

POSITIONS AND STRATEGIES OF SELF-REPAIR IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE CONVERSATIONS

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Abstract - Self-repair is very necessary for the speakers to keep their conversations go on and gain efficiency in communication. There have been a lot of surveys on this matter, but the researchers have inclined to do the researches on other-repair or both. Schegloff et al. [5] mentioned self-repair with such features as positions and strategies of correcting the mistakes causing communication breakdowns from the speakers. This is one of the most valuable researches contributing to helping the speakers in the conversations feel more confident and help them to know how to control their conversations so that they can gain their communicative purposes. This paper presents and analyzes the positions and strategies of self-repair in English and Vietnamese conversations, based on the theory of Schegloff et al. [5] with the aim of discovering the similarities and differences in the positions and in using the strategies to repair the mistakes in the two languages. The results will provide learners with some useful ways to make effective conversations.

Key words - self-repair; positions; strategies; conversations; theory of Schegloff et al.

1. Introduction

Conversation - the verbal communication between people is indispensable in daily life. However, interlocutors cannot always understand all the utterances from the speaker. Sometimes the speakers cannot clearly express his thoughts in their utterances due to some reasons. For example, the speakers are searching for suitable words to talk or are looking for a correct word in a specific situation. As a result, they make the hearers misunderstand or not understand their sayings. All of those problems are factors that disrupt the conversations and lead to the lack of communication efficiency. To overcome the factors causing communication breakdowns, the speakers must use some strategies. However, this matter has not been properly studied in Viet Nam, so this is the first time the positions and strategies of self-repair in English and Vietnamese conversations have been studied. This article presents the results of the research with the hope of having a small contribution to teaching and learning speaking skill.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Emanuel Abraham Schegloff's theory of repair

Schegloff et al. [5] investigated repairs because of their roles as a "self-righting mechanism for the organization of language in social interaction". They focused on, for the first time, self-repair and other-repair with the positions and strategies. After observing and analyzing the data from a large corpus of audio tapes, video tapes, naturally occurring conversations and transcripts of those tapes, they find that self-correction occurs more frequently than other-correction. Since then, many studies have applied the theory of self-repair from Schegloff et al. to carry out

their conversational analyses, for example, Luu Quý Khương & Nguyễn Thị Minh Hạnh [1]; Rieger, [2]; Rogers [3] ... In this paper, we apply this theory to discover and compare the positions and strategies of self-repair in English and Vietnamese conversations.

2.2. Repair in Conversations

According to Schegloff et al. [5, p361], "repair" is the treatment of trouble occurring in interactive language use or "a mechanism that operates in conversation to deal with problems in speaking, hearing, and understanding the talk in conversation". It includes processes for mutual comprehension such as word search as well as a replacement or correction on hearable errors or mistakes.

Schegloff et al. [4] gave out two types of repair: self-initiated repair and other-initiated repair. Each type consists of three components, namely *trouble - source, repair initiator* and *repair completion*.

- *Trouble source* refers to any elements in a conversation which cause communication breakdown. It could be found anywhere during conversational interactions and any element could be repaired by participants in conversations, even it is grammatically correct form or pragmatically appropriate expression.

- *Repair Initiation*: A trouble-source can be identified by the speaker in his / her own talk (i.e., self-initiated) or by the recipient in someone else's talk (i.e., other-initiated), and then the speaker (self-initiator) or the listener (other-initiator) initiates the repair strategies to repair it or to ask for repairing.

- *Self*: Self is the party who produces the trouble source in his/her talk.

- *Repair strategies* include the interlocutor's verbal responses to another interlocutor's wrong, incomplete, or silent responses. They also include interlocutors' responses that either repair the trouble directly in the same turn or initiate repair that another interlocutor will complete the repair.

- *Repair completion*: After a trouble source is identified, it can be repaired by the self-initiator or by the other-initiators.

2.3. Self-Repair

According to Sack, Schegloff and Jefferson [5], "self-repair" consists of two types: self-initiated repair and other-initiated repair. Self-initiated repair ordinarily involves the speaker of the trouble source initiating repair and prosecuting it to conclusion in the same turn; Other-initiated repair generally involves a recipient of the problematic talk initiating the repair, but leaving it for the

speaker of the trouble-source to deal with the trouble himself/herself in the following turn. So, self-repair ordinarily involves the speaker of the trouble-source initiating repair and prosecuting it to conclusion in the same turn or the listener will help him/her to repair.

In example (1), the trouble source is caused by the speaker:

(1) *It's important for us to accelerate ... accumulate the working experience.*

[<http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsSelfinitiatedRepair.htm>/retrieved on June 27, 2010]

This example shows that the speaker produces the trouble source “*accelerate*”. Then he/she finds out the trouble source and initiates repair by using the word “*accumulate*”.

