

Third Turn Repair*

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1. Introduction

When parties to ordinary conversation address some trouble or problem in speaking, hearing or understanding the talk, they virtually always do so from one of a very few sequentially-situated moments or positions. When dealing with the trouble is initiated by someone other than the speaker of the trouble's source, it is almost always initiated in the turn following the one in which the trouble source occurred.¹ When dealing with the trouble is initiated by the **SPEAKER** of the trouble, the effort is initiated in the same turn as was the site of the trouble-source,² just after the possible completion of that turn (in what Sacks et al. 1974:705-6 called 'the transition place'), or in "third turn to the trouble-source turn, i.e., in the turn subsequent to that which follows the trouble-source turn" (Schegloff et al. 1977:366).

When one searches a corpus of conversation for instances of the last of these three — for "repairs initiated after next turn" — several quite different sorts of repairs turn up.³ The most common can be termed 'third position repair'. In such instances, some party to the conversation has produced an utterance, the response to which (ordinarily in the following turn) reveals an apparently problematic understanding. The 'misunderstood' speaker may then undertake to set the matter straight, and does so in the turn following the one which displayed the problematic understanding. Such repairs regularly take the form, "No, I don't mean X, I mean Y." Although this is most often in the third consecutive turn, it can sometimes occur later, as for example, when the trouble-source utterance is addressed later than in the following turn. Such repairs are termed 'third **POSITION** repair' because they show themselves

to be prompted by the response (position 2) to some earlier utterance (position 1). Because such responses are ordinarily in the next turn, such repairs are ordinarily in the third turn. But they need not be; they can be later (Schegloff 1992:1317ff.).

There is, however, another sort of repair initiated in this position — “...the turn subsequent to that which follows the trouble-source turn...” — the circumstances of whose production are quite different, as is the form of their realization. These I will call ‘third TURN repair’. I want to describe these circumstances and forms, develop an account of their organization and proper understanding, and explicate an ‘upshot’ for analytic approaches to the study of language.

2. Environments of Third Turn Repair

The sequential contexts of third turn repair unfold in the following manner. Some participant produces an utterance in a turn which will turn out to be a trouble-source turn (I will refer to this as T1). This turn is followed by a contribution from another participant which neither claims nor embodies ‘trouble’ with what preceded. Three forms of such ‘responses’ may be mentioned, which recur in the corpus of such occurrences on which the present account is based.

First, the following ‘contribution’ may be something less than a full turn; it may, for example, be a ‘continuer’ such as “mm hmm”, as in excerpts (1)-(3) below (in which ‘TS’ designates ‘trouble-source turn’, ‘NT’ designates ‘next turn’, and ‘→’ indicates the third turn repair).

(1) SBL, 1:1:12:10

TS B: hhh And he’s going to make his own paintings,
 NT A: Mm hmm
 → B: And- or I mean his own frames.
 A: Yeah

(2) BC: Gray, 42-43

Call: I never saw a single piece of action while I was there.
 Brad: Mhmm,
 TS Call: I was (manning the) civil affairs, and I had a very good time.

- NT Brad: Mm hm,
 → Call: Nothing uh lewd in any- by way of a good time, I mean
 Brad: Yes, [I know whatchu mean
 Call: [(Perfectly) honest good time.

(3) CDHQ, 1:131

- Lehr: So, now the sand problem will be solved. when we-
 TS we get sand. Now it's- it's a matter of first getting a
 TS good reading on this levee.
 NT Sch: Mm hm.
 → Lehr: That is not- not this one. See this- this project is solved. I mean that's- they- they gonna- they gonna work like the dickens and they'll they'll bag that up. But it's along here...

On the one hand, such 'continuer' tokens do not constitute full turns at talk; indeed, they pass the opportunity to produce full turns.⁴ On the other hand, in-process speakers may leave an opening for the interpolation of such tokens, and they can be found to be 'missing'; they are not, therefore, 'nothing'. We may think of them as 'quasi-turns'. But if these quasi-turns 'pass' anything, they pass the opportunity to voice some trouble with the just-preceding utterance or part thereof. In (1)-(3) such opportunities have in just this manner been passed.

