

THE RELEVANCE OF REPAIR TO SYNTAX-FOR-CONVERSATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The theme of this chapter is that the phenomena elsewhere treated under the rubric “repair”¹ are potentially relevant to syntax, if syntax be thought

¹ In Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), we pointed out that troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding of “talk” are dealt with in an organized fashion in conversation, are not limited or necessarily occasioned by independently establishable “error,” and are therefore referred to not as “correction” but by the more generic rubric “repair.” We differentiated between repair initiation and solution, described a PREFERENCE FOR SELF-REPAIR and a PREFERENCE FOR SELF-INITIATION of repair to be operating, and showed that the organization of repair initiation operates in a restricted “repair initiation opportunity space” around the “trouble-source” or “repairable,” encompassing the turn in which the trouble-source occurred (“same turn”), a next turn by some other speaker, and the turn after that. For further details, see Schegloff *et al.* (1977). For parallel findings on Thai materials, cf. Moerman (1977).

A longish segment of transcript is provided in Appendix 2 for readers who have not had occasion to examine such materials. Some notational conventions used in data citations are explained in Appendix 1.

of as “syntax-for-conversation.” In support of this theme, I will try to show:

1. Repair operations affect the form of sentences and the ordering of elements in them, quite apart from the sheer fact of their occurrence in sentences doing so.
2. There are structural pressures, derived from those types of discourse organization we term “turn-taking” and the “organization of sequences,” that tend to concentrate repair in the same turn as contains what is being repaired and, within that turn, in the same sentence (or other “turn-constructive unit”).
3. Formal arguments are possible to show that repair is, in principle, relevant to any sentence.
4. The phenomena of repair that occur in sentences are orderly and describable.

No decision can be reached at this time as to whether “same-turn repair” should be considered a sort of “super-syntax” that operates second-order on whatever syntax, otherwise conceived, organizes, or whether same-turn repair should be considered a part of syntax proper but a syntax reconstructed as a syntax-for-conversation, which is but one of the discourse types in which “language” is used, albeit the most common and fundamental one. Because this chapter is organized around this theme, none of the phenomena touched on in its course are explored extensively; only the minimum needed for the theme is extracted from each.

I write as one occupied with the study of the social organization—most centrally, the sequential organization—of talk in interaction. The data I work with are audio and video tapes of commonplace, everyday interaction in a variety of so-called “contexts.”

The sentences in the talk that I deal with are full of the “hitches” and “disfluencies” that I have referred to. They have an incidence not limited to the environment of independently establishable “errors.” They appear to be orderly. Though some are perhaps connectable to various “degeneracies” of “performance,” not all of them are; and even those that are make demands on the environments of their occurrence that are accommodated in an orderly, independently organized manner. They are implicated in an organization that operates on a scope wider than that of the sentence yet appears to have decisive consequences for the organization of sentences. In this respect, they are like other aspects of sentences in conversation that are linked to types of organization operating beyond the sentences—for turns, for sequences, for conversation. What they involve, then, is not some generic “discourse organization” but the organization of a particular type of discourse, with its own organizational structures: conversation. That is why my theme potentially relates these phenomena not to “syntax” and not to “discourse” but instead to a possible “syntax-for-conversation.” Other

types of discourse have other types of organization, with potentially different requirements of, and consequences for, the syntax operating in them (e.g., poetry, telegraphy, philosophical debate, interviews, comedy routines, religious rituals—ceremonies, mathematical texts, etc.).

The absence of repair from the sentences with which linguists (especially syntacticians?) concern themselves (among other absences) sometimes inclines me to share the suspicion that much of the available analysis is for written sentences or for “might-as-well-be-written” sentences. An orientation to materials of this sort and the terms of analysis appropriate to them may have been inherited from such disciplinary ancestors of linguistics as philology and may have been supported by the historical and technological facts that made writing and printing the media of scholarly exchange.

Consider, however, the philologist or historical linguist of the distant or proximate future who treats as the linguistic remains of contemporary society not scrolls, books, or memoranda but film and video/audio tape of everyday, spontaneous interaction in the lives people live. Imagine as well that such a linguist is not committed to a theoretical set and to terms of analysis like those currently familiar but is prepared to derive the appropriate terms of analysis from the materials under investigation. What understanding of the English language might result if not only the analyses but also the very terms of analysis were formed on the basis of such materials? Perhaps what follows might be thought of as a memorandum to such a linguist.

2. ON THE EFFECTS OF REPAIR ON THE SYNTACTIC FORM OF SENTENCES

It should be noted, first of all, that the occurrence of repair in a sentence can have consequences for the shape of the sentence and for the ordering of its elements beyond the consequence embodied by sheer inclusion of the repair elements (e.g., the *uh*).

To be sure, repair may replace one word with another of the same word class, entailing no such syntactic effect, though possibly leaving an interactional effect, since the replacement cannot excise all traces of the word that was initially said or starting to be said (cf. Jefferson 1975). Regularly, however, syntactic changes of greater or smaller magnitude are wrought by repair. Only a small sampling of the types of changes can be suggested here. (In formulating the shifts being exemplified, I intend an essentially vernacular description, so as to avoid choosing by terminology some theory or vision of syntax.)

A repair can expand a noun phrase by inserting a descriptor or “modifier” [cf. (9) to follow].

It can change the syntactic form by subsuming, under another, “frame” sentence, the whole sentence being said or starting to be said.

