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Repair Strategies Usage of Primary Elementary ESL Students: Implications for ESL Teachers

Eun Hye Cho

Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul, Korea

<eunhye.c@gmail.com>

Patricia J. Larke

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, USA

<plarke@tamu.edu>

Abstract

Repair strategies are the ways in which students resolve conversational problems in speaking, hearing and understanding. While there is a plethora of research on college and adult students' repair strategies usage, limited research has been done on the repair strategies usage of elementary school students, more specifically, English as a Second Language (ESL) students. This article examines the repair strategies used by 5 ESL primary elementary students in grades 1-4. Data were collected from 24 class hours of video recordings. The results revealed that students used 9 types of repair strategies:

1. Unspecified
2. Interrogatives
3. (Partial) repeat
4. Partial repeat plus question word
5. Understanding check
6. Requests for repetition
7. Request for definition, translation or explanation
8. Correction
9. Nonverbal strategies

Of the 9 types, students used understanding check 30% of the time and (partial) repeat 24% of the time.

Introduction and Background

The number of school-aged students who are enrolling in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in the U.S.A. continues to increase, especially in states like Texas, California, New York, and Florida (NCELA, 2010). Typically in these

elementary ESL classrooms, the instruction is delivered in English and many ESL students have limited English competence (van Lier, 1988; Cho, 2008). The English instruction and students' limited competence can impact miscommunication between students and teachers. In many situations, students try to solve this miscommunication between their teachers and other students to gain the appropriate understanding. Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) call these kinds of activities conversational repair, which is defined as strategies used by students for resolving miscommunication problems involving speaking, hearing and understanding. Yet, in many instances, teachers do not respond appropriately to repair strategies that are initiated by students. Understanding how students treat these communication breakdowns will provide teachers with more insights about how to develop lessons to assist students in the development of their language proficiency.

Since the foundational work of Schegloff et al. (1977) on repair strategies, there has been a growing body of conversation analytic work on repair practices in classroom talk as well as in mundane conversation. From the previous research, adult language learners employed seven types of repair strategies. Five of these adult language learners' repair strategies are from Schegloff et al. (1977), which includes unspecified, interrogatives, (partial) repeat, partial repeat plus question word, and understanding. Egbert (1998) provides one—requests for repetition—and Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2003) have another, request for definition, translation, or explanation. These repair strategies are used for communication breakdown from their natural conversation to classroom conversation.

However, little research has been done on young children's talk that involves the description of how students use different types of repair strategies in different conversation breakdowns in a second language classroom. As such, this study was designed to investigate primary grade elementary students' repair strategies in their classrooms. The research question that guided this study was: What are the types and frequency distributions of students' repair strategies that primary elementary ESL students employ in the classroom? This study will describe the conversations in the ESL classroom, why the communication breakdowns occurred, and how they were solved. More specifically, this article will:

- a) Discuss the research on repair strategies
- b) Share the results of a study that examined the types of repair strategies used by five elementary ESL students

Research on Repair Strategies

There are two areas of repair strategy research: strategies of native speakers in ordinary conversation and those of language learners in classroom settings.

Repair Strategies of Native Speakers in Ordinary Conversation

Repair is an organization of practices of talk in which speakers deal with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing or understanding talk. Schegloff et al. (1977) initially did a comprehensive and thorough investigation of repair in everyday conversation. The researchers identified five types of repair techniques that native speakers use when they encounter conversation breakdowns. Schegloff et al.'s (1977) findings have

provided the baseline data for repair studies. The following section discusses the five repair strategies by Schegloff et al (1977) that have been cited most frequently in conversation analysis literature. When someone other than the speaker of the trouble source initiates repair, there are several different practices used to specify the trouble source to initiate the repair.

1. Unspecified Repair Example

D: Wul did'e ever get married'r anything?
C: → Hu:h?
D: Did jee ever get married?
C: I have // no idea. (p. 367)

In the unspecified example there is a repair initiator 'huh' or 'what.' This type of strategy does not specify the trouble source. These repair initiations usually yield a repetition of the trouble source turn as noted in the next turn in D.

