

28. It is easier to read and write English than to speak and understand it.	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
29. People who are good at Math and Science are <b>not</b> good at learning English.	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
30. Kurds think that it is important to speak English language	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
31. English language helps me to get to know its speakers better.	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
32. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
33. Kurds are good at learning English.	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
34. Everyone can learn to speak English.	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree

Asian EFL Journal Research Articles. Vol. 18 No.4 December 2016



## The role of proficiency, speaking habits and error-tolerance in the self-repair behaviour of Emirati EFL learners

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of the present paper is to shed light on the role of proficiency, error-tolerance and speaking habits in EFL speakers' self-repair behaviour. Thus far, research studies on self-repairs have not consistently identified the factors that contribute to EFL learners' self-repair behaviour during unrehearsed oral speech. In this study, self-repair behaviour was defined as the frequency and types of overt self-repairs as well as the rate of successful grammatical and lexical error-repairs. Speaking habits were considered on the basis of the aspects that speakers tend to focus more on while speaking (i.e. fluency, accuracy or precision of expression), while error-tolerance was operationalised as a) level of embarrassment when making errors in oral speech, b) level of irritation when others make mistakes while speaking EFL and c) perceptions of an ideal

L2 speakers. The results showed that lower-intermediate participants performed more rephrasing repairs than their elementary counterparts. In addition, participants' perceptions of the ideal L2 speaker were found to contribute to a greater amount of self-repairs. The main findings show that increased proficiency contributes to qualitative differences in L2 self-repair behaviour while the frequency of self-repairs seems to depend on L2 speakers' perceptions of an ideal L2 speaker. Thus, self-repairing is not an exclusive linguistic or psycholinguistic phenomenon but a decision associated with personal beliefs about self-repairing and speaking in L2.

**Keywords:** self-repairs, monitoring, L2 proficiency, speaking habits, error-tolerance, individual differences

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## **Introduction**

Self-repair behaviour is considered the overt manifestation of the monitoring process which is believed to contribute to the development of second language (L2). Based on Swain's (1985, 1993) Output Hypothesis, learners notice the gaps in their knowledge through external or internal feedback (i.e. monitoring) and thus aim to fill these gaps. In both L1 and L2 research, this monitoring process has primarily been explored through the study of self-corrections speakers perform after articulation. Understanding this monitoring process by investigating the factors contingent for overt self-repairs can provide researchers and language practitioners with further insight into the psycholinguistic mechanisms behind L2 speech production and, ultimately, language learning.

Previous studies have focused on the nature, frequency and distribution of self-repairs in oral speech as well as the various factors (i.e. task characteristics) and speaker individual differences that contribute to it (Dietrich, 1982; Fathman, 1980; Georgiadou, 2014; Kormos, 1999a, 2000; Lennon, 1984, 1990, 1994; Mojavezi & Ahmadian, 2014; Poulisse, 1993; Van Hest, 1996). The type and number of self-repairs speakers perform have been linked to overall L2 competence, which is in turn related to the level of automaticity of the linguistic processes (i.e. formulating and articulating a message), on one hand, and on extended metalinguistic knowledge, on the other. It has been suggested that with the development of L2 proficiency and increases in the metalinguistic knowledge and automaticity in the processes of message

formulation and articulation, L2 speakers are more successful in self-correcting but also make fewer mistakes to begin with.

Apart from L2 competence, a number of individual differences has also been investigated. These include L1 background, motivation, language aptitude and working memory (WM). While these previous studies have provided valuable insight into L2 self-repair behaviour, some of the findings have not been founded on statistical analysis (Diethrich, 1982; Fathman, 1980; Lennon, 1990) and therefore their findings cannot be generalized. In addition, with the exception of more recent studies (Kormos, 1999; 2000; Mojavezi and Ahmadian, 2014) which use Kormos's (1998) L2 taxonomy of self-repairs, the identification of overt self-repairs has been previously based on various taxonomies rendering the comparison and interpretation of results somewhat problematic. In addition, all of these studies have investigated the number of self-repairs speakers perform without taking into consideration whether such repairs are successful. Finally, it has been suggested that in L2, unlike L1, the speaker makes a conscious decision about what and when to self-repair. Among others, this decision may depend on how serious the error is, how seriously it impedes communication or on how important linguistic accuracy is for a specific task (Kormos, 2000). However, self-repair behaviour may also be linked to other factors that can render it a conscious or semi-conscious decision, such as speakers' own speaking habits and their tolerance for making errors. Unlike the factors mentioned above, these factors are not contingent upon the speaking situation but on the speaker.

