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Repair Sequences in Iranian EFL Learners' Interactions: A case of Azad University Translation Students

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ABSTRACT

In conversation analysis, repair is defined as practices for dealing with troubles in talk (Schegloff, 2000,3). From a sequential perspective, it is divided into self-initiated, self–repair (SISR), self–initiated, other-repair (SIOR), other-initiated, self-repair (OISR), and other-initiated, other-repair (OIOR). In order to investigate what type of repair occurs more regarding two linguistic categories of syntax and pronunciation, the oral performance of 30 sophomore university students as a convenient sampling, majoring in translation, was recorded and then transcribed. The analysis of data revealed a preference for SISR and OIOR in terms of syntax and OIOR and OISR in terms of pronunciation. Altogether, OIOR was the most common repair sequence and SIOR was the least. Inadequate Knowledge of students about pronunciation and grammatical troubles was one the major reasons for the high occurrences of OIOR. Likewise, inadequate production practice among Azad University students may be a relevant reason for the low frequency of SIOR.

1. **Introduction**

Repair has been defined as practices for dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing and understanding the talk in conversation and in other forms of talk in interaction (Schegloff, 2000:3). And from a sequential perspective it can be occurred in one of four forms self-initiated, self-repair (SISR), self-initiated, other-repair (SIOR), other-initiated, self-repair (OISR) and other-initiated, other-repair (OIOR) (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977). Along with the other conversational mechanisms like turn-taking and discourse markers, repair has been in the realm of scholars' investigations. Conversational analysts have examined repair-related actions from different aspects and in different contexts and settings (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schwartz, 1980; Firth, 1996; Wong, 2000a; Buckwalter, 2001; Hosoda, 2006; Nakamura, 2008 among others). Specialists in the field have been interested in how, when and where these mechanisms have been applied by speakers and interlocutors in dialogues and monologues. Some studies have examined the type of repair (for example, Schegloff, 2000) and some have investigated it in terms of setting (for example, Nakamura, 2008).

Obviously, since conversation analysis (hereafter CA), at the beginning, has mostly considered interaction among native speakers, many studies have been done in this regard. Yet it has also examined conversational mechanisms among second language speakers (Carroll, 2000; Wong, 2000b; Markee, 2000, 2004a; Mori, 2002, 2003; Hauser, 2003; Gardner & Wogner, 2004; Kurhila, 2004; Seedhouse, 2004 among others). However, concerning literature on foreign language speakers' conversation (except some studies like Buckwalter, 2001) it seems that not many investigations have been done in this regard at least in the case of Iranian EFL university students and in particular Payame Nour University Students. So, there seems to be room to examine how foreign language learners use conversation mechanisms, specifically repair, in talk. With respect to this, the present study attempts to investigate how Iranian EFL learners apply repair in ongoing talk. So, the major question is among the four types of repair, SISR, SIOR, OISR and OIOR, which one is more common, or more occurred, among Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the investigation purports to see between the two language categories of pronunciation and syntax which one receives more repair-related actions.

2. Literature Review

In this section, first, it will be elaborated on the nature of repair and then some of the conducted studies which are more relevant to the present one will be reviewed. Unlike second language acquisition (SLA) in which repair, to a great extent, is narrowed down to error correction, in the CA sense, according to Schwartz (1980) it "encompasses not only error correction or the replacement of an error for the correct form but also the wider world of repair in conversation when there is no audible error" (p. 38). Based on ideas like this, Schegloff (2007: 100) states that "anything in the talk may be treated as in need of repair. Everything is a possible repairable or a possible trouble-source." Shokouhi and Kamyab (2003: 100) defines repair in a more understandable way stating that "repair is the way by which we find a way to do with interaction problems." Schegloff et al. (1977) looks at repair from the speakers' point of view as "a self-righting mechanism" (p. 34) and from the speakers' and the interlocutors' viewpoint as "a co-managed process" (ibid). Likewise, concerning the levels at which repair can be occurred, Johnson and Johnson (1998: 274) state that "repair may focus on either meaning or form, and operate at any level: phoneme, morpheme, word, phrase, clause, sentence or discourse."

