

A Study of Repetitions as Conversational Repair Strategies

by Chinese English Learners

Lihong Quan

School of English and Education

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies

Guangzhou, China

sallyquanli@126.com

According to research, L2 learners resort to communication strategies in times of difficulty. One common communication strategy is the use of repetition, which entails the repetition of lexical and/or syntactic items by L2 learners. This study used data from the Chinese component of LINDSEI corpus and its native speaker counterpart (LOCNEC) to examine the similarities and differences between Chinese English learners and native speakers in the use of repetitions in terms of the forms and functions. The data were analyzed with a specific focus on the initiators of repetitions (the syntactic categories of the first item to be repeated in repetitions). Based on the previous research, the present study aimed to seek answers to the following questions:

1. How do L2 learners and NSs use repetitions differently in terms of their forms?
2. How do L2 learners and NSs use repetitions differently in terms of their functions?
3. How do L2 learners and NSs use repetitions differently in terms of the initiators of repetitions?

We selected the data from LINSEI-China and LOCNEC with the same tokens and the same tasks in order to ensure the comparability of the two corpora. During the coding process, we ensured that the observed repetitions belonged to the same-turn category. The data collected was analyzed in two stages. Firstly, repetitions were divided into two groups: as word-level repetitions (WLR) (e.g. ...I... I) and group-level repetitions (GLR) (e.g. ...we should... we should). WLR were categorized according to their syntactic classes such as subject pronoun, determiner, noun, etc.. The rubrics were adapted from Maclay and Osgood (1959) and Bada's (2010) classifications. Syntactic categorization of GLR was made considering the class of the words initiating the groups. Secondly, we investigated repetitions in terms of their functions. The rubrics were adapted from Hieke's (1981) classification, in which repetitions were considered to have two major functions: as vocalized fillers (planning for a new utterance) and as self-repairs (modification of the utterance in the repeated form, e.g. ...*I can*... *I could*). A chi-square analysis was conducted to see whether the dispersion of frequencies was statistically significant.

The results of this study indicated that: (1) In general, L2 learners employed more repetitions at the form and function levels than NSs; (2) For both L2 learners

and NSs, there were more WLRs than GLRs; (3) Most observed initiators of repetitions among the two corpora were subject pronouns and determiners. One striking finding was that L2 learners utilized more verbs as initiators of repetitions than NSs; (4) For both L2 learners and NSs, there were more WLRs than GLR as vocalized fillers while there were more GLRs than WLRs as self-repairs. We interpreted the findings from a psycholinguistic and cognitive perspective, specifically, employing the Theory of Attention and Automaticity. Finally, we summarized the implications of this study for the teaching of English with specific reference to L2 learners' use of communication strategies and their oral communicative competence.

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