



Conversational repair, gender, and interactional competence in an Indonesian EFL classroom: insights and implications

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Abstract

This article provides a qualitative examination of conversational repair in an Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom, focusing on how gender differences in initiating repair strategies are indicative of the EFL learners' interactional competence (IC). Based on data from a case study approach involving ten adult students, five male and five female students, in an English course class, the article contributes to an in-depth insight into how male and female students handle communication problems. The results show that there are patterns: female students tend to utilize "weaker" or less specific repair initiators, suggesting a pragmatic orientation to politeness, as well as a collaborative approach to the identification of problems. In contrast, male students mainly employ "stronger" and more direct techniques, including a higher frequency of direct "correction", hinting at a more assertive interactional style focusing on a prompt resolution of the detected issue. According to the findings, gendered preferences of repair initiations have some direct implications for various aspects of interactional competence, both of learning the language itself and of dealing with the pragmatic dimensions of talk. The findings have important implications for EFL pedagogy regarding the groundwork of explicit instruction on different types of repair strategies and gendered communicative styles to promote more equitable and effective classroom interactions and greater interactional competence in general.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning, the competence of the learners is no longer only measured by the grammatical and lexical accuracy. It goes without question that Grammar and Vocabulary are still seen as the integral parts of the measurement, but in terms of communications, the indication of the success settles in whether they can use language effectively and appropriately, along with strategic competence, in a variety of forms (genres, registers) and contexts (situations, cultures). Referred to as pragmatic competence, this skill is increasingly regarded as a central aspect of second language proficiency (Taguchi, 2011; Tarawneh, 2023; Yan, 2022; Young, 2019).

One important dimension of pragmatic competence is interactional competence (IC). IC itself is defined as the ability to participate in simultaneous interaction, co-regulate turns in speaking, negotiate meaning, and to sustain intersubjectivity with others (Kramsch, 1986; Walsh, 2006; Young, 2011). Intersubjectivity here refers to the shared understanding, that speakers are not only trying to make their own ideas clear, but also actively working to understand each other, so the communication keeps going smoothly and both sides can co-construct meaning coherently. In multilingual and mixed-gender classrooms, interactive competence is even more relevant as learners are challenged to engage in communication not only in a non-native language, but also in complex exchanges involving social identities, linguistic resources, and pragmatic potentials.

In such complex environments, communicative breakdowns are inevitable, and how learners respond to them offers valuable insight into their developing competence. There has been a long convention in traditional EFL teaching which regards errors as mistakes that must be corrected. However, new viewpoints question this deficit model. More recent studies claim that mistakes serve as a window to understand the learners' pragmatic strategies, including how they perceive, process, and repair breakdowns in communication. Repair strategy sequences provide a glimpse into learners' concurrent decision-making, social appropriateness, and their ability to co-construct meaning with interlocutors (Albert & de Ruiter, 2018; Chen & Ye, 2022; Dingemanse & Enfield, 2024; Huensch, 2017). Hence, the way speakers deal with troubles on their communicative paths does not have to be condemned, but should be considered a reflection of their interactional skills.

In conversation analysis (CA), the phenomenon of conversational repair has been investigated in detail. According to its main proposers, Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), conversational repair involves identifying and solving problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding during interaction. Therefore, repair in the pragmatic sense does not only consist of error correction, but also other layers such as detecting the trouble source and clarifying intention (Albert & de Ruiter, 2018; Sidnell, 2010).

Schegloff et al. (1977) in their seminal work established four foundational repair trajectories, based on the participant who conducts the repair initiation and the actual corrector (with 'self' referring to the first speaker, and 'other' to another party). The four main repair types are widely known as: Self-Initiated Self-Repair (SISR), Other-Initiated Self-Repair (OISR), Self-initiated Other-Repair (SIOR), and Other-Initiated Other-Repair (OIOR). Additionally, repair mechanisms also involve specific initiator techniques, naturally ordered from the "weakest" to "strongest" based on their capacity to locate the trouble source (Egbert, 1998; Liebscher & Dailey O'Cain, 2003; Schegloff et al., 1977).

Table 1. Repair Initiation Techniques

Technique	Description	Example
Unspecified/Open-Class	non-lexical signal such as cut-offs, sound stretches	"Huh?", "What?"
Q-word	Using a question word	"who?", "how?"
Partial Repeat plus Question Word	Repeating part of the trouble source and adding a question word	"They know what?"
(Partial) Repeat	Repeating some or all of the trouble source	"They know?"
Understanding Check	Proposing a candidate repair	"You mean...?"

