You went where?
Repair in language teaching and learning

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Abstract

When speakers in spontaneous interactions proceed through their turns-at-talk there often occur instances of trouble. These trouble sources may be troubles in speaking such as mis-saying a word, inability to produce a word in ʻtip of the tongueʼ type occasions, reformulating a grammatical unit and the like. Similarly, troubles of hearing may also occur, due to environmental noise, low speaking volume and so on. Thirdly, problems of understanding may occur, such as when a listener does not know the referent person or place. When these trouble sources occur, participants engage in what is known as *repair* in order for the interaction to progress. This paper describes ways in which repair is carried out by L1 speakers and also details the specific ways in which L2 learners go about the business of repair, such as use of silence, reversions to L1 and incremental turn construction. It is suggested here that awareness of the nature of repair in L1 and sensitivity to learnersʼ repair strategies can help learners develop a wider repertoire of repair practices with concomitant benefits for using the target language naturalistically.

The intellectual curiosity surrounding human language is a constant in human culture. Certainly, the study of grammar dates back to ancient civilizations.

The Vedic scholars of ancient India placed grammar analysis at the center of their intellectual efforts.

> Indian culture is unique in the world for its rigorous analysis of its own language, which it furthermore made the central discipline of its own culture. The Sanskrit word for grammar, *vyakarana*, instead of being based, like the Greek *grammatike*, on some word for *word or writing*, just means *analysis: so* language is the subject for analysis par excellence.
>
> Ostler. (2005, p.180)

However, for most of human history, the study of language relied on examples drawn from two sources, the written form of the language, especially the great literature of any culture, and secondly, examples drawn from the intuition of the scholar or grammarian. What was missing from these analyses was data drawn from the primary use of language in all human cultures: quotidian spoken interaction between to co-present persons, that is to say, conversation. Despite being the central use of language, the nature of conversation remained largely resistant to analysis for most of recorded history, because of its speed and dynamism, its context-bound and participant-oriented nature and also because of the limits of human memory and powers of recall.

This changed in the 20th century with the advent of reliable, portable recording technology that brought about a revolution in the study of language. As Halliday (1994:xxiii) remarked:

> Perhaps the greatest single event in the history of linguistics was the invention of the tape recorder, which for the first time captured natural conversation and made it accessible to systematic study.

The results from this systematic study of actual, real-time conversation revealed a wide variety of phenomena that had hitherto been largely invisible to scholars of language, or had been dissatended to, sidelined and ignored or dismissed as chaotic or degenerate. As Chomsky (1965, p.4) somewhat dismissively states,

> A record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid-course and so on.

Chomsky goes on to explain that 'observed use of language … surely cannot constitute the actual subject matter of linguistics, if this is to be a serious discipline.' (1965, p.4)

However, the discipline of conversation analysis has taken the stance that these performance phenomena, far from being a distraction, are central to any understanding of what language is and how people use language, not so much to make truth statements about the world, but to jointly construct, with their interlocutors, social action and intersubjectivity.

Spoken and written language

Historically, the written form of the language, partly because of its permanence and accessibility, was seen to be the expression of the highest form of any language. The corollary of this view has been, '… the spoken language has been downgraded and has come to be regarded as relatively inferior to written manifestations.' (Carter, 2004, p. 26)

One of the main findings to emerge from the study of real-time, spontaneous spoken interactions was the true extent of the difference between spoken and written forms of language in lexis and grammar. Certain words, expressions, grammatical constructions, collocations and the like are often strongly skewed

towards the spoken or the written form of the language.

Despite these differences, one similarity of spoken and written language is the way in which speakers and writers engage in a process when they produce language. That is to say, neither speakers nor writers proceed smoothly through the production of language, but rather, they engage in multiple stops, starts, deletions, re-phrasings and so on as they proceed through their written composition or their turn-at-talk. The main difference between the two is that the repair processes of writing end up being invisible to the reader of the final written product. The frequent backspacing, deletion, correction of typos and other such phenomena are entirely invisible in the final piece of writing. A pause between writing one word (or sentence or paragraph or chapter) and writing the next one may be of seconds, minutes, hours, days or even years of duration, but that pause is invisible to the reader of the final product. Evidence of the processes of written composition are entirely absent from the finished product and inaccessible to the reader.