Second, the talk following T1 can be a fully-fledged next turn, albeit a minimal one, such as a 'receipt' or 'change-of-state token' (Heritage 1984), as in (4).

(4) TG, 286-289

- Bee: Y'have any cla- y'have a class with Billy this term?
 TS Ava: Yeah, he's in my Abnormal class.
 NT Bee: Oh yeah [how
 → Ava: [Abnormal Psych.

Third, the talk following T1 can be a sequentially implicated response to a preceding sequence initiation. In excerpt (5) the next turn is an 'answer' to a question. In excerpt (6) it responds to a 'story preface' (Sacks 1974) with a 'forwarding' or 'go ahead' response.

- (5) NYI, 3-4
 TS Jim: Is it goin to be at your house?
 NT Bonnie: Yeah.=
 → Jim: =Your apartment?=
 Bonnie: =My place.=
- (6) Super Seedy
 TS Louise: I read a very interesting story today.
 NT Mom: Uhm what's that.
 → Louise: W'll not today, maybe yesterday, aw who knows
 when hu-it's called Dragon Stew.

In each of these instances (and types of instances), although the utterance at T1 is received unproblematically, and/or is 'successful' in being sequentially implicative for what follows it in next turn, its speaker then goes back to repair it.

Although these are third turn repairs in the sense of "third turn to the trouble-source turn, i.e., in the turn subsequent to that which follows the trouble-source turn" (Schegloff et al. 1977:366), I want to argue that they are so only incidentally. Although 'subsequent' to the following turn, they are not in any organizational or procedural sense '*relevantly* after' next turn. Their positioning is not by reference to next turn.

3. The Relevant Positioning of Third Turn Repair

Several observations about the environments in which third turn repairs occur may serve to set their placement in appropriate context.

First, in the trouble-source turns to which third turn repair is addressed, the trouble-source itself is with great regularity in terminal position. In the excerpts already cited these are, respectively, "his own paintings" in (1), "good time" in (2), "this levee" in (3), "Abnormal class" in (4), "your house" in (5), and "today" in (6).⁵

Second, between the end of the trouble-source turn and the start of the third turn repair, the intervening talk by another is very brief. In instances (1)-(3) above, it is composed of "mm hm", in (4)-(6) it is composed respectively of "oh yeah", "yeah", and "uhm what's that", in (7)-(8) (in note 5) they are

“mm” and “yeah I know.” This is in contrast to the ‘next turns’ which follow trouble-source turns in instances of third *position* repair, which are virtually without exception more substantial (cf. Schegloff 1992; for an exception, Schegloff 1991:164-7).

Third, because of a general practice of initiating self-repair as soon as possible, most self-repair is initiated within the same turn (indeed, within the same turn-constructional unit) as contains the trouble-source or repairable. However, if the repairable is the terminal element of its turn, most repairs initiated by the same speaker (except for those which are initiated in mid-production of the repairable) will necessarily be initiated in the transition space, that is, in the moments just following possible completion of the turn. Indeed, although some transition space repairs are ‘delayed’ repairs on mid-turn components of an utterance, most transition space repairs do have as their repairables terminal components of the turn.

Then: it appears that if a turn-terminal component is to be repaired by its speaker, such repair will be initiated in the transition space. But if, in the interval between the end of the trouble-source turn and the initiation of repair, some brief utterance is interpolated by another party, then the same repair which would otherwise have been in the transition space now appears in/as third turn.

If this is the case, then transition space repairs and third turn repairs are really instances of the same sort of repair operation, being discriminated by what is, relative to their production, an organizationally incidental occurrence. These repairs are not engendered *by virtue* of the next turn; they just turn out (as it were) to have been placed after it. In that sense, although in the turn subsequent to the next turn, they are not relevantly ‘after’ it.

On this account, we should expect transition space repairs and third turn repairs to be similar in most respects; for example, to be similar in form or in type of operation. Several exemplars may be offered to indicate that this is the case.

In (4) and (5) above, the penultimate word of the trouble-source turn is used to ‘frame’ the repairable on which some operation is to be performed, and the next (i.e., final) word is then replaced by another: “Abnormal class/ Abnormal Psych” and “your house/your apartment”, respectively. The following transition space repairs (from Schegloff et al. 1977:370) are alike in all relevant respects, except for the intervening talk by another in (4)-(5).

