

# Partial repetitions as other-initiations of repair in second language talk: Re-establishing understanding and doing learning



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## Abstract

This conversation analytical paper examines other-initiated repair sequences in everyday interactions between first and second language speakers of Finnish. More specifically, it focuses on sequences that are initiated by a second language speaker by repeating a part of the trouble source turn and shows that the repetitions are recurrently treated as actions indicating specific language-related problems of understanding. The analysis suggests that the linguistic asymmetry in second language interactions is a resource that is drawn upon in situations in which other resources for action formation and recognition are not sufficient. In addition, the analysis illustrates why and how certain linguistic elements become objects of language learning in everyday interaction and informs our understanding of everyday encounters as language learning environments. It has implications for the discussion on the identities of second language users and learners and highlights the importance of keeping these concepts analytically separate.  
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## 1. Introduction

This conversation analytical paper analyses other-initiated repair sequences in everyday interactions between first and second language speakers of Finnish. More specifically, it examines sequences that are initiated by a second language speaker by repeating a part of the trouble source turn. Drawing on a database of 13 h of video-recorded interactions of which a collection of 81 partial repetitions functioning as other-initiations of repair (OI) is compiled; the paper shows that in second language interactions, partial repetitions produced by second language users are recurrently treated as actions indicating specific language-related problems of understanding. The analysis focuses on the process of solving these problems and illustrates how the trouble sources are sometimes developed into objects of language learning. The paper aims at complementing previous research in two important ways. First, it contributes to previous conversation analytical work on other-initiated repair by showing how repetition-formatted other-initiations of repair are treated in second language contexts. Second, it adds to previous conversation analytical research on language learning in interaction and brings new insights to the research on language learning activity in everyday interactions.

Partial repetitions of the preceding turn can be used in interaction to implement different kinds of social actions, for example, to register the previous turn (Sorjonen, 1996; Schegloff, 1997; Svennevig, 2004), to do confirmation (Schegloff, 1996), to resist presuppositions of preceding questions (Bolden, 2009), to show surprise (Selting, 1996; Wilkinson and

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Kitzinger, 2006), and to initiate repair (Jefferson, 1972; Schegloff, 1997; Wu, 2009; Benjamin and Walker, 2013; Robinson, 2013). In second language interactions, especially at the earlier stages of language learning, they can be used simply as a means to take part in interaction as other linguistic resources are still lacking (see Broeder, 1992; Suni, 2009). Also as other-initiations of repair, partial repetitions may be used to accomplish various actions in their particular contexts. They can be used as candidate-hearings to check whether the repeated element was the one used in the trouble source turn (see e.g. Koshik, 2005). Furthermore, they can be used to indicate troubles in understanding (see e.g. Robinson, 2013) or to show disagreement and accomplish other actions closely related to initiating repair (Schegloff, 1997; Benjamin and Walker, 2013). Because of the multifunctional character of repetitions, the participants in interaction have to figure out the specific action each repetition is performing, in order to be able to respond to it in a relevant manner.

Interactions between first and second language users are often characterized by the linguistic asymmetry between the participants. However, the epithets “first” and “second” language user are “extrasituational”, and it is the analysts’ task to show in what ways the linguistic asymmetry is procedurally consequential for the construction of interaction – if at all (see Schegloff, 1992; Wong and Olsher, 2000). Previous research analyzing second language interactions has shown that the participants in second language interactions tend to act in ways that do not highlight the linguistic asymmetry (see Gardner and Wagner, 2004; Kasper, 2004; Hosoda, 2006; Kurhila, 2006; Koshik and Seo, 2012). In the repair sequences analyzed in this paper, the linguistic asymmetry is made relevant in the repair solutions that treat the preceding repetition as an indication of not knowing the meaning of the repeated element. The analysis thus exemplifies one particular interactional environment in which the linguistic asymmetry between the participants is procedurally consequential for the construction of interactional activities and suggests that the linguistic asymmetry in second language interaction is a resource that is drawn upon in situations in which the other resources for action formation and recognition (such as the sequential and the activity contexts of the particular unit together with prosody and the embodied means) are not sufficient.

The analysis also shows that the explicit orientation to the asymmetric linguistic positions has consequences for the unfolding of interaction. Once the linguistic positions of a second and first language user are highlighted, the mutual focus is on language and this opens up possibilities for language learning – even in everyday interactions that are not pedagogical in essence. The analysis thus contributes not only to our understanding of the organization of second language interactions but also to previous research on language learning in interaction by giving insights into the less examined everyday interactions as learning environments.

I will begin the paper by quickly explicating the basic organizational features of other-initiated repair sequences. I will then review relevant previous research on partial repetitions as other-initiations of repair and show how the present paper contributes to the existing research on language learning in interaction (CA-for-SLA). After describing the database and the analytical methods, I will present the analysis in two sections. The first section focuses on analyzing the repair solutions and seeks to answer the question of why the first language speakers choose to treat the repetitions as indications of trouble with understanding the language. The second part of the analysis shows how the repeated elements subsequently come to be treated as objects of learning.

## 2. Partial repetitions as other-initiations of repair

In conversation analysis, repair organization is seen as one of the fundamental organizations of human interaction (Schegloff et al., 1977; Sidnell, 2011; Hayashi et al., 2013). Repair practices are made use of in situations in which the participants encounter trouble either in speaking, hearing or understanding. Repair is organized according to certain principles. It can be initiated by the current speaker (*self*) or by the co-participant (*other*). The term *trouble source* refers to the part(s) of the turn that the participants treat as problematic (Schegloff et al., 1977; Schegloff, 1992; Sidnell, 2006, 2011).

The present paper analyzes repair sequences that are initiated by *others*, i.e. addressees of the trouble source turns. The initiation (OI) is generally located in the turn following the trouble source turn, and the repair solution is produced by the trouble source turn speaker in the turn following the OI (see Schegloff, 2000). There is a set of formats for *others* to initiate repair that include open class repair initiators (see e.g. Drew, 1997; Robinson, 2006; Haakana, 2011; Enfield et al., 2013), question words (see e.g. Egbert et al., 2009), partial repeats of the preceding turn combined with question words (see e.g. Sidnell, 2011), (partial) repetitions (see e.g. Jefferson, 1972; Schegloff, 1997; Wu, 2009; Robinson, 2013; Benjamin and Walker, 2013), candidate understandings (see e.g. Kurhila, 2006; Antaki, 2012; Benjamin, 2012), different interrogative clauses (see e.g. Olsher, 2003; Koshik, 2005; Egbert, 2009; Lilja, 2010), and embodied means (see Seo and Koshik, 2010). The OI-formats<sup>1</sup> differ from each other in how precisely they locate the trouble source item and characterize the problem they are indicating (see also Dingemans et al., 2014).

<sup>1</sup> I use the term “format” to refer to both the generic practices (e.g. repetitions) and language-specific devices (intonation, particles) that are combined in OIs to form the social action (see also Dingemans et al., 2014).

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