Regarding the organization of repair, it can be characterized in terms of who initiates the repair and who performs it. When there is a problem in the conversation or talk it can be detected by the speaker himself/herself or by the interlocutor, thus self-initiated or other-initiated. Then the repair can be done, again, by the speaker or the interlocutor and this leads to self-repair or other repair. This in turn leads to four possible repair sequences which Schegloff et al. (1977: 364-368) summarize as follows: [see also Levinson (1983: 340-341)]

1) Self-initiated, self-repair (SISR). 2) Self-initiated, other repair (SIOR).

3) Other-initiated, self-repair (OIOR). 4) Other-initiated, other-repair (OIOR)

Looking at repair in this regard is to some extent different from what is concerned in SLA perspective because in SLA repair is the correction of the problem which has occurred due to a lack of L2 system and is mostly done by someone else other than the

speaker or self. To clarify this point more, consider the following example taken from Buckwalter (2001:381):

1- NS: What do you want on your pizza?

2- NNS: Pardon?

3- NS: Do you want sausage or pepperoni?

According to Buckwalter (2001: 381), here, in SLA sense the inclination would be to see the trouble source from the NNS interpreting the data to mean that the NNS has not understood the content of line 1 due to an inadequate L2. But in CA, who really is at fault is not relevant. Rather "using the concept of self and other allows for a more objective approach to the data than does the assumption of an incomplete or incorrect L2 system" (ibid). Therefore, from the CA perspective the above example is an example of other-initiated, self-repair.

As mentioned in the previous section, many studies have investigated repair among both first language speakers and second language speakers. Here some of them which are more relevant to the present one will be mentioned. In investigating repair sequences, Kurhila (2004) in a study examined L1-L2 Finnish conversation in institutional settings. Kurhila concluded that when language expertise was on the focus, it was mostly triggered by L2 speakers' activities that displayed linguistic trouble. L1 speakers rarely commented on L2 speakers' linguistic efforts and kept orienting to their institutional role. However, when L1 speakers oriented to their language expertise, they displayed their orientation by correcting L2 speakers' language use (mentioned in Hosoda, 2006: 28-29). So, it can be said that the repair sequence that Kurhila observed was self-initiated, other-repair. Unlike the present study, Hosoda (2006) investigated repair and relevance of differential language expertise in casual conversation between speakers of Japanese as a first and second language. After analyzing data, she found that "participants' disfluencies or linguistic errors were usually not treated as instructional trouble" (p. 34). She concluded that "the sequential environment in which differentially distributed linguistic knowledge became relevant was that of repair, specially (a) when one speaker invited the other's repair and (b) when mutual understanding was jeopardized unless one party repaired the other" (p. 44). Concerning repair two

outstanding points can be drawn from Hosoda's research. First, two types of repair has been happened, SIOR and OISR, and second, repair has been applied for eliminating of ambiguity and misunderstanding and this has been done by 'self' or 'other'.

Wong's (2000a) belief that CA had been largely confined to native speakers discourse encouraged her to conduct a research to show how non-natives produced the talk in a way which was different from that of natives. She examined 'oral practice' of non-native speakers of English whose native language was Mandarin. Her findings have revealed that other-initiation of repair "is delayed within next turn position" (p. 245) and also other–repair initiation has been considered as a resource for "avoiding and correcting miscommunication and misunderstanding" (p. 244).

Wong's (2000a) findings that other–initiation repair by non-natives may orderly be delayed were compared by natives of English in a study by Schegloff (2000), one of the pioneering figures in CA. Based on his earlier study in which he introduced another term for next turn repair initiation (NTRI) namely "fourth position (Schegloff, 1992), he re-examined this matter and discussed the location of other–initiation repair. He concludes that "most OI which appears to have positioned in other than the next turn after the trouble–source which it locates can be understood by reference to the organization of repair itself, the organization of turns and turn- taking" (p. 233). Likewise, in the postscript of his study Schegloff states that the studies of participating of non-natives in interaction should not be considered as separable from the study of general talk–in–interaction (ibid).

