Discussion on Teacher's Conversational Repair in Primary School English Classroom

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Abstract: Conversational repair has been widely used in English classroom teaching in recent years, and it is an important topic in the field of classroom discourse research. Teacher-initiated conversation repair can help students accumulate experience, reduce errors, and develop language skills. This study audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed ten English lessons from ten teachers in a primary school in Zhaoqing City, Guangdong Province, China, with the aim of exploring the classifications, strategies, and related pedagogical implications of teachers' conversational repair. The findings reveal that in Chinese primary schools, SISR, SIOR, OISR and OIOR are the main classifications of teacher-initiated conversational repair, and the most commonly used strategies are direct correction, replacement, explanation and repetition.

Keywords: classroom discourse, conversational repair, repair types and strategies, instruction in Chinese primary school

1. Introduction

Conversational repair falls into the research field of conversation analysis, which was originally proposed by Schegloff et al. in 1977 [1]. Conversational repair refers to a speaker's self-correction of various types of speech errors monitored during communication, which is commonly found in second-language classrooms and is a key factor in measuring the success of learners' second language acquisition [2]. In second-language classrooms, being an important part of oral communication, conversational repair is an effective way to enhance the fluency, accuracy, complexity, and appropriateness of second-language learners' oral output [3].

However, although the research on conversational repair has achieved some results, there are still very few empirical studies on English classroom discourse, let alone empirical studies on primary English teaching. Therefore, a more in-depth inquiry into conversational repair in primary school English teaching can help us recognize the essence of classroom interaction.

What's more, a large number of classroom observations show that in today's primary school English classrooms, teachers have too much control over the classroom and students have fewer opportunities for making output independently. Besides, in most cases, teachers have difficulty in controlling the number, the ways, and the timing of repair. Therefore, this study focuses on ten English listening and speaking lessons of ten teachers, which were audio-recorded, transcribed, as well as analyzed, with the aim of exploring the categorization, strategies, and related pedagogical implications of teachers' conversational repairs.

2. Literature Review

Repair is a common phenomenon in conversation, which has important implications for CA. Due to different starting points, many scholars have defined repair from several perspectives. Repair was first proposed by Schegloff [1], who argued that repair refers to the handling of problems or errors in listening, speaking and comprehension in conversations and other interactive dialogues. According to Schwartz [4], repair is the process by which speakers reach understanding through mutual negotiation. While in Kasper's research [5], repair is the correction of problems in conversation. Besides, Yao Jianpeng [2], a domestic scholar, pointed out that conversational repair is the speaker's self-correction of all kinds of verbal errors monitored during the communication process. Scholars Wu Yongyi and Wang Shengheng [3], on the other hand, believe that conversational repair is the explicit manifestation of language

monitoring, meaning negotiation, and communicative behavior.

Linguists Schegloff et al. [1] were the first to study the structure of repair in conversation and concluded that this structure consists of a trouble source, initiation, and repair outcome. Based on the relationship among them, the following four structures are derived: self-initiation /self-repair; self-initiation/other-repair; other-initiation/self-repair; and other-repair; other-repair.

In the classroom, when the repair is initiated by the teacher, it is called "teacher-initiated repair". Since Schegloff started the research on repair, many scholars such as Kasper [5], Van Lier [6], Zhao Chen [7], and Zhu Yarong [8] have begun to study the phenomenon of conversational repair in the classroom.

Among them, according to scholar Zhu Yarong [8], the relationship among the trouble source, initiator, and the implementer in the teacher-initiated repair mechanism is shown in TABLE 1.

Table 1: Trouble Source, Initiator, And Completion in The Teacher-initiated Repair Mechanism

Categories	Trouble Source	Initiator	Completion
Teacher Self-Initiation Teacher Self-Repair	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher
Teacher Self-Initiation Teacher Other-Repair	Teacher	Teacher	Student
Teacher Other-Initiation Student Self-Repair	Student	Teacher	Student (Self)
Teacher Other-Initiation Student Other-Repair	Student	Teacher	Student (Other)

As for repair strategies, which is an important part of the conversational repair mechanism, have received the attention of many scholars [9]. Repair strategy refers to a certain method or means used by the repair implementer to repair the problems encountered in listening, speaking, and comprehension [8]. Research on repair strategies has been particularized as well as concrete. Schegloff [10] classified self-repair strategies into four: recycling, replacing, adding and restarting. Zhu Yarong [8] classified conversational repair strategies in postgraduate public English classrooms into eight: completion, reconstruction, explanation, code-switching, negation, word spelling, repetition, and recasting. More specifically, Wu Yongyi et al. [3] subdivided the repair strategies into two categories, linguistic repair as well as communicative strategy repair. In the study, the authors adopted the principles of these strategies when observing the class.