(2) *À, ở ... chúng tôi ... xin một tí xà phòng, à quên xin ngum nước uống, khát quá.*

[*Hỏi úc một bình nhì*, Nguyễn Thế Tường]

In (2), the S produces the trouble source *xà phòng*. It is a lexical problem, so in the same turn, S initiates repair by replacing this word.

Schegloff et al. [3] investigated and *systematically* described *self-repair in conversations*. This type of self-repair is conducted in two positions *within the same turn*; *after the next turn (third turn repair and third position repair)* and it has a particular set of repair strategies such as *error correction, searching for a word, hesitation pauses, immediate lexical changes, false starts, and instantaneous repetitions*.

3. Methodology

This study adopts descriptive and analytic methods. Three criteria to select samples have been established: 1-the samples have to be *conversations*, 2-they have to contain self-repair, 3- the sources have to be reliable. The sources from 30 English stories and 30 Vietnamese stories in the 1970s. Each of them contains from 200 to 500 pages. The year of publication is carefully chosen with the hope that the utterances in conversations are modern and similar to what people say in daily conversations at the present time. Some data are from the internet. With such set of criteria, 300 English conversations and 300 Vietnamese conversations have been collected to build up the corpus. The numbers of conversations like this can be reliable enough and various to represent the features of self-repair.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Positions of Self-Repair in English and Vietnamese Conversations

4.1.1. *Within the same turn: the speakers realize the trouble source in their utterance and they initiate repair by themselves.*

(3) "I am - I was - I am his son."

[Ender's Shadow, Card. O.S]

In the example above, S (he speaker) has the trouble source in his/her saying but he/she can repair it in the same turn of speaking. S knows that he/she uses the verb “to be”

in the wrong tense, so he/she immediately corrects it.

(4) *Bác ... bác hỏi ai ạ? A, có phải bác là ... là chị Hoài không ạ?* [Mùa lá rụng trong vườn, Ma Văn Kháng]

In this example, S produces the trouble source “*bác*” and initiates repair in the same turn after recognizing H (the hearer) is a familiar person.

4.1.2. After the Next Turn

There are different types of repair that occur *after the next turn*. They can be divided into two types depending on their position and sequential development in relation to the trouble source: *third turn repair and third position repair*.

a. Third Turn Repair

(5) S: It's just about three o'clock, so she's probably free. I'll call her now.

H: What time is it?

S: Three, isn't it?

H: I thought it was earlier.

S: Oh, two, sorry. [3, p.377]

As an example of “third turn repair”, S's first turn It's just about three o'clock makes H know that S is giving the wrong time. However, S does not know that. In the second turn, S answers the question What time is it? from H with Three, isn't it?, H feels unsure about his/her telling the time in the first turn but S only initiates repair in the third turn when H says I thought it was earlier.

(6) S: Hiệu quả lắm! Hiệu quả lắm!

H: Mày nói gì thế?

S: Tao bảo giọng ca của mày hiệu quả ghê lắm.

H: Tao chả hiểu gì cả.

S: Có gì đâu không hiểu! Này nhé, Hiền Hòa lâu nay ở nhà một mình, không có thì giờ quét dọn nhà cửa nên chuốt giần, sâu bo, mỗi một lần vì trùng lúc nhúc khắp nơi, mua thuốc diệt côn trùng về xịt chưa chắc đã hết. Này mày rống lên như thế, tất nhiên bon chúng sẽ chạy vát giò lên cổ không còn một móng, chả hiệu quả quá xá quá xa là gì! [Kính vạn hoa, Nguyễn Nhật Ánh]

S produces the trouble source “*Hiệu quả lắm*” which confuses H because H does not know what makes “*hiệu quả*”. In the second turn, S explains but it is not explicit enough for H to understand. H continues asking for explaining and in the third turn, S initiates repair by explaining everything in details.

b. Third Position Repair

(7) S: He came from somewhere.

H: You mean his mind came from somewhere.

S: I mean the whole package. I think you're going to end up replying on this boy, betting all our lives on him, and I think you need to know what's going on in his genes. It's a poor second to knowing what's happening in his mind, but that, I suspect, will always be out of reach for you”

[Gentlemen in their season, Gabriel Fielding]

(7) is an instance of “third position repair”. Repair is triggered by the recipient's misunderstanding displayed in the next turn following the trouble source. A common type

of third position repair occurs when an interlocutor displays misunderstanding of the speaker's prior talk. That is, one participant produces a turn in a conversation and a listener produces a sequentially appropriate response in the following turn, based on her/his own understanding of the prior turn. However, the initial speaker finds this understanding problematic and thus may undertake a repair on the misunderstood prior talk. In the above example, in the first position of the conversation, S says "He came from somewhere", in the second position of the conversation, H finds it difficult to understand what or who he is from S's utterance, H tells about his/her idea of S's saying. In the third position of the conversation, S recognizes that H misunderstood S's prior talk, so S self-repairs the prior talk.