Request for Repetition	Explicitly asking for repetition	"Can you repeat that?"
Request for Definition, Translation, or Explanation	Directly asking for clarification of meaning	"What does ...mean?"
Correction	Directly providing the correct form	"Clementine"

In the context of multilingual EFL classrooms as in Indonesia, conversational repair is even more complex. Most students have a diverse language repertoire, so they can resort to code-switching in their repair strategy. Code-switching, even in repair sequences, is not a last resort; it is a resource people turn to strategically. This assists learners in the negotiation of meaning, validation, emotion, and the development of interconnection (Blanco, 2024; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2003; Sakania & Priyana, 2018). These are pragmatic decisions that highlight the fact that interactional competence is not just a question of L2 fluency, but of context-bound linguistic aptitude.

In addition to this pragmatic accord, dimension of gender also plays a role in learners' involvement and organization of interaction. Studies of sociolinguistics and pragmatics have demonstrated the role of gender in spoken language, although it is not determinant. Women are frequently linked to indirectness, hedging, and politeness, which have the effect of prioritizing solidarity and face-saving (Bakhtiyarovna, 2024; Holmes, 2008; Hu & Zhou, 2024; Lakoff, 1975; Li, 2016). On the other hand, men are more apt to exhibit directness, assertiveness and directives or control-oriented moves (Coates, 2013; Gavenila et al., 2019; Nawaz et al., 2024; Tannen, 1990). Although such orientations are culturally investigated and not universally prescriptive, they inform the pragmatic strategies learners choose during repair. For instance, a female student might choose to make repairs with a soft open-class marker to avoid threatening, while a male student may produce a more specific repair or direct request for clarification. Both are measures of interactional competence, but they proceed from different pragmatic lenses.

While there has been increased interest in interactional competence, not many studies have investigated the intersection of gender and repair practices in EFL classrooms. Previous studies tend to focus on types of repairs in general (Aleksius, 2021; Cho & Larke, 2010; Tsuchiya, 2016; Wong & Waring, 2008), or explore gendered participation without inspecting the micro-level strategies applied during communication breakdowns (Dastjerdi & Shahrokhi, 2015; Ukhrowi, 2024). Few studies have explicitly questioned how learners' repair initiation strategies reflect gendered patterns of pragmatic competence, especially in multilingual Southeast Asian classrooms where the choice of language of communication, authority relations, and peer interactions complicate matters even more.

This study aims to fill that gap by asking the following research question: How do gender-based differences in repair initiation strategies reflect EFL learners' interactional competence in a multilingual classroom? The study uses classroom discourse data recorded at an adult conversation class of an English course in Semarang city, Indonesia. Based on an analytical qualitative discussion of the data, we examine the use of different repair strategies by male and female learners in classroom interaction and how these judgments reflect their pragmatic awareness, identity orientation, and communicative goals. Particular focus is given to the types of repair initiators employed, the practical strength of these initiators, and the role of L1 in handling or mitigating repair sequences.

The theoretical background for this study consolidates three major strands: (1) Conversation Analysis, in particular Schegloff et al.'s (1977) model of repair organization; (2) Pragmatics and Gender, originating from the work of Holmes (2008), Coates (2013), and Tannen (1990); and (3) Interactional Competence based on Kramsch (1986), Young (2011), and Walsh (2006). These frameworks accommodate a multifaceted lens through which repair acts can be elucidated more than linguistic correction, but as interactional attainment that reflects learners' sociocultural alignment and conversational intent.

This study offers a novel approach in its intersectional study of conversational repair theory, gendered talk, and the implication to students' interactional competence. Several prior scholars have attempted to conduct a research on repair organization or gendered talk separately. However, less is known about the extent to how gender-specific pragmatic strategies shape learners' repair initiation behavior, and how these manifest their developing interactional competence. In addition, this study

indicates that repair is not merely an identification for correction, but a complex pragmatic space in which learners assert agency, navigate relationships, and construct meaning in actual time.

By placing gender at the forefront of the analysis of repair sequences, this article brings new discussion to the ways interactional competence develops across diverse learners and how it is performed differently in contextually nuanced ways. The results have implications for discussions about pragmatic instruction, classroom discourse, and unbiased interaction in EFL settings. In the aspect of pragmatic instruction, it shows that language teaching should also pay attention to how students solve problems in conversation, not just correct grammar. It also informs classroom discourse analysis, encouraging teachers to be more aware of how participation styles vary, and to recognize repairs as moments of learning rather than failure. Moreover, these findings support more unbiased interaction in EFL settings by showing that communicative competence may look different depending on students' identities, and that all such variations should be equally valued and supported.