2. Interrogatives Repair Example

J: Tsk ther's Mako: (hh)
C: → where,
J: there, (p. 368)

In this example, there is a single question word such as *who*, *where*, or *when* as repair initiations. This type of strategy specifies a trouble source of the prior turn.

3. Partial Repeat Plus A Question Word Repair Example

B: Was last night the first time your met Missiz Kelly?
(1.0)
M: → Met whom?
B: Missiz Kelly,
M: Yes. (p. 368)

In this type of repair, there is a question word with the partial repeat of the trouble source turn. As noted, Speaker M initiates repair for the person "Missiz Kelly" with the verb *met* and speaker B completes repair in the third turn.

4. Partial Repeat Repair Example

A: Well Monday, lemme think. Monday, Wednesday, an' Fridays I'm home by one ten.
B: → One ten?
A: Two o'clock. My class ends one ten. (p. 368)

In this example, there is a partial repeat of the trouble source turn that is used for repair initiation. This type specifies the trouble source by saying the time *one ten* again in the second turn, and then Speaker A completes the repair by clarifying the time.

5. Understanding Check Repair Example

- A: Why did I turn out this way.
B: → You mean homosexual?
A: Yes. (p. 368)

Within this example, the repair initiator is *you mean* plus a possible understanding of prior turn. Speaker B is initiating repair at the trouble source by giving an alternate understanding of the trouble source, then Speaker A completes the repair on the next turn.

Repair Strategies of Language Learners in Classroom Settings

Few studies deal with the repair strategies employed by students (Egbert, 1998; Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain, 2003). Egbert (1998) studied the types of repair initiations that college German learners employed in dyadic interviews. She categorizes six types of repair initiation that included the five types observed by Schegloff et al. (1977) in ordinary English conversation and an additional type called request for repetition. Among these six types of repair initiations, partial repeats and understanding checks, the simplest strategies that can be transformed from learners’ native language, are the most common student-initiated repair types. Students do not use some repair types such as interrogatives and partial repeats with question words because those repairs require a combination of cognitive, linguistic and interactive skills that may not yet be highly developed.

6. Request for Repetition Example

- 36 I: *Was hat Ihnen dieses Semester im Deutschkurs*
37 *ni:cht gefallen*
What did you not like this semester in your German course.
- 38 (1.5)
39 → S17: *No:ch einmal?*
O:nce more?
- 40 I: *Mhm tch! Was hat Ihnen dieses Semester*
Uh huh tz! What did you not like this semester
- 41 *im Deutschkurs ni:cht gefallen.*
in your German course.

Native speakers did not find the request for repetition strategy in the data set of repair initiations. This strategy shows a repetition of the trouble source turn just as the native speaker forms of unspecified. In response to the S17’s repair initiation interviewer, Speaker I repeats the entire trouble source turn in lines 40 and 41.

Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain (2003) analyzed the data in an applied linguistics seminar for advanced German learners. With their data, they categorized seven types of repair initiation in which they added one more from Egbert (1998)’s typology which was request for definition, translation, or explanation. They compared the repair organization between students and their teacher and found that students and the teacher used different repair types. According to the study these differences occurred due to their role perception within the classroom. Students show a preference for more specific repair initiation techniques when interacting with the teacher. Students use this type “to avoid committing face-threatening acts that would seem inappropriate to their role in the classroom as learners” (p. 387).

7. Request for Definition Example

TR: *f-fatima hat banken (.) gesagt*
F- Fatima said (.) banks

→ S7: I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT *gegen*
obj-

WHAT WE'RE TALK- *gegenstand*
object

TR: *gegenstand ist ein objekit*
'Gegenstand' is an object (p. 386)

Here student S7 initiates repair to the word which she needs translation. The teacher (TR) provides the definition of the word.

Comeau and Genesee (2001) identified types and frequencies of bilingual children’s repair strategies during dyadic communication. Their study provided deeper insights about monolingual children’s conversational skills. Their study found that even before children acquire their native language fully, they attain relatively high levels of communicative competence. The study further noted that not only monolingual children but also bilingual children master important conversational skills, such as the ability to repair communication breakdowns, and that they are capable of responding differentially to various types of feedback.

