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# Four repair operations in Hungarian conversations in the light of cross-linguistic examinations

SUMMARY

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## 1 Introduction: The aim and structure of the thesis

In conversations, speakers may encounter problems which make them stop their talk-in-progress. The treatment of such problems triggering speech disfluencies has been intensively studied in various linguistic disciplines. In the framework of conversation analysis (CA), which studies human social interaction across sociology, linguistics, and communication (Stivers–Sidnell 2013: 1), "the set of practices whereby a co-interactant interrupts the ongoing course of action to attend to possible trouble in speaking, hearing or understanding the talk" constitutes the domain of repair (Kitzinger 2013: 229), and is regarded as one of the fundamental structures of conversation (Sidnell–Stivers 2013: v). While conversation analysis examines repair from an interactional point of view, psycholinguistics and phonetics regard repair as the correction of speech disfluencies (Gósy 2004: 15), and focus on the cognitive and phonetic aspects of the phenomenon. As the main focus of my research is on the interactional aspects of the repair mechanism, the starting framework of my study is conversation analysis.

The previous studies in the conversation analytic literature have paid a great deal of attention to self- and other-initiated repair (see, e.g., Schegloff–Jefferson–Sacks 1977; C. Goodwin 1980, 1981; M. H. Goodwin 1983; Heritage 1984; Jefferson 1972, 1974, 1987; Fox–Hayashi–Jasperson 1996; Drew 1997; Stivers 2005; Robinson 2006; Wilkinson–Weatherall 2011; Schegloff 1979, 1987, 1992, 1997a, b, 2000, 2008a, b, 2013). Apart from English, repair has been studied across a range of other languages. Kitzinger (2013: 229) mentions Brazilian Portuguese (Guimaraes 2007), East Caribbean English Creoles (Sidnell 2008), Finnish (Laakso–Sorjonen 2010), French (Maheux-Pelletier–Golato 2008), German (Egbert 1996, 2004), Indonesian (Wouk 2005), Japanese (Fox et al. 1996; Hayashi 2003), Korean (Kim 1993, 2001), Mandarin (Wu 2006; Luke–Zhang 2010), Norwegian (Svennevig 2008), Russian (Bolden–Mandelbaum–Wilkinson 2012), and Thai (Moerman 1977). While Fox and her seven colleagues (2009) have carried out a comparative study on English, Bikol, Sochiapam Chinantec, Finnish, Indonesian, Japanese, and Mandarin, Fox, Maschler, and Uhmann (2010) have examined self-repair in English, Hebrew, and German. We can add Hungarian to this list. While Lerch (2007) and Németh (2012a, b, c, 2013, 2014) have focused solely on self-repair in Hungarian, Szabó (2012) has examined other-initiated repair as well when applying conversation analysis to language ideology studies. The focus of the present thesis is on self-repair.

Schegloff (2013) describes ten main same-turn self-repair strategies, which speakers employ "to deal with some putative trouble-source in an ongoing turn-at-talk in conversation or to alter it in some interactionally consequential way" (Schegloff 2013: 43). These *repair operations* are recycling, replacing, deleting, searching, parenthesizing, sequence-jumping, reformatting, reordering, inserting, and aborting. Apart from Schegloff's (2013) study, we can say that relatively few of the previous conversation analytic studies have focused on repair operations in their own right. Among the exceptions, see Fox et al. 2009 and Fox et al. 2010 on recycling and replacement (see the languages above); Luke and Zhang 2010 on insertion in Mandarin Chinese; and Wilkinson–Weatherall 2011 on insertion in British, New Zealand, and U.S. English. As far as the investigation of repair operations in Hungarian is concerned, apart from the previously published findings of the present thesis (Németh 2012a, b, c, 2013, 2014), Lerch (2007) has explored the lexical category of the target word in repetition (recycling). The list also shows that even fewer studies in the conversation analytic literature have examined repair operations relative to each other, i.e., contrasting them in the repair mechanism from a certain perspective or perspectives (among the exceptions, see Fox et al. 2009; Fox et al. 2010; and Németh 2012a, b, c, 2013, 2014), and as far as the author of the present thesis knows, the only cross-linguistic studies comparing two repair operations with each other are Fox et al. 2009 and Fox et al. 2010.

On the basis of the research of Fox et al. (2009) and Fox et al. (2010) involving a total of nine languages in their examinations, it can be suggested that recycling is a more frequent repair operation than replacement in all the languages examined. This generalization prompts us to ask the following research questions: Is there such a difference between the frequency of recycling and replacement in Hungarian? That is, does the distribution of recycling and replacement in Hungarian conversations support Fox's et al. (2009) and Fox's et al. (2010) results? If yes, how could we explain the cross-linguistic difference between the frequencies of the two repair operations?