- (1) Gene: . . . *they’re—talkin’ now about goin’ up tuh thirty one **grand** ez a principal.*
 Cathy: *Oh rrilly?*
 Gene: *Yeah.*
 Cathy: *Wul knowing **you** you’d **have** thirty one en, thousan’ and a **nickel**,*
 Gene: *hhh! heh-heh-heh-^{[heh}*
 → Cathy: *Shit y- I think y’got the*
 → *original nickel.*
 (Goldberg, II:1:6; also cited in Jefferson, 1975)

Or it can “unframe” such an incipiently subsumed sentence:

- (2) B: *And she didn’t come **in** today; I haven’t hy:ear’d or seen any-thing **of** her, I don’t know what she’s d(hh)oi(hh)ng heh heh*
^{[hah hah hah}
 → A: *Well I don’t think she-*
 → *eh she doesn’t uh usually come in on Friday, does she*
 B: *Well, yes she does, sometimes,=*
 (SBL:I:1:1:3)

It can convert what is starting to be a sentence into a subordinate clause:

- (3) → B: *Yeah, he- ez he wz handing me the book en ‘e tol’ me twunny dolliz I almos’ dro(h)pped i(h)t.*
 (TG:313–314)

It can convert a question into an assertion:

- (4) (J and L are husband and wife)
 J: *We saw Midnight Cowboy yesterday-*
or ^{[Suh- Friday.}
 E: *^{[Ch?}*
 → L: *Didju s- **you** saw that, it’s really good.*
 (JS:II:61)

It can convert a wh-type question to a yes–no type question:

- (5) Agnes: *Chop || it.*
 → Martha: *Tell me, uh what- d’you need a hot sauce?*
 (0.5)
 Agnes: *i’hhh a **Taco** sauce.*
 (NB:IV:2:2)

It can reorder the elements of projected talk, inserting into a current sentence what might have been planned for a later one:²

- (6) A: . . . *Fridays is a funny day. mMost a' the*
 → *people in schoo:l, 'hh that's why I only*
 → *have classes on Tuesday en Fri:day 'hh*
 → (0.3) *u- one cla:ss, because most a' them*
 have o:ff those days . . .

(TG:657–660)

² Note here that the start of the sentence—*Most a' the people*—is not discarded by the repair but instead informs its end—*most a' them*. The same is the case in (8) below—*And uh Gene uh that Nobles . . .* to *That Gene*. It is hoped that references in the literature to “editing” (e.g., Hockett 1967, Labov 1970) will not be understood to imply that what has been “edited” is entirely “out,” for this would, apparently, be incorrect. This is especially important to interaction when it is the recipient of the talk who speaks to the edited talk. Consider:

- A: *W-when's yer uh, weh- you have one day y'only have one course, uh?*
 → B: *mMonday en Wednesday: [s right.] That's my=*
 hhhh [Oh.] that's-
 B: = *linguistics course hh.*

(TG:121–125)

in which B answers the *when* question that had apparently been replaced. And consider as well the following:

- Mark has called to complain about not being invited to a party
 Bob is involved in planning. Lengthy discussion transpires.
 Near the end of the conversation,
 Mark: *Okay well Bo:b? ah hhmhh Ah'll see yuh Friday.*
 (0.2)
 Bob: *t'hhh Okay Mark en uh::: yihknow, a (.) thous'n pard'ns. =*
 → *= fer yer- the oversight.*
 (0.2)
 Mark: *t'hhhh =*
 Bob: *(Or //is it)*
 → Mark: *Oh::uh no: . Well I wasn't I didn't fee:l like I wu:z::*
 → *ah.hh wt's the wo:rd. uhm =*
 → Bob: *= rebu:ffed? =*
 → Mark: *= 'hh-'hh rebu:ffed,h*
 :
 :
 Mark: *Uh::mhh I didn't feel rebu:ffed,*

(SF:2:24, Simplified)

Note that Bob apparently suppressed a word that he replaces with “the oversight.” Mark picks it up, responds to it, and disagrees with it, even though he hasn’t quite got it. When he goes into a word search for it, Bob solves the search immediately, displaying that Mark had indeed sniffed it out. All of this turns on *yer*’s not being entirely “edited out” when it is replaced by “the oversight.”

It can have the consequences that a sequence of turns is inserted within the boundaries of a sentence.³

- (7) B: *Uh she asked me to stop by, she bought a chest of drawers from*
uhm
 (4.0)
 →B: *what's the gal's name? Just went back to*
 → *Michigan*
 (2.0)
 →B: *Helen uhm*
 →A: *Oh I know who you mean,*
 (1.0)
 →A: *Brady- Brady.*
 →B: *Yeah! Helen Brady.*
 A: *Mm hm*
 B: *And she- she says she's uh never. . . .*
 (SBL, SW)

- (8) B: *No, I had the queen Clarie. And uh Gene uh that Nobles, or- no*
their names aren't Noble. but Gene and Ruth or Roo-uhm oh
whoever they|| are
 →A: *Yeah I-I keep saying Noble- Jones.*
 →B: *Yeah, Jones*
 →A: *Uh || huh*
 B: *Uh that Gene had the ace king.*
 (SBL, SW)

Repair, then, does not merely occur in sentences; it can change their shape and composition and can do so within a retained identity of “the sentence,” and not only by apparently aborting one sentence in favor of another, though this, too, is a potential consequence of repair for sentences, and one with considerable frequency of occurrence.

³ It is worth pointing out that the following fragments show that discourse is not necessarily external to sentences by being composed of multiples of them. Discourse can be inside sentences, just as sentences can be in discourse. Both instances in the text happen to occur as parts of “word searches,” but this is not criterial to the inclusion of a sequence within a sentence; note:

- K: *That is, if the warp has sixteen greens an' two blacks an' two light blues and two blacks*
an' sixteen greens an' sixteen blacks an' sixteen blues an' so on, =
 →K: *= y'know the warp are the long pieces*
 →F: *Mm hm*
 K: *the weft has exactly that.*
 (KC-4:36)

3. ON THE OCCURRENCE OF REPAIR IN SENTENCES

Here I want to show that the occurrence of repair within the boundaries of sentences is not incidental but is the systematic product of other sequential features of conversation.