The present study investigates the role of L2 proficiency in the amount and type of self-repairs as well as the rate of successful error-repairs using statistical analysis. It further explores whether a variety of speaker variables, such as speaking habits and error-tolerance, contributes to the overt self-repairs performed by less advanced L2 speakers.

Although the impact of L2 proficiency on self-repair has been previously investigated, the aim of the present study is to address some of the gaps in the literature by using statistical analysis and applying Kormos's taxonomy of L2 self-repairs. It focuses on the self-repair behaviour of participants at lower levels of proficiency when the automaticity of language production is more limited. Furthermore, the impact of proficiency is examined in relation to the successful detection and correction of grammatical and lexical errors. Finally, the study expands on Kormos's (2000) work on error-tolerance as an individual difference that may contribute to EFL speakers' self-repair behaviour. More specifically, the study addresses the following

research questions:

1. Is there a difference in the amount and types of self-repairs performed by elementary and lower-intermediate L2 speakers?
2. Is there a difference in the successful repair rate of grammatical and lexical errors in the speech of elementary and lower-intermediate L2 speakers?
3. Is there a relationship between L2 speakers' speaking habits, error-tolerance and the amount and types of self-repairs they perform?

## **Literature review**

Previous studies in self-repair behaviour have either focused on identifying the overt self-repairs in EFL speakers' speech or on examining the frequency and type of self-repairs in relation to different speaker variables. The following section provides a brief overview of their main findings.

### ***Distribution of L2 self-repairs***

In a study with 75 children speaking English as L2, Fathman (1980) distinguished between five types of self-repairs: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and lexical self-repairs. She found that the majority of L2 self-repairs (50%) were lexical while phonological repairs were the most rare. Similarly, Lennon (1984) found that lexical repairs (73%) were more frequent than any other type of repairs (phonological, syntactic and semantic) in her 12 German university students' L2 speech. However, Lennon's advanced L2 speakers self-corrected only a total of 23 times, which makes this a very small sample of self-repairs. The assumption that L2 speakers focus more on the correction of their lexical choices has since been further supported by Poulisse's (1993) analysis of a corpus of slips of the tongue made by Dutch speakers of English,

which showed that repairs of lexical slips outnumbered morphological, syntactic and phonological ones.

Van Hest (1996) used Levelt's (1983) taxonomy of L1 self-repairs to classify 4700 self-repairs made by Dutch speakers of English both in their L1 and L2. Van Hest's analysis revealed several interesting findings. First, error-repairs were found to be more common in L2 than in L1, which can be explained on the basis of automaticity of the formulating processes in language production. Second, phonological error-repairs were detected and corrected faster than lexical errors. This was in line with Levelt's (1989) monitoring model whereby, in contrast to lexical self-repairs, the repaired version of a phonological error does not need to be checked in the conceptualiser against the original message. In addition, van Hest's analysis of self-repairs in three different oral tasks (picture description, story-telling and informal interview) indicated that appropriacy repairs were the most common types of self-repair (L1 and L2) in tasks that required precise expression, such as the story-telling and picture description tasks suggesting that task characteristics play a role in the overt-self repair behaviour of both L1 and L2 speakers. Finally, her findings suggested that L2 cutoff-to-repair intervals are longer than L1 intervals, which is in alignment with the notion of limited automaticity in the processes of message formulation and articulation.

In another study on self-repair behaviour, Kormos (2000) analysis showed that L2 repairs involving slight modifications, such as error and rephrasing repairs at the linguistic level and appropriacy repairs at the conceptual level, take less time to re-plan. Therefore, Kormos concludes that compared to different-information repairs which involve the reconstruction of the message from scratch, these types of repairs require less effort and attentional resources. These findings by Kormos and van Hest offer considerable support to Levelt's (1983, 1989) 'modular theory of speech production' and 'the perceptual loop theory' of monitoring as they suggest that L2 speakers, similarly to L1 speakers, do not have access to the intermediary results of formulation but only to parts of the phonetic string already processed and stored in the articulatory buffer.