The general aims of the thesis were therefore as follows: 1) to examine recycling and replacement repairs relative to each other in Hungarian conversations, and make a comparison with the languages so far investigated in this respect, and 2) to propose a model able to describe repair operations relative to each other. Setting up the model required the extension of the research to further repair operations. Insertion and aborting have received relatively greater attention in the conversation analytic literature than the other repair operations (except for recycling and replacement). Apart from these four repair operations, there are six operation types described in the conversation analytic literature (see above) (Schegloff 2013),

but as Schegloff (2013: 68) suggests, there may be others which await recognition and invite description. However, the techniques employed in accomplishing deleting, searching, parenthesizing, sequence-jumping, reformatting, and reordering, and their interactional import have not been examined so far (cf. Schegloff 2013: 41). For this reason, in my study I have explored recycling, replacement, insertion, and aborting in Hungarian, and compared my findings with the previous results.

Conversation analysis grounds its empirical analyses in audio and film recordings of naturally occurring interactions collected in familiar, everyday settings as well as in institutional settings, and regards data as these recordings (Mondada 2013). The purposes of the present thesis require a wider spectrum of sources. Apart from semi-spontaneous speech recorded in a corpus consisting of Hungarian, casual face-to-face conversations, I have built my argumentation on previous research, as well as on my intuition. In order to integrate these various data sources in a conscious way, I have also offered a metatheoretical reflection on my study using Kertész and Rákosi's (2012, 2014) *p-model of plausible argumentation*, which regards data as plausible statements originating from direct sources (e.g., corpus, linguistic intuition, and experiment) (Kertész–Rákosi 2012: 169), and makes the conscious integration of the data from these various data sources possible. In my thesis, following the terminology of the p-model, by the term *data* I mean plausible statements originating from direct sources, and not the recordings which CA researchers produce as data by collecting them for the purpose of studying them, and not the recordings which can be done by participants for their practical purposes and turned into data by researchers (Mondada 2013: 38).

The thesis is organized as follows. I first provide the metatheoretical background of the research, i.e., I introduce the p-model in Chapter 2, then I also provide the object theoretical, conversation analytical background of my thesis in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I describe the corpus and methodology of the study. In Chapter 5, using examples from the previous literature and the Hungarian corpus, I characterize the repair operations of recycling, replacement, insertion, and aborting. In Chapter 6, I examine recycling and replacement in Hungarian conversations relative to each other, and compare my results with the previous findings concerning the other languages so far examined in this respect. In Chapter 7, I extend the comparative analysis to insertion and aborting, and propose a model which describes repair operations relative to each other. In Chapter 8, I summarize the results and conclude the thesis.

## 2. The corpus and methodology of the study

The findings of the research presented in this thesis are based on two corpora, one compiled in the Institute of Psychology, University of Szeged (SZTEPSZI corpus), and the other in the Kempelen Farkas Speech Research Laboratory in the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest (Hungarian speech database (BEA) (Gósy 2012)). While the SZTEPSZI corpus consists of video recordings, the conversations from the BEA database are audio recorded. The conversations can be regarded as semi-spontaneous.

Although the initial object theoretical framework of the thesis is conversation analysis, my research aims established in Section 1 made it necessary to diverge from the "conversation analytic mentality" (Schenkein 1978) in some respects. First, the metatheoretical framework of the present thesis, i.e., the p-model of plausible argumentation regards data as statements with positive plausibility values (strength of acceptability) originating from direct sources (e.g., corpus, linguistic intuition, experiment). In the thesis, I have used the term *data* in the sense of the p-model. Second, the conversation analytic method is primarily qualitative (Stivers–Sidnell 2013: 2). However, the main research aims of the thesis (see Section 1) have made statistical analyses well-motivated; consequently, conversation analysis is only the starting framework of my thesis.

From a methodological point of view, the thesis can be divided into three main parts. While Chapter 5 introduces the repair operations investigated in the study by analyzing examples (qualitative analysis), Chapter 6 and 7 present two successive phases of the research. I have coded the corpus for the following features: syntactic category (function or content word) and length (monosyllabic, bisyllabic, multisyllabic) of all words in the corpus, syntactic category and length of the target word in all recycling and replacement instances in the corpus, and site of initiation (i.e., the location in the target word where speakers initiate repair) in all recycling and replacement repairs in the corpus.