By contrast, the processes of producing a turn-at-talk are, of necessity, performed in full view (or earshot) of the listener. As with writing, speakers generally do not proceed through all of their turns smoothly, without hesitations, pauses, re-starts, corrections and the like. Speakers quite often fail to produce utterances that would pass muster as 'correct' by the standards of written composition. Rather, the production of utterances by speakers is characterized by the process known to conversation analysts as *repair*. (See Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977 for a rationale for terming the phenomenon repair rather than *correction*.)

This repair process, despite being accessible to co-participants in the interaction in a way that written repair is not accessible to readers, tends to have only localized impact on the unfolding interaction, and is tacitly dissatended to by all participants beyond the immediate context of its occurrence. Indeed, Lindsay and O'Connell (1995) find that phenomena such as restarts and hesitations are sys-

tematically omitted in transcriptions of natural spoken interaction.

To sum up then, the written form of the language has been privileged over the spoken form of the language and thus, for many years, the written form of the language was seen as the proper form to be studied by language learners. In addition, due to the impermanent nature of spoken language and the limits of human memory, before the advent of recording technology many of the aspects of spoken language were invisible to scholars and linguists, and thus could find no place in language learning programs of the past. Thirdly, even when identified by systematic study, many of the aspects of spoken language seem to lie below a cognitive threshold during speaking and be inaccessible to the intuitions of speakers and are generally not recallable afterwards.

The system of turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974), the use and meaning of discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987, Heritage, 1984, Hasselgreen, 2005) and the processes of repair (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977) are some of the central skills that all speakers possess that allows spoken interaction to take place even though speakers remain largely unaware of the skills they rely on to carry out spoken interaction.

Perhaps because of their subconscious nature, these skills are not, or have not until comparatively recently, been a prominent part of language learning syllabi. It is by no means clear that these skills, extant and fully developed in the repertoire of all psychologically normal adult speakers of a language, are readily transferable to the second language. That is to say, the assumption that L2 speakers will somehow intuitively pick up the repair processes of the target language during exposure to the language is probably misguided. It is to the process of repair and its relevance to language learners that I will now turn.

Repair

Speaking is one for the four skills of language. Along with writing, it is labeled as an active skill, in opposition to reading and listening, which are referred to as passive skills. But, just as it is recognized that there are many different genres of writing (e.g. business letters, creative writing, academic writing) so, in speaking, there are multiple different genres of speaking (e.g. presentations, interviews, conversation). Furthermore, the skills needed to perform well in one genre are not necessarily transferable to another genre; the ability to write business e-mails will not automatically enable the language learner to write an academic essay, nor will the ability to deliver a rehearsed speech guarantee that the student will be able to engage in spontaneous conversation.

As was mentioned above, the written form of the language is generally privileged over the spoken form, and this can lead to a situation where the rigorous standards for written language are assumed to apply to spoken language. That is to say, the ʻcleanʼ and ʻerror-freeʼ finished written product serves as a model for students who are tacitly expected to produce similarly ʻcleanʼ and ʻerror-freeʼ spoken language.

The aversion to speaking which does not meet the standards of perfection idealized in the finished written product is referred to by Sedivy (2015):

Imagine standing up to give a speech in front of a critical audience. As you do your best to wax eloquent, someone in the room uses a clicker to conspicuously count your every stumble, hesitation, *um* and *uh*; once youʼve finished, this person loudly announces how many of these blemishes have marred your presentation.
This is exactly the tactic used by the Toastmasters public-speaking club, in

which a designated "Ah Counter" is charged with tallying up the speaker's slip-ups as part of the training regimen. The goal is total eradication. The club's punitive measures may be extreme, but they reflect the folk wisdom that *ums* and *uhs* betray a speaker as weak, nervous, ignorant, and sloppy, and should be avoided at all costs, even in spontaneous conversation.

This preference for 'error-free' speaking, devoid of disfluencies, hesitations, restarts and repetitions does not reflect the actual ways in which speakers of a language actually speak in real-time spontaneous conversation, which is the central use of language in all cultures, and is, surely, one main skill that language learners are aiming for when attempting to learn another language.

