RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES
PERSPEKTYWY BADAWCZE

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THE LOCAL REPAIR SYSTEM IN CONVERSATION

Précis***

Inspection of audio and video recordings of everyday conversational interaction reveals an extensive organization of repair. The use of the term "repair" should not be taken as a suggestion that what is "repaired" is necessarily a mistake, error, violation, etc. Repair is done to "repairables", a great many of which do not otherwise appear flawed. "Errors" and the like are, then, but a possible sub-set of repairables. They are of no special interest to the study of local repair because of the apparent independence of the organization of error and the organization of repair. No theory of error, accordingly, is required for the understanding of the organization of repair, both because of this independence and because repair is exercised not only on "errors" and the like. All talk is repairable. And repair organization is a crucial component of the various systems of sequential organization that operate in conversation, e.g., the turn-taking system.

There are various types of repair, e.g., word search, turn component replacement, overlap repair, turn reorganization, turn-type repair, recognitional and other recipient-design repair, etc.

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*** Unpublished manuscript, circa 1971/72. Initial formulation of the "repair" problem in conversation, later developed in numerous studies in conversation analysis. Probably a preliminary version of Emanuel A. Schegloff, Gail Jefferson and Harvey Sacks. 1977. "The preference for self-correction in the organization of repair in conversation". *Language* 53(2): 361–382.

Overwhelmingly, whatever the type of the repair, repair is initiated locally. That is, most repair is initiated in a repair space composed of a) the turn in which the repairable occurs, b) the next turn, by some recipient, and c) the turn after that, taken by the speaker of the turn in which the repairable occurred, respectively, in decreasing order of frequency. In the turn in which the repairable occurs, there is a set of places at which repair is initiated, if it is initiated. Mechanisms for repair and its initiation vary with the place in the repair space at which the repair is initiated.

There is both a relative preference for self-repair over other-repair, and an independent dis-preference for other-repair. This is evidenced, for example, by the overwhelming preponderance of self-repair over other-repair, and by the ways in which opportunities for other-repair are exercised by recipients of a turn containing a repairable. This preference structure for repair fits well with other sequential organizations in conversation, e.g., the turn-taking system, the "preference for agreement", etc.

While there is enough generic about repair to warrant depiction of "a local repair organization", various types of repairs are addressed to various special technical problems in the organization of conversation, and supply specialized solutions to them. The case of overlap repair is employed here (though it should be noted that not all overlap is treated by parties to conversation as subject to repair).

The special technical interest of overlap repair is this. As noted, repair is organized in terms of turns: current (the one in which the repairable occurs), next, and second next. But in overlap, "whose turn it is" (and thus, which turn is "current") is precisely the issue engendering the repairable, and is problematic as a resource for the repair. What happens when a major component of the repair system is itself the repairable?

Actually, two types of repair are potentially engendered by an overlap: a) repair of the overlap per se, i.e. of more than one speaking at a time, and b) repair of the component turn(s) of the overlap, which are potentially impaired by the overlap. These repair types are ordered, repair of a component turn generally being initiated when resolution/repair of the overlap is achieved or is in sight. While that order of repair itself has special technical interest, it is not the one noted above, for it is undertaken when the sequential organization of the turns has been repaired, and the repair space is, thus, available as a resource. That is not the case with the repair of the overlap per se.

The solution to the overlap repair problem cannot be described in this précis. The above should be treated as a sketch of an outline of the paper.