I first attempted to find out whether the speakers tend to initiate recycling and replacement in monosyllabic, bisyllabic, or multisyllabic, and function or content words, respectively. I also tried to reveal whether the type of the repair operation, the length of the target word, and/or the syntactic class of the target word influence the site of repair initiation. After carrying out these examinations, I compared my findings to those of Fox et al. (2009) and Fox et al. (2010). The findings of Chapter 6 motivated the second phase of the study. In Chapter 7, I proposed a model which describes repair operations relative to each other. Using the definition of repair as a starting point, I set up the model on the basis of data from

previous research, the qualitative analysis of examples from the Hungarian corpus (during which I also use statements from previous research), and test it with a quantitative method.

## 3. The results of the research and future directions

I have built the metatheoretical issues into my object theoretical discussion, which has made my object theoretical results more reliable for the following reasons:

1. I have relied on a wide spectrum of data (statements originating from direct sources) as well as statements obtained as the conclusions of plausible inferences (statements originating from indirect sources). These direct and indirect sources can be divided into two main groups. The first group relates to previous studies, and involves their qualitative, quantitative, and statistical analyses based on the corpora of their languages examined, as well as the inferences they made and the conclusions they drew on the basis of their investigations. I have also obtained data from previous studies by finding connections between some pieces of their data which they left uncovered. The second group of sources I have used is comprised of my own qualitative, quantitative, and statistical analyses carried out on the Hungarian corpus, and the inferences I have made and the conclusions I have drawn on the basis of these analyses. I have used more types of statistical analyses the results of which have reinforced each other. Finally, I have used my intuition as well. These sources have been consciously integrated in the course of the research.

2. This metatheoretical approach has also made my problem solving more effective. When I have faced p-inconsistency (informational overdetermination), I have retrospectively re-evaluated the p-context (i.e., the previously accepted hypotheses, data, data sources, and methodological norms) from different perspectives, and treated the p-problems with the help of the problem-solving strategies offered by the p-model. Setting up the preference hierarchy hypothesis of repair operations in this way has not been linear, but cyclic and prismatic: cyclic, because the p-context has been retrospectively re-evaluated again and again, and prismatic, because this re-evaluation has been carried out from different perspectives. From this it follows that my argumentation has left open the possibility of more alternative solutions and further argumentation cycles.

My object theoretical findings which I have obtained in the way described above are the following:

1. I have found it plausible that repair operations are in the domain of same-turn self-repair.

2. I have defined repair operations as practices whereby a co-interactant interrupts her/his ongoing turn-at-talk to attend to possible trouble in speaking, hearing, or understanding the talk or merely to alter the turn in some interactionally consequential way without any problems fixed in it.

3. I have argued for the repair operation status of recycling when it is employed solely to delay the next item due so that the speaker can attend to possible trouble in speaking, hearing, or understanding the talk or alter the turn in some interactionally consequential way without any problems fixed in it (Fox et al. 2009: 75).

4. I have proposed that if the practices such as *uh(m), y'know,* and silence are employed solely to delay the next item due so that the speaker can attend to possible trouble in speaking, hearing, or understanding the talk or alter the turn in some interactionally consequential way without any problems fixed in it, then they should be regarded as repair operations.

5. I have found that the speakers of the Hungarian corpus tend to recycle back to monosyllabic function words, and in the recycling repairs of the corpus syntactic class plays a more important role than word length.

6. My results concerning function word recycling in Hungarian support the prediction of Fox et al. (2010: 2504), who suggest that languages with function words preceding their respective content words will show a preference for recycling back to function words rather than content words.

7. I have found that the speakers of the Hungarian corpus tend to employ replacement repair in multisyllabic content words, and in the replacement repairs of the corpus word length plays a more important role than syntactic class. This may be due to the rich system of inflectional and derivational morphology of the language.

8. With respect to site of initiation, Hungarian fits the patterns suggested as universal by Fox et al. (2009): while recycling tends to be initiated after recognizable completion, replacement is generally initiated before the word is recognizably complete. As speakers initiate repair mainly in monosyllabic words, they tend towards initiation after recognizable completion, but they show no preference for site of initiation in

bisyllabic words, where restarting repairs contribute to early repair initiations in the Hungarian corpus.