The Study

The data for this study were collected between September and November 2007 in an ESL classroom in a suburban elementary school in Texas with five students. Twenty-four ESL classes were video recorded.

The School

The school was chosen primarily because of the diversity of its students (49.3% White, 22.3% Hispanics, 15.6% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 12.4% African Americans and 0.3% Native Americans). The ESL classes were also diverse, which provided greater opportunities for students to use the second language. At this school, students were provided the benefits of two types of ESL instruction: one from the ESL class

taught by a certified ESL teacher, and one from ESL tutoring classes taught by ESL tutors from the local university. Students' oral language proficiency and standardized achievement tests provided the rationale for having these two types of instructional support. Each class consisted of no more than four students.

The Participants

Five students from first to fourth grade participated: one Indian, two Chinese, and two Koreans. All participants had been living in the USA for less than a year. The first and second grade students (two Chinese and one Indian) began learning English when they arrived in the USA and had no formal education in English prior to their arrival. Those three students were in the same ESL class based upon their test results. The third- and fourth-grade students (two Koreans) had been learning English for three years as one of their school subjects while in Korea. They were evaluated to the same level of English proficiency and had tutoring class together.

The teacher was a female native speaker of American English with fifteen years of experience in teaching ESL to children. The tutors were two volunteers from a large local university near the elementary school. They were female undergraduate students majoring in child development and wanted a career in teaching. The teacher and the tutors were chosen on the basis of their professional interests and willingness to participate in the study.

Data Collection

All the data were collected from September to November 2007 after an Institutional Review Board approval. Videotaping occurred at least two weeks after the beginning of the semester after permission was granted. One researcher spent time in the room to learn routines and to develop relationships with students. This extended classroom presence also enabled the researcher to become familiar with the classroom routines. Artifacts, including the textbook, other activity materials, and board games were collected and examined.

Data Analysis

A total of twenty-four classes of video-taped data were transcribed following transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). With the transcribed data, this study identified all instances of repair initiations by students and coded them according to nine strategy categories. The types and frequencies of each category were tabulated.

The coding categories are illustrated in Figure 1. The coding process started with the Schegloff et al.'s (1977) five categories of repair strategies (unspecified, interrogatives, (partial) repeat, partial repeat plus question word and understanding check for their communication repair). Along with those categories, request for repetition discovered by Egbert (1998) and requests for definition, translation, or explanation found in the research of Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2003) were used.

