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# **Organization of Repair in Talk-in-Interaction and Politeness**

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Joint construction of intersubjective meaning as a major goal of conversational interaction presupposes the existence of a mechanism which would attend potential trouble spots. Being such a mechanism, conversational repair involves a wide range of phenomena. The paper discusses trajectories of several types of especially other-initiated repair as employed at different stages of radio phone-in programmes to address various aspects of interactional activity. The paper further claims that execution of repair interfaces politeness aspects of interaction since it may pose a challenge to interactants' individual faces.

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## **1 Introduction**

If we view talk-in-interaction as a dialogically-based effort for the establishment and maintenance of intersubjectivity which emerges as a result of a joint endeavour of several interactants, it is reasonable to assume that it is not always a faultless process but rather one which is not immune to various problems, such as mishearings, non-hearings, misspeakings, misunderstandings, self-editings, proper word selections, term specifications, factual errors, etc. In order to ensure that serious damage to the on-going interaction (with concomitant ill-effects on participants' faces) is prevented, it may be supposed that interaction disposes of a mechanism in charge of repairing such faults. Moreover, existence of such a mechanism would touch upon the very nature of conversational interaction, in which participants utilize the others' previous turns as resources for structuring their own turns; each conversational turn then displays recipient's understanding of the previous one. Proper 'analysis' of the current speaker's turn by the hearer is thus essential for the course of interaction. The interactional device of repair offers itself as an effective tool for dealing with the above-mentioned types of interactional 'trouble'. The following discussion of examples taken from

radio phone-in programmes shows that problematic spots which invite repairing occur at various stages of on-going talk and may relate to various aspects of conversational organization, such as initial contacting, turn-taking system, membership categorization, etc.

Repair as a standard item on the list of conversation-analytic agenda has, since the publication of the classic paper (Schegloff *et al.* 1977), produced a number of important contributions, e.g. Jefferson (1987), Schegloff (1987, 1992, 2000). A lucid explanation of repair within the general framework of conversation-analytical methodology can be found in Levinson (1983). The present discussion aims to be a contribution to the research into the relation between repair and politeness.

## 2 Methodology and the Data

The paper is grounded in ethnomethodological Conversation Analysis (CA) which stresses the importance of situated talk for the production of social order by focusing on detailed analysis of procedures participants take when interacting. For the present paper the two lines of CA study are relevant, viz. sequential organization of talk (turn-taking) and membership categorization. The second approach the paper is based on is the Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness whose basic claim is that interactants, if they wish to be considered competent members of society, should employ strategies in which they display their orientation to the (negative and positive) face wants of their co-members. The study of various manifestations of the related strategies of negative and positive politeness forms the core of the theory.

As to the analysed data, they are taken from the corpus of phone calls to a radio talk show ("Irv Homer Show", WWDB, Eastern USA) recorded over the years of 1995-2000. The media genre is an instance of a public participation radio programme through which the listenership is given opportunity to voice and discuss their opinions with the host of the programme. The institutional nature of the interaction is defined by the uneven distribution of interactional resources between the two parties, the host and the caller (for the discussion of the tasks bound to these organizationally-relevant categories see Ferenčík 2005), which is manifested by the ways interactional procedures, including repair, are conducted.

## 3 Organization of Repair

The term repair is used as a generic notion to cover a variety of phenomena of which only a few, as its name might suggest, involve actual correcting of factual errors or faults in the contents. It is not the case that in normal circumstances similar faults do not happen; rather than that, when they occur, they do not tend to be corrected explicitly by recipients but are made 'visible' and the relevance for their repair (preferably by the producers themselves) is established. Because of the preferences associated with the resolution of troubles, repair is seen to operate within the framework of preference organization of talk (cf. Levinson 1983).