### ***Individual differences and self-repairs***

In addition to the frequency and distribution of overt-self repairs, several studies have attempted to shed light on speaker individual differences that may play a role in how often L2 speakers self-repair and the kind of self-repairs they tend to perform. A few of the individual differences (IDs) thus far investigated are L1 background, motivation and working memory. The need for these studies stems from the assumption that in L2 speech the detection of errors is not automatic as it is in L1, and thus does not necessarily entail their correction. Mackay (1992), for example, has argued that L2 speakers make a conscious decision about correcting or not correcting the errors they detect in their speech. The reasons for this may be related to speakers not wanting to slow down their speech, sounding native-like (Lennon, 1990), feeling embarrassed to self-correct and, thus, direct the listener's attention to the mistake (Krashen, 1981), and being bothered by frequent mistakes in speech (Seliger, 1980).

In her 1980 study, Fathman investigated the role that a speaker's L1 background plays in the frequency of overt self-repairs. Her analysis indicated that children with L1 Korean self-repaired more than children with L1 Spanish. In a small-scale study, Dietrich (1982) investigated the relationship between motivation, L1 background and language aptitude, and the overt self-repair behaviour of four American and four Japanese learners of German. Her analysis focused on the self-correction of morphological and phonological errors and revealed that language aptitude and L1 background play a role in overt L2 self-repair behaviour. Both Fathman's (1980) and Dietrich's (1982) studies, however, lack the support of statistical analysis. Therefore, the extent of the relationship between L1 background and overt self-repair behaviour remains relatively unclear. Kormos (1999b) investigated another aspect of overt self-repair behaviour connected to Krashen's approach to speech monitoring, namely speakers' tolerance for error. Krashen (1981) distinguishes between three types of speakers, the optimal users, the monitor over-users and the monitor under-users. Optimal users use the monitor appropriately while monitor over-users have a low tolerance for error and tend to use the 'monitor' constantly. Monitor under-users, on the other hand, are more tolerant in that respect and may almost never monitor their output. Monitor under-users are believed to speak faster and not self-correct as often while monitor over-users are more sensitive to the mistakes they make. These speakers tend to be more self-conscious, speak more slowly and are more likely to correct themselves when they think they have made a mistake (Seliger, 1980). To investigate this aspect, Kormos (1999b) asked her 30 participants to complete a self-report questionnaire on their speaking

habits. The questionnaire sought answers to questions related to whether participants consider it more important to express their thoughts precisely, to speak more quickly, to make fewer mistakes and so on. Based on their responses, participants were categorised as monitor-over-users, monitor-under-users and average monitor users. The statistical analysis of the self-repair data revealed that monitor-over-users, who were found to pay more attention to the correctness of their message, made significantly more rephrasing repairs than the monitor-under-users while monitor-under-users, who tended to speak faster and focused more on the precision of their message, had a higher correction rate of lexical errors. No relationship was found between grammatical error-repairs and speaking habits as measured by the self-report questionnaire. Likewise, no significant results emerged between the frequency of self-repairs and speaking habits. Nevertheless, a tendency was observed whereby monitor-over-users generally corrected their errors more frequently than monitor-under-users.

In another study, Kormos (2000a) found that the frequency of appropriacy repairs correlated with proficiency test scores suggesting that with the increase of proficiency L2 speakers pay more attention to the informational content of their message. According to Kormos (2006), “with increasing L2 proficiency there is a shift from simple error repairs to more complex discourse-level repairs, but the global frequency of self-repairs does not seem to be affected by the level of L2 competence” (p.133). In a later study (2000b), Kormos’s findings revealed that the less advanced L2 speakers made more grammatical and lexical error-repairs than more advanced L2 and L1 speakers. Similarly to L1 speakers, the increased automaticity in the oral production processes in the advanced L2 speakers also allowed them to cater more to discourse-level aspects of their message. In support of previous studies (Poulisse, 1993; van Hest, 1996), Kormos found that her L2 participants, like her L1 participants, were more concerned with correcting their lexical errors than their grammatical errors.