These findings have important implications for the teaching and learning of EFL. Teachers could think about how classroom practices represent student errors: not as problems to be fixed but as interactional opportunities. Repair sequences can serve as teachable episodes for the advancement of pragmatic consciousness and interactional competence. In addition, focusing on gendered patterns in communication encourages classroom strategies that are more socially inclusive and allow for differences in pragmatic style. Pedagogically, it may be beneficial to introduce other forms of signals in 'repair initiators,' encourage peer-to-peer negotiation of meaning, and discuss the role of politeness and authority in communication. Ultimately, a gender-sensitive, pragmatic-driven approach can enable learners to participate more confidently and adeptly in actual communication.

METHODS

Grounded in Conversation Analysis (CA), this research takes a qualitative approach to examine the gendered repair strategies through which interactional competence is expressed in a multilingual EFL classroom. CA focuses on the sequential organization of naturally occurring talk, allowing for detailed analysis of how participants manage communication breakdowns in real-time (Hutchby, 2017; Raclaw, 2015). As repair is intricately woven in the construction of conversation, CA equips us with the means to observe how learners address issues, initiate repairs, and achieve mutual understanding. This approach is especially valuable in language learning contexts, where pragmatic choices are closely tied to learners' social identities and communicative development.

The data were collected at an adult-level EFL class of an English course in Semarang. The class was attended by 10 students (five male and five female students) and one teacher, all of Javanese origin. The data were taken when students performed a presentation about their friend's favorite book, movie or music. As there were no restrictions on classroom interaction, spontaneous contributions and peer input were frequent, generating rich opportunities for repair sequences to occur naturally.

Although the researcher also served as the classroom teacher, the session is considered a non-participant observation as there were no interventions to influence the interaction. The whole session was audio-recorded and transcribed in orthography according to Wray et al. (1998), with focus on utterance structure and turn organization rather than phonetic detail.

Purposive sampling was then adopted to identify repair sequences that best highlighted gender-based differences. It is considered appropriate to use purposive sampling in this study since the aim was to focus on repair sequences that clearly reflected gender-based differences. This approach allowed for the selection of data that were most relevant, where male and female students' ways of initiating and managing repair could be seen clearly. The unit of analysis was the students' turn of talk that contained a repair act. Student-initiated repairs were the focus, while teacher turns were only analyzed when they directly supported a student's repair construction. Repair instances that resulted in failures were noted but excluded from detailed analysis.

In analyzing the data, selected excerpts were coded according to four Repair types: Self-Initiated Self-Repair (SISR), Other-Initiated Self-Repair (OISR), Self-Initiated Other-Repair (SIOR), and Other-Initiated Other-Repair (OIOR), as described in the repair framework developed by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977). Strength and directness of repair initiation techniques were also taken into account following the previous works of Schegloff et al. (1977); Egbert (1998); and Liebscher & Dailey O'Cain (2003). The pragmatic function of the repair, as well as additional notes regarding the speaker's identity and gender (coded M for male students, and F for female students;

for example, M1 refers to male student 1, F2 refers to female student 2, and so on), along with the context of the utterance were also listed in the coding. These details were then compiled into two comprehensive data tables (one containing repair instances of male students and the other of female students) for reference and comparative analysis.

The table includes key parts that are important for the discussion in this study. The data sample shows how the repair actually happens in real talk. Furthermore, the repair type column lists the kind of repair used, as explained prior. Columns for the initiation technique and pragmatic function are also included to help show students' IC in dealing with issues during the conversation, such as problem orientation, resource awareness, and turn management.

In the analysis of the findings, the study also makes reference to gendered pragmatics theories (Holmes, 2008; Coates, 2013; and Tannen (1990), in particular investigating how male and female learners may prefer to use varied initiators (some more face-threatening, others less so), that seem to be adopted in distinct ways of interacting. By examining these findings in detail, the study draws broader insights into how gendered patterns of repair contribute to the learners' overall interactional competence within a multilingual classroom environment. The goal is to see how students' negotiate with pragmatics in repair sequences, reflecting gendered patterns of communication, and illustrate their interactional competence in actual classroom contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed qualitative analysis of conversational repair instances, categorized by the gender of the student participant, either the speaker of the trouble source or the initiator of the repair. The analysis specifically focuses on how gender-based differences in repair initiation techniques reflect the students' interactional competence, particularly concerning politeness and assertiveness.