9.  I have assumed that in the languages where speakers tend to use function word recycling to delay the next content word due and replacement repair to replace content words, the function of recycling repair and the function of replacement repair may not be independent of each other. Recycling in these languages may serve as a device for avoiding the repair operation of replacement. The study of Fox et al. (2010) and my result regarding Hungarian have supported this assumption. Fox et al. (2010) have found that the speakers of their three languages tend to use function word recycling to delay the next content word due and replacement repair to replace content words. Since in the replacement repairs of the Hungarian corpus word length plays a more important role than syntactic class, my finding that most of the function word recyclings in the Hungarian corpus happen before multisyllabic words, has also made the hypothesis plausible.

10. According to my assumption, both restarting repair and recycling repair initiated after recognizable completion may be employed to prevent the speaker from producing inappropriate segments, and thus both of them may be employed to help the speaker in avoiding replacement. The only difference is that while recycling initiated after recognizable completion is used before the problematic word, restarting is initiated when the problematic word has already begun. This is supported by the finding that restarting and replacement tend to affect the same word length and syntactic class categories in the languages examined so far.

11. I have assumed a preference hierarchy among recycling initiated after recognizable completion, restarting, and replacement: if speakers cannot use recycling initiated after recognizable completion where they need extra time, they will tend to substitute it with a restarting repair just to avoid replacement. This hypothesis offers a possible explanation not only for the possibly universal preference for recycling over replacement, but for the possibly universally constant recycling – replacement ratio as well. On the basis of the results of Fox et al. (2009), Fox et al. (2010), and the examination of Hungarian, I assume that the ratio of early and late initiations in recycling repairs depends on the typical orders of function and content words in the languages, i.e., the exploitability of the delaying function of function word recycling. This is in accordance with the previous studies which have described how the methods of repair are shaped by the linguistic resources of languages, and argued in this way

for the relationship between grammar and repair (see, e.g., Fox et al. 1996; Rieger 2003; Lerch 2007; Fox et al. 2009; Fox et al. 2010).

12. I have introduced retrospectivity, redundancy, and inappropriateness as the respects in which the repair operations of recycling, replacement, insertion, and aborting may violate the preference for progressivity, and I have proposed a model which can describe repair operations relative to each other. I have argued that the fewer respects in which a repair operation overrides the preference for progressivity, the more preferred it will be in the repair mechanism.

13. Since the preference hierarchy hypothesis of repair operations offers a possible explanation for the cross-linguistic difference assumed between the frequency of recycling and replacement, it proposes a candidate answer for the main research question of the thesis. It also influences the interpretation of the relationship between the principle of intersubjectivity and the principle of progressivity in talk-in-interaction. Saying that the principle of maintaining progressivity also has an impact on the principle of maintaining intersubjectivity (not only vice versa), it supposes a two-way relationship between intersubjectivity and progressivity.

14. I have elaborated a testing method for the hypothesis, which was based on the sub-hypothesis that in a case in which more than one self-repair is employed while carrying out the same action, the repair operations following one another will not be independent of one another. The analysis of the Hungarian corpus with this method has made the hypothesis on the preference hierarchy of repair operations plausible.

Summarizing the object theoretical results of the thesis, we can conclude that the speakers' possible choices of repair operations relating to self-repair depend on at least three factors: *the function of repair operations, the number of respects in which they override the preference for progressivity,* and *the morpho-syntactic structure of the language used* by the speaker. This is in accordance with the previous studies illuminating the strong relationship between grammar and repair (see, e.g., Schegloff 1979; Fox et al. 1996; Rieger 2003; Lerch 2007; Fox et al. 2009; Fox et al. 2010), and further supports the research highlighting the interaction between grammar and pragmatics.

The features of redundancy, retrospectivity, and inappropriateness do not belong to the four repair operations per se but to the property of halting the progressivity of the turn. Therefore, in order to test the hypothesis in a direct way, i.e., to see the frequencies of the different categories in the corpus, and to see whether there are more categories (more respects

in which the preference for progressivity can be violated), we should examine the other six repair operations as well (deleting, searching, parenthesizing, sequence-jumping, reformatting, and reordering) (see Schegloff 2013). This could be the next step of the study. Moreover, in order to see even more clearly, we sould take into consideration all the phenomena halting the progressivity of the turn. In this way, it would be possible to recognize new repair operations which have not been described in the literature yet (cf. Schegloff 2013: 68), and also phenomena where the progressivity of the turn is suspended without repair occurring. Furthermore, since the repair operations of deleting, searching, parenthesizing, sequence-jumping, reformatting, and reordering has not been investigated in Hungarian so far, the analysis should be expanded to the interactional import of the six repair operations, the techniques employed accomplishing them, as well as the potential relationship between the structure of the language and their usage.

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