Kormos’s findings are based on the assumption that with the increase of L2 competence and automaticity, more attentional resources become available for monitoring. According to Levelt (1983; 1989), self-monitoring requires the allocation and division of attentional resources as it occurs in parallel with the conceptualisation, formulation or even the articulation of the message, as demonstrated in overt error-repairs. Although formulation and articulation are largely automatic in L1, Levelt (1989) postulates that conceptualisation and monitoring of one’s own speech require awareness and controlled processing made possible by the attentional

capacity of WM. In L2, the limited automaticity of the formulator, especially in novice learners, would further tax WM and possibly affect both the speakers' monitoring process and their self-repair behaviour.

To explore this, Mojavezi and Ahmadian (2014) investigated the relationship between WM, as measured by an L1 listening span, and the frequency and types of overt self-repairs their L2 speakers (English and English Translation majors) performed in a narrative task. Kormos's (1998) self-repair taxonomy was used to identify participants' self-repairs. Mojavezi and Ahmadian's findings revealed a significant negative relationship between listening span test scores and different-information repairs as well as a significant positive relationship between listening span test scores and error-repairs. These relationships suggest that speakers with greater WM capacity, i.e. with extra attentional resources, performed fewer reformulations of their initial message and more corrections of accidental grammatical, lexical and phonological lapses. The authors argue that the positive relationship between WM and L2 error-repairs indicates that L2 speakers with extra attentional resources will utilise them to attend to form (in addition to meaning) and, consequently, perform more error -repairs. The authors postulate that this is in keeping with previous studies on task complexity and self-repair behaviour (Ahmadian, 2012; Guara-Tavares, 2009) which showed that when L2 speakers have more attentional resources to their disposal, as is the case with structured tasks, produce more accurate language because they can monitor more effectively. Although the proposed explanation is plausible and in accordance with Levelt's (1999) theories of speaking and monitoring, it is based on the assumption that monitoring equals self-correction. This may be true for L1, but most likely it is not the case for L2 (Mackay, 1992). In addition, the relationships observed were based on the amount of error-repairs performed, not on the number or rate of errors corrected – an approach which would have arguably provided stronger support for the authors' claims regarding the interconnection between monitoring, self-repair behaviour and linguistic accuracy.

The relationship between working memory and L2 self-repair behaviour was investigated in a study by Georgiadou (2014) who found that neither executive working memory nor phonological short-term memory were associated with the amount of self-repairs L2 speakers performed. However, speakers with greater executive working memory and phonological short-term memory performed significantly fewer phonological error-repairs. This was explained on the basis of Levelt's model of speech production whereby phonological encoding is the last stage



of speech production. The outcome of this process is internal speech, which can be monitored prior to articulation. The author supports that as a result of the limited automaticity in novice L2 speakers' linguistic production processes, internal speech is not adequately monitored because by that time the speaker has shifted his/her attention back to the earlier stages of production (conceptualisation, lemma activation, syntactic encoding, etc.) in order to continue to produce 'fluent' speech. Speakers with greater WM and PSTM have the attentional resources to allocate to monitoring internal speech more effectively so as to avoid phonological lapses and thus perform fewer phonological error-repairs.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The participants in the present study were 77 learners of L2 English aged 17-20 (mean age = 18). All participants were female and spoke Arabic as their L1. At the time of data collection, they were studying English at an intensive EFL course at a state university in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). The learners had been previously taught EFL at elementary and secondary school for a mean length of nine years. Although none of the participants reported having lived or studied in an English-speaking country for a period of more than six months (mean = 1 month), language students in the UAE, especially the two largest emirates, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, are daily exposed to English outside the classroom. As the population of these two Emirates is quite diverse, English is the main language used to communicate with both native and non-native speakers of English outside the classroom and the home.

At the beginning of the study, participants took the Oxford Quick Placement Test (2004; see below for details) and based on their scores, 42 participants were at the elementary level (mean score = 20/40) and 35 at the lower-intermediate level (mean score = 25/40) of L2 proficiency.

### ***Instrumentation***

#### ***L2 English proficiency***

Participants took the paper-and-pen version (Part 1) of the Oxford Quick Placement Test (2004). The 30-minute test assesses vocabulary, grammar and reading ability and was administered at the initial stage of the data collection in order to gauge participants' level of L2 proficiency.