A basic locus of organization in conversational interaction is a series of two turns-at-talk; think of them as *CURRENT* and *NEXT*. The organization of turn-taking in conversation, by which turns are allocated to the parties by the parties and have their size determined, operates by organizing successive sets of current and next, each next becoming a current as it is begun.⁴

A turn series has the potential of being a *SEQUENCE* or part of a sequence. That potential is realized when some next does not merely follow its predecessor temporally but is produced in some fashion by reference to it, to *it* in particular. One form this can take is that the current turn projects some range of possibilities for next turn (as a yes–no type question projects positive and negative answers as possibilities next, or an invitation projects acceptance or rejection, etc.) and, in next turn, one of these is done. We speak of this as the *SEQUENTIAL IMPLICATIVENESS* of a turn.⁵

Next-turn position is the organizedly systematic position for any current turn to be sequentially implicative, to have another turn produced by reference to it, and, thereby, to have its effect on the course of the conversation registered in the talk. The organization of conversation—of turn-taking and of sequences—is built for sequential implicativeness next, and participants are oriented to it: To see if some turn is/will be sequentially implicative, the structurally given place to look is next turn.

Next turn, however, is also the systematically available position for other-than-speaker of some turn that is beset by some trouble of speaking, hearing, or understanding to initiate repair on the source of the trouble.⁶ When next turn is used to initiate repair on something in current turn, the sequential implicativeness of current turn is displaced from its primary home and is lost at least for that turn. Because other-initiated repair in next turn itself engenders a sequence and is itself sequentially implicative,⁷ the sequential implicativeness of current turn is yet further displaced and potentially loses its organized locus of realization.⁸

⁴ Cf. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974).

⁵ Schegloff and Sacks (1973), p. 296.

⁶ Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), p. 367, §3.12.

⁷ Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), p. 369, §3.3; p. 377, §5.22.

⁸ For some sequential units, such as the “adjacency pair” (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973, pp. 295–297), the sequential implicativeness of their first parts is almost invariably retained across the insertion of repair sequences after them. A paper on the embedding of repair sequences in adjacency pairs is planned; cf. related discussions in Jefferson (1972) on “side sequences” and Schegloff (1972) on “insertion sequences.”

As between these alternative uses of next-turn position, there is a structural preference for keeping next-turn position free for sequentially implicated nexts.⁹ Relative to this, other-initiated repair is *DISPREFERRED* in next turn. One way in which the preference for keeping next turn free is served is by the self-initiation of repair by the speaker of the trouble-source in current turn, that is, in the turn in which the trouble-source occurred, before next-turn position.

To review: A discourse feature of talk in conversation—an interest in the sequential implicativeness of current turn for next turn—structurally motivates an aspect of the conduct of a turn; there is a preference for initiating, in current turn, repair on whatever is self-repairable there, before next-turn position arrives. In fact, self-initiated, same-turn repair is, by far, the most common form of repair.

To have motivated the concentration of repair-initiation in same or current turn is not yet to have motivated its occurrence *WITHIN A SENTENCE*. It would be compatible with the preceding if some trouble of speaking, hearing, or understanding that arises in a sentence in a current turn were addressed in a next sentence (or other turn-constructual unit) in the same turn; that would also serve the keeping of next turn free. Repair would then be occurring in sentences, but in sentences occupied with doing the repair and not themselves intruded on by it. There *ARE* repairs of this sort, in which a trouble in one turn-unit is addressed just after completion of that unit, in another unit built to do the repair. These we have termed¹⁰ *TRANSITION-SPACE REPAIRS*, and they do address the trouble-source while preserving the integrity of the sentence. However, by far the most common placement of repair initiation is not in the transition-space or after the sentence or other turn unit in which the trouble occurs. Most commonly the integrity of the sentence is *NOT* preserved, and repair occurs not in a sentence devoted to it but “intrusively” in a sentence occupied with something else (the something that can be sequentially implicative in next turn). There is a basis for this distribution.

Turns are possibly complete at the possible completion of a turn-constructual unit.¹¹ Possible completion of a current turn makes transition to a next turn relevant (i.e., though turn-transfer may not occur at each such point, its possibility is structurally provided for at each such point,

⁹ It appears to me that this is a specification, for “sequences,” of a more general preference for “progressivity,” that is, for “next parts” of structured units (e.g., turns, turn-constructual units like sentences, stories, etc.) to come next; cf. the later discussion of progressivity in successive repairs on a same repairable.

¹⁰ Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), p. 366, §3.11 and Footnote 12.

¹¹ On this and on the immediately following points, cf. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), pp. 702–704 *et passim*.

unless otherwise provided in the talk). Sentences are turn-constructional units. Unless otherwise provided for, their possible completion can constitute possible completion of the turn in which they occur and can thereby make transition to a next turn relevant at that point; it is at such points that intending or incipient next speakers regularly begin next turns.¹² An interest in getting repair initiated in some same turn (current turn) and before next turn, in order to be methodically assured, will need to be initiated before the next possible completion of the sentence or other turn-constructional unit in which the trouble-source occurs. That means within the boundaries of the sentence. WHAT IS THOUGHT OF IN TERMS OF CURRENT SYNTAX AS THE “INTEGRITY” OF THE SENTENCE IS, THEREFORE, SYSTEMATICALLY SUBORDINATED TO OTHER SEQUENTIAL REQUIREMENTS.

If the preceding is correct, then it holds for any sentence (or other turn-constructional unit) in any current turn. Since any turn in conversation is at some point a current turn, it holds for any sentence in conversation. A syntax-for-conversation might be expected to incorporate provision for such systematic contingencies.

4. ON THE SYSTEMATIC RELEVANCE OF REPAIR

It is the intended conclusion of the preceding section that, if repair is relevant, there are systematic organizational pressures that concentrate its relevance within sentences in turns. But is repair systematically relevant?