The processes of repair

When we speak of repair, in the conversation analysis meaning of the word, we are referring to a number of different phenomena that occur in spontaneous spoken interactions. As Sidnell remarks,

[w]hen people talk together they frequently encounter problems of hearing speaking, and understanding. Troubles of speaking arise, for instance, when a speaker uses a wrong word or cannot find the word they want. Troubles of hearing arise when a hearer cannot make out what a speaker has said. Troubles of understanding arise within a wide variety of circumstances, such as when a hearer does not recognize a particular word used, does not know who or what is being talked about, or cannot parse the grammatical structure of an utterance.

(2010, p. 110)

It is vital that the view of language use outlined in this quote be firmly fixed in the consciousness of language learners. That is to say, native speakers of a language (and also high proficiency L2 speakers of that language) do not proceed through turns-at-talk without encountering problems. The second/foreign language learner must be made to understand that the ability to verbally interact without problems of speaking, hearing and understanding is an unrealistic goal to pursue. Rather, time, effort and attention must be given to the processes of repair by which such problems are dealt with locally by co-participants in spoken interaction, such processes allowing the interaction to progress. The ways in which speakers go about conducting repair are systematic and orderly.

Repair types

There are four different categories of repair that can take place in spoken interaction. The repair can be initiated by the current speaker (self) or by the current listener (other). The repair can then be carried out by either the current speaker, or by the current listener. Thus we have the following categories of repair:

1) Self-initiated self-repair in which a current speaker indicates some problem with their own talk and then proceeds to repair the trouble source.

2) Other-initiated self-repair in which the current listener indicates a problem with the speaker's output. The speaker then repairs their speech to make it comprehensible to the listener.

3) Self-initiated other-repair in which the current speaker indicates some problem with their speech and the listener carries out repair.

4) Other-initiated other-repair in which the current listener indicates a problem with the ongoing speech and then repairs the speech.

The following excerpts illustrate the categories:

1) Self-initiated self-repair

Excerpt 1

Dateline London. Sacerodoti (2011)

01   B: >abuh< hundreds of thousands of people were
02   killed and also the the Ame. >you know< the
03   West lost more than two trillion dollars

In this excerpt, the speaker is talking about the cost of the Iraq war and in line 02 starts to utter a word which is projectably hearable as ʻAmericaʼ or ʻAmericansʼ. However, this is cut off mid-way (shown by the period) and the speaker quickly uses the discourse marker ʻyou knowʼ, both items serving to initiate the repair. The speaker then goes on to carry out the repair by saying ʻthe Westʼ.

2) Other initiated self-repair

Excerpt 2

Schegloff et. al. (1977)

01   D: Wul didʼe ever get marriedʼr anything?
02   C: Hu:h?

03   D: Did jee ever get married?

04   C: I have no idea.

In this excerpt D asks the question at line 01 and finishes the turn seemingly thinking that it is unproblematical for the listener C. However, C indicates some problem with this question and initiates repair at line 02 with the open class repair initiator 'Hu:h?' This prompts D to repeat and slightly rephrase the question. In line 04 C receipts this repair by answering the question.

3) Self initiated other repair

Excerpt 3

Tourists in Japan (56-59) Crofts (2014)

01. K: Okino::yaku?

02. Z: Yaeh

03. S: Okinomiyaki? [You had that?

04. K: [Yeah

In this excerpt K and Z are tourists in Japan, and are being asked by S, who is a British resident in Japan about the food they have tried during their stay. In line 01 K initiates repair by offering a candidate word for a dish she has eaten. There is a sound stretch midway through the word and it is pronounced with upward intonation (shown by the question mark), both actions serving to indicate non-certainty as to the word as uttered. Speaker Z aligns with this attempt and then S repairs the trouble source with the correct name of the dish referred to, i.e. not okinoyaku but okinomiyaki.