(8) S: Chết rồi!

H: Em bảo cái gì chết rồi?

S: Em bảo anh Quý chết rồi! – Chợt nhận ra mình vừa nói câu xúi quẩy, nó vội vàng chữa lại – Ý em muốn nói nếu biết anh Quý là Bình Minh, bạn bè trong lớp sẽ tha hồ chọc ghẹo anh, nhất là tụi "tứ quây"! Tụi mình chắc chắn sẽ không để anh yên!

[Kính vạn hoa, Nguyễn Nhật Ánh]

H does not know what S is saying, so H asks for information. After answering for H, S recognizes that S makes a trouble source. S continues repairing the misunderstanding of the prior talk.

Table 1 below is the summary of the positions of self-repair and the frequency of its presence from 113 English conversations and 120 Vietnamese conversations.

Table 1. Positions of Self-Repair in English and Vietnamese Conversations

Positions		English		Vietnamese	
		Occurrence	%	Occurrence	%
Within the same turn		53	46.9	30	25
After the next turn	Third turn repair	15	13.3	22	18.3
	Third position repair	45	39.8	68	56.7
Total		113/300	100	120/300	100

The statistics indicates that the position of "self-repair within the same turn" in English conversations is higher than that in Vietnamese ones. The reason is that there are more factors causing trouble in English conversations such as phonological, morphological and lexical problems. However, with the position of "After the next turn", more Vietnamese people tend to repair in the third position than English people.

4.2. Strategies of Self-Repair in English and Vietnamese Conversations

4.2.1. Trouble source Correction

a. Phonological Trouble source Repair (speakers may find they do not pronounce some sounds correctly which may cause misunderstanding, so they go back and correct them.)

(9) My happiest my happiest memory is related to my friends

[<http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsSelf-initiatedRepair.htm>/retrieved on June 27, 2010]

The speaker produces a trouble-source *happinest* and he/she knows that it is a phonological trouble source, so he/she initiates a repair.

There are no phonological trouble source in Vietnamese conversations.

b. Lexical Trouble source Repair

Many English words have nearly the same sounds, so the speakers sometimes produce the trouble sources during their conversations.

(10) *It's important for for us to accelerate...accumulate the working experience.*

[<http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsSelf-initiatedRepair.htm>/retrieved on June 27, 2010]

This example shows that the speaker produces the trouble source *accelerate*. Then he/she finds out the trouble source and initiates repair.

(11) *À, ờ...chúng tôi...xin một tí xà phòng, à quên xin ngum nước uống, khát quá.*

[*Hồi ức một binh nhì*, Nguyễn Thế Tường]

In (11), S produces the trouble source, *xà phòng*. It is a lexical problem, so in her/his same turn, he/she initiates repair by correcting the word.

c. Morphological Trouble source Repair (including repairing word forms, tenses, and so on.)

(12) In my in everyday life, she always help me helps me

[<http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsSelfinitiatedRepair.htm>/retrieved on June 27, 2010]

After saying, the speaker finds out that he/she pronounces the verb wrongly, so he/she initiates repair.

(13) I consider the price and the quality of the good goods.

[<http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsSelfinitiatedRepair.htm>/retrieved on June 27, 2010]

S knows that good without -s will confuse the listener, so he/she initiates repair by saying goods.

There are no morphological trouble sources in Vietnamese conversations.

4.2.2. Searching for a word

(14) I need a new bolt for my oil fit - um PAN

[Harry Porter and the Goblet of Fire, Rowling, J.K.]

In (14), S cannot think out a word he/she wants for the first time of speaking, but in the same turn after the hesitation marker um, the speaker can find the right word "Pan" and initiates the repair of his/her utterance.

(15) Nói thiệt với chú, mời chú xuống chơi cho biết nhà biết cửa. Sau nữa, tôi có chuyện này tính kể chú nghe. Nếu không thích, chú bỏ ngoài tai, chớ với tôi, nó ... - anh đừng lại tìm chữ- ... nó thiênng liêng lắm!

[*Những người thợ nạn*, Hoàng Đình Trung]

In this example, S hesitates because he is choosing the

word to express his feelings. After his moment of thinking, he finds the word and initiates repair.

4.2.3. Hesitation Pauses

Hesitation pauses occur when the speakers cannot express or find it difficult to express their thoughts at the moment of speaking; or when they want to mention another thing.

(16) *“It’s like some sort of ... I dunno ... like some sort of rally”* said Mr. Roberts. *“They all seem to know each other. Like a big party”*.