Any of the systems and contingencies implicated in the production and reception of talk—articulatory, memory, sequential, syntactic, auditory, ambient noise, etc.—can fail. Aspects of the production and analysis of talk that are rule-governed can fail to integrate. In short, the exchange of talk is indigenously and exogenously vulnerable to trouble that can arise at any time. In this sense, if a peal of thunder can blot out a part of any turn at any time, thus producing a problem of hearing, then repair is potentially systematically relevant to any sentence. And, although many of the sources of the relevance of repair or the “need” for it are extrinsic to syntax, the repair that is done is done in syntactic environments that, in a fashion, accommodate it.

More formal arguments and, necessarily, more specific ones are possible for the systematic relevance of repair to sentences in conversation and, therefore, possibly to syntax-for-conversation.

¹² For this reason, “transition space repair” is not a fully reliable resource. For a discussion of a countervailing organization that helps account for the fact that transition-space repair gets done (and uninterruptedly) at all, cf. Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), p. 374 and Footnote 20.

Consider the question: Is there a class of sentences such that, in their actual occurrence in conversation, repair appears systematically relevant? If such a class of sentences could be described, and if what defined the class was such that any sentence of the language could on some occasion of production be a member of that class, then it would follow that repair was potentially relevant for any sentence in conversation and that provision for repair was as systematically relevant to an adequate syntax as provision for anything else.

Then consider this class: first sentences in topic-initial turns or in topic shift position.¹³ For such sentences, it is the case that:

1. They very regularly have self-repair in them, the nature of the trouble being repaired often being obscure and the positioning of the repair regularly being at the word that KEYS the new topic being initiated, as in:

- (9) B: *That's too bad* ((very quiet))
 A: *hhhh!*
 (0.5)
 → B: *(I 'unno) 'hh Hey do you see V- (0.3) fat ol' Vivian anymouh?*
 → A: *No, hardly, en if we do:, y'know, I jus' say hello quick'n 'hh*
y'know jus' pass each othuh in the [e hall(way).] still hanging
 B: *[Is she*
aroun' (with) Bo:nny?
 (TG, 338–366)

Here the topic-initial turn contains a self-initiated repair of a common type, one in which a noun is cutoff at some point in its production and a descriptor or modifier is inserted before it; the repairable is *Vivian*, and the KEYNESS of its topicality is displayed in B's next turn, which continues to focus on *Vivian*. Or, again,

- (10) B: *'hh But it's not too bad, 'hh*
 A: *That's goo* [d, ((very quiet))
 → B: *[Diyuh have any-cl- You have a class with Billy*
 → *this te:rm?*
 A: *Yeh he's in my abnormal class.*
 B: *mn Yeh* [how-
 A: *[Abnor]mal psy-ch*
 B: *Still not gettin married,*

¹³ My use of the word "topic" is not related to current usages in linguistics, such as "topic-comment structure." Because nothing has yet appeared in print to describe "topic" as a sequential unit of analysis, it should be treated here as a vernacular term, roughly referring to "what is talked about" through some series of turns at talk.

Once again the topic-initial sentence gets self-initiated repair; the trouble is obscure (shift from “any classes” to “a class”), and, though B’s later turn does not pursue “classes” as topically key, A focuses on it beyond a minimal turn, with a repair of her own. (In the substantial data fragment in Appendix II, the turn at lines 198–200 is topic initial, has self-initiated repair, and operates on the topical key, *the feller/man fer linguistics*.) A great many first sentences in topic-initial turns have this sort of self-initiated same-turn repair. Some, of course, do not.

2. If first sentence in topic-initial or topic-shift position does not have self-initiated repair, then with great frequency the next-turn involves the initiation of repair by some other.

(11) B: *Tch! I’ll get some advance birthday cards, hhm hmh!*

(0.6)

B: *hhh A:n:d uh, (0.5) Me:h,*

(0.2)

→ B: *Oh Sibbie’s sistuh hadda ba:by bo:way.*

→ A: *Who?*

(TG, 706–711)

The topic-initial turn’s sentence does not have any same-turn repair, and, in next turn, one of the prototypic next-turn repair initiators is employed.¹⁴ I might note, without citing the rest of this topical sequence, that it initially, and mostly, focuses on *Sibbi’s sistuh*—the repairable located by the repair initiator (and not, for example, on the *baby boway*). Or, again,

(12) A: *Ripped about four nai:ls, ’n okhh!*

B: *Fantastic.=*

→ A: *=B’t it wz fun-You sound very far away.*

(0.7)

→ B: *I do?*

A: *Nyeahm.*

B: *mNo? I’m no:t,*

(TG, 70–76)

Here, again, there is no same-turn repair in the topic-initial turn’s sentence; repair is initiated by other in the next turn.

I have tried to indicate for this class of sentences—first sentences in topic initial turns—either self-repair occurs in the sentence or other-initiated repair occurs in next turn. Repair thus appears to be generically relevant

¹⁴ Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), p. 367.

in this sequential environment, and the by now familiar pressures tend to push the repair back into same turn.¹⁵

Because this class of sentences is formally characterized by its relationship to immediately preceding talk—that is, that it is in a topic-shift relationship—no sentence of the language is in principle excludable; any sentence can, in principle, occur in an environment in which it represents a topic shift from what immediately precedes. It follows, then, that repair is, in principle, potentially relevant to the construction of a sentence in conversation. In that case, it is hard to imagine that a syntax-for-conversation does not systematically provide for it.

5. ON ASPECTS OF THE ORDERLINESS OF SAME-TURN REPAIR

In preceding sections, I have tried to show that the incursion of repair into sentences can and does have substantial effects on their syntactic form; that, when relevant, repair is structurally skewed into sentences and that it is pervasively and systematically relevant. Here I want to suggest that the details of the impact of repair on the shape of sentences should be describable by showing that the components of repair are orderly in their operation. I will touch on only two areas. The first is in terms not unfamiliar to syntactic concerns; that is showing the positioning of an element to be orderly and related to its form, which I will discuss for the initiation of same-turn repair. The second concerns an area of expectable disorderliness, that is, when an initial repair fails and repeated tries are made.