4) Other-initiated other-repair

Excerpt 4

Tourists in Japan (42-51) (Crofts 2014)

01. Z: [?I dunno (what my favorite was?)]

02. Z: the (.) stuff that was on the (0.4)

03. K: flattop

04. Z: Yeah↓

05. S: Fleahtop

06. K: Huhh [huh]

07. K: [hhh.h]

08. Z: Flat top

09. S: Do you mean the tepan?

10. Z: [Sure]

In this excerpt, which is replete with instances of repair, Z and K are referring to a dish that is cooked at the table on a hot metal plate. K describes this item as a 'flattop'. S somewhat humorously mimics K's American pronunciation in line 05 (S is British). Z retorts by mimicking a stereotypical British accent in line 08. Finally, S completes the repair that he has initiated at line 05 by supplying the Japanese word for hotplate/flattop, i.e. 'tepan.'

This brief overview gives an insight into to some of the dimensions involved in repair and also some notion of the prevalence of repair in talk in interaction, or as Schegloff et al. put it, (1977, p.381) the 'massive occurrence in the overwhelmingly most common use of language-conversation.'

However, not all repair types are equal. Schegloff, et al. (1977) find that there is a strong preference for self-repair. (The word preference here does not refer to

the psychological desires of a person, but rather to the ways in which sequences unfold, preferred sequences more common and produced more smoothly; dispreferred sequences being less frequent and produced with hearable perturbations in talk.) Schegloff et al. find that other-repair is highly constrained and found most prominently in the 'domain of adult-child interaction, in particular parent-child interaction; but it may well be more generally relevant to the not-yet-competent in some domain without respect to age.' (ibid, p. 381). This reference to the not-yet-competent in some domain is exactly the situation that pertains in the second/foreign language classroom. By this I mean that although other initiated and/or other-repair is dispreferred in social interaction in general, in the language classroom it may actually attain the status of preferred repair, or at least the most frequently encountered.

In a classic study, Coulthard and Brazil (1992) described a model for classroom interaction that consists of three parts, usually refereed to as an IRF sequence. 1) Initiation. This is where some piece of talk is initiated, typically by the teacher and typically in the form of a question. 2) Response. This is where a student responds to the initiation, i.e. answers the question posed by the teacher. 3) Feedback. This is where the teacher gives an assessment of the language produced in step 2, for example 'good', 'right' and so on. Of course, if the language produced in step 2 is in some way deviant from the locally relevant expectations of the teacher (for example, syntactically, lexically, prosodically, or pragmatically) then the teacher will offer feedback that addresses the issue. That is, the teacher (the other) will initiate repair. This other-initiated repair, whilst being dispreferred in most other contexts, is canonical within the language classroom. Indeed, learners may expect, and even demand that the teacher initiate and carry out repair, and likewise, the teacher may see it as part of his or her institutional role to be constantly alert to repairable learner language and to initiate and carry out repair on a more or less regular basis.

In addition to the IRF based interactional architecture of the language class-room, which legitimizes a high level of other-repair conducted by the teacher, we also have to consider the nature of learner speech, and contrast this to speech that takes place in non-language learning settings. Firstly it must be remembered that language learners can have their role as learner backgrounded and simply become language users, seeking to use the language for normal communicative ends. However, in many cases, especially with lower level learners, this possible recast of participant identity is not psychologically attainable. The perception of themselves primarily as non-proficient speakers may cause learners to ascribe all of the troubles that occur in spoken interaction to their own lack of proficiency in the L2, and never to any of the other causes of trouble that routinely occur in daily talk in L1 interactions. This orientation to a learner identity may manifest itself in the ways learners do (or do not do) repair.

Learner repair: Silence, L1 and incremental progression

It is clear that learners, especially those with limited proficiency, will rou-tinely encounter problems in interaction that are based on their emergent profi-ciency in the L2. They will know exactly what they want to say in their L1 but lack vocabulary and/or grammar resources in L2 and be unable to continue with their intended turn. This is a trouble source that is particularly salient to language learn-ers but is generally not a feature of talk by native/highly proficient L2 speakers of a language. This inability to produce a turn or strategize around linguistic short-comings may manifest itself as a lapse into silence, or, perhaps as a more fitting description, a deployment of silence as an interactional resource. (See Nakamura, 2004, Nakane, 2007 for a fuller discussion of silence in language class-rooms, with a focus on Japanese learners of English.)

The use of silence to initiate other-repair, such repair being validated by the

IRF framework of the language classroom, is a strategy that learners may come to rely on, and may prove disconcerting to interlocutors outside the language classroom who fail to understand the repair function of the silence, and instead perceive it as disinclination to talk or a signal of such limited proficiency in the language that communication is next to impossible.