### ***Background questionnaire***

A questionnaire consisting of 11 items was used to gather basic biographical information about participants' language learning history and exposure to English. It was administered in both English and Arabic and was piloted with two different samples from the same population before being administered to the participants in the present study. Except for the first question, the rest regarded participants' use of or exposure to English as this could affect their L2 proficiency, and possibly their self-repair behaviour. More specifically, four factors were considered likely to affect participants' proficiency and thus their performance in the oral task: 1) how long they have been formally taught English, 2) whether they had studied or lived in an English-speaking environment for an extended period of time, 3) whether they attended a public or private school prior to university<sup>3</sup>, and 4) whether there is a native English speaker in their immediate living environment with whom they daily interact in English. The analysis of the data showed that the sample was quite homogeneous with only very few participants having lived or studied abroad for a limited time or having attended a private high school. Statistical analysis did not reveal any significant differences between groups in relation to their L2 proficiency or their self-repair behaviour. Therefore, the groups were collapsed in the analysis of their self-repair behaviour.

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<sup>3</sup> This is specific to the region as students who attend private schools tend to have better command of the English language.

### ***Oral task***

Oral data were collected through an interview structured to resemble a standardized speaking test (IELTS, n.d.). The interview lasted approximately 5 minutes, but only a portion of the interview was used for analysis (Part 2). In Part 2, participants were given a task card with five questions about their best friend (how they met, a description of their friend, etc). They had to address all the questions and speak for two consecutive minutes. Prior to speaking, all participants were given one minute to plan and take notes if they wished. It is worth mentioning that none of the 77 participants utilised this option.

### ***Self-report questionnaire on speaking habits and error-tolerance***

Following the completion of the interviews, participants answered a 6-item questionnaire on their speaking habits and error-tolerance (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was designed for this specific study and was piloted twice prior to being administered to the present sample. In terms of speaking habits, it was based on the brief questionnaire used by Kormos (2000). The rationale for the remainder of the questionnaire items, which addressed error-tolerance, was founded on Krashen's (1981) and Selinger's (1982) characteristics of monitor over- and under-users. More specifically, in the present study, error-tolerance was operationalised as a) level of embarrassment when making mistakes in oral speech as monitor over-users tend to be more self-conscious in this regard, b) perceptions of an ideal L2 speaker, and c) bothersome behaviour in other speakers' speech. The last two operationalisations were used to provide more information on speaking habits that participants valued in other speakers and possibly wished to adopt in their own speech. The questionnaire was provided in English and Arabic. It consisted of four Likert-scale items and three multiple-choice questions. Each of the six questions was treated as a categorical variable.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

The measures were administered in the following order. First, participants completed the background questionnaire and the L2 proficiency test in groups supervised by the author.

Subsequently, the oral interview took place in which participants were interviewed individually by the author. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in CHAT format for subsequent analysis via the CLAN program of the CHILDES database (MacWhinney, 2000). In the final stage of the data collection, participants answered the self-report questionnaire in groups supervised by the author.

The interviews were analysed for self-repair behaviour, which, for the purpose of the present study, was defined as the number and types of overt self-corrections participants made during their two-minute turn as well as error-repair rate (grammatical and lexical errors<sup>4</sup>/grammatical and lexical error repairs per 100 words). Overt self-corrections were coded in accordance with Kormos's (1998) taxonomy for L2 self-repairs (see Appendix 2). Inter-coder reliability based on a sub-sample of 10% of the transcripts was 90%, with cases of disagreement between the two coders resolved through discussion.

## Results

Firstly, the study addressed the issue of whether self-repair behaviour differed between the two proficiency groups in the sample, namely the elementary and lower-intermediate participants. Table 1 displays the total number of self-repairs performed by the two groups as well as the number of overt self-repairs by type. Elementary and lower-intermediate participants performed nearly the same number of self-repairs (223 and 225, respectively; see Table 1). A Mann-Whitney U test showed that the difference between groups was not statistically significant ( $p=.126$ ).