The initiation of repair in same turn takes one of a limited number of forms sensitive to the most immediate sound environment of their production. One very common form is the CUT-OFF (typically a glottal or other stop), which is used for within-word (or within-sound, for *uh* also gets cut off) initiation. When repair is initiated outside the boundary of a word or

¹⁵ Note that, although the repair is done to an element of a sentence and is done within a sentence, in important ways the organizational source of the repair is not the sentence but the topical sequence, for it is in sentences-in-turns characterized by their sequential status and on elements characterized by their topic-relevant status that the repair is done. A suggestion lurks here that some types of repair, of which this is one, may not be the product of a “performance frailty” in respect to the production of the sentence but may be affirmatively enjoined features of certain sequential and interactional operations. For other such types, see Jefferson (1975) and Goodwin (1977). Because anything to be done in talk will be done in a turn and, regularly, that means in a turn-constructive unit like a sentence, it appears that a syntax built for sentences in talk in interaction will make provision for the occurrence within them of whatever is needed for other orders of organization, for example, “discourse” organizations, that routinely operate.

Generally, but not invariably, the cut-off initiates repair on some already-produced element of the turn; it is POSTPOSITIONED. *Uh* or a pause, standing in the place of a next-due element, is more likely to initiate repair on a next-due item; that is, it is generally PREPOSITIONED. The former is, therefore, generally disjunctive syntactically, interrupting what is syntactically projected by the sentence-so-far. The latter delays but carries forward the syntactic projection of the sentence-so-far.

(13) Merle: *So how's Michelle.*
(1.0)
Robin: ***They** brought **her** ho:me.*
(0.7)
→ Robin: ***She** hadda wait up the:re fo:r- u-she:'s been there since
eight uh' clock this morning'n at six thirty she called me . . .*
(0.5) *Said "Please com'n get me . . .*
(PB 3–4:6)

¹⁷ Cf. Schegloff (1978, mimeo).

a search, is converted to a different type of repair, a reorganization or reconstruction of the turn-so-far in order to achieve a solution. What gets “changed” is the turn-so-far; what was the trouble was the next element. Similarly,

- (14) A is talking about the “May Company,” a department store chain with many branches.

A: *We wen'tuh the one uh- I wen'tuh the one uh- Thursdee on uh* (0.9)
up there by Knoxberry Farm.

(NB:4 calls:1:1:7)

“A” twice comes to the point where a locational formulation of the branch referred to is “due.” Each time, *uh* replaces the next element due. Each time, some alternative to the search is done, first a repair in which *we* is replaced by *I*, then the insertion of a time reference. Then, a third time, the position for the location is arrived at, but this time with a format for the location formulation exhibited—*on*, which seems to project a street name as the next element due. Again, *uh* occurs where the next element is due, and then a pause. A search is in progress for a prototypical search object—a name. But, again, the repair is converted; this time, not by reconstructing the whole turn-so-far, but by replacing the “format-exhibiting” element, the *on*. The form of location formulation is repaired from “*on* + street name” to the “near X” format,¹⁸ and the latter format has its elements readily solved. Here, again, what starts as a repair on next element gets for its solution a repair on some prior element.¹⁹ Some of the variability that is found in the tie between cut-off and *uh*/pause and backward and forward

¹⁸ Cf. Schegloff (1972) on place formulations.

¹⁹ Two more instances I leave for the reader to explicate:

- (i) District Attorney in a TV news interview concerning certain actions by his office against some nursing homes:

DA: *Some of the nursing homes had a low bed: uh uh had a high vacancy factor in terms of the beds.*

(EAS:FN)

Talking about what will be served for dinner tomorrow.

- (ii) Grandma: *Well somebody come in here 'n said “Let's have a- we'll have () steaks fer tamarra” so I was just repea:ting.*

(0.2)

Grandpa: *That was || last night.*

→Dad: *Whoever said it was a- was a- was a:::::*

Grandma: *I don't- I think it was one of the girls.*

→Dad: *-didn't know what they was talking about.*

(Curtis:142–148)

(Can Dad's sentence be given a thorough syntactic analysis without reference to the repair in it?)

repairables, respectively, is due to such repair conversions and is, thus, orderly variation.

The generally prepositioned repair initiators appear quite restricted in their distribution (as INITIATORS, rather than as later components of a repair segment): They occur just before the “trouble-source.” The post-positioned repair initiators (and, therefore, most of the postpositioned repair) are more variable in their distribution.

In fact, repair generally, and postpositioned repair in particular, can be initiated anywhere in the turn. There is no exclusion rule that I know of, even in terms that have otherwise ordered the distribution of repair, that is, relative to the repairable.²⁰ There are concentrations of repair initiation that can be mentioned, though I will not treat them in detail here.

1. Just-post-initiation and just-pre-completion of various unit types seem to be specially common loci of repair initiation. Thus, just after the start of a turn-constructive unit (e.g., a sentence) or just before its completion; after the first sound of a word or just before its last sound.

2. Most same-turn repairs that operate on a focused repairable, for example, a particular word or phrase in the turn-so-far, are concentrated in the proximate aftermath of the repairable, most of them within two words of the repairable. When combined with the preceding observation, this means that a great many repairs of focused items such as words are initiated just after the first sound of the word, before its last sound, or in those positions for the next several words. However, it should not be forgotten that these bunched repairs are within a larger distribution that excludes no particular locus of initiation in same turn.