- (9) GTS 5, 33
 Roger: We're just workin on a different thing, the same thing.
- (10) SBL 3:1:2
 B: ...then more people will show up. Cuz they won't feel obligated tuh sell. tuh buy.

What differentiates (9) and (10) from (4) and (5) is only the presence or absence of talk by another between repairable and repair.

Similarly, in (6) above, the repair takes the form of first rejecting one component of the prior talk ("not today") and then replacing it with another ("maybe yesterday"). Compare (11) (from Schegloff et al. 1977:376), which takes the same form.

- (11) AT:FN
 TS A: That store has terra cotta floors.
 ((pause))
 → Not terra cotta. Terrazzo.

Once again, what differentiates the cases is the presence or absence of talk by another between repairable and repair.⁶ Otherwise, they are cut from the same cloth.

4. Differential Interactional Import

Even if transition space and third turn repair are understood as of a piece except for the presence in the latter of intervening talk by recipient, they may nonetheless be seen to involve different interactional imports and contingencies. One instance will have to suffice.

In third turn repair, a recipient will have claimed to understand the speaker's turn, and indeed may have acted with respect to it, based on (and displaying) that understanding. For example, in (2), repeated here for convenience, Brad (a radio talk-show host) has in effect claimed adequate understanding of what his interlocutor has just said.

- (2) BC: Gray, 42-43
 Call: I never saw a single piece of action while I was there.
 Brad: Mhmm,

- TS Call: I was (manning the) civil affairs, and I had a very good time.
- NT Brad: Mm hm,
- Call: Nothing uh lewd in any- by way of a good time, I mean
- Brad: Yes, [I know whatchu mean
- Call: [(Perfectly) honest good time.

The subsequent self-repair of that prior turn can imply that its recipient was not right to claim such understanding. As can be seen in (2), the recipient may address just that implication, here with “Yes, I know whatchu mean.”⁷ Repair in the transition space involves no such contingencies, coming as it does before any talk by the recipient can have laid claim to understanding.

5. An Upshot to be Drawn from Third Turn Repair

Those who approach the study of language from a functional point of view, interested in the ways in which the uses and communicative goals which it serves shape its structure and organization — understanding ‘form’ by reference to ‘function’ — may wish to take a special interest in the excerpts offered here as exemplars of third turn repair. What is striking about them is that the repair is undertaken AFTER the communicative adequacy of the utterance seems to have been assured, in some instances after responsive talk — adequate responsive talk — has sealed that functional success.

To be sure, in some cases a speaker may hasten to correct something in their prior talk precisely BECAUSE it seems to have been successful — if, for example, it had inadvertently included incorrect information; (1) above might be a case in point. But in other of the instances we have examined — (4), (5), or (6) for example — something other than functional or communicative adequacy seems to be involved. Attention and effort are devoted to ‘getting it right’, even though getting it right seems to have little bearing on the undertaking of the moment.

Third turn repair is not the only locus of such undertakings. Persons trying unsuccessfully to remember the name of a mutual acquaintance may satisfy themselves that they are thinking of the same person and may bring to successful closure whatever they were talking about in that connection. And then they may return to the collaborative effort to remember the name, although it is seemingly no longer in point for their interaction.

So, as Labov (1982) pointed out from his own perspective some years ago, a narrow functionalism will not do; a juxtaposition of linguistic usage and particular communicational tasks will take too constricted a view of the way in which the place of language use in social conduct bears on our understanding of its organization and its forms. The practices by which humans conduct their commerce and sociality with one another — including the practices of language — involve an attention to the integrity of its own forms and its own smooth operation. When these lapse momentarily, attention WILL be paid, even if the needs of the moment themselves do not otherwise require it.

Notes

- * The present paper draws on a larger project undertaken while I was a Fellow of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences and Humanities during 1978-79. My thanks again to NIAS for that year, and to the National Science Foundation, from whose support (under grant BNS 87-20388) I benefitted while drafting this paper in 1990. Other related papers from the same project include Schegloff 1987, 1991, 1992.

