Other-initiated repair in English conversation:
Focus on locating the ‘un-said’ trouble

Sally Jones ジョーンズ・サリー (D1)
2017年度8月日本語教育学講座・分野研究会
2 August 2017

Introduction

This paper will investigate other-initiated repair in English conversation. In particular, I will look at how others do repair on the speaker’s talk when that talk contains trouble that is ‘un-said’.

What is repair?

Repair is a set of practices that deal with problems of speaking, hearing and/or understanding.

The repair sequence for other-initiated repair is as follows (‘S1’, ‘S2’ refer to different speakers):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt (1)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 S1: Trouble source [T-1]</td>
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<td>2 S2: Repair initiator [T0]</td>
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<td>3 S1: Repair proper [T+1]</td>
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</table>

The trouble source [T-1] and the repair proper [T+1] are defined relative to the repair initiator [T0].

The following are two examples of repair, which focus on ‘what’ as the repair initiator [T0].

Excerpt (2): constructed example.
1 S1: I bought a pencil. [T-1]
2 →S2: what? [T0]
3 S1: I bought a pencil. [T+1]

Here, ‘what’ is occurring with rising intonation (denoted by ‘?’). It is an ‘open class repair initiator’ (Drew, 1997). ‘what’ does not specify the nature of the trouble, so it is orienting towards a hearing problem and possibly an understanding problem too.

Excerpt (3): constructed example.
1 S1: can you give it to me today? [T-1]
2 →S2: what. [T0]
3 S1: the textbook. [T+1]

This ‘what’ is occurring with falling intonation (denoted by ‘.’). This is referred to as a ‘reference repair initiator’. The repair initiator [T0] is targeting a particular component (i.e., referential expression) in the trouble source [T-1].
Significance

Firstly, this research will examine the intersection of interaction and grammar. Grammar itself becomes a resource for participation in conversation. This research will not only shed light on how language and linguistic resources are adapted for interaction, but also how grammar is emergent in interaction.

Secondly, it is significant for second language pedagogy (Wong & Waring, 2010). As maintaining mutual understanding is fundamental in our interaction, understanding how repair is done is crucial for developing a learner’s interational competence.

Research questions

1. What practices are used to locate the ‘un-said’ trouble in English conversation?
2. In what sequential environments (i.e., where) do these different practices occur in?
3. What possible different social actions do these practices achieve?

Practices that locate the ‘un-said’ trouble

The speaker may have designed their utterance to be pragmatically complete (i.e., in terms of action), but for the recipient, it may not be pragmatically complete. This may lead to difficulties in responding to the speaker’s turn. The repair practices that I will examine how the recipients initiate repair to the speaker’s trouble source to locate the ‘un-said’ trouble and to make the speaker’s turn ‘response-ready’.

The six practices that I will discuss are: (1) appendor question, (2) appendor question with wh-word, (3) increment elicitor, (4) wh-word, (5) partial repeat, and (6) partial repeat with wh-word.

Appendor question

The repair initiator [T0] is a grammatical expansion of the trouble source [T-1] (Sacks, 1992).

Excerpt (4): Calfriend (North US) - ENGN6278.
1 S2: maybe I'll be in Guam hhh .h
2 S1: <did I miss something cruci:al?>
3 S2: .hh <well> I've been dating somebody. [T-1]
4 (0.6)
5 →S1: from ¡Gua::m? [T0]
6 (0.4)
7 S2: $n(h)o:$ [T+1]
8 (.)
9 S2: somebody who's in the Navy
10 (.)
11 S1: >oh.<
Excerpt (5): Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English – SBC002. S1-S5 have been discussing S2’s dancing lessons.

1 S1: do you need a partner?    [T-1]
2 (1.3)
3 S2: to go there?     [T0]
4 (.)
5 S1: yeah.     [T+1]
6 (.)
7 S2: no.

Appendor question with wh-word

The repair initiator [T0] is a grammatical expansion of the trouble source [T-1], but also contains a wh-word.

Excerpt (6): Callfriend (North US) - ENGN6384. This segment directly follows where S2 has been talking about the web browser Netscape (lines omitted). A ‘mezuzah’ is a traditional Jewish ornament.

1 S1: o:h I got another gift today.    [T-1]
2 (0.5)
3 S2: from who?     [T0]
4 (0.5)
5 S1: from my sister    [T+1;T-1]
6 (0.5)
7 S2: ↑ for what?     [T0]
8 (.)
9 S1: she got (.). me a mezuzah    [T+1]
10 (0.9)
11 S2: ↑nice=
12 S1: =yeah

Increment elicitor

The repair initiator [T0] is a grammatical expansion of the trouble source [T-1], but in the form of a standalone conjunction or preposition (Lerner, 2004).