Regarding interaction in a foreign language, Buckwalter (2001) examined the dyadic discourse between university students of Spanish as a foreign language. The study aimed at investigating the ways in which adult classroom learners of Spanish would cope with difficulties faced when using the L2. She considered all types of repair, SISR, SIOR, OISR and OIOR in categories of Lexicon, morphology, pronunciation, syntax and ambiguity. She found that "SISR was the most common repair sequence and operated on the lexicon, Pronunciation and morphosyntax, with repairs on the lexicon and morphosyntax being the most Frequent" (p. 386). Based on her data, SIOR was the second, then OISR and finally OIOR.

Finally, Nakamura (2008), as a practitioner–research, studied informal teacher–student talk outside of classroom setting. She found that although learners possessed limited language knowledge, they profited from adequate conversational sense to participate in face-to-face interaction (p. 280). She concludes that "repair sequences are co-managed and thus allow both participants to contribute despite imperfections (on both sides)" (ibid).

3. Method

3.1 Data collection

The data were collected through audio-taping in a classroom at University of Payame-Nour in Islamabad, a city located in Kermanshah province in Iran. All participants (30 translation students, both female and male) who mostly were the second-year students participated in an exam session for the course of oral reproduction of short stories 1. They had been assigned to read a story and summarize and present it as a part of their final examination. But this was done in a face-to-face interaction with the instructor. Recordings did not impose any stress or abnormality on the participants because recordings were made for other oral courses. Participants had been said that recordings were made for more objective evaluation of their performances. Also, the participants' performances were completely recorded to understand and investigate their actual foreign language practice. Although the students' performances were in the form of monologue, they sometimes conversed with the instructor and the monologue changed to a dialogue.

3.2 Data Analysis

After recording the data, they were listened and transcribed to be analyzed in terms of repair–related actions. Two paper sheets were supplied that each one was divided into four columns and each column for one type of repair, SISR, SIOR, OISR, OIOR. Then one paper sheet was allotted for repairs related to pronunciation and the other for syntax. After that, while listening and transcribing, wherever a repair–related action was detected it was analyzed to be found that to which language category (pronunciation or syntax) and also to which type of repair it belonged to. Likewise, during analyzing the

data some repair-related points were realized which pertained to lexicon and under the type of SIOR but they were excluded from the data because their frequency was very low. The last point needs to be mentioned here is that since in this study the sample size was not very large there was no attempt to generate a random sample of the data rather the total data were analyzed and then quantified in the form of percentage using descriptive statistics.

4. Findings

	SISR	SIOR	OISR	OIOR
■ occurrence of repairs	6	4	30	43
□ percent	0.07	0.05	0.36	0.52
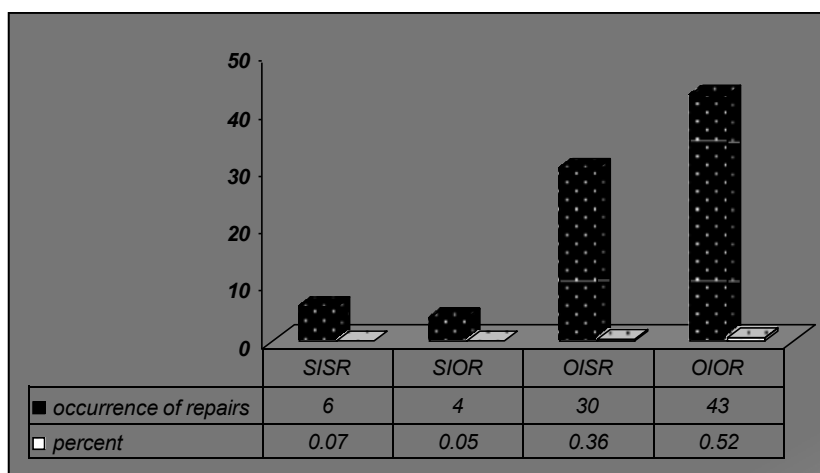
Figure: 1. Repair Sequences for Pronunciation