The mechanism of repair is constituted of the "repair trajectory" (He 2004: 203), viz. a sequence of trouble source (TS), repair initiation and the actual repair (repair execution), and involves three related organizational dimensions (cf. Schegloff *et al.* 1977) (see Table 1):

- a) a participant who initiates the repair (i.e. who identifies TS), who may either be the current speaker (the producer of TS, hence self-initiated repair) or recipient (hence other-initiated repair),
- b) a participant who executes the repair – speaker (self-(completed) repair) or recipient (other-(completed) repair), and

- c) the location where the execution of repair is done in relation to the location of TS; here three major repair opportunities may be identified (cf. Levinson 1983):
- 1<sup>st</sup> opportunity – within (1) or immediately after (2) turn construction unit (TCU) containing TS within the same turn (same-turn repair); the repair is done by the producer of the TS, hence the self-initiated self-repair (SISR),
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> opportunity - immediately at the next transition-relevance-place (TRP) within the same turn, or after the turn containing the trouble source (repair in TRP); this is also the case of a SISR (3),
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> opportunity - within recipient’s turn following speaker’s turn with TS; this is a possibility for either other-initiated other-repair (OIOR) (4), or other-initiation of self-repair done in turn 3,
  - 4<sup>th</sup> opportunity - within the speaker’s turn following the recipients’ initiation of repair (i.e. next-turn repair initiation (NTRI)); this is the case of other-initiated self-repair (OISR) (5).

**Table 1** Major Types of Repair and their Preferences (adapted from Levinson 1983)

Turn	Participant	Opportunity	Repair Type	Repair Initiation	Repair Execution	Preference	Frequency in the Corpus
1	Speaker	1	SISR	self self	self -	1	1
Transition	Speaker	2	SISR	self	self	2	2
2	Recipient	3	SIOR OIOR	- other other (NTRI)	other other -	4 5	5 3
3	Speaker	4	OISR	-	self	3	4

[1] (IHS II 6)

22 M → but they will eventually get it because the + the I I didn't see Dole or Clinton addressing it last night ...

[2] (IHS I 2)

6 C → ((laughter)) .h oh see I do too. e:h I am a Libertarian like you do, .hh like you are? and I don't understand what + why there's a problem with + two consenting adults ...

[3] (IHS II 2)

4 C one of the biggest problems? of this North American Free Trade Agreement? it's just sold out American industrial system? right down the river. it even abolished we used  
→ to have what they called a VAT. the value added tax. that meant .hh if I manufacture shirts? I can send them material the cut material? the buttons or thread? ...

[4] (IHS I 5)

2 C ... .hh there're, you know. all men, you know should be entitled to + you know

- get what they need in the way of eh + sexual satisfaction.  
3 H → and women.  
4 C and women. you're absolutely right. ...

[5] (IHS II 1)

- 1 C hey listen. you can e:h buy toasters. that are manufactured in the United States.  
2 H where. (=NTRI)  
3 C → they're Toastmaster.

A relatively infrequent type of repair is the self-initiated other-repair (SIOR) done in the 2<sup>nd</sup> opportunity in which the speaker (i.e. the author of TS) himself signals the trouble and prompts recipient to repair it (in [6] host asks caller to provide a correct name that he is unable to recall):

[6] (IHS I 2)

- 7 H that's right? the woman? .h who gets? .h like this movie actor. whatever his name is Hank something or something=  
8 C → =Hugh Grant  
9 H Hugh Grant. and had he not offered her fifty dollars. ...

Table 1 is illustrative of the fact that, in general terms, the repair system is oriented towards giving preference for self-repair over other-repair (preference positions 1-3), viz. it offers the author of TS to repair it within his/her own turn (opportunity 1 and 2) or immediately after the TS has been made 'noticeable' by the recipient (opportunity 4). Analogically, on the preference scale the system ranks self-initiations of repair higher than other-initiations. This general claim is supported by the evidence drawn from the analysed corpus, viz. by a close correspondence of preference and frequency scales. It may be argued that the deviation of the actual frequency from the 'standard' relates to the exploitation of other-initiated other-repair for the strategic purposes (which is a characteristic feature of this media genre), viz. the escalation of confrontation, initiation of argument and incitement of tension (cf. Hutchby 1996).

Positionally, single repairs or entire repair sequences may be launched at the three recognizable stages of evolving interaction ('opening', 'body' and 'closing') as well as at different places within single turns, such as turn (7) and TCU (8) beginnings. Repairs may also constitute entire turns (6).

[7] (IHS I 2)

- C I:: wanted to talk about e:hm you were talking about the the house of ill-repute.

[8] (IHS I 2)

- 6 C ((laughter)) .h oh see I do too. e:h I am a Libertarian like you do, .hh like you are? and  
→ I don't understand what + why there's a problem with + two consenting adults...