However, the above scholars mainly focus on the theory of second language acquisition, and there are very few studies on the repair of teacher-student interactions in primary school English classrooms. Teachers' repairs to students help students accumulate experience, reduce errors, and thus develop language skills. Therefore, the author believes that there is a need to conduct research on teachers' conversational repair in primary school English classrooms.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

This study begins with a conversational analysis of some of the repair segments from 10 English classes of five teachers in a primary school in Guangzhou City, mainly exploring the classification of teachers' conversational repairs, their strategies, and the impact they have on students' discourse output in the classroom. Based on this research idea, the following research questions are proposed:

1) What is the classification of teacher-initiated conversational repair in primary school English listening and speaking classrooms?

2) What are the strategies adopted by teachers to initiate conversational repair in primary school English listening and speaking classrooms?

3.2 Subjects

In this study, ten English listening and speaking classrooms in a public primary school in Zhaoqing City, Guangdong Province, were taken as the subjects of study (the contents of the lectures are selected from the listening and speaking parts in the textbooks), and the relevant teaching clips were selected for

transcription and analysis. This school is a well-known public school in Zhaoqing City with a high social profile and good reputation, and the students have a relatively high level of English language proficiency.

3.3 Research Methods

This study takes a conversational analysis approach, using both qualitative combined with quantitative, content analysis, and document analysis methods. A fundamental goal of conversation analysis is to identify the behaviors of interaction participants and describe the specific behavioral practices they use to accomplish those behaviors [11]. The data of this study mainly came from the transcription of the segments of repair in the videos of primary school English listening and speaking lessons, and the corpus was analyzed by combining qualitative and quantitative research methods.

3.4 Research Process

This study transcribed ten English listening and speaking lesson videos with the help of Feimiao and Jianying software, intercepted a total of 38 segments of repairs, and selected 9 of them for in-depth analysis according to the categories of repairs and the strategies of repairs. In addition, this study draws on Gail Jefferson's notation system for conversational transcription [12], which is authoritative and can better demonstrate the characteristics of classroom discourse. The system includes pauses, extended beats, etc., i.e., "→", "↑", ":" and "......" and so on.

4. Classification of Teacher-initiated Conversational Repairs

In this study, with reference to Zhu Yarong's study [8], the categories of repairs that occurred in the 10 lessons were counted, as shown in TABLE 2 where the frequency of each type can be seen.

Table 2: Classification of Teacher-initiated Conversational Repairs and Frequency of Occurrence

Categories	Trouble Source	Initiation	Completion	Frequency
Teacher Self-initiation Teacher Self-repair	Teacher	Teacher	Teacher	60.32%
Teacher Other-initiation Teacher Other-repair	Student	Teacher	Teacher	10.3%
Teacher Self-initiation Student Other-repair	Teacher	Teacher	Student	20.48%
Teacher Other-initiation Student Self-repair	Student	Teacher	Student	8.9%

As shown in Table 3, TSTS OS the most frequent in the classroom at 60.32%, followed by TSSO correction, and TOSS is the least frequent at 8.9%. Examples of each of the four types will be analyzed below.

4.1 Teacher Self-initiation Teacher Self-repair (TSTS)

Schegloff et al. [1] noted that speakers tend to self-repair rather than be directed to do so by others. These preferences suggest that speakers self-repair as soon as they realize they have a problem, and by doing so they reduce the time it takes to create a potential misunderstanding. The high frequency of TSTS in the English classroom also indicates that teachers still have a large proportion of English classroom discourse, and students tend to be passive in acquiring knowledge with little initiative.