	SISR	SIOR	OISR	OIOR
■ occurrence of repairs	26	3	17	25
□ percent	0.37	0.04	0.24	0.35

Figure: 2. Repair Sequences for Syntax

	SISR	SIOR	OISR	OIOR
■ occurrence of repairs	32	7	47	68
□ percent	0.21	0.04	0.3	0.45

Figure: 3. Repair Sequences for Pronunciation and Syntax

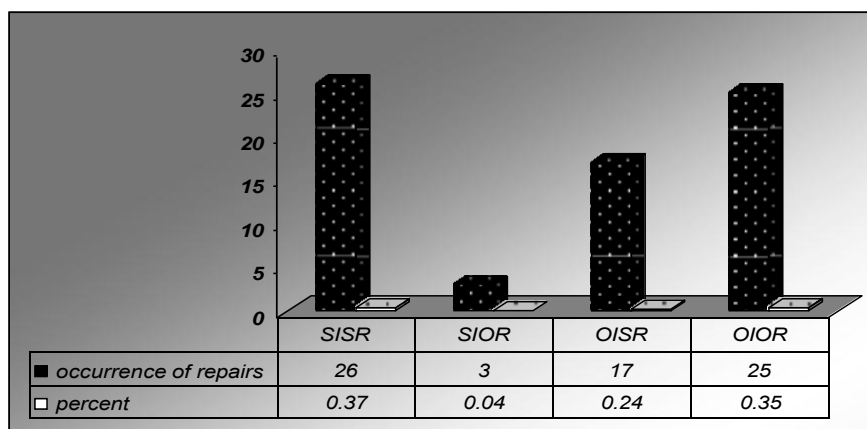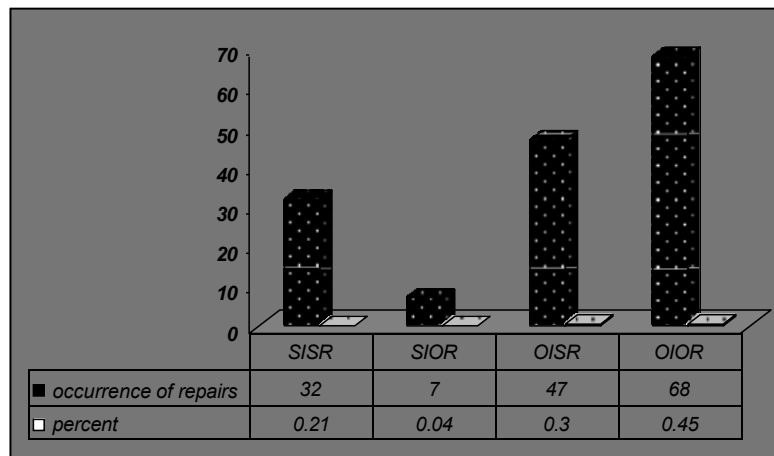According to Results shown in Figure 1, OIOR was overwhelmingly the most common repair sequence (45%) found in the data and it was found to operate on the pronunciation and syntax. Then comes OISR (30%) and after that SISR (21%). The least common repair sequence was SIOR (4%) among the four types of repair. Generally speaking, these repair sequences occurred in the same order for both syntax and pronunciation. That is, OIOR, OISR, SISR, and SIOR. This shows that altogether participants have not been aware of the problems in their talk and even when these problems were signaled by others. They could not repair them. So, the most number of participants' problems in talk relate to these problems that they are not aware of them and must be singled out by others. To be precise in terms of each repair sequence and exactly how they have occurred in the two language categories of pronunciation and grammar, repair sequences are separately analyzed in the following.

4.1 Repair Sequences of Grammar

As it has been shown in Figure 2, the order of repair sequences is SISR, OIOR, OISR, and SIOR. Each one has been exemplified and analyzed in the following.