3. There appear to be a set of subordering rules for repair initiation under particular conditions. I cite but one example. If there is a convergence between the first element of a repair and some element of the ongoing turn-in-production, the shared element is often used as the place to initiate repair. Such “pivot” elements (as they are called by several colleagues who are interested in them) can operate for the sound position in a word at which repair is initiated, as in (15):

(15) A has had a claim of hers called an exaggeration

A: *DON'T SAY that I'm exa-just say I'm a liar.*

(Pre-Party, p. 4)

Here, the initial sound of the repair, *j*, occurs in a word in the turn-so-far (*exa-[ggerating]*), and at its position the repair is initiated, with the consequence that it is not apparent until a bit later that it HAS been initiated. Or,

²⁰ Cf. Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), pp. 365–367, §3.1; pp. 374–375, §4.3.

(not to mention the remainder of the repair initiation opportunity space), at any point in the productional course of a turn (and, therefore, of a sentence in it) there is a systematic alternative to producing next a syntactically coherent next bit of the talk. That alternative is to initiate repair, either on some prior bit of the talk or on some next bit of it. Syntax-for-conversation and repair are both sequential organizations that bear on the production of turn-constructional units like sentences. Syntax is, among other things, that sequential organization that organizes the turn-constructional unit and by reference to which the progress of that unit is exhibited by speakers and analyzed-recognized by recipients. Repair in sentences can be "intrusive" in that it regularly interrupts that progress. Syntax and repair operate in the same sequential environment; they need to be investigated together.

The preceding discussion concerning repair initiation may be said to deal with the "left" boundary of repair. I shall not discuss the right boundary extensively here. I only want to note that repair aims for success and is overwhelmingly successful at achieving it quickly. For the most part, a single repair effort deals with a trouble-source. The effect of success is, and is displayed by, the resumption of the turn-unit as projected before the repair initiation or, if the repair operation involves reconstruction of the whole turn-unit, production of the turn-unit to completion. In both cases, syntacticity and "smooth" (i.e., without hitch) production characterize and display the continuation of the talk post-repair. Successful repair is, for the most part, built to "blend back" into untroubled talk.

We have arrived at a view of talk in a turn in conversation in which some sort of syntax organizes the smooth production of sentential turn-constructional units, and, when trouble arises, an organization of repair operates with orderly components (e.g., initiators) to address it, with syntactic organization quickly reasserting itself. Sometimes, however, a single repair effort does not achieve a stable, successful solution, and almost immediately another repair is initiated on the same repairable. This repair will be no less orderly than the first—its initiator being of one of the sorts described, and with syntacticity once again being reinstituted. Although not common, two successive repairs on a same repairable, yielding (together with the repairable) three tries at that bit of talk, are not rare. (Cases with more than two repairs on a same repairable are the harder to find the more repair segments are involved.) Each repair segment taken alone is orderly along lines already described. A "repair organization" ready for syntactic or quasi-syntactic description should not, however, leave the series or succession of tries at that bit of talk unordered. Nor should a repair organization operating for natural interaction allow a speaker unregulated time to "get it right." I shall, therefore, present some evidence (far from decisive) that successive repairs on a repairable are themselves ordered as a series. Several types of ordering can be discerned that suggest an orientation to

“progressivity”—to displaying that each repair has made progress toward a solution of the trouble being addressed.

1. **Each next “try” adds to the prior tries.**

- (18) Bee: *That’s why they have us in this buildin-~~we~~ finally got a’ ‘hhh a
→ roo:m tihday in-in the leh- a Iectchuh hall,*

(TG:492–493)

- (19) →T: *Yeah cause I saw- I saw s- some- dude like this jus’ come
marchin . . .*

(TH:61)

In (18), the first repair adds *the leh-* to what precedes, and the second adds *ctuhuh hall*. In (19), the first repair adds *s-*, and the second *some . . .*. Each try shows progress by accretion or extension.

2. **Or each next try changes an element of prior tries.**

- (20) Bee: *‘hhh I said theh go, I said there’s- there’s **three** courses
a’ready . . .*

(TG:234–235)

- (21) Bonnie: *Why? Because they hg- because they have- they asked you
first.*

(NYI:228–229)

In (20), the first repair replaces *Theh go* with *There’s* (the second adds to it). In (21), the first repair replaces *hg* with *have*; the second replaces *have* with *asked . . .*

Note also that, in (18), the second repair replaces the prior try’s *the* with *a*, yielding a series of shifts in which the first repair operates on the original try by extension and the second repair operates on the first by change or replacement. This is a not uncommon orderliness for successive repair segments; note:

- (22) →Bee: *-Yihknow theyd- they **do** b-(0:2) t!’hhhh they try even **harduh**
→ then uhr-yihknow a regular instructor.*

(TG:227–229)

- (23) →Mark: *She did I think. (‘) I- (‘) don’t- (‘) I was really drunk et the
time. .*

(SN–4:7)

- (24) →Mark: *She- she wa- she ’n I’re gonna go out en get drunk at four
o’clock in the afternoon.*

(SN–4:9)

3. **Each next try backs up less far than its predecessor.** It is common for same-turn repair to repeat a bit of the talk preceding a repairable, thereby

4. **Marking time leads to overt "search."** When a try at a bit of talk is the same as the prior try (i.e., the first repair like the original, the second like the first), we may speak of MARKING TIME. This does happen, but regularly the second of these two tries adds an *uh*, marking a more overt entry into a search and converting the repair type from redoing what has preceded to a forward repair. The solution of the repair is then converted into the solution of the search. As in:

5. **Regressive tries are last tries.** When a try is identical not with the preceding try but with a yet earlier one, we may speak of it as **REGRESSIVE**. Regularly, a regressive try turns out to be the last on a same repairable. When progress is no longer being made, the regressive try may become the one to which syntactic continuations are fitted.