A further repair strategy that is characteristic of some language learners is the deployment of a short stretch of meta-talk about the repairable item in the learner's L1. Consider the following excerpt taken from data of classroom interaction between Japanese university students.

Excerpt 5.

Birthday

01. R: Tomorrow is Ryouya's tanjyoubi eh tanjyoubi
02.   jyanai, >birthday birthday<

In this short excerpt, speaker R is talking about a friend's upcoming birthday. In line 01 the speaker seemingly misspeaks and uses the Japanese work *tanjyoubi* instead of the English word *birthday*. Immediately after this he initiates self-repair with the exclamation 'eh' and then proceeds with a small segment of talk in L1 'tanjyoubi jyanai', literally 'no, not tanjyoubi'. After this, he then completes the repair with the English word 'birthday', uttered twice in quick succession. Needless to say, repair initiation in a language other that the one in which the interaction is being conducted is not a normative repair practice in daily language use, but seems to be a feature, in the author's experience, of classroom talk by Japanese learners of English.

In addition to silence and repair initiation in the L1, learners may also engage in incremental repair that seems to show an orientation towards producing gram-

matically perfect utterances for an overhearing and assessing person (the teacher), even if the original utterance did not seem to cause any problem of understanding to the actual interlocutor. The practice is illustrated in excerpts 6 and 7 below, also from students＇classroom interactions.

Excerpt 6

Weekend

01. M: How about you?
02. Y: Ah:: I(.) I go: I went back home
03. M: Ah::

Excerpt 7

Weekend

01. M: Did you (.) give (.) [present to] your mother?
02. Y: [ah::::::::::::::]
03. Y: Yes (.) ah:: I (.) I give (.) I gave (.) I gave
04.   flower

In excerpt 6 speaker Y responds to M＇s question through a series of incre-ments. After using the marker ‘Ah::’ to initiate the turn she begins to construct the turn with the pronoun I. This is immediately followed by a pause. The speak-er then restarts the turn, by repeating ‘I’ and then adding the word ‘go’ with slightly stretched pronunciation. After this sound stretch, the speaker restarts the turn for a third time and proceeds to produce a full turn which is hearable as a complete turn which is the second pair part to the first pair part that was M＇s ques-tion. The repairable item is the word ‘go’, which is repaired to ‘went’. The speak-

er restarts the turn three times, each time from the beginning of the turn and pro-
ceeds incrementally through the turn. The practice of returning to the beginning
of the turn to repair items that are not turn-initial is illustrated again in excerpt 7.
In this case the speaker restarts the turn four times. Each increment is one word
longer than the previous increment, and each increment returns to the start of the
turn, i.e. ʻIʼ. Contrast this with the self-repair in the following fragment.

Excerpt 8

　(Sidnell, 2010, p.114. Line numbers in the original)

　02 Q:　　hh but-uh wha- [so what has the
　03 A:　　　　　　　　　[crazy
　04 Q:　　rest of the press gallery:
　05　　　　(.)
　06　　　　thought about this. uh done about this

　　In this instance the repair in line 06 is done proximally to the repairable item.
The self-repair is initiated in line 06 by the cut-off marked by a period after the
word ʻthisʼ and the hesitation marker ʻuhʼ and then ʻthoughtʼ is repaired with
ʻdoneʼ. The speaker does not start the repair at the beginning of the turn, i.e. he
or she does not re-start the whole question sequence from and produce ʻSo what
has the rest of the press gallery done about this?ʼ

　　These three repair strategies, silence, meta-talk in L1 and recursive incre-
mental progress from turn initial position seem to be particular to the exigencies
of the language-learning classroom. Silence as a repair strategy is possibly based
on the ubiquity and expectation of other-repair in L2 classroom settings, and per-
haps Japanese cultural norms in general and classroom norms in particular.
Reversion to L1 meta-talk to initiate and carry out repair may be based upon the

expectation that the interlocutor (a fellow L1 speaker) will understand the meta-talk, both in terms of its L1 expression and in terms of its repair function, and possibly a psychological effect where semi-unconscious use of L1 (in the example above, use of the word *tanjyoubi*) prompts a code switch into L1 in the immediate aftermath of the misspeaking and realization that repair is needed. Recursive incremental turn progression may reflect the concerns of the learner to prioritize grammatically correct and complete utterances over local conditions of comprehensibility and progressivity, and attempt to produce turns that satisfy standards derived from the written form of the language and align with the institutional needs of the lesson genre, rather than the communicative needs of the unfolding interaction.