4.1.1 Self-initiated self-repair

This type of repair was the most common repair sequence which occurred among the four types of repair. In this section, repair of correct form of verb and of noun modifiers for agreement of number and word replacement were more common. In the following excerpts some of these repairs have been illustrated.

Excerpt 1:

Student: One day Mary in the garden finds .. found an a strange thing

Excerpt 2:

 In the garden, Mary keeps .. kept pets (excuse me) some pets

Excerpt 3:

 …It happened about ten year ago ten years ago.

Excerpt 4:

At midnight, she hears …heard a strange sound …..

In the above excerpts, the learners incorrectly inflected the verb, and then, following a pause made morphological self-repairs that moved the utterances toward the target language form.

4.1.2 Other-initiated other-repair

This type of repair which consists of the correction of another's error was the second most common repair sequence in the data. In most instances, the learner accepted other-correction and either repeated it in isolation or included it in ongoing talk. The troubles consisted of incorrect form of verb, lack of articles, and lack of verb "be".

Excerpt 5:

Student: …He went to the garden and sit on the grass…(N)

Instructor: sit on the grass=

Students: sits on the grass.

 Instructor: sat on the grass.

Excerpt 6:

Student: ..And she afraid from him

Instructor: She ..

Student: She afraid … (N)

Instructor: she was afraid of him.

Excerpt 7:

Student: People took the woman to the center of the town and want to know who is the

father of baby

Instructor: And want

Student: yes want to…

Instructor: wanted to known …….**.**

 4.1.3 Other-initiated self-repair

In interaction between two learners or two people at roughly the same level of English, OISR is an indication of non-understanding. In most cases, it reflects a lack of familiarity with a lexical item or a grammatical structure used by one of the speakers. However, since, in this research, the instructor was more proficient than the learners, in most cases he knew what the correct structure was but intentionally repeated the incorrect structure to understand the reaction of learners, that is, whether they correct

the troubles in their utterances or not. In this part, again, most of the repairs were around the incorrect use of the verb form and lexical items. The following excerpts are a small portion of OISR.

Excerpt 8:

Student: He decided to came back …and when he arrived

Instructor: He decided to came back=

Student: He decided to come back

Excerpt 9:

Student: People took the woman to the center of the town and want know that who is

the father of the baby.

Instructor: And want…

Student: and…wanted…wanted to know…

Excerpt 10:

Student: One night the young minister said: I'm a sin person. Why all people loved me.

I'm not a good person…

Instructor: A sin person…

Student: Uh.. sinful… yes sinful person

Excerpt 11:

Student: Then Hester and her girl went near (   )

Instructor: Hester and her = girl

Student: No.. no.. Hester and her daughter… (   )

4.1.4 Self -initiated other-repair.

SIOR was rare in the data and only 4% of the collected data related to this type of repair. The two following excerpts show this type of repair.

Excerpts 12:

Student: They work in Mr. Wood's farm.

Student: In Mr. Wood's farm?

Instructor: On Mr. Wood's farm

Excerpt 13:

Student: He said …it is rubbish, take it out …take it out? or…

 Instructor: Take it away

Student: Yes, take it away

4.2 Repair sequences of pronunciation

Unlike repair sequences of grammatical category which consisted of different sub-categories, repair sequences of pronunciation mostly centered on the incorrect pronunciation of words. Likewise, most of the repair sequences included OIOR and OISR. That is, 88% of repair sequences consisted of these two types of repair. So in the following these two types are illustrated in detail and the two others, SISR and SIOR, are just exemplified in passing.

4.2.1 Other–initiated other–repair

OIOR was the most common repair occurred in the whole data so that 52% of data related to this type of repair. This is because most of university students at this level are not aware of their pronunciation problems and therefore even when their problems are singled out by others, they themselves cannot repair the trouble. However, the root of this problem comes back to high school and pre-university period (Yamohammadi, 2000). The evidence for ratifying this problem is that sometimes learners face with difficulty in pronouncing simple words. Like the following excerpts (the underlined words were pronounced incorrectly by the learners).