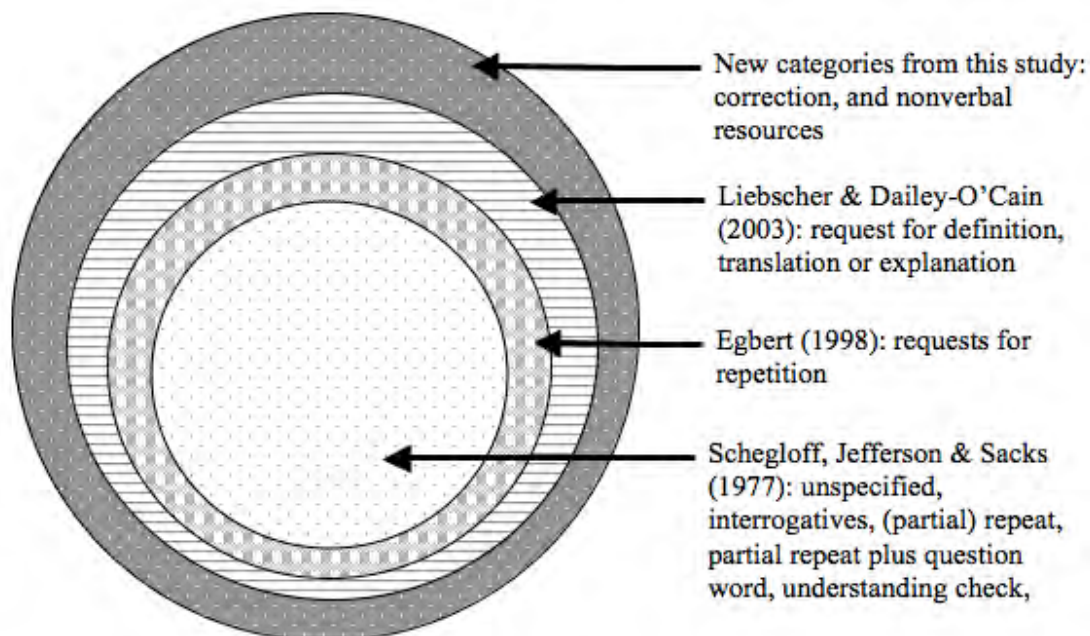


Figure 1. Coding Categories

Seven coding categories were used and for some data that did not fit, two new types of repair strategies (nonverbal resources and correction) were added to the categories from other studies. Nonverbal resources have been included in that they affect the meaning making process (Goodwin, 2000). Participants in conversation use not only verbal resources but also nonverbal resources to accomplish their communication (Hayahi, 2003; Streeck, 2003). Nonverbal resources, which were employed as repair initiators by the students, show that they are having communication problems. This repair initiation usually yields a repetition of the trouble source turn or a modified version of original utterances. The following is an example from Cho's (2008) study.

8. Nonverbal Resources Repair Example

- 1 TN: LC-2, what day of the week tomorrow?
- 2→ LC-2: ((patting his head with making squint eyes))
- 3 TN: what's [tomorrow
- 4 LC-1: [°fri-
- 5 TN: uh-oh LC-1, let's see if he can get it, what's tomorrow? (2.0) It
- 6 starts with f- f-
- 7 LI-1: <I know I know>
- 8 TN: just a minute. Let him think, just a minute
- 9 LC-2: (2.0) (°Friday)
- 10 TN: see↑ LC-2 knew all his own↑ (p. 59)

Correction has been added to the categories because of its frequent occurrences in the classroom conversation. In ordinary conversation, communication breakdowns caused by nonnative speaker are resolved in a way that minimizes interruption of ongoing conversation (Brouwer, 2003; Kurhila, 2004). However, participants in this study

tended to use correction explicitly in their classroom, even though other student initiates her/his repair to the teacher's questions or directions.

9. Correction Repair Example

- 1 TK: ok. today I sew with thread yesterday
- 2 LK-4: uhm? One more time
- 3 TK: today I sew with thread yesterday I
- 4→ LK-3: [sewed
- 5 LK-4: [sewed
- 6 TK: sewed (p. 107)

While they talked about the present and past verb forms, LK-4 had problems of understanding TK's question which caused him to initiate repair in line 2. LK-3 corrected LK-4's utterance in line 4.

Coding Reliability

To establish coding reliability, one female volunteer with a master's degree in ESL was recruited. After the volunteer understood the purpose of the study, she received training in category identification. The transcripts of two classes were used for comparison analysis. One transcript from the first/second grade students' ESL class was coded first with an agreement rate was 82%. After much discussion on the disagreements, both the researcher and volunteer achieved an agreement rate of 100% for that class. The third/fourth grade class followed the same procedure using one transcript from the third/fourth grade students' tutoring class. The agreement rate between the researcher and volunteer was 94%. This process provided coding reliability.

Findings

The greatest number of fragments of repair strategies were understanding check followed by, (partial) repeat, unspecified, nonverbal, interrogatives, correction, request for definition, translation or explanation, partial repeat plus question word, and the least was request for repetition.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Students' Repair Strategies

Repair Strategies	n	%
Understanding check	177	30
(Partial) Repeat	144	24
Unspecified	76	13
Nonverbal	59	10
Interrogatives	46	8
Correction	33	6
Request for definition, translation or explanation	32	5
Partial repeat plus question word	17	3
Request for repetition	5	1
Total	589	100

The ESL teacher was coded TN in fragments where as tutors were coded as TA and TK within the fragments. Students were coded as LI-1, LC-1, LC-2, LK-3 and LK-4. The second letter represents the ethnicity of the student and the number indicates the grade of the student.