Table 2. Male Students' Repair Initiation Techniques

No.	Data Sample	Repair Type	Initiation Technique	Pragmatic Function
1	M1 : 'He' ((pause)) He do it is every ((pause)) ↑'Sore' apa, Miss? 'What is the English of 'Sore', Miss?' Afternoon'	SIOR	Request for definition, translation/explanation	Seeking specific lexical help; efficient problem resolution; leveraging teacher as knowledgeable resource
2	M3 : =Oh, her favorite Indonesian singer:: is Ran ((pause)) and the:: song: from Ran ((pause)) which ((pause)) she: favor:ited- T : ((laugh)) M3 : ((laugh)) Halah, mboh, lha ↑[()? 'Ah, whatever'	SI - Failure	Unspecified/ Open-Class	Abandoning repair due to inability to self-correct; expressing frustration; leveraging L1 for emotional expression
3	M4 : He likes Javanese culture uh ((pause)) uh about wayang golek ((pause)) Uh:: ((pause)) he thinks uh:: wayang golek ((pause)) tell story: about: rural life= →M3 : About life M4 : = Rural life Javanese ((pause)) an::d ((pause)) the last:: time he watch ((pause)) wayang golek is when ((pause)) was ((pause)) child	OI - Failure	Correction	Attempted clarification/correction (understanding); failure to achieve mutual understanding
4	T : 'Afternoon' M1 : 'Af- ((pause)) ↑huh? T : 'Afternoon' M1 : 'Afternoon' ((pause)) ↑ <i>kalau sudah</i> , Miss? That's all= 'How to close it, Miss? That's all..'	SIOR	Partial Repeat plus Q-Word	Clarification seeking (hearing); pinpointing specific trouble

5	M4 : He likes Javanese culture uh ((pause)) uh about wayang golek ((pause)) Uh:: ((pause)) he thinks uh:: wayang golek ((pause)) tell story: about: rural life=	SISR	Unspecified/ Open-Class	Self-monitoring; maintaining fluency; lexical/structural search
6	M1 : He do it everyday= T : Uh-huh M1 : =and everywhere T : Okay M : ((whisper)) <i>Trus opo meneh?</i> 'And then what's next?' →F2 : <i>Opo meneh</i> ((laugh)) 'What's next' →M5 : <i>Lha kuwi ning [catetan</i> 'It's on your notes' →M3 : [<i>Semangat</i> 'Keep fighting' M1 : 'He' ((pause)), ↑'His' apa, Miss? ↑Eh, apa 'He'? ↑'His' ya? "He", what is it Miss, "His" or "He"? Eh, is it 'He'? 'His', right?	SISR	Unspecified/ Open-Class	Self-monitoring; seeking peer assistance (unsuccessful); expressing frustration/seeking encouragement
7	T : 'Afternoon' M1 : 'Af- ((pause)) ↑huh? T : 'Afternoon' M1 : 'Afternoon' ((pause)) ↑ <i>kalau sudah</i> , Miss? That's all= 'How to close it, Miss? That's all..'	SIOR	Partial Repeat plus Q-Word	Clarification seeking (hearing); pinpointing specific trouble
8	M5 : Yesterday Barcelona is lose ((pause)) [uh:: from- M2 : [Again= M5 : = Again from ((pause)) Bayern Munchen and:: ((pause))	OIOR	Correction	Direct correction (additional information); ensuring accuracy
9	M1 : Hello, good evening ((pause))I ((pause)) ↑ <i>He-eh to Miss bener to, Miss?</i> 'It is correct, right, Miss?' T : [Ya, Ya. Good evening M1 : Good evening ((pause)) my name is ...	SIOR	Understanding Check	Seeking validation/confirmation; managing social relations with teacher; efficient problem resolution
10	M2 : [It's been about ((pause)) ((whisper)) ↑ <i>umumu piro mau?</i> 'How old did you say you were?' →M5 : ((laugh)) <i>Limo las</i> 'Fifteen' M2 : It's been about fifteen years [he lives in this- in this planet=	SIOR	WH-Question	Seeking specific information from peer; reinforcing in-group solidarity/informality; efficient problem resolution

Male students in this EFL classroom demonstrate their interactional competence through a clear preference for stronger, more direct repair initiation techniques. As shown in Table 2, techniques such as "Request for a definition, translation, or explanation" (Excerpts 1), "Partial Repeat plus Q-Word" (Excerpts 4, 7), and "Correction" (Excerpts 3, 8) are applied frequently. It shows a pragmatic adjustment and emphasis on efficiency and assertiveness to overcome breakdowns in communication. In one of the instances (Excerpt 1), M1 asked the teacher (T) to give him the English translation of the Indonesian word 'sore' ("Sore apa, Miss?"), which displays his capabilities in using existing resources (the teacher's knowledge) to bridge lexical gaps quickly and effectively. This directness allows for immediate problem-solving, minimizes interference with the flow of communication, and demonstrates a task-oriented approach to interaction.