Other-initiated repair formats

It is perhaps inevitable that when starting to learn a new language one of the first phrases that learners acquire is the expression ʻI donʼt understandʼ. Two other phrases that often enter the active vocabulary of learners are ʻWhat does X mean?ʼ and some version of the request for repetition; ʻAgain pleaseʼ, ʻOne more timeʼ or the like. Such expressions constitute a very basic template for other-initiated repair for lower level learners. In addition, learners may deploy an open-class repair initiator such as ʻwhat?ʼ, ʻeh?ʼ or ʻhuh?ʼ which ʻindicate only that the recipient has located some trouble in the previous turn and do not locate any particular repairable component within that turnʼ. (Sidnell, 2010, p. 117)

In my experience, many learners rely on these few repair formats to initiate other-repair, and struggle to develop any other repair initiators. These formats are not unproblematical and overreliance on them can place strains on the interaction. That is, not only is the trouble source an impediment to progressivity, the repair itself becomes a trouble source.

Firstly, the bare expression 'I don't understand' can be an instrument prompting a repair sequence, or, alternatively, it can serve as an indicator that interaction in the language referred to is simply not possible and must be abandoned. (It is sometimes the case that the only thing that one can say in a foreign language is 'I don't understand!') Its potential for indicating abandonment of the interaction renders this expression a trouble source in its own right.

The expression 'What does X mean?' is also not without problems. Its utility is predicated on the repair initiator being able to recall (and re-pronounce) correctly the referent X in order to locate the repairable item precisely to the original speaker of the trouble source. However, the ability to accurately recall an unknown word, even a few seconds after its utterance, is not a given. It seems to be the case that there are severe limits on the recallability of a new foreign word. The following excerpts are reconstructed from notes taken by the author of classroom interactions set up by the teacher to test recallability. The students were instructed to use the format 'What does X mean?' to ask about unknown vocabulary in response to an utterance by the teacher.

Excerpt 9 (Constructed)

01   T: So, I'm going to have to leave early today. I'm going to
02   go to the dermatologist.
03   (.)
04   S: What does dermatologist mean?

Excerpt 10 (Constructed)

01   T: So, I'm going to have to leave early today. I'm going to

02   go to the dermatologist. I mean, I've been having some

03   trouble with my foot you know. It's been kind of painful.

04   S: What does, er (.) de. er (.) darm...

In these instances the teacher deliberately chose a word that was likely to be unknown to the students and forewarned them that such a word would be forthcoming. In excerpt 9 the repairable word was uttered at the hearable end of a turn and followed by a short pause. The student could retrieve the word more or less intact for repair initiation. In excerpt 10 the repairable word was uttered mid-turn and was then followed by some further content. Even the short time that elapsed between the utterance of the repairable word and the end of the turn seemed to place too high a strain on the short-term memory of the student and severely affect the recallability of the repairable item. Unknown words in a foreign language, especially multi-syllabic ones and ones containing phonemes or phoneme clusters that are not found in the learner's L1 can be difficult to recall and reproduce, even after a very short interval. The format 'What does X mean?' is largely unproblematical when working from written language material where the trouble source is permanent and easily accessed, and may be shown to the interlocutor to read, but it has some shortcomings when deployed in spontaneous spoken interactions.

The open class repair initiators 'Huh?', 'Eh?' and so on are also problematical to some extent in that they do not precisely locate the source of the trouble and therefore place the burden of figuring out the trouble source on the original speaker. This speaker may have no idea whether to repeat the entire utterance verbatim, at the same volume or a louder volume, or repeat it more slowly, whether to rephrase a part or the whole of the utterance with different vocabulary or grammar and so on. Although they clearly initiate repair, these open-class repair initiators give the original speaker a lot of work to do. Indeed, the repair initiation itself might become a trouble source, occasioning more confusion and further

impeding progressivity.