Table 2. Abbreviations for Fragments

Teacher	Tutors	Students
TN	TA	LI-1
	TK	LC-1
		LC-2
		LK-3
		LK-4

Understanding Check

Elementary ESL students used understanding checks most in their classroom to initiate repair. Understanding checks represented 30% of the total repair practices. This type of repair strategy provides an alternate for understanding the trouble source. The speaker targets the trouble source more specifically than other strategies. In providing an understanding, the speaker indicates his or her interpretation of the trouble source turn. This type also refers to the students' repair moves where they explicitly say, "I don't know" or "I don't understand" to show their understanding problems and initiate repair.

Fragment 1 Understanding Check

- 1 TN: everybody's gonna have surprise party, everybody has to be very
- 2 quiet, the person is not gonna know. opposite of quiet is what↑
- 3 (3.0)
- 4 YEAH:: everybody says happy birthday very noisy, noisy, loud.
- 5 noisy↑ quiet.
- 6→ LI-1: magic?
- 7 TN: it's magic birthday I guess
- 8→ LI-1: is it turning up?
- 9 TN: yes it is turning up. ok. Everybody needs to be really really quiet,
- 10 shh:: (2.0) now want to be noisy? can you be noisy WOW AH::
- 11 those are opposite. OK↑

Teacher TN talked about the opposites *noisy* and *quiet*. In lines 6 and 8 in Fragment 1, LI-1 initiated the repair by offering a possible understanding of surprise party in the teacher TN's explanation in lines 1 to 5. In line 6, LI-1 negotiated the meaning of the surprise party with his alternate understanding *magic* and in line 8 with the words, "is it turning up." In lines 7 and 9 the teacher TN agreed to LI-1's understanding.

The conversation between the teacher and the students in the ESL class was characterized by frequent multiple repair sequences of understanding checks because of young students' limited attention to the teacher's explanations or directions. Fragment 2 shows the multiple sequences of understanding checks.

Fragment 2 Understanding Check

- 1 TN: let me see down there, see the windmill↑ look at that, here, that's
2 mill.
3→ LI-1: ((pointing to the sticker on the wall)) can I take it?
4 TN: no, leave it right there, do you know what mill makes? (2.0) they
5 make flo::ur
6→ LI-1: are we gonna make flours?
7 TN: well, we can make gingerbread man on Friday
8→ LI-1: tomorrow?
9 TN: no, another fun Friday
10 LI-1: NO
11 TN: it's coming soon. tomorrow you'll have some snacks with honey,
12→ LC-1: can I have it?
13 TN: we are gonna have crackers made out of this flour
14 LC-1: ((pointing to the flour in a ziplock under the picture)) why is?
15 TN: ((showing the flour to the students)) I'm gonna show you what I
16 brought today. this is flour made at the mill
17 LC-1: is it [real?
18→ LI-1: [can I see it?
19 TN: shh:: we will do that later ok?

The teacher (TN) talked about the pictures on the wall that illustrated the story "Rosie's Walk." Under the picture were samples of hay, flour, and honey, which were in the illustrations. In this sequence there were six repair initiations by the students in lines 3, 6, 8, 12 and 18. It seems that the students were distracted by the samples under the pictures and did not pay attention to the teacher's statements.

(Partial) Repeat

The second highest repair strategy used by students was (partial) repeat. Partial repeats accounted for 24% of the total repair practices. In repeats and partial repeats, some of the trouble source turn is used again in the repair initiation, which makes them more specific than unspecified repair initiations. Unlike the understanding check, the partial repeat did not yield lengthy sequences. With this repair strategy used in the classroom, the communication problems of the students were resolved at the next turn. Fragment 3 is an example of partial repeat.

Fragment 3 Partial Repeat

- 1 LK-4: which means useless and hind?
- 2 TK: hind? uhm, hind means the back
- 3→ LK-4: back?
- 4 TK: uh huh. and useless means that they don't have any use, they don't
- 5 work, they don't have any purpose

In line 3, LK-4 initiated the repair by repeating the word “back” from the tutor’s dialogue. By the affirmation of tutor (TK) in line 4, the problem was resolved.