Excerpt 14:

Student: …He was ill

Instructor: He was =

Student: he was ill? I mean (body gesture) …

Instructor: @ ..He was ill

Excerpt 15:

Student: …So the winds were moving fast

Instructor: So the

Student: Winds? (pronounced incorrectly)

Instructor: Winds

Other common examples of OIOR of pronunciation are as follow:

Excerpt 16:

Student: This is the most important night in your life, Mr. Wood said. But Tony was

too tired to answer the <u>question</u>

Instructor: Answer the=

Students: <u>Question</u> (pronounced incorrectly)

 Instructor: Question

Excerpt 17:

Students: He didn't believe my story and called me a <u>thief</u>

Instructor: Called me a …

Student: <u>Thief</u> (pronounced incorrectly)

Instructor: You mean some one who robs or steals money

Students: Yes .. yes

Instructor: Thief

Excerpt 18:

Student: I'll go to the shop and buy some <u>poison</u>, said the youngest brother

Instructor: And buy some …

Student: <u>Poison</u> .. <u>poison</u> (hesitating in correct pronunciation)

Instructor: Poison

4.2.2 Other-initiated self-repair

36% of repair sequences were within the pattern of OISR. This considerable percent again shows that learners have not been aware of their pronunciation deficiencies in speech for one reason or another. Some of the examples of this type of repair have been put forward in the following.

Excerpt 19:

Student: So he decided to <u>hide</u> (incorrect pronunciation) it behind the picture

Instructor: To …

Student: To hide (correct pronunciation).

Excerpt 20:

Student: Then … she <u>looked</u> (incorrect pronunciation) at me and walked out the room

Instructor: She …(N)

Student: Looked …she <u>looked</u> (corrected)

Excerpt 21:

Student: Mr. Bin started to <u>read</u> (pronounced as past tense) it

Instructor: To//

Student: // to <u>read</u> (corrected) it

Excerpt 22:

Student: Is everything all right? said the manager. Yes, answered Mr. Bin. He <u>smiled</u> (incorrect pronunciation) and the manager <u>smiled,</u>(incorrect pronunciation) too.

 Instructor: He//

 Student: //<u>Smiled</u> (corrected)

As mentioned before, the occurrences of SISR and SIOR were minor and totally 12% of repairs were due to these types of repair. That is, 7% for SISR and 5% for SIOR. The following examples show these types of repair.

Excerpt 23: (SISR)

Student: Suddenly he saw a lot of money on the <u>ground</u> (incorrect pronunciation) … On the <u>ground</u> (corrected)

Excerpt 24: (SIOR)

Student: He bought three bottles of wine, he <u>bought</u>? (hesitating in correct pronunciation)

Instructor: <u>bought</u>

5. Discussion

The findings revealed, in terms of syntax, a slight preference for self-repair over other-repair and self-initiated over other-initiated repair and this is in line with the conclusion that adult non-native speakers behave in repair preference much like adult native speakers of English (Schegloff et al., 1977). Likewise, the majority of SISR, and the other types of repairs, was self-regulatory work. In other words, as Shonerd (1994) states, most repairs were 'local' (mentioned in Buckwalter, 2001:392), that is, they were made in order to move an utterance closer to the target language form. In fact, SISR reflected learners' attempts to gain control in their use of the L2. This shows that they know what they are already able to do with the language. Put it another way, one can discuss that in terms of SISR, the learners have been conscious of L2 which is in consistence with Buckwalter's (2001) findings that L2 learners in SISR were aware of their language ability.

Regarding OISR sequence, both in terms of syntax and pronunciation, scholars believe that this sequence is that which most reflects what we have come to understand as the negotiation of meaning. It is a sequence more commonly seen in NS-NNS interaction (Brooks, 1991; Pica, 1994). In this research, if we consider the instructor as one who is more proficient than the learners, then we can suppose an interactional

situation like native speaker and non-native speaker. Likewise, Buckwalter (2001) believes that there is a greater incidence of this sequence in learners –learners discourse with different linguistic background (p. 393). Keeping this in mind, the considerable percent of OISR, 24% for syntax and 36% for pronunciation, is plausible if we suppose that the linguistic background of the instructor and that of learners are different and are not at the same level. Since the instructor's linguistic knowledge is at the higher level in comparison with that of learners, naturally first other initiated occurs and then self-repair. This type of repair also shows that learners know the structure or pronunciation of a given word but because of some reasons like stress, fatigue, etc. they do not pay enough attention and make mistakes.

