

Self-repair at transition place as an interactional resource for pursuing response: Observation from Chinese conversation

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Repair is an important organization in talk-in-interaction that manages troubles arising from speaking, hearing and understanding the talk (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977). In addition, it often serves as a vehicle for other actions in interaction as illustrated in the recent studies led by Lerner and Kitzinger (2012) on reference and repair. For instance, the action of pursuing response can be accomplished by repairing an indexical reference (Bolden and Mandelbaum 2012). Repair also contributes to the sustaining of socially shared cognition (Schegloff 1991). Previous studies have demonstrated that same-turn self-repair, in coordination with body deployment, provides means for speakers to construct and re-construct turns at talk as display of their orientation to various knowledge state of the participants in a given conversation (Goodwin 1979, 1980, 1981).

In line with these inquiries, we conducted a study of self-repair at transition place (TRP repair) in Chinese conversation with an aim to investigate possible actions in interaction accomplished by such repairs. Our analysis draws on video-recorded conversations, and examines TRP repairs in terms of their syntactic format, prosodic characteristics and deployment of body/gaze for potential interactional relevance of the action they accomplish. This presentation focuses on TRP repairs produced after possible completion of first actions such as question and topic initiator, where there is no immediate verbal uptake from the recipient. These repairs perform similar actions as those indexical repairs examined in Bolden and Mandelbaum (2012) in that the apparent repair on troubles of speaking in the prior turn constructional unit (TCU) serves to deal with the lack of immediate verbal response from the recipient. Close examination of the participants' body deployment reveals that absence of verbal response is not equivalent to no response. Rather, absence of response may be accompanied with a 'thinking/searching' gaze on the face of the recipient, or absence of gaze engagement with the speaker which display possible problem or momentary difficulty being experienced by the recipient. TRP repairs are sensitive to such cues from body/gaze by extending and recompleting the prior turn, thus providing the recipient with a new relevant place for the yet-to-be produced verbal response. Our findings from the Chinese data agree with Bolden and Mandelbaum's (2012) argument that TRP repairs pursue response in an indirect and off-the-record manner, and provide supporting evidence that such actions are not limited to indexical repairs at TRP, but repair at TRP in general. We argue that TRP repairs present an excellent venue for exploring the relation of talk and body as well as the relation between cognition and social interaction across languages in different speech communities.

Key words: Self-repair at transition place, pursue response, Chinese conversation, talk and body, cognition and social interaction

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