#### 4 Type, Frequency and Position of Repair

The corpus data show that by far the most commonly occurring type of repair is SISR because it is endowed with the greatest variety of specific functions. Among the most prominent

belong those which are associated with real-time, online-planned, situated production of spoken language and which often manifest themselves as dysfluencies: repeats, restarts, backtrackings, reformulations and/or re-routings, phenomena generally known as self-editing or self-correcting (examples [1], [2], [3], [7] and [8]). This type of repair is distributed proportionately between the two participants in the talk and is 'endemic' to the on-topic stage of the talk which constitutes the 'main body' phase of the speech event.

The phase of discursive development of the topic, in which a particular issue raised by the caller is disputed, is the territory where OIOR, the second most frequent type of repair, is used as a resource which adds to the argumentative character of the programme. The resource of making an other-repair is available to, and actually employed by, both host (4) and caller (example [9] where the caller overtly corrects host's erroneous use of a name). The availability of this interactive resource to both participants is given by their constituting a standard relational pair within the membership category device 'parties to the argument' whose category bound predicate is their engagement in "adversative activities such as challenge, contradiction, negation, and other forms of opposition" (Hutchby 1996: 22). Other-repair can be seen as one such type of 'forms of opposition'.

[9] (IHS I 6)

- 5 H we're talking about Bella Feminina. you did the report?  
6 C → right. Bella Femina.  
7 H whatever.

Comparatively speaking, the two remaining types of repair, OISR and SIOR, are infrequent. Their occurrence is again bound to the 'argumentative core' of the speech event where they contribute to the specification of the references made to various aspects of the talk, such as personal referents (6), add to the topical elaboration (10) or negotiate the extent of shared knowledge (11).

[10] (IHS II 3)

- 11 H → and this moron this moron Ronald Reagan says it was a what did he say it was?  
a admirable venture? // or something? why the hell didn't he go.  
12 C // right  
13 C that's right

[11] (IHS III 6)

- 6 C ok. now eh got something in the mail on the emissions. they're gonna  
implement? it again in ninety nineteen ninety seven.  
7 H yes sir. I'm aware of it.  
8 C are you aware of it?  
9 H → yes I'd mentioned it last week and nobody gave a damn.

Two special uses of repair deserve a special, albeit brief mention. They are notable for their location at turn beginnings which are considered to be important places in conversation: it is there where projection of TCUs is displayed by current speakers to which the next speakers orient when taking over their turns. Turn beginnings are thus essential for the proper management of the turn-taking system whose purpose is to achieve, via coordinated effort of participants, a 'one-speaker-at-a-time' ideal with a minimum of gap and overlap (a feat which is, as the majority of empirical evidence suggests, not impossible to achieve). As turns are produced, their course may, however, be re-projected, revised or recast, which often manifests itself as 'normal' conversational non-fluency (see, for example, a hesitant start in example 7).

Another way the link between turn beginnings and repair is made evident is the case of overlapping talk, in which the next speaker's 'recycled' turn-beginning overlaps with the current speaker's end of turn. What is noteworthy here is that the overlapped talk and overlapping repair tend to be synchronized: the boundaries of recycling are attuned to the current turn's TCU pattern. Example [12] illustrates the situation where the "recycle begins at precisely the point at which the 'new' turn emerges 'into the clear'; that is, as overlap ends by the 'old' turn coming *to* its 'natural' or projected completion or by being stopped/withdrawn *before* its projected completion" (Schegloff 1987: 74). Here, structural projectability (end of clause) of the prior turn enables H to attempt a smooth transition.

[12] (IHS II 3)

- 9 C oh I I did go over there? and fortunately I didn't die? but many of others that I know did .h but I I woke up while I was there. Irv and I // ( )  
decided this is
- 10 H→ // and this moron
- 9a C wrong. ( )
- 11 H→and this moron this moron Ronald Reagan says it was a what did he say it was? a admirable venture? // or something? why the hell didn't he go.
- 12 C // right
- 13 C that's right

## 5 Preference, (Other-)repair and Politeness

Similar to the adjacency-pair system of preference organization (manifested by, for example, preferredness of acceptances over declinations as responses to invitations), the system of repair also exhibits patterns of giving preference to some choices. The following discussion offers some evidence to support the claim (which is not, to the best of our knowledge, always explicitly stated in the relevant literature on repair, with the exception of Brown and Levinson, 1987) that the preference system of repair (as presented in Table 1) and awareness of the mutual vulnerability of participants' faces are closely linked. It may be argued that it is participants' face wants, notably "participants' self-esteem and its preservation" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 41) that delineate the 'repair trajectory'. It appears then that repair procedures endanger participants' faces by exposing them to the chance of serious face damage.