This assertive style is further highlighted by the use of "Correction" repair initiation technique by male students, as shown by M3 in Excerpt 3 and M2 in Excerpt 8. When M3 attempts to correct

M4 ("About life" - Excerpt 3), or M2 directly corrects M5 ("Again=" - Excerpt 8), it reflects a proactive stance in ensuring accuracy and managing the conversational topic. This may be seen as a demonstration of Interactional Competence (IC), the ability to make use of language and other interactional tools (such as turn-taking, repair, topic handling) to maintain communicative engagement (Hall, 2007). In this case, the speaker regains control or asserts responsibility for the accuracy or coherence of the dialogue, despite the interruption or correction of a peer (Hall, 2007; Nuha et al., 2024). This assertiveness accords with specific sociolinguistic theories that contrast male speech to female speech as being more direct and competitive (Coates, 2013; Holmes, 2008).

Furthermore, male participants' strategic code-switching with direct initiations (e.g., M1 asking for a translation in Bahasa Indonesia in Excerpt 1, M2 asking another peer in Javanese in Excerpt 11) evidences a strategic aspect of interactional competence. This is a pragmatically-charged selection in order to choose the most efficient linguistic code to ensure immediate understanding and continue the smooth nature of social interaction with peers, even when L2 resources might be inadequate. This strategic use of code-switching from L2 to L1 shows their ability to adapt to the specific interactional context and speaking partner by utilizing the linguistic repertoire that the speakers have (Hanafiah, 2022; Pekarek Doehler, 2018).

Table 3. Female Students' Repair Initiation Techniques

No.	Data Sample	Repair Type	Initiation Technique	Pragmatic Function
1	F1 : =Uh:: in this:: time I will ((pause)) uh I would like to tell you about uh:: ((pause)) my uh ((pause)) Ms. Lana favorite food ((pause)) Uh, [Ms. Lana likes ((pause)) spicy food-	SISR	Unspecified/ Open-Class	Self-monitoring; maintaining fluency and speaker autonomy; correcting structural/grammatical issues
2	F5 : The title of ((pause)) favorite movie is ((pause)) " War::kop DKI " T : ((laugh)) Okay →M3: ↑ " War of DKI "? T : ((laugh)) F5 : Warkop , [Warkop →M3 : [Oh, Warkop ((laugh))	OISR	(Partial) repeat	Clarification seeking (hearing/understanding); prompting self-correction; collaborative meaning negotiation
3	F3 : Her favorite book is:: ((pause)) "Ganti Hati" the- the:: and the wI (.) tər ('writer') Dahlan:: ((pause)) Is:: T : = the raItə: ('writer') = F3 : = Oh, the raItə: ('writer') is Dahlan Iskan	OIOR	Correction	Direct correction (pronunciation); ensuring accuracy; teacher exercising pedagogical authority
4	T : Okay, th- close it then if there F3 : ((pause)) Uh:: ((pause)) T : That's (.) all F3 : I uh, Okay I think that's all((pause))=	OISR	Elicitation/ Providing unfinished sentence	Prompting self-correction; fostering learner autonomy
5	M2 : English lesson in BBC. With ((pause)) with ((pause))= →F1: =↑ Motorcycle? M2 : Motorcycle if he want to go to this place ...	OISR	Offering a possible word	Peer assistance; facilitating sentence progression