Bill Labov and I were colleagues on the faculty of Columbia University in the late 1960's and early 1970's. When he played an important role in organizing the Linguistic Institute at the University of Michigan during the summer of 1973, he was kind enough to invite my late colleague Harvey Sacks and me to participate as members of its faculty. That was as fulfilling an academic experience as I have enjoyed, in no small measure by virtue of his contribution to it. He has always been a colleague in the best sense — supportive of our undertaking in his distinctive enthusiastic way, holding us to the highest standards of craftsmanship as he understood them, and insistent that the shape of scholarship and science does not respect traditional academic boundaries. Personally, he has been supportive both in the earlier days and in later, more difficult, times. It is a pleasure to contribute to this volume of esteem.

- 1 The major exception (and it is uncommon) is what I have called elsewhere (Schegloff 1992:1320-26) 'fourth position repair'.
- 2 This is the primary site of those repairs (in contrast to 'corrections' of 'errors') which have managed to attract the attention of linguists. Among the very earliest to take the phenomena of repair at all seriously was William Labov, whose interest in assessing how much of ordinary speech is actually grammatical, or separated only slightly from grammaticality, led him to formulate "...rules of ellipsis...and certain editing rules to take care of stammering and false starts..." (Labov 1970:42) as early as 1966 (Labov 1966).
- 3 As was recognized by Gillian Sankoff when commenting on the three data excerpts exemplifying such repairs in Schegloff et al. (1977) in refereeing that paper for *Language*.

- 4 The set of what I am calling ‘continuers’ partially overlaps with what Duncan and his colleagues (Duncan & Fiske 1977, following Yngve 1970) call ‘backchannels’. For the differences between the two accounts, and other points in this paragraph, cf. Schegloff (1982), especially pp. 91-2, fn. 16.
- 5 That the party initiating repair may be oriented to some special affinity between repair in third turn and trouble-sources at the very ends of their turns is suggested in (7):

- (7) Super Seedy, 9
 TS Louise: I’m dying for a sh- tha’ cat had it in Debbie’s closet
 NT Mom: Mm
 → Louise: Had the::m in [Debbie’s clo-

“Had them” is clearly directed at repairing “had it” (the reference is to kittens) in the trouble-source turn. But Louise does not stop at “had it”, which would leave the target ‘repairable’ as having been located in ‘the middle of the trouble-source turn’. By including the whole rest of the turn, she embraces the whole ‘rest of the turn’ in the repair as possibly part of the trouble-source, thereby positioning the trouble-source as ‘terminal’, albeit a very generously defined ‘terminal’ (the same sense of terminal as is exploited in the aphorism “today is the first day of the rest of your life”, an aphorism which can be used however long that “rest” may be expected to be). Much the same effect is achieved in (8) as well:

- (8) BB Gun, 3
 Jim: Yuh goin’ be doin’ it up on stage in front of the whole school?
 Bonnie: No no no::,
 Jim: No.
 TS Bonnie: Jis’ in my drama class.
 NT Jim: Yeah I know.=
 → Bonnie: =In front of my [drama class.]
 Jim: [I m e a : :n] in your class.

- 6 Third turn repair contrasts here with third POSITION repair as well. Both may contain ‘rejection components’. But whereas what is named as the target of rejection in third turn repair is (as it is in (6)) in the same speaker’s prior turn, in third position repair it is NOT found in the same speaker’s prior turn. There it takes such forms as “I don’t mean X, I mean Y”, and it is understood as attributing ‘X’ to the recipient of the trouble-source turn as their understanding of it, and is treated as a problematic understanding, to be rectified by operating on the speaker’s misunderstood turn so as to produce an understanding more acceptable to its speaker; (on rejection components in third position repair, see Schegloff 1992:1306-8).
- 7 This instance involves another kind of complexity as well. Having remarked (in note 6) on the difference between rejection components in third turn and third position repair, re-analysis of some of the excerpts previously presented may be warranted. Example (2) is a case in point. In it there are rejection components which are not clearly addressed to elements of the speaker’s prior turn (“nothing lewd...”). This raises the possibility that in (2) the continuer following the trouble-source turn may have been as delivered with ‘leer-prosody’, and it is the understanding which this alludes to that is being rejected in the repair turn. In that case, the repair would have been occasioned by that ‘next turn’, and (2) would present an instance of third *position* repair rather than third *turn* repair.

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