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The phenomenon of self-repair in Spanish and Portuguese

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Abstract

Since self-repair represents a phenomenon that has not been investigated for Spanish and Portuguese speaking natives in interactive contexts, this study is an attempt to approach the different forms of self-repair in these romance languages. The data to be qualitatively analysed are retrieved from the corpus programmes CORLEC and the *Corpus do português*. The study shows that the different forms of repair according to Levelt (1989) are more easily to be detected than the different types of speech error if following Cohen (1966).

1. Introduction

The aim of the paper is to investigate the different forms of self-repair in Spanish and Portuguese spoken interaction, that is, when speakers correct themselves.

Even though more work on self-repair has been done (cf., for instance, Schegloff, 1987; Uhmann, 2001; Fox, Maschler, & Uhmann, 2010) since the seminal paper "The preference for self-correction in the organization of repair in conversation", which was published by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks in 1977, most studies treat the phenomenon of self-repair in connection with second language acquisition or second language interaction, that is in connection with non-native speakers (cf., for example, Kleppin & Königs, 1991 or Scheuerer-Willmar, 1993).

Self-repair has not been investigated for Spanish and Portuguese speaking natives in interactive contexts so far. The study is thought to explore and then deeply and subtly analyse the different forms of self-repair. In doing so,

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self-repair is "a classic example of the processual character of oral communication" (Uhmann, 2001, p. 377). The following two examples are provided in order to illustrate the phenomenon of self-repair:

1. [...] lo cual ha llevado a esta tragedia de **desas\<palabra cortada\>... desabastecimiento** total y de un malestar social tremendo. (ADEB002B)

In (1) the speaker interrupts himself immediately after the error has occurred in order to initiate self-repair. The trouble source is obviously the /s/ following the /a/ sound which is superfluous in the word "desabastecimiento". In (2) the form of self-repair is slightly different: the speaker even goes one step back and repeats the auxiliary verb "tem" in order to pronounce "tem havido" fluently:

2. […] ainda existem bairros sem água - saneamento não existe - há uma preocupação muito grande **tem áh: tem havido** uma preocupação muito grande [...] (19Or:Br:LF:Recf)

As the sources for the examples illustrate, the examples analysed in the present study come from the corpus CORLEC, *Corpus oral de referencia de la lengua española contemporánea*, and the *Corpus do português* (CP). CORLEC is a corpus of oral speech containing ca. 1,100,000 words, which was compiled by the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. The CP is a corpus of oral as well as written data, and contains aprox. 45 Mio words.

2. Theoretical background: speech errors and self-repair

Generally, speech errors are understood as "unintended, non-habitual deviations from a speech plan" (Postma, 1991: 26). According to Fromkin (1973: 13), Meringer (1895) may be considered "as the 'father' of the linguistic interest in speech errors" because he made the first attempt in the linguistic investigation of speech errors. Speech errors may be of various kinds since speakers "rarely produce their utterances in a perfectly fluent and smooth concatenation" (Postma, 1991: 3): "They often pause, they insert numerous 'eh's', they repeat words or part of words, or they get completely stuck in a sentence. These interruptions of the speech flow have been denoted with a variety of names: hesitations, nonfluencies, disfluencies, stuttering, pauses" (Postma, 1991, p. 3). Cohen (1966) distinguishes three different kinds of speech errors:

- **Anticipation**, whenever the segment which is actually being produced clearly reflects the influence of a segment that should occur later in the utterance.
- **Perseveration**, whenever a segment is produced which clearly reflects the influence of a segment that had already occurred earlier in the utterance.
- **Transposition**, when two segments clearly manifest a mutual influence in the utterance (Cohen 1966: 89).

In distinguishing speech errors from self-repairs one could say that the latter "refer to speakers' backtracking in an utterance to correct a speech error or unintended meaning" (Postma, 1991, p. 27). So self-repair represents the consequence of speech errors. Self-repair may be either realized *overtly* or *covertly* (Postma, 1991: 15; see also Hocket, 1967: 118). Example (a) represents an instance of an overt self-repair because "the speaker needs several tries until he finally produces the right form, i.e. accomplishes the self-repair" (Postma, 1991: 15). If the speaker detects the speech error before actually pronouncing it, it is an instance of covert self-repair (cf. Postma, 1991, p. 15), as in example (b):

(a) *You made so much noise you worke Cor? – wore? – w? – woke Corky up.*

(b) *You w? – w? – w? – woke Corky up.*

Thus the speaker discovers the trouble source and interrupts himself before the trouble item is actually uttered, so that the "repair is called 'covert' because we don't know what was being repaired" (Levelt, 1989, p. 478). As example (b) indicates, covert self-repair is often represented by stuttering.