- Of course, the speaker may give up²³ or recipients may interrupt.²⁴ This last ordering is of particular importance. It suggests that a succession of

²⁴ Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), p. 365, instance (15).

repairs is not organized only by relating any next unit to its prior but that, in its apparent sensitivity to the relationship of some try to all prior tries, the organization operates for the SERIES AS A WHOLE, an important property for a candidate syntactic organization.

In this section, I have tried to show that the materials of same-turn repair are not intractable but that there is preliminary evidence that they are orderly. Almost certainly, the types of orderliness that remain to be found are more powerful than the ones cited. It should be borne in mind that displays of progressivity will always be fashioned out of the language materials otherwise in use in the turn's sentence, and, thus, quite unintuitive forms of progressivity display should be admitted as possibilities. If the preceding sections have warranted the appropriateness of investigating repair for its possible relations to syntax, it appears that such investigations should not be frustrated by disorder in the data.

6. SYNTAX OR SUPER-SYNTAX?

In some respects, the operation of repair in sentences is like a super-syntax. It can order and reorder the arrangement of the components of the sentences as well as restructure its overall shape. It is systematically relevant to sentences and is at any point an alternative to other ordering devices for next bits of talk. One of its resources is the capacity specifically to override syntactic ordering in the production of a next bit of talk, and this resource can be used to reconstruct the syntactic ordering of the sentence-so-far. When it operates, it sometimes creates positions in the talk at which the relations between successive items in the talk are specifically not governed by syntax but instead by some other relationship (e.g., on either side of a cut-off repair initiator, or successive repair segments on a same repairable).

On the other hand, some repair operations can retain the projective import of the syntactic shape of the sentence-so-far (e.g., the *uh* repair initiator). It is not unfamiliar for some component of a syntax to operate on the product yielded by other components of the syntax. The "non-syntactic" orderings produced by repair are not unsyntactic in principle; they happen not to be components of the types of syntax of which we currently have accounts. The organization of same-turn repair might well be a natural component of a syntax-for-conversation.

What a syntax-for-conversation will look like cannot be specified before those who might describe it set about the examination of turn-constructual-units that are produced in conversation empirically. It seems to me, however, that such a syntax-for-conversation is likely to have certain characteristics.

1. It will recognize that its sentences will be in turns and will be subject to the organization of turns and their exigencies. For example, it will recognize

- (a) that possible sentence completion implicates possible turn completion, and that can implicate next turn starts.
- (b) that there can be organizational pressures for next turns to get early starts or be deferred, and current turn, and a sentence in it, can both affect that and suffer it.
- (c) that the turn the sentence is in can have other sentences or other turn-constructional-units in it, and that can have consequences for any given sentence.
- (d) that, generically, others are present who can talk, who will talk when the turn is over, who may, under strictly regulated conditions, talk during the turn and during a sentence in it at the "invitation" of the speaker, and who may intrude on it in its course under a variety of specifiable conditions.

As a consequence, one set of terms for the description of a sentence or other turn-constructional-unit in conversation will involve its progressive development toward possible completion, so that, for example, "pre-possible-completion" could be a place in a sentence of which a syntactic account could be given. It will allow description of a succession of sentences-so-far and turns-so-far in the course of the talk.²⁵

2. It will treat the pace of talk and pauses in it as potentially deployable syntactic objects in a sentence in a turn and will admit such relationships between components of a turn as adjacency, pre- and postpositioning,²⁶ etc.

3. It will recognize that the sentence may be part of a "project" (e.g., a story) pursued by the speaker through a series of turns and may be sensitive to its place in that project.

4. It will recognize that the turn the sentence is in is regularly a turn in a sequence, a structural unit whose organizational contingencies have consequences for component turns and, consequently, for sentences in them.

5. It will recognize that the sentence is always not only someplace in particular sequentially but is also spoken to some party or parties in particular, so that it is subject to considerations of "recipient design," which is relevant to the choice of words and syntactic forms in it.

6. It will recognize that, whatever long-term project or "intention" the sentence's speaker has, the speaker is first and most immediately under the

²⁵ For example, cf. Goodwin, 1977.

²⁶ Some of these matters have occasionally been touched on in the past; for example, see Bolinger's "Linear Modification."

constraints of, and afforded the resources of, some sequentially local here-and-now, and

7. that all the types and orders of organization that operate in and on turns in conversation can operate on the sentence.

8. It will be grounded in the inspection of sentences actually produced in turns at talk in naturally occurring conversation.

7. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In continually writing of a “syntax-for-conversation,” I mean to treat explicitly as hypothetical what seems to me to be prematurely treated as presupposed fact, and that is the existence of A syntax. That there is a trans-discourse-type syntax may end up to be the case; it should be found, not presupposed. With that, I also mean to make explicitly hypothetical the current sense of “a language,” or “language.” The notion “a language” seems to be the product of an assumption about some common, stable, underlying properties of an immense range of human behavior—from talking to the family to reciting Shakespeare to cadging alms to writing memoranda to lecturing, etc.—each of which is embedded in its own combination of organizational structures, constraints, and resources. Much attention has been devoted to these supposedly common features; relatively little to their respective environments of use, which differentiate them. Accordingly, a serious weighing of the commonalities against the differentiae has yet to take place. In any environment of so-called “language use,” there is a locally organized world in which it is embedded. Some of these are “speech exchange systems”;²⁷ some do not involve talking. Until the characteristics of these locally organized settings are investigated and explicated in appropriate detail, the extraction of “language” from them is a procedure with unknown properties and consequences. A syntax-for-conversation is an attractive candidate for early treatment because conversation is the most common and, it would appear, the most fundamental condition of “language use” or “discourse.”

APPENDIX 1

A full set of notational conventions used in the transcripts may be found in Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). The conventions most relevant to this chapter follow. The transcription system was developed by Gail Jefferson.

²⁷ Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), 729–31.