OIOR was the most common for pronunciation and the second most common for syntax. This finding is in contrast with Buckwlter's (2001). The reason may be due to the fact that the participants in Buchwalter's research were, to a great extent, at the same level of proficiency and naturally OIOR occurred less than the other types of repairs. But it is consistent with Hosoda's (2006) since Hosoda investigates the differential language expertise in conversation between speakers of Japanese as a first and second language. He concludes that because of the differences in linguistic expertise between participants other-repair become relevant in two situations; first, "when speakers invited the other repair" and second, "when mutual understanding was jeopardized unless one party repaired the other" (p. 44). Another reason for OIOR may be related to the learners' lack of knowledge towards some linguistic categories. In this research, as the researcher observed, the instructor initiated and made salient the trouble but due to the fact that the learners were not able to correct themselves they made a pause or through eye contacts required the instructor as 'other-repaired' to deal with the trouble. Further reason is contributed to the role of instructor as a teacher. Since teachers naturally tend to correct their students' problems, sometimes when the learners make mistakes, teacher immediately make them aware of their mistakes and, in most cases, immediately correct them. This may particularly occur in the case of pronunciation because teachers and instructors are more sensitive towards pronunciation problems and more importantly they can correct them faster because they are, most of the time, just one word. It seems that it is because of this reason that the percent (52%) of OIOR in pronunciation category is significantly higher than the other types of repair.

The discussion over why the percentages of SISR, SIOR are considerably low in comparison with other types of repair may be related to the inadequate production practice among the participants in this research. Scholars state that the conversational mechanisms include turn-taking, discourse markers, topics, and repairs (Shokouhi and Kamyab, 2003:86). Although these mechanisms are to some extent cultural, they are clearly obtained by native speakers and L2 learners while engaging in naturally occurring conversations, but by EFL learners, to a great extent, in classroom settings or other places like classroom. So EFL learners need to practice and engage in production practices in order to deal with these mechanisms. Since students of Payame-Nour University attend in classes less than that of their counterparts in other universities, they cannot be relax in oral performance and cannot overcome the "debilitative anxiety" (Brown, 2000) which prevents learners to perform well. Because in SISR the starting point and the ending point focus on the learners' ability, and not others', the learners need much practice to learn and handle their troubles themselves while speaking.

6. Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that EFL learners need activities that encourage production practices. In fact, EFL learners, especially Payame-Nour University students, should be given more opportunities that allow them to compare their utterances which formed based on self-learning and reformulate the utterances as necessary. Moreover, for most Iranian EFL learners in general, and Payame-Nour University EFL learners in particular, the classroom is the primary resource for FL development. For most Payame-Nour University students there is no sufficient opportunity to interact with their counterparts and the instructor in the classroom. Consequently, there is not enough opportunity for self-regulation and learning how to do this mechanism. So, the findings of the present research lend support for providing more opportunities for Payame-Nour University students to engage in communicative activities in the FL classroom so that they learn the conversation mechanisms in general and self-regulation in particular. Furthermore, a by-pass result of activities is that the FL learners will be more proficient and as a result OIOR which shows lack of knowledge towards some special troubles will decrease.

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Appendix

Some parts of transcription notation which have been used in this study taken from Chafe (1987) and Du Bois and Thompson (1991) (mentioned in Shokouhi & Kamyab, 2004: xiv-xv).

Appeal   ?

Final   .

Laughter   @

Lengthening   =

Long pause   . . . (N)

Medium pause   . . .

Short pause   . .

Speech overlap   [   ] or //

Vocal noises   (   )