However, some relevant remarks have to be made as to the relation between the repair type and the type of face threat. It seems that a) it is primarily one's negative face that repair poses a threat to, as it seriously constrains recipient's course of action impinging thus upon his/her freedom, and b), it is the other-repair and/or doing overt 'correction'-type of repair that potentially involve highest face damage since it openly challenges hearer's 'cognitive preserves' (i.e. the extent or quality of hearer's knowledge). For this reason, any 'rational' agent shall regard other-repair as a face-threatening act (FTA) to the hearer's negative face and shall attempt to take an appropriate redressive action (viz. a negative politeness strategy) in order to (preferably) avoid discord and maintain interpersonal balance. Since this type of repair (viz. other-initiated 'correction') involves higher face risk, it is normally least socially preferred and, accordingly, least frequent. The data drawn from the corpus, however, suggest quite an adverse tendency, viz. that participants freely employ OIOR as an argumentative resource.

It should be noted, however, that preference here stands for the systematic variations in the production of alternative types rather than individual participants' likings: preferred sequences are usually proffered immediately and tend to be structurally simpler (hence

unmarked sequences), dispreferred procedures tend to be hesitant, delayed and have more elaborated structure (it should be, however, underlined again that these tendencies tend to be somewhat modulated in this type of interactional setting). In [13] the two cases of OIOR carry markers of dispreferredness: delay (*now, well*), repetition (personal pronoun), hedge (*I think*). Both interactants use the ‘other-repair’ technique for the purpose of proffering their (counter)claims.

[13] (IHS III 1)

10H well there’s only one thing eh incorrect in Claude’s column? and that is that he never called me. eh if if you see? in the article .h that he spoke to me on the phone?

11C→ now it doesn’t appear there

12H→ well I I think it does. + I I think it does.

As it has been already observed, the major part of other-repairing occurs in the ‘arena for disputes’, viz. argumentative sections of the phone-ins in which participants are expected to ‘enact’ their programme-relevant identities. This is, however, the area where the institutional asymmetry arising from unequal distribution of interactional resources is projected onto the interactional pattern at its best: while callers are required to put forward their positions early in the calls, the host in turn can not only withhold proffering his position but he can systematically build opposition in the pursuit of controversy. Through this practice “hosts routinely attend to callers’ talk as potentially arguable and seek to define callers’ claims and assertions as arguable actions, and so to locate, in details of their talk, resources for building oppositions” (Hutchby 1996: 59). By way of illustration, in example [14] the host manipulates the caller into a difficult position: by asking a wh-question (with a range of possible answers) he fully demonstrates his power advantage over the caller: it is not only that he disagrees, but he does so overtly by explicitly denoting caller’s answer as erroneous; through making an unhedged other-repair (line 13), viz. one carrying the heaviest load of potential face-damage, he openly challenges the adequacy of the caller’s stock of knowledge. The caller demonstrably takes the host’s move as a FTA and attempts to restore his face by offering a candidate answer (line 14) which, however, is again denied as being inadequate (line 16).

[14] (IHS IV 4)

11H ... .h you gotta deal specifically with one issue. but above all you got to know what makes America work. .h do you know what makes America Michael different that any country in the world.

12C + well the supposedly the the power and the clout of the vote? of individual? citizen.

13H→ wrong.

14C well then then // ( ) the thing. that really makes America work who has

15H // because people the most money to buy best options. .he either //

16H // well a patriotism is a joke. don’t don’t ever fall victim don’t ever fall victim .h to this silly nonsense. + the fact is. + the only thing that makes this country different than any other country? + .h is the restrictions? that the Constitution of the United States puts on government.

## 6 Repair and Categorization

Besides being employed as an argumentative tool, repair can be seen to perform other important interactional tasks, among which membership categorization holds a prominent place. Category work is a permanent activity through which various participants' identities emerge on a moment-by-moment basis. A crucial categorial co-membership that needs to be established early in each talk is represented by the organizationally/institutionally-relevant categories of 'host' and 'caller' whose predicated tasks inform the 'infrastructure' of the programme. In [15], the host brings the caller into the 'participatory framework' (Thornborrow 2001) by eliciting from him, in a stepwise fashion through two repair-initiations, the category of caller (the categorial relevance is, however, established implicitly in line 13).