The other-initiated repair formats described above are, in the author's experience, common in the repertoire of language learners, and they only weakly locate the repairable item in the previous turn. There are a variety of other repair initiators which more strongly indicate the precise location and nature of the trouble source. These formats are as follows. (from Sidnell, 2010, p.118)

Weaker   *Stronger*

Open class > Wh-word> Repeat + Wh-word > Repeat > Understanding check

To put these examples into concrete terms, the repair of the utterance in excerpt 9 is exemplified below.

01 T: So, I'm going to have to leave early today I'm going to
02   go to the dermatologist.

Repair formats:

1) Open class: Eh?
2) Wh-word: Where are you going?
3) Repeat + Wh-word: You're going to go where?
4) Partial repeat: You're going to go …?
5) Understanding check: You mean you are going to go to a doctor?

The above examples all deal with repair to language based on problems of vocabulary, that is, non-comprehension of lexical items in the stream of speech. This form of trouble-source may be more salient to language learners than to

native speakers, given that language-learners, by definition, have a limited amount of lexical knowledge compared to native speakers. But it must be made clear to learners that native speakers of a language may also have to engage in repair sequences for unknown vocabulary ('Phatic? What's that?'), unknown referents ('John who?'), mis-hearings, ('Thirteen or thirty?') non-hearings (What was that you said?) and a whole host of other trouble sources that beset conversationalists, whether native speakers, proficient non-native speakers, interlanguage users with emergent proficiency or nascent learners armed with only a few phrasebook style utterances from which to work. Repair is a central part of the repertoire of all users of a language.

Repair in the language classroom

Repair, despite its centrality in the daily workings of language users is a problematical subject to deal with in the language classroom. The main source of this problematicity is that fact that speakers do not purposefully introduce trouble sources into their utterances. Trouble sources in production or reception of spoken language are unplanned and have a hic et nunc quality. They are extremely localized and are usually dealt with on the spot by interactants. In addition, not all potential trouble sources are repaired by interlocutors. Consider the following excerpt:

Eexcerpt 11

Tourists in Japan (25-28) Crofts (2014)

01.   Z: An then uh like (0.3) it would be like
02.   fried chicken with teriyaki sauce y'know (.)
03.   like that sort of things but we didn't. we don't

04.   have anything like takoyaki

In this case the speaker engages in a self-initiated self-repair of her utterance at line 03, changing 'we didn't' to the past tense 'we don't'. It is not clear what the original planned utterance was going to be (i.e. what was originally planned to come after 'didn't') or how this repair contributes to an increased under-standing of the propositional content of the utterance. However, also in line 03, the speaker uses singular and plural forms in the same general extender phrase: 'That sort of things.' Although this is a violation of grammatical norms, neither the speaker nor the listeners initiate repair. The potential trouble source, which is of the kind that is often repaired in language classrooms, is here left unrepaired with no negative impact on the ongoing interaction.

This then adds to the difficulty for language learners and indeed, language teachers. Not only do trouble sources, by definition, (the exception of humorous utterances notwithstanding), appear without planning, not all potential trouble sources are repaired, indeed not all errors and misspeaking can be repaired, cer-tainly not if the conversation is to maintain any kind of forward momentum. Learners must chart a mid-course between, on the one hand, sensitivity to trou-ble sources that need to be repaired for the interaction to be comprehensible and, on the other hand, to maintain a sense of progressivity in the interaction so that not every potential trouble source and misspeaking is subjected to rigorous and detailed repair. The kinds of repairs exemplified in excerpts 6 and 7 above can impede progressivity of the interaction so that it becomes stilted and unnatural.