Fragment 4 Partial Repeat

- 1 TK: ok. what place has palace, you remember?
- 2 LK-3: France
- 3 LK-4: where?
- 4 TK: the palace, the pretty big castle
- 5→ LK-4: um. castle?
- 6 TK: uh huh
- 7 LK-4: China

Fragment 4 is another example of a short repair sequence with partial repeat. It seems that LK-4 wanted to make sure what he heard by repeating the word *castle*. His answer in line 7 indicates that his problem was resolved.

Unspecified

Along with the (partial) repeats, unspecified was common student initiated repair strategy. Students use unspecified strategy about 13% of the time. This type of strategy does not specify what the trouble source (e.g., *huh? pardon? I'm sorry? etc.*). This repair initiation usually yields a repetition of the trouble source, which the repair initiator could not hear or understand the meaning of on the previous turn.

Fragment 5 Unspecified

- 1 TK: if the telling parts of two sentences are the same, you can combine
- 2 the naming parts using the word. and (1.0) like for instance
- 3 whenever you'll go somewhere, me and Mike go somewhere (1.0)
- 4 right? so it says my aunt went walking I went walking then, how
- 5 would you put together. anyone tell me?
- 6→ LK-4: uhm?
- 7 TK: how would you put these two sentences together, my aunt went
- 8 walking I went walking
- 9 LK-4: (2.0) yeah. (2.0) uhm, my aunt and I went walking.

In Fragment 5 line 6, LK-4 initiated the repair with unspecified. His initiation did not show if he did not understand the specific words or phrase or the whole of the tutor’s explanation. In line 7, the tutor TK chose to repeat the question that she asked right

before LK-4's initiation. In line 9, the LK-4's acknowledgement token *yeah* followed by correct answer to the tutor's question showed that the trouble source was the tutor's question and the communication breakdown was solved.

Fragment 6 Unspecified

- 1 TK: alright, we get to read a book today. have you been at a zoo?
2→ LK-4: uh?
3 TK: have you been at the zoo?
4 LK-4: ((shrug his shoulder))
5 LK-3: yes
6 TK: you've been in the zoo?
7 LK-3: yes
8 LK-4: yes

The dialogue occurred at the beginning of semester and students LK-3 and LK-4 were not familiar with tutors. Even though they had English education in their country, they showed limited oral proficiency in terms of hearing and speaking. Fragment 6 shows students' repair initiations to the unfamiliar speech of a native speaker in class. In lines 2 and 4, it seems that LK-4 could not understand tutor TK's meaning due to the unfamiliar speech of the native speaker. The first problem was not resolved by the tutor's repetition of the trouble source in line 3, and the student LK-4 tried to initiate repair with nonverbal again in line 4. After observing the interaction between LK-3 and the tutor TK, LK-4 finally resolved the problem.

Nonverbal

This category of nonverbal strategies includes students' gesture, bodily movement, gaze, facial expression and silence. Nonverbal repair strategies were used most of time by LC-2 who came to the USA one month before. Since LC-2 had no English instruction before coming to the USA, the only strategy that he used at the beginning of the semester was nonverbal. Fragment 7 is an example of a nonverbal strategy used by LC-2.

Fragment 7 Nonverbal

- 1 TN: LC-2 do you remember this one? ((to LC-2 pointing at her front))
2 this is the front, the opposite (1.0) ((turning around and showing
3 her back)) this is- this is the what↑ front ↑ b- b-
4→ LC-2: (°indistinct sound)
5 TN: ((showing her back)) this is what↑ this is called what↑ ok, [tell me
6 LC-1: [back
7 TN: this is your back, ok? front↑ back, front↑ back. ok,

In line 4 the student LC-2's repair initiation with indistinct sound indicated that he had a problem understanding the teacher. In line 5, his teacher TN provided the trouble source one more time. However, LC-1 replaced the turn of LC-2 by explicit correction in line 6.

Interrogatives

This type of strategy starts with a single question word such as *who*, *where* or *when* as repair initiations. This type of strategy specifies trouble source of prior turn.

Fragment 8 Interrogatives

- 1 TK: let's see and we are gonna read a book. have you read it before?
- 2 LK-3: that's e::asy
- 3 TK: easy:: i'm glad y'all think easy. ok start on the first page. this is
- 4 Silvia this is her papa. they are from Mexico or Spain.
- 5→ LK-3: who?
- 6 TK: Silvia. see the name↑ Silvia↑ they are Spanish name.