6	F2 : . . . , She answered Naruto have <u>persistence person</u>= →F1: [[↑Huh? T : [[Okay= F2 : =↓Ini ya Miss ya ‘Here it is, okay, Miss’ T : [[[laugh]] →F1: [[<i>Apa, Apa?</i> ↑<i>Apa</i> Miss? ‘What, What? What was that Miss?’	Other-Initiated Failure	Open Class: Interjection	Signaling general trouble (hearing); prompting re-utterance
7	F3 : Uh:: Her like ((pause)) Her like ((pause)) motivat- uh:: ((pause)) her ((pause)) the kind of the- uh:: ((whisper)) ↑<i>gimana?</i> ‘how (to say it)’ T : <u>She likes</u> F3 : <u>She like</u> motivation book or:: knowledge and:: true story	SIOR	Q-word	Seeking specific structural help; efficient problem resolution; leveraging teacher as knowledgeable resource
8	F2 : [My name is Rina ((pause)) I am ((pause)) [part- Miss Erni partner ((pause)) →M3: [Yes I know T : ↑I am? F2 : ↓Miss Erni partner T : Miss <u>Erni</u>’s partner.	OIOR	(Partial) Repeat	Eliciting self-correction (grammar); prompting clarification
9	F3 : Go::od ((pause)) eveni::ng, ↑<i>ya</i> Miss <i>ya?</i> ‘Right, Miss?’ T : <i>Ya, good evening</i>	SIOR	Understanding Check	Confirming appropriateness of expression; collaborative meaning negotiation; seeking validation
10	F1 : Ms. Lana likes spicy food. She likes ((pause)) um, eh she likes mat- meatball and noodle ((pause)) uh:: ((pause)) She likes ((uh)) all of meatball ((pause)) ek: ↑<i>səpt-</i> (‘except’) T : uh-huh= F1: ((whisper)) =<i>ini bacanya gimana?</i> ‘How do you pronounce this?’ T : [[<u>Iksept</u>]] (‘except’) →M3: [[<u>Iksept</u>]] (‘except’) F1 : =<u>Iksept</u> (‘except’) ((pause)) <i>urat</i> meatball ‘tendon meatball’	SIOR	Request for definition, translation/ explanation	Seeking specific pronunciation help; efficient problem resolution; leveraging teacher/peer as knowledgeable resource
11	F3 : =↓ ‘her’. Ms. Rina, her m:y favor:: ((pause)) ((softly)) ↑my favorite= T : =‘Her’, ‘Her’. Her favorite F3 : Ms. Rina, her favorite literar- ((pause)) ↓is book	OIOR	Correction	Direct correction (grammar); ensuring accuracy; teacher exercising pedagogical authority
12	F1 : She thinks- T : Mm hmm F1 : Uh ((pause)) meatball is very delicious ((pause)) and- <u>are</u> very delicious and smooth T : Okay	SISR	Unspecified/ Open-Class	Self-monitoring; correcting grammatical structure; maintaining coherence

13	F3 : Go::od ((pause)) eveni::ng, ↑<i>ya</i> Miss <i>ya</i>? 'Right, Miss?' T : <i>Ya, good evening</i>	SIOR	Understanding Check	Confirming appropriateness of expression; collaborative meaning negotiation; seeking validation
14	F1 : Ms. Lana likes spicy food. She likes ((pause)) um, eh she likes mat- meatball and noodle ((pause)) uh:: ((pause)) She likes ((uh)) all of meatball ((pause)) ↓ <i>eksəpt-</i> 'except')	SISR	Unspecified/ Open-Class	Self-monitoring; correcting slip of the tongue; maintaining fluency

Female students, on the other hand, demonstrate their interactional competence through a greater tendency to employ "weaker" or less specific repair initiation techniques, particularly when initiating repair with others. As seen in Table 3.2, techniques like "Open Class: Interjection" (F1 in Excerpt 6) and "Q-word" (F3 in Excerpt 7) are more prominent in their repertoire compared to male students. For instance, F1's use of "Huh?" (Excerpt 6) more generally implicates a problem without specifying it, thereby providing more opportunity for the original speaker to interpret and remediate the trouble. This may be understood as a pragmatic orientation to politeness and face-saving, with the initiator sidestepping the need to explicitly identify an error, leading to preservation of social harmony and positive face during the interaction (Jarrah, et al., 2025). This is consistent with general sociolinguistic theories on the way in which women communicate, in terms of rapport and indirectness.

Although also showing to a certain extent the use of "stronger" techniques as 'Understanding Check (F3 in Excerpts 9, 13) and Request for definition, translation/explanation' (F1 in Excerpts 10), female students overall show a distribution toward less specific initiators than males. Those initiators with less degree of specificity such as Unspecified/Open-class, Q-word, and (Partial) Repeat are noticeably demonstrated by F1 in Excerpt 1, F5 in Excerpt 2, F4 in Excerpt 4, F2 in Excerpt 6, F3 in Excerpt 7, F1 in Excerpt 12, F3 in Excerpt 13, and F1 in Excerpt 14. The frequent use of "Understanding Check" by female students, often accompanied by code-switching to Bahasa Indonesia (F3 asking "*ya* Miss *ya*?" in Excerpt 9), highlights their IC in collaborative meaning negotiation. They actively participate in clarifying ambiguities by proposing a candidate repair, demonstrating a cooperative approach to achieving mutual understanding (Irwandi et al., 2024; Martina & Afifi, 2024).