The transcript segment reproduced in Appendix 2 is a reconciliation of separate transcripts by Gail Jefferson, Richard Frankel, and myself. Most of the other data segments used in the text are the work of Jefferson.

- The dash indicates a cut-off, usually a stop.
- : Colons indicate a stretch of the preceding sound, in rough proportion to the duration of the stretch.
- [] Brackets mark turns spoken in overlap: Left brackets indicate the point of onset; right brackets (not always marked) indicate the point of resolution.
- // Double slash is an alternate convention for overlap; the point of the double slash is where the next marked turn starts.
- (0.5) Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed silence in tenths of a second (stopwatch is not used).
- Boldface** Boldface italics indicate stress but do not differentiate whether pitch or amplitude is involved.

NOTE: The data fragments cited here are drawn from a collection of audio- and videotapes of naturally occurring ordinary conversation. The parties to these conversations are diverse—students, housewives, janitors, etc.—as are the “contexts”—telephone, co-present, at home, at work, etc. Sources are identified by code in the text so as to allow retrieval, should that be relevant.

APPENDIX 2

Here is a bit of transcript in which you can see a number of instances and types of instances of the phenomena I will be concerned with. I have not ensured that it is “characteristic”; it has about as much of “same-turn” repair as many other fragments, fewer than others, more than still others. It is a bit skewed, in that, for most of it, one of the parties is telling a story, so that the other says relatively little. The parties are two girls who have apparently known each other for a long time, who for a while went to the same college until B transferred to another school. They have been talking about a former mutual teacher, who is the *she* of line 179, and then B begins to tell about a current teacher of hers. I offer the fragment as a resource for those who have not examined materials from natural conversation and who might see little sense for the observation that the recurrence of the events of repair in conversation would be readily noticeable to anyone who would look. (Transcription conventions in Appendix 1.)

- 179 Ava: *She must know somebuddy*
 180 *because all those other teachers they got rid of .hhh*
 181 (0.3)
 182 Bee: *Yeh I bet they got rid of all the one:: Well one I had, t!*
 183 *'hhh in the firs' term there, fer the firs' term of English,*
 184 *she die::d hhuh-uhh* ['hhh
 185 Ava: [Oh: .
 186 Bee: *She died in the middle of the 'te:rm?mhhh!=*
 187 Ava: *= Oh that's too ba:d hha ha!=*
 188 Bee: *= Eh-ye:h, ih-a, She wz rea:lly awful, she ha-duh, (('hh))*
 189 *she's the wuh- She ha:duh southern accent too.*
 190 Ava: *Oh: .*
 191 Bee: *A:nd, she wz very difficul'tuh unduhstand.*
 192 Ava: *No, she ain't there anymoh,*
 193 Bee: *No I know I mean she, she's gone a long t(h)ime*
 194 *(h)a'rea(h)* [dy? hh
 195 Ava: [Mm, [hhmh!
 196 Bee: ['hhh
 197 (0.2)
 198 Bee: *nYeeah, 'hh This feller I have-^(nm)“felluh” ; this ma:n.*
 199 *(0.2) t!'hhh He ha::(s)- uff-eh-who-who I have fer*
 200 *linguistics* [is real] ly too much, 'hh [h=
 201 Ava: [Mm hm?] [Mm [hm,
 202 Bee: [=I didn' notice it
 203 *b't there's a woman in my class who's a nurse 'n. 'hh she*
 204 *said to me she s'd didju notice he has a ha:ndicap en I*
 205 *said wha:t. Youknow I said I don't see anything wrong*
 206 *wi [th im, she says his ha:nds.=*
 207 Ava: [Mm.
 208 Bee: *'hhh So the nex' cla:ss hh! 'hh fer en hour en f'fteen*
 209 *minutes I sat there en I watched his ha:n(h)ds hh*
 210 *hh [hhh=*
 211 Ava: [Why wha [t's the ma [tter] ^o with (his h'nds)
 212 Bee: [=She [meh-] (him.)
 213 Bee: *'hhh t!'hhh He ksh- He doesn' haff uh-full use uff hiss*
 214 *hh-fin::gers or something en he, tch! he ho:lds the chalk*
 215 *funny=en, 'hh=*
 216 Ava: *=Oh [:*
 217 Bee: [hhHe-] eh-his fingihs don't be:nd=en, ['hhh-
 218 Ava: [Oh [::
 219 Bee: [Yihknow] she

- 220 *really eh-so she said you know, theh-ih- she's had*
 221 *experience. 'hh with handicap' people she said but 'hh*
 222 *ih-yihknow ih-theh- in the fie:ld.*
 223 (0.2)
 224 Ava: (Mm:.)
 225 Bee: *-thet they're i:n* [::.=
 226 Ava: *(Uh* [huh)
 227 Bee: *= Yihknow theyd- they do b-* (0.2)
 228 *t!' hhhh they try even harduh then uhr-yihknow a regular*
 229 *instructor.*
 230 Ava: *Righ* [t.
 231 Bee: *[hhhh to uh instr- yihknow do the class'n evr* [ything.]
 232 Ava: *[Uh huh,]*
 232a Bee: *An:d,*
 233 Bee: *She said they're usually harder markers 'n I said wo::wuhh*
 234 *huhh! 'hhh I said theh go, I said there's- there's three*
 235 *courses a'ready thet uh(hh)hh* [hff
 236 Ava: *o Yeh*
 237 Bee: *-I'm no(h)t gunnuh do well i(h)n,*
 238 Ava: *hhhh!*
 239 Bee: *'hhh Becaw but uh, Oh my, my north american indian class*
 240 *'s really, (0.5) tch! It's so boring.*
 241 (0.3)
 242 Ava: *Ye(h)e(h)ah!*
 243 (0.2)
 244 Bee: *I-ah- y-yihknow this gu:y has not done anything yet thet*

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