Example 1(Beautiful Seasons):

01   T: →There are four seasons in a year,

02   spring, summer, autumn and winter, right?

03 →And I like winter best. It is cool and beautiful. (0.3) I mean, winter is cool and beautiful.

In example 1, the teacher was introducing knowledge about the "four seasons". When the teacher realized that "it" might cause misunderstanding, he initiated a repair after a 0.3-second pause. At the same time, he replaced "it" with "winter" in an attempt to make it clear to the students that the subject is

"winter". At this point, the teacher's discourse is the source of the repair, and the teacher completes the repair.

4.2 Teacher Other-initiation Teacher Other-repair (TOTO)

Teacher's repair is an indispensable part of the teacher's discourse in English classroom conversations. Through their repairs, teachers guide students to accurately participate in various communicative activities, creating opportunities for students to exchange information and express their thoughts.

Example 2(We're going to Hainan):

01 S: I am going to Sichuan.

02 T: Oh yes. A nice place!

03 S: I go to Sichuan by bus. I can going...

04 T: I am going to Sichuan!

The main focus of this lesson is to talk about travel plans. In this session, the teacher asks the students about their travel plans, and they are required to use the future tense to explain the destination and the means of transport. In the third line, the student wanted to say that he planned to travel to Sichuan by bus. The correct expression should be "I will travel to Sichuan by bus.", but he said "I can going to Sichuan by bus..." which is an error in tense and grammar. In the fourth line, the teacher interrupted and immediately repaired the mistake and said the correct expression. At this point, the grammatical problem in the student's discourse is the trouble source, and the teacher completes it.

4.3 Teacher Self-initiation Student Other-repair (TSSO)

In the TSSO mode, teacher discourse is the trouble source of repair. The repairs are usually initiated by the teacher, who then guides the students through the repairs. In this process, the question-answer pattern is one of the most common. In this way, the teacher is able to guide the students to think, complete the repairs, and promote their oral output.

Example 3(You can play football well):

01 T: I like doing sports, too. When I was a kid, I wish to be an athlete, what does it mean? Can anyone guess the meaning? Who want to have a try?

02 →Who can guess? Just have a try? You can say in Chinese.

03 S: (soccer player in Chinese) I don't know.

04 T: Ok, athlete means, uh, a person who does any kind of physical sports, exercise, or games, especially in competitions.

05 S: professional player in Chinese

06 T: Yes, you are right! You are so clever.

The content of this unit focuses on sports. The teacher says that she likes sports very much and she would like to be an "athlete". The word "athlete" is a little difficult for students in grade three so the teacher intended to let the students guess the meaning. However, the students failed to guess the meaning, thinking that "athlete" refers to "football player". After that, the teacher tried to explain it to the students in English, and immediately some students answered the correct meaning of "athlete" and completed the repair. In this case, the teacher's question is the trouble source and the students are the repairers.

4.4 Teacher Other-initiation Student Self-repair (TOSS)

Through repairs, learners can receive comprehensible input and output [13]. Teacher-initiated repairs prompt students to produce language output, which is beneficial for language acquisition. In classroom teaching, the process of teacher-initiated repairs and students' completion of the repairs are also considered as the process of students' language output.

Example 4(We love animals):

01 T: Look at the picture and let's guess together! You can ask me like "Is it a cat?" or "Is it a tiger?" You can use the sentence "Is it…?" to ask me.

02 S: Is it a elephant?

03 T: A elephant?

04 S: an elephant!

05 T: Yes!

In this session, the teacher showed the students silhouettes of animals on the screen and let them guess the animals. Students need to ask the teacher questions by using the sentence pattern "Is it a / an…?". In the first line, the teacher provided an example and asked the students to model his questions on the sentence pattern. The student tried to ask "Is this an elephant" but mistakenly said "an" instead of "a". On the third line, the teacher repeated the student's answer, and the student realized that she had made a mistake with the article and completed the repair by adding "an" in the fourth line. In this case, the grammatical error in the student's discourse was the trouble source, and the student was also the completion of the repair.

Strategies for Teacher-initiated Conversational Repair

Combining the above scholars' studies, the author has sorted and classified the classroom conversational examples collected in this study, and classified the revision strategies adopted by primary school English teachers into four: direct repair, replacement, explanation and repetition.