As with male participants, the female ones also strategically use code-switching to get their repair initiated. For instance, F3 inquires "*gimana?* (how?)" in Bahasa Indonesia (Excerpt 7) for assistance with sentence structure, and F1 asks "*ini bacanya gimana?*" (how do you pronounce this?) in Bahasa Indonesia (Extract 10) to help with pronunciation. The pragmatic decision in this context to code-switch to L1 to produce a clear and efficient message to their interlocutor (especially that of the teacher) showed their IC in their ability to use their entire language repertoire to overcome any communicative barriers (Hanafiah, 2022; Pekarek Doehler, 2018).

Gendered interactional competence in repair initiation

The comparative analysis of male and female students' repair initiation techniques reveals distinct gendered patterns that reflect different facets of their interactional competence. While both genders demonstrate IC through their ability to manage communication breakdowns, their approaches to initiating repair differ significantly. The dominance of male students' preferences to use direct and explicit initiators like questions and corrections signifies an IC that values efficiency and assertions in conversations (Amalia et al., 2009; Sullivan et al. 2015). They are alert to identify the source of the problem and decide to resolve it as soon as possible, representing a task-oriented mode of communication. This can be interpreted as a demonstration of their competence in building up the repair sequence and ensuring clarity with minimal number of turns.

By contrast, female students' higher preference for indirect or less specific initiators (e.g., open-class interjections, Q-words without specific referents) indicates that an IC which favors politeness and collaborative problem identification is in place. The latter creates more room for

negotiating, which can reduce the face-threatening acts and thus create a more amicable interactional setting. This is an indication of how they handle social relationships and promote shared responsibility to resolve misunderstandings.

The fact that male students more often directly employ correction than their female counterparts supports these differential orientations. Even though direct correction may be more effective, it could be considered more aggressive, or even an interruption. Female students' less frequent use of this strategy may reflect a practical decision not to use such assertiveness and to play more facilitative roles in the conversation (Amalia et al., 2009, Thomas-Tate et al., 2017).

Thus, these gendered variations in repair practices similarly do not suggest a lack of interactive skill for either group but an alternative pragmatic orientation towards classroom interaction. Direct and indirect strategies are two legitimate ways to accomplish a communicative goal; their use can be seen as an index of learners' emerging sensitivity to linguistic and social features of the foreign language environment.

Gender, repair initiation techniques, and interactional competence

The findings of this study underscore that gender plays a discernible role in shaping how EFL learners initiate conversational repair, and these choices directly reflect their developing interactional competence. The observations of the patterns occurred, that male students preferred assertive, direct initiators and female students tend to utilize more indirect, politeness-oriented ones, are parallel with sociolinguistic theories in general regarding gendered communication styles.

The preference of male students for "stronger" repair initiators, like direct questions for translation or explicit correction, shows an interactional competence adjusted towards efficiency and clarity. This assertive mechanism enables them to address linguistic mishaps like gaps or error rapidly, to then ensure their turns can progress smoothly and information is delivered accurately. Their strategic implementation of code-switching in these repair initiation techniques is another instance of the pragmatic adaptability in pursuit of goals. This is indicative of an IC that leans towards direct problem solving and task completion.

Female students, on the other hand, typically use "weaker" or less specific initiators, such as open class words like "Huh?" or general question words like "how...?". This could be considered as an instance of interactional competence that promotes politeness and collaborative negotiation. Through signalling a general problem, rather than pinpointing an individual fault, they open up a space for the original speaker to self-identify the trouble source and give them opportunities to conduct self-repair. It is a politeness act attempted to mitigate face threats and foster a more cooperative interactional dynamic. The deployment of "understanding checks" presents more evidence of this collaborative orientation. This is in line with findings that indicate women tend to take more facilitative roles in interaction.

One important thing to note is that such gendered variation should not be interpreted as one gender being "more" or "less" competent IC-wise. Instead, they point out a range of pragmatic strategies that learners can employ in response to the intricacies of L2 communication in a complex multilingual setting such as an EFL classroom (Tajeddin & Malmir, 2024; Woodfield, 2015). Both direct and indirect strategies play important roles to support the success of the communication, and these strategic uses demonstrate learners' pragmatic awareness of the dynamic exchanges between linguistic accuracy and social appropriateness. It is also enriched by the multilingual nature of the classroom, as students strategically use their language repertoire to meet the communication goals in their repair sequences.

Pedagogical implications

The study has a number of practical implications for the ELT practices, especially in the context of Indonesian EFL classrooms, where teachers could imply explicitly the development of students' interactional competence to manage the gendered patterns of social language. First of all, teachers need to develop learners' pragmatic awareness, more specifically about initiating repairs. The explicit discussion about range of repair initiation techniques, from "weakest" to "strongest", as well as their pragmatic functions, whether it is to imply politeness, assertiveness, efficiency, and so on, can encourage empowerment to students in making conscious choices about how they manage trouble sources in communication. This can allow female students to have more confidence to use direct initiators when it is called for, and instill awareness to male students regarding the social implications of overly direct correction techniques.