### Table 1

*Descriptive statistics: Overall number of self-repairs*

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<sup>4</sup> An error was defined as "...a linguistic form or combination of words, which in the same context and under similar conditions of production, would in all likelihood, not be produced by the speakers' native speaker counterparts..." (Lennon, 1991, p.182)

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Total SRs</b>
Whole sample	77	1	15	5.6	5.0	3.1	448
Elementary	42	1	14	5.3	5.0	2.9	223
Lower Int.	35	1	15	6.4	6.0	3.2	225

In terms of specific types of self-repairs (see Table 2), lower-intermediate participants performed a slightly greater number of different-information and appropriacy repairs, but the difference between the two groups was not found to be statistically significant ( $p=.343$  and  $p=.060$ , respectively). On the other hand, elementary participants focused more on repairing language. Overall, elementary participants made more error-repairs, but again with no recorded statistical difference ( $p=.904$ ). The single statistically significant result emerged for the type of rephrasing repairs ( $p=.034$ ), whereby lower-intermediate participants were shown to make more rephrasing repairs ( $n=20$ ) than their elementary counterparts ( $n=10$ ).

**Table 2**  
*Number of self-repairs by type*

	<b>Whole sample</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Lower Intermediate</b>
Different-information (D) repair	198	98	100
Appropriacy (A) repair	75	34	41
Error-repair (E) overall	145	81	64
Error repair: grammatical	54	27	27
Error repair: lexical	70	41	29
Error repair: phonological	21	13	8
Rephrasing (R) repair	30	10	20
Total	448	223	225

The analysis of error-repair rate for the elementary and lower intermediate participants showed that there was no difference between speakers' success in correcting these errors

( $p=.361$ ). As grammatical and lexical errors per 100 words were also calculated in order to assess error-repair rate, it is worth mentioning that the lower-intermediate participants were overall more accurate in their grammatical and lexical use. The difference in the number of errors per 100 words between the two groups was statistically significant ( $p<.001$ ) with elementary participants making on average 13 (+/- 5) errors and lower intermediate averaging 9 (+/- 4) errors per 100 words.

In terms of speaker variables and whether they contribute to the frequency and types of self-repairs, the analysis of speaking habits, namely whether a speaker attributes greater importance to fluency, precision or accuracy expression, did not reveal any significant findings. Similarly, the level of embarrassment speakers feel when making mistakes in oral speech did not produce any significant results either. However, the speakers who reported feeling *quite* embarrassed performed more rephrasing repairs than their counterparts (*not embarrassed at all; a little embarrassed; extremely embarrassed*); the difference approached significance ( $\chi^2(3)=7.074, p=.070$ ).

A statistically significant difference between participants was observed for the speaker variable of perception of an ideal L2 speaker. More specifically, a Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that participants who consider an ideal L2 speaker to be one who speaks at medium pace but only makes few mistakes were shown to perform overall a greater amount of self-repairs ( $\chi^2(3)=9.124, p=.028$ ).

A Tamhane post-hoc test revealed that these participants performed more self-repairs than participants who regarded an ideal L2 speaker as one who realises and corrects her mistakes but still speaks fast. The former produced a mean of 8.2 ( $\pm 2.7$ ) self-repairs while the latter performed an average of 5 ( $\pm 2.8$ ) self-corrections. No other statistical significance was borne out in relation to different types of self-repairs and participants' answers to the questions in the speaking habits and error-tolerance questionnaire.

## **Discussion**

As per the difference in self-repair behaviour between speakers at the elementary and lower-intermediate level of L2 proficiency, the present study did not produce any significant results. Nevertheless, the tendencies observed in the data seem to corroborate previous findings that

suggest a shift of speakers' focus from low-level linguistic errors to higher-level discourse-related ones (Kormos, 1999; 2000) with the increase in L2 proficiency.

The significant finding regarding the larger number of rephrasing repairs performed by lower-intermediate participants suggests that as L2 proficiency progresses, speakers' repertoire of lexical and grammatical structures expands. Therefore, they have a greater variety of structures available to them to select from for the formulation of their message. Although rephrasing repairs were not included in the measure of error-repair rate, and, therefore, the accuracy of the rephrasing repairs could not be determined, what the finding can confirm is that the added lexical and grammatical options available to the participants are not yet fully stabilised in their linguistic system and thus compete with each other causing speakers to feel more unsure of their initial language selections resulting in their attempt to rephrase. The lack of significant difference in the error-repair rate between elementary and lower-intermediate participants corroborates the findings in Kormos (1999b). This suggests that the detection and correction of lexical and grammatical errors does not change with increased proficiency but is most likely dependent on other speaker characteristics.