4.5 Direct Repair

Direct repair is a common repair strategy in the classroom. When there is a trouble source in a student's discourse, the teacher will directly correct the student's error, sometimes supplemented by some form of direct negative words such as "no" and "not". Although direct repair is commonly used, if teachers use overly direct or negative words, they may hurt students' self-esteem and fail to make them think deeply.

Example 5(His dog can help him):

01 S1: Is it your dogs?

02 S2: No. My dog is more small than it.

03 T: →Very good. Maybe you should say my dog is smaller than this one, not "more small", ok?

04 S2: Yes.

In this session, the teacher used a direct repair strategy by suggesting that students use "smaller" after noticing that they had made the grammatical error "more small" in the dialogue. This strategy can make students realize the root cause of the error in a short and efficient way, but it also bears the risk of hurting students' self-esteem. Therefore, teachers should use this strategy in moderation.

4.6 Replacement

Replacement, also known as substitution, is the topping up of a trouble source that appears in the verbal output of a second language learner to the self or others in some other form, with the aim of making the verbal representation more precise or reasonable.

Example 6(My day):

01 T: Every Monday morning, I go to school at 7:30 a.m.

02 And you guys attend, er…, come to the class at 8:00 a.m., right?

03 Ss: Yes.

In this part, the teacher was trying to describe her day. In the first line, when the teacher said "You come to class", she meant to say "attend to class" but realized that Grade 4 students might not know the meaning of "attend" and the related collocations, so she replaced it with the simpler "come" After that, thanks to the substitution strategy adopted by the teacher, the students were able to accurately grasp the meaning of the teacher's words…

4.7 Explanation

In addition to the two repair strategies mentioned above, teachers also tend to "explain" in the English classroom. In particular, when students do not understand the meaning of certain words or sentences, teachers use relatively simple and easy-to-understand expressions to explain them to students.

Example 7(What happened to your head?):

01 T: →When we talk about accident, we must pay attention to traffic accident. Because traffic accident happens all the time.

02 So now, what does traffic accident means?

03 S: No.

04 T: Traffic accident happens when a car hits a person, an object, or another car. It is very dangerous. So now, what does traffic accident means?

05 S: traffic accident in Chinese.

06 T: Excellent.

In Example 7, since the theme of the lesson was "accident", the teacher introduced the new word "traffic accident and found that students did not understand the meaning of the word. Then the teacher explained, "A traffic accident happens when a car hits a person, an object, or another car." In this way, the teacher explained the words and guided the students to answer.

4.8 Repetition

Repetition refers to the teacher repeating words or phrases spoken by the student. In most cases, repetition is accompanied by a change in pitch. By raising the pitch of the voice, the teacher attracts students' attention and highlights the source of the problem, thus allowing students to discover their own potential errors. As a common repair strategy, repetition is highly purposeful and useful in the English classroom.

Example 8 (My week):

01 S1: How's your weekend?

02 S2: I think it's so interesting.

03 S1: Er…what did you do?

04 S2: I usually do my homework. Then I played volleyball with my mother.

05 T: →You usually do your homework? Do homework or…?

06 S2: Oh, I did my homework.

07 S2: Yes.

In this example, the teacher asked two students to make a conversation about "what they did on the weekend". In line 3, S1 asked S2 what she did last week (the past tense), and S2 replied "I usually do my homework" (the simple present tense). Instead of correcting her immediately, the teacher waited for S2 to finish the sentence and then began to repeat, "You usually do your homework? Do homework or...?" The teacher guided the students to spot the incorrectness of the answer by repeating what S2 had said. Upon hearing the teacher's repetition, S2 immediately responded that there was an error in the tense and eventually completed the self-repair.

As mentioned above, according to the data collected, there are four main strategies for teacher-initiated repair in primary school English listening and speaking classes: direct repair, replacement, explanation and repetition. However, there are many other strategies in the English classroom that have not been mentioned in this paper. In particular, it is important to note that whatever strategies are used, teachers should make full use of their strengths to avoid adverse effects on students.