The trouble identified in [16] (and explicitly stated in line 2) is the occupation of the 'programme-relevant' category of the 'host' of the show by Irv Homer himself. Even though the host's introductory turn provides an abundance of 'verbal material' for his safe recognition, caller takes a marked (dispreferred) course of initiating a repair by asking for more recognitional clues (cf. preference for identification by recognition over explicit self-identification in American English telephone calls as pointed by Schegloff (1979)). The markedness of this procedure is underscored by the host's ostentatious list of three predicates bound to the category of 'self'. What is more, caller's self-categorization as a 'frequent listener' (line 4) renders the sincerity of her initial query questionable. The two participants seem to be engaged in the reciprocal reinforcement of 'community' ties by means of the exchange of teasing remarks (cf. joking as a positive politeness strategy; Brown and Levinson 1987: 124).

[15] (IHS I 3)

- 7 C I wasn't expecting that.  
 8 H well what. did you call?  
 9 C → yes? I did. // I just + e:hm  
 10H // well did you di  
 11H did you expect me to push the button?  
 12C → yeah I did.  
 13H ok.

[16] (IHS IV 6)

- 1 H .h e:h let us go to Virginia? in Broomall good morning Virginia  
 2 C good morning. is this Irv?  
 3 H → yes ma'am? I. it's me? I am wearing his clothes? and. // driving his car? and sleeping with his wife.  
 4 C // ((laughter)) .h well  
 Irv? I've listened to you for years. ...

## 7 Repair and Turn-taking

The last interactional function of repair to be discussed here is its use as a resource to signal participants' orientation to the basic 'one-party-at-a-time' turn-taking rule. One type of such repair recycles structures in order to produce overlapping talk through which to compete for the interactional floor. In [17] host, in the pursuit of controversy, blatantly interrupts the caller

and issues a series of vocatives which constitute a SISR. The recycled part terminates once the caller stops speaking upon which host produces a challenge to the epistemic validity of caller's claim (which is itself a NTRI, or an other-initiation of self-repair). Needless to say, by resorting to interruption when competing for the floor, host performs a major turn-taking violation, an act threatening caller's positive face (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 67). The other repair strategy commonly employed by host in an effort to claim his right to ground is using explicit formulation of the above quoted rule. Example [18] further demonstrates how host displays his institutionally-granted power to dispose of interactional resources, such as right to floor, at any moment. He denies the caller his right to begin a new turn at a regular TRP and, by evoking the TT rule (*wait a minute, let me finish*), takes the turn back.

[17] (IHS IV 2)

- 2 C ... .h number two, people do tell their mis men do tell their mistresses things they do not // tell anybody else? + number three  
3 H→ // well ha ha John John John John John have you ever had a mistress?  
4 C no I haven't=  
5 H =well then how do you know what men tell their mistresses.

[18] (IHS IV 6)

- 7 H ... so that when I come in the company of a congressman a senator or judge? + they are not held in any revere status to me because I pay them. + .h I treat them with a respect? but I don't consider them to be above me because they are my employees.  
8 C + but. Mr. Homer.=  
9 H→ = now wait a minute, let me finish.  
10C ok.

## 8 Conclusion

Repair as a particularly effective interactional device is used by the interactants to put the interaction back 'on the right track'. The paper focuses on the employment of repair in attending to some aspects of the on-going interaction, such as negotiation of 'epistemic stances', the management of turn-taking and membership categorization. Repair sequences are seen to demonstrate participants' orientation to politeness considerations of interaction by attending to their positive and/or negative face wants.

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### Abbreviations:

CA	Conversation Analysis	FTA	face-threatening act
MC	Membership Categorization Analysis	NTRI	next-turn repair initiation
OIOR	other-initiated other-repair	OISR	other-initiated self-repair
R	repair	SIOR	self-initiated other-repair
SISR	self-initiated self-repair	TCU	turn-construction unit
TRP	transition-relevance place	TS	trouble spot, trouble source
IHS	Irv Homer Show		

### Symbols:

.hh	audible breathing	<u>no.</u>	(underlining) emphasis
→	exact location of the discussed point	( )	area of unintelligible talk
=	latching	?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation	//	overlapping talk

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