	C11: And then, aaa...during the aaa...I'm working I continue my study aaa...I'm continue my aaa...Masters study and after aaa... finish aaa... my study, I'm offer...I'm I got the offer to continue my Ph.D. from Faculty IM	verb tense error & syntactic error	After finishing my studies, I was offered/I got an offer to continue my PhD
	9.	C11: And then, aaa... I'm joined the innovation during my Ph.D.	verb form error & article error	1. I [also] joined innovation

	aaa... I'm also joined the innovation aaa...and already got the three gold medals and one silver medal		[competition] during my PhD 2. ...already got three gold medals
10.	C9: I really like teaching. So, aaa...in master also I learn...I teaching a student in PTAR. Okay, that's all from me. Thank you	Combination of word choice error and verb tense error	In Master's studies, I taught a student..
11.	C12: I want they know...I want Muslim Malay know more about what is our religion and what is how can we relate with our Creators.	Pronoun error & prepositional error	1.I want them to know 2.I want Muslim Malays to know
12.	C12: I want they know...I want Muslim [Malays to] know more about what is our religion and what is how can we relate with our Creator.	syntactic error	I want Muslim Malays to know what our religion is and how we can relate with our Creator.

As seen in Table 4, the types of errors that were unsuccessfully repaired by the respondents were syntactic errors which occurred six times, followed by verb-form and verb-tense which recorded four occurrences. Here, the candidates' sentences were not only misconstrued but also showed organizational of words and phrases that did not make sense; a condition that reflects serious language errors among English language learners in the current study.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that syntactic errors, with six occurrences, were the most difficult type of L2 errors to be handled by L2 learners as none of these errors was successfully repaired by the candidates. Other types of errors that were unsuccessfully repaired were verb-tense error and article error with occurred four times and once, respectively. Unlike these errors, verb-form and prepositional errors which showed 10 and four occurrences were repaired with more than half successful rate, indicating that the learners had some control on these aspects of language.

From what has been concluded, effective measures are obviously needed to help L2 learners produce sentences with correct structure and tenses. Since the data of this study were taken from L2 learners' oral language production in real communication context, the findings provide useful insights on the aspects of L2 learning that must be emphasized and addressed by educators and people of authority in order to produce competent English language speakers in Malaysia.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In the current study, the number of respondents was determined by the candidates who attended the interviews, which totalled 19. Since this number may not reflect a broader L2 learner population, future research is recommended to include a larger sample from various L2 proficiency levels so that the results can better reflect how proficiency level influences L2 learners' reactions to their own L2 errors.

Another recommendation for future research relates to the scope of analysis. While the current study focused on L2 learners' self-initiated repairs, future research could examine how these learners respond to language errors initiated by other, known as other-initiated repairs. In doing so however, the researchers

must ensure that the unit of analysis provides rich data for other-initiated repairs, unlike the current studies in which the interview sessions offered limited opportunities for L2 speakers to repair interviewers' language errors. It is hoped that results from both self-initiated and other-initiated repairs will further clarify the interactional dynamics in L2 communication.

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