5. Findings And Discussion

As mentioned above, the findings can be concluded to the fact that in primary school English listening and speaking classrooms, teacher-initiated repair includes four main categories: TSTS, TOTO, TSSO, and TOSS. Among them, teacher self-initiated teacher self-repair is most commonly used. As for correction strategies, direct repair, replacement, explanation and repetition are most frequently adopted.

From the study, it can be found that conversational repair under the guidance of the theory of conversational repair has a certain facilitating effect on students' English listening and speaking classroom teaching at primary school, and it also provides some insights into primary school English listening and speaking teaching in the following three aspects.

5.1 Improve self-repair skills and set a good example

According to the above, teacher self-initiation teacher self-repair (TSTS) has the highest percentage of frequency, indicating that teacher self-repair is very common and of high significance in the classroom. Classroom language is special in that its main communicative purpose is to achieve the transfer of information and understanding between the teacher and the students. However, it is unlikely that every word uttered by a teacher will be immediately understood by the students. Therefore, teachers have to conceptualize how to get the most out of their words on the one hand, and on the other hand, they have to constantly check whether their students have understood their words. This is a complex dynamic process that leads to the inevitable occurrence of teachers' conversational repairs [14].

In Example 1 in the "Classification of Teacher-initiated Conversational Repair" section above, the teacher is attempting to repair his own words. Due to students' different levels of understanding and acceptance, teachers' words may not be entirely understood, and this situation happens every now and then in English class. This requires teachers to pay attention to the actual learning situation of their students, to make targeted repairs to their language expressions according to their different levels of English learning, and to make effective self-repairs so as to provide comprehensible input information for their students.

5.2 Control the frequency and timing of repairs, and be concerned about students' psychological needs

Correct and skillful repairs not only enable students to use the language correctly but also help them to develop good language learning habits [15]. Therefore, conversational repair is a necessary means for students to acquire knowledge.

Nevertheless, the number of repairs is not "the more the better" but should be in moderation. First of all, if the teaching objective is that students can express their thoughts fluently, teachers should not repair any mistakes, but should make repairs after students have expressed their thoughts completely. Too much intervention by the teacher will inevitably affect the fluency of students' English expression. On the other hand, if the teaching goal is the accurate use of the target language, then timely repair is necessary. Secondly, primary school students are not yet psychologically mature. Thus, if the teacher repairs every mistake and interrupts the students' oral output many times, repairs may become a mental blow to students. Therefore, teachers should control the frequency of repairs. Only in this way can we create a good environment for students' psychological growth and a safe classroom.

5.3 Guide students to self-repair and develop their thinking skills

Repair is an indispensable part of classroom interaction. However, it is difficult for learners to recognize their own mistakes and self-repair, which makes the guidance of teachers essential. Self-repair may lead to comprehensible output which is an important factor in successful language learning and a yardstick for measuring success in second language learning. Thus, self-repair is closely related to second language learning.

Therefore, teachers should act as "facilitators" and "encouragers". First of all, teachers should provide opportunities for students to speak in English. When the teacher discovers the trouble source, he or she does not have to correct it immediately, but wait until the student completes their speech and then give them appropriate guidance. In other words, it is the teacher who discovers the trouble source and initiates the repair, but the completion of the repair is the student himself. After that, the teacher should

offer encouragement and advice, so as to strengthen the students' confidence in expressing themselves and cultivate their learning interest.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned above, the findings can be concluded to the fact that in primary school English listening and speaking classrooms, teacher-initiated repair includes four main categories: TSTS, TOTO, TSSO, and TOSS. Among them, teacher self-initiated teacher self-repair is most commonly used. As for correction strategies, direct repair, replacement, explanation and repetition are most frequently adopted.

Regardless of the strategies used, teachers should make full use of their strengths to avoid adverse effects on students. Still, limitations exist. Firstly, the classroom corpus isn't enough. The corpus contains only classroom discourse from ten English lessons. The small number of students and teachers and the limited time available for the study are far from enough to depict a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of teacher-initiated conversational repair. Therefore, more related research on this topic with a bigger corpus on a larger scale is expected, which will eventually be devoted to the research field of classroom discourse.

Author Contributions

Shiting Chen and Jianfen Ying designed and conducted the research; Shiting Chen collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the paper; two authors had approved the final version.

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