In Fragment 8, LK-3 initiates the repair with a single question word *who* at the line 5. To LK-3, the association Silvia with Spanish name contributed to break down the communication. It seems that LK-3 did not understand cultural context of the word. The lack of sociocultural knowledge was observed to contribute to the students' difficulty in understanding. LK-3's repair initiation with interrogatives was launched and the tutor TK mended the communication problems.

Correction

The students tended to use this strategy explicitly in their classroom conversation. Correction is related to not only linguistic errors but also comprehension of the trouble source turn.

Fragment 9 Correction

- 1 TN: what's the opposite of new. ((to LC-2)) you are wearing new shoes.
- 2 LC-1: I got new shoes too.
- 3 TN: these shoes are not new. they are what↑
- 4 LC-2: ((gazing at the teacher))
- 5→ LC-1: <old>
- 6 TN: old. new↑ old, those are opposites. I'll give this card to LC-2.

In line 4, LC-2 responded to his teacher with eye gaze, nonverbal way of communication. In line 5, the rushed talk of LC-1 indicated that he considered LC-2's gazing as a repair initiation and he offered correction to the LC-2.

Requests for Definition, Translation or Explanation

This repair type targets what needed to be repaired. Along with the requests for repetition, this type is specific to the classroom of language learners. In the Fragment 10, they are reading a book.

Fragment 10 Requests for Definition, Translation or Explanation

- 1 TK: there you go. (to LK-3) you wanna read this?
- 2 LK-3: male seals and sea lions are called bulls, females are called cows,
- 3 their babies are called pups, the pups are usually born on land.
- 4→ LK-4: um, (1.0) what is female and pups, what is female and pups?
- 5 TK: females and pups↑
- 6 LK-4: yeah
- 7 TK: female are girls
- 8 LK-4: aha↑
- 9 TK: yeah male seals boy seals are called bulls (1.0) like big cow
- 10 female seals are called cows, this is a little baby called pup.

While LK-3 read the textbook LK-4 encountered the vocabulary problems and launched repair right after LK-3's turn. Tutor TK's explanation about the repairable dissolved the communication breakdown in the next several turns.

Partial Repeat plus Question Word

This type includes repetition of the trouble source turn with a question word. In Fragment 11, they discussed the body parts of kangaroos.

Fragment 11 Partial Repeat plus Question Word

- 1 TK: ok. on the paper where are the back paws(.) can you circle that for
- 2 me? back paws?
- 3 LK-4: (pointing at the wrong word on the worksheet)
- 4 TK: right here, see that? those are the back paws, they use like hands
- 5 see that? right there. ok, look at your little finger.
- 6→ LK-3: where is back paw?
- 7 TK: (pointing at the word 'paw' on the worksheet) right there
- 8 LK-3: back paw?
- 9 TK: uh huh
- 10 LK-3: back paw.

Tutor TK asked the students to circle the words *back paws* and pointed where they are. However, LK-3's repair initiation in line 6, partial repeat with a question word, indicated his loss of the subject. In line 7, tutor TK's response resolved the communicative problem.

Requests for Repetition

This type is similar to the unspecified category in that it can also yield a repetition of the trouble source turn as response. Requests for repetition are specific to the classroom of language learners. In Fragment 12, they were talking about the past tense verb forms.

Fragment 12 Request for Repetition

- 1 TK: ok. today I sneeze wobbly, yesterday I, what verb form
2→ LK-4: uhm? one more time
3 TK: today I sneeze wobbly
4 LK-3: <sneezed>
5 TK: yeah sneezed.
6 LK-4: aha↑