In further evidence of this point, the self-report questionnaire produced one significant finding that can be tentatively used to explain the difference in the amount of overt self-repairs among participants in the present sample. There was a statistical difference in the amount of self-repairs made by participants who perceive an ideal speaker of English to be someone with a balanced performance between linguistic accuracy and speed, namely someone who makes few mistakes but can maintain a medium speed of production. These participants performed significantly more self-repairs than the participants who believed the ideal L2 speaker to be someone who speaks fast but also detects and corrects their mistakes. There are two differences between these two aforementioned options. The first difference clearly addresses the speed of speech, and the second addresses linguistic accuracy. In one of the options, the speaker 'makes few mistakes', but at the same time maintains a medium pace of speech. On the other hand, in the latter, the speed of speech is fast, something that is often equated with native-likeness. In addition, the speaker is able to detect and correct his/her mistakes, which means that he/she may make errors - an anticipated and acceptable practice for L2 speakers - but has the capacity and linguistic knowledge to correct them, as an L1 speaker would detect and correct the inevitable errors/lapses in their speech. Although this difference between the two options is subtle, it may

be indicative of the sample's perceptions of ideal L2 speakers and their behaviour, as well as the participants' personal desire and aspiration to sound as such. Thus, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the participants (65%) selected the latter. Counter-intuitively, these participants self-corrected the least among all other participants.

A possible interpretation of this finding lies in how often oral competence in a foreign language is closely associated with oral fluency, which in its everyday sense it has come to mean speed of production or lack of pausing. More specifically, "in the narrow sense, L2 fluency has been conceptualised as a temporal performance phenomenon, manifested primarily as speed and effortlessness" (Chambers, 1997, in Rossiter, 2009, p. 397). Being fluent, in this case fast, can give the listener the impression of the speaker's ease in L2 processing and production. As Lennon (1990) supports, oral fluency can also help divert the listener's attention from grammatical, lexical, syntactic, phonological or other inconsistencies in speech, and, in addition, a fluent speaker can be seen more favourably in terms of his/her communicative competence. This perception places certain significance on being fluent (fast) rather than accurate or precise. As a result, speakers' perceptions of what they think means to be an ideal L2 speaker or, consequently, their own aspiration to be perceived as good speakers or native-like by their interlocutors, may be a factor affecting L2 speakers' overt self-repair behaviour in terms of how often they choose to self-correct.

Speaking habits and the affective factor of embarrassment, which has been linked to monitoring and correction (Krashen, 1982) were not found to play a role in participants' self-repair behaviour. Similarly, whether speakers are bothered by errors in others' speech was not found to be a contributing factor to the amount or type of self-repairs they themselves produce either. Their perceptions of an ideal L2 speaker though, and by association, how they are perceived themselves as L2 speakers seems to be a possible explanation, especially if one considers that on standardised speaking test rubrics self-repairs are consistently coupled with dysfluent and disruptive speech. This creates a negative perception regarding self-repairs and, therefore, speakers will avoid self-correcting if it means being labelled as non-fluent or less competent in their oral performance. In addition, the focus EFL curricula place on communicative competence, especially in parts of the world like the United Arab Emirates where there is wide variation in the Englishes used by speakers of ranging proficiency for everyday communication, promotes the perception that accuracy and precision of expression are not as



important or even necessary. Consequently, for these speakers monitoring and repairing one's speech become rare processes, and this can further affect their ability to notice gaps in their language and work towards acquiring this knowledge.

In an English-language learning setting as culturally diverse as Abu Dhabi where English is used in everyday interactions between native and, mostly, non-native speakers of English, successful communication is not evaluated based on linguistic accuracy but on efficiency. According to the Statistical Centre of Abu Dhabi (2012), the total population of the Emirate at the end of 2011 was 2.4 million, of which 18% were UAE nationals. The rest of the population, the non-nationals, consist mainly of other Arab and South Asian nationalities as well as 'Westerners', a term used to denote residents of the Emirate who are either native speakers of English and citizens of English speaking countries, such as USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa or of the western world at large. Among such a diverse population, English is the common language used extensively in daily life, outside the classroom. Naturally, in such settings where getting the message across is more important than being accurate, focus on linguistic form and formal rules deteriorates, and as a consequence, the monitor may become underused and self-correction limited. According to Krashen (1981), this is a common characteristic in speakers who live in the country where the target language is spoken or are frequently exposed to the target language in their own country, as is the case some participants in the present study.