1 Jack: I just returned         [T-1]
2 S2: Kathy: from    [T0]
3 Jack: Finland    [T+1]

Not all increment elicitor serve as repair initiators. They may also serve as prompts for sequence expansion, but do not pinpoint a particular trouble with the trouble source [T-1]. For instance, the standalone ‘so’ (Raymond, 2004). The next excerpt shows this (with the conjunction ‘and’).
Excerpt (8): Callfriend (North US) - ENGN6278. This segment comes after they have been talking about S2's new boyfriend (lines omitted).

1 S2: a::h hm but I talked to my sister today. [T-1?]
2 (0.7)
3 →S1: and? [T0?]
4 (.)
5 S2: >she might have Gra:ve's Disease,< [T+1?]
6 (0.8)
7 S1: [wha:t?]
8 S2: [ she]’s (.) thrilled. (0.3) you [know like the-]
9 S1: [ when did ]=
10 S1: =that- I know what it is.

Wh-word

The repair initiator [T0] is not a grammatical expansion of the trouble source [T-1], but it is targeting an 'un-said' trouble.

Excerpt (9): Griffith Corpus of Spoken Australian English - GCSAusE37.

1 S1: that was the only funny part of your who:le $ni(h)g(h)ht$? (0.3)
2 S1: $you were there for like four hours,$ (0.9)
3 S2: <no:: we went to u::m> (0.3) eat <pizza fi:rst.> [T-1]
4 (.)
5 →S1: whe:re? [T0]
6 S2: <at the Ho- (0.3) Harrison Grey’s office>,=>ah< [T+1]
7 S1: [      their office is     ] crazy?
8 S2: [ <well I didn’t wanna loo->] (0.8)
9 S1: [their office is ]

Other wh-words may target a 'said' trouble. In the following, 'who' is targeting the 'he' in line 1.


1 S1: yeah:: >he- he< went into the city
2 ye- umm two days ago. [T-1]
3 →S2: >who?< [T0]
4 S1: Reich. [T+1]
**Partial repeat**

The *repair initiator* \([T0]\) repeats part of the *trouble source* \([T-1]\) that it is targeting an ‘un-said’ trouble. Note that ‘_’ indicates flat intonation.

**Excerpt (11): Callhome English corpus - CallHome6825.**

1 S1: but weddin- wedding was in Great Hall um \(0.8\)  
2 \(\text{.hhhh} (1.6)\) Liz, Mike Gorey and h \(0.6\) um \(0.5\)  
3 Scott (.). played at the end h \(0.8\) \(T-1\)  
4 \(0.8\)  
5 S1: \(\text{.hhhhhh after everyone had [left}\) \(0.8\)  
6 \(\rightarrow S2: \text{[play::ed_}\) \(T0\)  
7 \(0.5\)  
8 S1: um: \(0.6\) whatever instruments they happened to play \(T+1\)

Partial repeats may also target ‘said’ troubles in the trouble source \([T-1]\) by acting as a frame.

**Excerpt (12): Callhome English corpus - CallHome6825.**

1 S1: ye\[ah (static) (\(0.5\)) much going on ev\]eryone\=  
2 S2: \(>\text{well- uh oh< my Appolonious paper is- half written}\)  
3 S1: =everyone's gone again  
4 \(\rightarrow S1: \text{.hhhh your Appolonious pap::er_}\) \(0.3\)  
5 \(0.3\)  
6 S2: is half written. I'm on page six out of \(\text{ten}\).

**Partial repeat with wh-word**

\([T0]\) repeats part of the trouble source \([T-1]\) with a wh-word that it is targeting an ‘un-said’ trouble.

**Excerpt (13): Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English – SBC033.**

1 S1: it came with \(\text{[the valley girls I think.]}\)  
2 \(\text{S3: [ everything's ripe with ] with=}\)  
3 \(= (0.8) \text{ hidden meaning.}\)  
4 S1: *where it started* \(T-1\)  
5 \(1.2\)  
6 \(\rightarrow S2: \text{start what?}\) \(T0\)  
7 \(0.4\)  
8 S1: that \(0.6\) way of speaking \(T+1\)
Partial repeats with a wh-word may also target ‘said’ troubles in the trouble source [T-1] by acting as a frame.

Excerpt (14): Griffith Corpus of Spoken Australian English - GCSAusE7.

1  S1:  so how did the:: (. ) class go?   [T-1]
2    →S2:  the what?             [T0]
3    S1:  the class go?           [T+1]
4    S2:  yeah good I missed the first one

References