Once the learner has a sense of which items to repair and which items to leave unrepaired a second set of choices becomes relevant. That is, which repair format should the learner deploy from the list of options? Will an open class repair ini-tiator such as *pardon?* or *eh?* be sufficient to indicate both the existence of a trou-

ble source and its precise nature. The choice of format will also depend on the actual ability of the learner. As was noted earlier, some repair formats (e.g. open class repair initiators) are cognitively less demanding for the repair initiators than other formats (e.g. repeat with question word, '*You went where?*'). It is paradoxical that the repair formats that signal most clearly the location and nature of the trouble source, and thus contribute more readily to its swift resolution, are more difficult to produce. The simpler repair formats such as open class repair initiators, whilst being easier to produce, may also need further work by participants to precisely identify the location and nature of the trouble source. It is not unheard of for the repair initiation itself to become a trouble source, necessitating repair of the repair. Which brings us to the final point of repair which is that just as not all utterances are successful in communicating the speaker's intent to the listener, not all repair sequences are successful in actually repairing the trouble source. Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977, p.363) note that repair is not always successful and that after a certain number of attempts at repair, participants may abandon the repair and move on with the interaction. Although Schegloff et al. (1977) note that most instances of repair are successful and quick Schegloff (2000) also notes:

It does happen, however, that the response to the other-initiation [OI] of repair does not resolve the problem whose solution the OI made relevant. One way this outcome can be (and often is) displayed is by the deployment of another repair initiator (and, as noted in Schegloff al. 1977: 369, a stronger one). Indeed, a second such repair sequence may also 'fail' to resolve the trouble or problem and a third repair initiator may be deployed. Such a trajectory may be characterized as involving 'multiple other-initiations of repair', or 'multiples' for short, and subsequent repair sequences can be characterized by their position in the sequence as M(ultiple) 2 or M(ultiple) 3 That

being the limit of expansion of OI sequences in my experience. (p.212-213)

Schegloff is here referring to quotidian conversation, not classroom interactions. The upper limit of three repair attempts before repair is (presumably) abandoned may be a feature of non-classroom interactions. However, language classroom repair sequences may proceed to many more multiples than the three mentioned by Schegloff as language teachers and learners orient to the institutional goals of the language classroom, typically notions of syntactic or lexical 'correctness' and disattend to interactional concerns of progressivity. The upper limit of repair attempts in language classroom situations is a possibility for further research.

Conclusion

To sum up, the centrality and frequency of repair in spoken language is directly relevant to the language-learning classroom. Students must be made aware that even native speakers of a language do not proceed through utterance sequences without problems, but routinely encounter problems of speaking, hearing or understanding. These problems are dealt with by practices known as 'repair' and these practices are systematic and orderly. Despite the identifiable and quantifiable nature of repair, it does pose a problem for language teachers and learners alike.

Firstly, the interactional architecture of the language classroom foregrounds the occurrence of other-repair (repair initiated and often carried out by the teacher) rather than self-initiated self-repair which is the most common form in non-classroom interactions. Connected to this is the tacit adherence to producing language modeled on the written language, that is, language free of hesitations, repetitions, re-starts and the like, even though this goal is unrealizable for native speakers, let alone language learners.

Secondly, repair in the classroom is often connected with ideas of grammatical well-formedness, which leads to repair occurring where no problem of comprehension has occurred. Again, this is in contrast to non-classroom interactions, which often leave misspeaking that is comprehensible unrepaired.

Thirdly, in non-classroom interactions, trouble sources are, by definition unplanned. To practice repair strategies, classroom activities must resort to deliberate errors. (See McCarthy, McCarten & Sandiford, 2014, pp. 48-49 dealing with ʻI meanʼ to correct purposeful errors or ibid pp. 112-113 to initiate other-repair of pre-scripted utterances.) The authors of this textbook are correct in including repair as a lesson target, but the nature of repair means that these kinds of exercises are inauthentic. The exercises may serve as a useful introduction to the topic of repair, but are unlikely to capture the spontaneity of authentic repair.

For these reasons, repair poses a problem for language learners, but despite these problems, repair must find its way into classrooms. Awareness of repair, its occurrence and its systematic nature can be explained to students overtly. Similarly, the teacher can help learners, through close monitoring and feedback, to become aware of their own repair behavior, whether it be reliance on a limited class of open class repair initiators and not utilizing any of the other strategies (e.g. partial repeats plus question words), or engaging in non-normative repair behaviors such as silence, L1 meta-talk or incremental restarts. In addition to carrying out planned but largely inauthentic repair exercises, teachers can explain and model repair in a didactic manner to the whole class and also take the theory and apply it directly and intervene in student-student interactions to show students how to deal with actual trouble sources that occur in real time.

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