In line 2, LK-4 started his turn with two types of repair initiation. Unspecified was followed by a request for repetition. Tutor TK responded with the repetition of the trouble source in her turn in line 3.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the repair strategies that elementary ESL students used to deal with communication breakdown in their ESL classroom. The data examined in this study showed some similarities and differences with the previous research on repair strategies. Elementary students used various repair strategies that were observed in conversations of adult native speakers and language learners. Specific repair initiation types such as understanding check, partial repeat, unspecified were the three common strategies used by elementary students. These findings are consistent with similar studies (Egbert, 1998; Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain, 2003). Understanding check is the most specific repair initiation type found in everyday conversation and partial repeat is also highly specific with respect to the kind of trouble that is targeted (Schegloff, 1987). The tendency of using specific repair initiations can be applied to elementary ESL students as well as adult language learners. Meanwhile, complicated strategies that require a combination of cognitive and linguistic skills, such as request for repetition, partial repeat plus question word, request for definition, translation, or explanation were not observed frequently. Since the students in this study were at the beginning level of English competence, they rarely used the most advanced types of repair strategies in their classrooms.

This study offers a contribution to the repair strategies research by examining the use of repair strategies in primary elementary ESL classrooms. After analyzing the data from the primary elementary ESL classroom, it became necessary to add new categories to the combined categories derived from the previous studies. Those were correction and nonverbal resources. In natural conversation, participants have a tendency not to use explicit correction; instead, they disguise this pattern as what Lerner (1996) identifies as “a list of alternatives.” However, the young language learners in this study tended to use this strategy explicitly in their classroom conversation. This type is related to comprehension of the trouble source turn and linguistic errors. It includes pronunciation, grammar, syntax, morphology, vocabulary meaning, usage of words, and content. Another strategy observed in this study is nonverbal resources. A wide range of nonverbal actions such as body movements, gazing, and facial expressions were found in this study by the students who did not have English proficiency.

Conclusion

There are three important findings in our research. First, this study involved analyzing conversations of young learners in primary ESL classroom while most studies involved older students and adult learners. By describing the process of primary students' repair practices, this study raises the need for elementary ESL teachers and researchers to be aware of the types of conversational problems that occur in primary elementary classroom. Such information can be useful in understanding the repair practices of primary ESL students in solving their communication breakdowns.

Secondly, results from this study support the need to examine ESL materials and lessons that will assist students in the development of repair strategies. This study found that elementary ESL students who were newcomers to US schools have a tendency to use simple strategies such as unspecified and partial repeat in their classroom. More attention should be given to the ESL curriculum that will assist students in developing more sophisticated repair methods and communication breakdowns.

Thirdly, this study adopted conversational analysis as analytic framework that is different from those previously used in second language acquisition studies. Instead of analyzing linguistic products of students, this study focused on the processes toward mutual understanding between students and teachers. With a micro-analytic approach, this study provided insights about ESL students' repair patterns, functions and strategies. Such research approach could assist in helping ESL teachers work more effectively with the increasing population of ESL students in US schools or in other countries that are experiencing population growths of ESL or EFL students. We do not propose that repair strategies are the panacea for helping students to increase their proficiency in learning a second language. However, we proposed that if educators were aware of the types of conversation breakdowns and repair strategy usage, they could utilize the necessary instructional strategies to assist primary students in the development of more sophisticated repair strategies.

In summary, much of the research on repair strategies has addressed repair strategies usage with adult language learners. However, the findings from this study indicate that primary elementary ESL students frequently use repair strategies such as understanding check and partial repeat, and that they also use nonverbal and correction. Since many students in the study are at the beginning level of English oral proficiency, they do not have the same knowledge of repair strategies or usage of repair strategies as adult language learners. Therefore, these primary elementary ESL students responded to their communication problems in their classrooms with simple strategies such as nonverbal and corrections. Moreover, it is imperative that more research is conducted with primary elementary students and their repair strategies usage to provide information about how students at this level treat their communication breakdowns. Such work is important in assisting the level of English proficiency for primary elementary ESL or EFL students who are growing rapidly in schools.

About the Authors

Eun Hye Cho received her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction with emphasis in English as a Second Language (ESL) and multicultural education from the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture, Texas A&M University. Her research interests are conversational repair, second language acquisition, and classroom conversation. She teaches in the Department of English, Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul, Korea.

Patricia J. Larke is a professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX. Her research interests are multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching, and educating teachers for diverse classrooms.

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