Secondly, based on the gendered patterns that are identified, educators can devise targeted strategies to promote a more egalitarian communicative space. In the case of female students, planning some activities that encourage more direct and specific repair initiations can be helpful. This could involve role-plays where they practice explicitly pinpointing trouble sources or directly asking for clarification in English. Alternatively, for male students, promoting more facilitative and less interruptive repair practices can be valuable.

The strategies mentioned are not only intended to improve students' interactional competence, but also as a response to undertake broader pedagogical demands to counter gendered imbalances in the classroom discourse. In the classroom, traditional interactions can perpetuate gendered expectations in male and female students, such as encouraging male students to be assertive while simultaneously rewarding female students for being "polite" or "cooperative" (Brady & Eisler, 1995; Koch, 2003). Through purposeful communicative task designs that oppose to these patterns, such as giving female students leadership roles in discussions or challenging male students to engage in a reflective, more cooperative discourse, teachers can start dismantling such expectations. This approach supports the recent trends in ELT researches, which urged stronger attention to gender bias in some pedagogical domains like teaching materials, turn-taking patterns, and teacher-student interaction.

Moreover, educators should consider recognize and accommodate these gendered repair strategies to promote varied communicative styles, rather than requiring all students to adopt a single model of 'effective' language use. This facilitates a balanced and equitable learning culture, which respects both direct and indirect communication acts as correct representations of pragmatic aptitude. Tapping into social identity and meaning negotiation: Issues of culture and multilingual subjects Social identity and the critical moment of meaning negotiation are particularly important when the EFL context includes interlocutors who are involved in some kind of cultural and/or social negotiation that occurs when one tries to communicate in a second or other language. In the final analysis, it is this pedagogical position that enables learners not only to extend the range and scope of their pragmatic repertoire but also to feel identity-affirmed and at ease in interaction.

In addition, by leaning towards these gendered practices in repair strategies, educators can validate to a wide range of communicative styles, instead of expecting all students to adhere to a single model of 'effective' language use. This leads to the establishment of a more inclusive and equitable classroom environment, where both directness and indirectness run parallel as equally legitimate expressions of pragmatic competence in IC. In multilingual EFL settings, learners are not only negotiating meaning, but also deal with more complex social identities. Thus, from pedagogical perspective, such sensitivity is crucial in order to let language learners develop their pragmatic repertoire, while also feeling a sense of identity and comfort in interaction.

Finally, the study underlines the need to consider conversational repair as an intrinsic part of interactional competence, more than simply error treatment. It is recommended for teachers to develop tasks that offer sufficient spaces for them to practice different repair strategies in authentic communicative situations. By recognizing and discussing the strategic use of L1 in repair, however, teachers can also validate students' entire language repertoires and then slowly nudge them towards L2-only repair practices as they develop in proficiency and confidence. This integrated view of IC production will enable students to better respond to a variety of communication situations they will encounter.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of conversational repair in an Indonesian EFL classroom, yielding key conclusions regarding gender-based differences in repair initiation strategies and their reflection of EFL learners' interactional competence. The analysis revealed that while overall repair strategies are similarly distributed across genders, significant variations exist in their initiation techniques. Female students often use more "weak" or less direct initiators and are observed to be more pragmatically polite and strive towards collaborative problem identification. In contrast, male learners rely heavily on "stronger" and more direct repair initiator technique, as well as a higher frequency of direct "correction, demonstrating a more assertive interactional style focused on efficiency.

The evidence of gendered preferences in repair initiation techniques indicates layers of interactional competence. It highlights the way learners navigate challenges in linguistics and social dynamics. Moreover, code switching act is also observed to be utilized strategically within these

initiations, highlighting further affirmation of learners' pragmatic adaptability in leveraging their linguistic repertoire. This research is significant to be conducted in order to broaden the understanding of conversational repair, interactional pragmatic competence, as well as sociolinguistic dynamics in second language acquisition, particularly within less-researched contexts like Indonesian EFL class.

In the near future, more extensive qualitative studies of gender and repair initiation techniques in various EFL contexts would be useful for a fuller understanding of the social and cultural bases of these patterns. Similar research on the pedagogical effectiveness of explicit instruction on diverse L2 repair practices (including those to account for gendered communication styles) is also encouraged to enhance students' overall interactional competence.

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