## **Conclusion**

The present study investigated the difference in the amount and type of overt self-repairs as well as error-repair rate between elementary and lower-intermediate speakers in addition to the role other speaker variables play in the amount and type of self-repairs performed by Emirati EFL university students.

Every effort was made to ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments used in collecting the data for the present study. It has to be acknowledged, however, that the self-report questionnaire consisted of subtle nuances that might have been lost on the participants. Individual interviews and qualitative data would have added to the validity of the results. In addition, although the study looked at the self-repair behaviour of speakers at different levels of

proficiency, the two groups were not widely distinctive. More studies allowing for the comparison of more clearly distinct proficiency groups, for instance elementary versus advanced, would provide further useful insight in how the individual differences in the present study manifest themselves in L2 speakers' self-repair behaviour. Finally, the relationship of overt self-repair behaviour and individual speaker variables in participants from various L1 backgrounds and L2 learning settings would be an interesting path of inquiry.

The findings indicate a trend towards a shift in the types of self-repairs performed with an increase in L2 proficiency as lower-intermediate participants performed a greater number of higher-level, discourse-related repairs. The lower-intermediate speakers also produced significantly more rephrasing repairs than the elementary participants, which seems to suggest that with the expansion of the language system, a wider variety of structures becomes available for experimentation. When speakers are unsure of the accuracy of their message, they have more options at their disposal.

Furthermore, the study tentatively supports the view that self-repair behaviour, if not a conscious decision, is at least associated in the present sample with the speakers' perceptions of what self-repairing means in terms of fluency. The findings from the self-report questionnaire suggested that speakers who valued fast speech as a characteristic of an ideal L2 speaker chose to self-correct less frequently. Although this was the single significant finding borne out of the questionnaire, and thus any interpretation should be approached with caution, it might be indicative of how individual L2 speaker perceptions can play a role in their decision to self-correct during oral speech. Future studies on speakers' perceptions of fluency, temporal phenomena and the ideal L2 self can help shed more light on this topic.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Speaking habits & error-tolerance self-report questionnaire

1. When I make a mistake in English, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.

1	2	3	4
Not embarrassed at all	A little embarrassed	Quite embarrassed	Extremely embarrassed

2. In general, I consider it important to express my thought/ideas *precisely*.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

3. In general, I consider it important to speak accurately with no grammatical mistakes.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

4. In general, I tend to express my thoughts quickly even if what I say may not be absolutely grammatically accurate.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

5. An ideal speaker of English is \_\_\_\_\_. (choose only ONE)

- a. Someone who speaks fast even if they make a few mistakes.
- b. Someone who speaks at medium pace but only makes few mistakes.
- c. Someone who speaks slowly but makes no mistakes.
- d. Someone who realizes his/her mistakes and can correct them but can still speak fast.

6. When I hear someone else speak in English, it bothers me when \_\_\_\_\_. (choose only ONE)

- a. They make too many mistakes.

- b. They speak too slowly.
- c. They speak too fast.
- d. They frequently correct themselves.
- e. They keep repeating the same mistakes.

**Appendix 2** Kormos's (1998) taxonomy of L2 self-repairs

<b>Type of self-repair</b>	<b>Operationalisation</b>	<b>Examples from the present study</b>
Different-information repair (D-repair)	Message replacement; different information is encoded.	“um my friend [//] I know my friend since grade one...” “um she like [//] we have a strong relationship..”
Appropriacy repair (A-repair)	Intended message is encoded in a modified way to provide more detailed, more specific or less ambiguous information.	“I give her a hug [//] big hug...” “and not I am in the university [//] in Z university...”
Error repair (E-repair)	Corrections of accidental grammatical, lexical or phonological lapses.	“and sometimes I went [//] I go with...” (grammatical) “my friend he [//] she is...” (lexical) “if I am absent [//] upset...” (phonological)
Rephrasing repair (R-repair)	Revision of form but not content of message due to uncertainty about correctness.	“we go together shopping [//] for shopping...” “I’ll talk about my friend she’s name [//] her name is Amani...”