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Discourse constraints on prosodic marking in lexical replacement repair

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Abstract

This paper reports on an investigation of instances of lexical replacement repair, in which a speaker replaces one lexical choice with another, sampled from Dutch spontaneous interaction. The study is driven by the question as to what motivates a speaker to produce a particular instance of self-repair with or without 'prosodic marking' — with or without notable prosodic prominence — and the notion that a close consideration of the discourse context in which the repair is embedded, and its function in that context, is paramount in addressing this question. The study explores the empirical grounds for two proposals regarding the function of prosodic marking: one in which marking is a response to the speaker's embarrassment or unease at the error or infelicity, and one in which marking is done for the listener's benefit, to highlight particularly important information. This paper describes three discourse contexts in which prosodic marking is notably common, and argues that both proposals find some support in these contexts. The analysis suggests that speakers' decisions for or against prosodic marking are based at least on considerations of epistemic authority, precision and exaggeration, and discourse coherence.

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1. Introduction

This paper reports on an investigation of instances of lexical replacement repair sampled from Dutch spontaneous interaction. By lexical replacement repair, I mean a type of same-turn, self-initiated self-repair (Schegloff et al., 1977) in which a speaker replaces one lexical choice with another: an English example is *I'm going on Thursd- Friday*, where *Thursday* is replaced with *Friday*. In what follows, I will refer to the first, replaced item as the 'trouble source item', and to the second, replacement item as the 'repair item'.

Much recent discourse-analytic work on self-repair has focused on its various syntactic shapes, its structural motivations and its interactional import (e.g. Schiffrin, 2006; Lerner and Kitzinger, 2007; Egbert et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2009, 2010; Bolden et al., 2012; Drew et al., 2013; Raymond and Heritage, 2013; Romaniuk and Ehrlich, 2013; Schegloff, 2013). While some of the insights from these studies are relevant to the current study, its main focus is elsewhere — namely, on self-repair prosody. In particular, I focus on the perceived prominence of the repair item relative to the trouble source item, taking inspiration from Goffman (1981), who distinguishes 'flat' and 'strident' repairs. In the former, the

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speaker does the correction 'apparently unselfconsciously and with no change in pace' (Goffman, 1981:215), while in the latter,

> the speaker gives the impression of suddenly stopping in midstream because of being struck by what he has just heard himself say. Voice is raised and tempo increased. He then seems to redirect his attention to the single-minded task of establishing a corrected statement, as if this could (done quickly and forcefully enough) somehow grind the error into the ground, erase it, obliterate it, and substitute a corrected version. (Goffman, 1981:216)

Goffman's observation was taken up by Cutler (1983) and Levelt and Cutler (1983), who renamed Goffman's 'strident' repairs 'prosodically marked', and his 'flat' repairs 'prosodically unmarked'. Cutler (1983) describes an 'unmarked' repair as one in which the pitch, intensity and speaking rate of the repair solution are not noticeably different from those of the trouble source. A 'marked' repair, on the other hand, 'is distinguished by a quite different prosodic shape from that of the original utterance' (Cutler, 1983:81).

1.1. Why mark a repair?

A relevant question is, of course, what motivates a speaker to produce a particular instance of self-repair with or without prosodic marking. Goffman (1981:215–216) appeals to the speaker's level of unease, or embarrassment, at the error or infelicity: 'flat' repairs are produced 'as though the correction...is itself nothing to be ashamed of', while 'strident' repairs suggest that 'although the speaker may have been asleep at the switch, he is now more than sufficiently on his toes, fully mobilized to prove that such indiscipline is not characteristic of him'. This implies that the main effect of prosodic marking is to divert attention away from the error or infelicity (see Nooteboom, 2010 for a similar interpretation), and that the choice to implement it is to a large extent motivated by a desire to maintain 'face' (Goffman, 1967a,b) — although Goffman (1981) does not refer to this concept. Unfortunately, Goffman does not elaborate on how speaker embarrassment might be empirically assessed: clearly, without access to speakers' feelings at the time of producing repairs, it is impossible to directly measure the extent to which they considered the corrected errors or infelicities a source of unease, or constituting enough of a threat to face to attempt to 'erase' them.

Levelt and Cutler (1983) take a different tack, proposing that the speaker's choice for or against prosodic marking is constrained by what they call the 'semantics' of the repair. Like Levelt (1983), Levelt and Cutler distinguish between 'error repairs', in which a factual or linguistic error is corrected, and 'appropriateness repairs', in which the problem with the initial lexical choice is one of felicity rather than error. The example of *Thursd- Friday* above illustrates error repair: *Thursday* and *Friday* have mutually exclusive denotations, so if one is factually accurate the other cannot be. An example of appropriateness repair would be *I saw that guy- uh, man yesterday*, where *guy* and *man* have the same referent, but the latter is — presumably, from the speaker's point of view — more appropriate given the discourse context. In a study of Dutch task-oriented speech, Levelt and Cutler observe that while a majority of error repairs is perceivable as prosodically marked, a majority of appropriateness repairs is perceivable as unmarked. They take this to mean that the likelihood of prosodic marking is correlated with the degree of semantic contrast between the two lexical items involved in the repair: the greater the contrast, the more informative the repair, and the more likely it is that the speaker will choose to produce it prominently. Levelt (1989:495) points out that the proposal that semantic contrast constrains repair prosody neatly explains the reported absence of prosodic marking in phonological repair, where a mispronunciation is corrected (Cutler, 1983; Shattuck-Hufnagel and Cutler, 1999): here, the trouble source and repair are two productions of the same lexical item, so no semantic contrast exists between the two.

While Goffman's account of prosodic marking is predominantly a 'speaker-oriented' one, concerned with the speaker's feelings at the time of the repair, Levelt and Cutler's (1983) account is more 'listener-oriented': in this account, the speaker produces informative discourse content prominently for the listener's benefit. This is consistent with the recurrent finding in phonetic studies that new, unpredictable or otherwise important information is more likely to be produced with prosodic salience, emphasis or 'hyperspeech' than old, predictable or unimportant information, based on speakers' estimations of listeners' knowledge and general intelligibility (Lindblom, 1996; Baker and Bradlow, 2000; Aylett and Turk, 2004; Pluymaekers et al., 2005; Smiljanić and Bradlow, 2009; Seyfarth, 2014). The reasoning in relation to repair is made explicit by Geluykens (1994:60), who suggests — unfortunately without elaboration — that in a subtype of repair in which a pronominal reference is replaced with a full noun, 'it is important that this reparans gets some prosodic prominence, to facilitate comprehension for the hearer, and thus to ensure the resolving of the referential problem'. Studies focusing specifically on the relationship between prosody and information status (see Calhoun, 2010; Ito and Speer, 2011; Genzel et al., 2014 for recent reviews) support this reasoning — but to my knowledge, none has investigated repair.