[*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rowling, J.K.]

(17) *“You...you...”* Wormtail’s voice suddenly sounded hoarse, as though his mouth had gone very dry. *“You...are going...to kill me too?”*

[*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rowling, J.K.]

In (16), S hesitates because he does not know how to express what he sees. After lengthening his silence by “...”, he initiates the repair in his same turn with *like some sort of rally, like a big party*. In contrast, in (17), S predicts that something dangerous will happen to him, so his hesitation pause “...” shows his frightening and his difficulty to express his ideas. The speaker also initiates the repair in the same turn.

(18) *Trời ơi!...con...con hãy tha thứ cho mẹ...mẹ Thu của con đây...Vì tương lai của đời con...mẹ không muốn cho mọi người biết con có người mẹ bị hủi nên ra đi từ lúc con lên hai...Trời ơi...Thu Trang...cha của con đâu rồi?* [Người tình của cha, Từ Nguyễn Tĩnh]

In this example, the speaker hesitates because she is too moved to say anything fluently. Her hesitation helps her keep calm and gain some more time to continue her utterance.

(19) S: *...oa...oa!*

H: *Hoa?*

S: *...oa...oa!*

[*Kính vạn hoa*, Nguyễn Nhật Ánh]

In this example, S has trouble with the pronunciation, so H identifies the word “...oa” from S as the trouble source, H repeats S’s prior talk with the rising intonation to confirm S’s utterance. In the third turn, S self completes her utterance and confirms that the name H mentions is right.

4.2.4. False start repairing

(20) *“Talking about breathing in front of me!”* she said shrilly, and her voice echoed loudly around the bathroom. *“When I can’t... when I haven’t...not for ages...”*

[*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rowling, J.K.]

In this example, S also starts his/her saying wrongly with I can’t and initiates a repair at once in the same turn.

(21) *Cái xe ... Tôi cuống cuống ngồi thực xuống, lần mở cái van. - Cháu...cái xe... làm sao ấy.*

[*Chàng trai ở bến xe đò*, Hồ Anh Thái]

S knows he/she is wrong when beginning with a different subject which he/she wants to mention, so the

speaker initiates a repair just after saying it out.

4.2.5. Immediate Lexical Changes

(22) I don’t know. The school - school uh, bookstore doesn’t carry anything anymore [1, p.91].

S finds out that the word “school” is not the word he/she wants to mention, so “bookstore” is immediately used to replace “school” in the same turn of speaking.

There are no immediate lexical changes in Vietnamese conversations.

4.2.6. Repetitions

Repetition is one of the strategies including a lot of subcategories.

a. Repetition of Personal Pronouns

The repetition of personal pronouns occurs when the speakers want to postpone a possible transition-relevance place and to gain additional time [1].

(23) *I - I thought she might be useful, My Lord -*” [*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rowling, J.K.]

In this example, the pronoun *I* is repeated so that the speaker can have more time to think about what he/she is going to say.

(24) *Cô...cô...cô giúp anh một tay, gọi đám trẻ ra ngoài này chơi (những tụi này không trị nổi thì nó làm loạn). Tệ quá! Tệ quá mất thôi!*

[*Chuyện thường gặp*, Nguyễn Thị Đạo Tĩnh]

The personal pronoun “*cô*” is repeated when the speaker feels puzzled to ask the hearer to do something. However, after the repetition, the speaker self completes his utterance.

b. Repetition of Conjunctions

The repetition of conjunctions such as “but” and “and” serves to delay the production of the next lexical item or to postpone a possible transition-relevance place. Conjunctions are most often repeated without any other elements, but occasionally pauses, lengthening of sounds, quasi-lexical and lexical fillers are uttered between the first and second use of the conjunction [1]

(25) *“But they get paid?”* she said. *“They get holidays, don’t they? And - and sick leave, and pensions, and everything?”*

[*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rowling, J.K.]

(26) *“But - but you said it’s illegal, Professor,”* said Herminone uncertainly as Moody cleared away the desks with a sweep of his wand, leaving a large clear space in the middle of the room. *“You said - to use it against another human was-“*

[*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rowling, J.K.]

In (25) and in (26), the speakers repeat the conjunction “and”, “but” without adding any other elements. In (25), the speaker wants to have more time to think out some things related to the salary. In (26), the speaker wants to postpone producing the lexical item although the speaker knows what he/she is going to talk about.

(27) S: *Ảnh có vẻ không tin em!*

H: Ghen hả?

S: Nói ghen cũng chưa đúng. Nhưng ... nhưng ảnh có vẻ không thích chú Phuong.

[Quãng đời ảm áp, Dạ Ngân]

The conjunction *nhưng* is repeated in the above example because S wants to gain more time to think out what he/she is going to say. Then, he/she self completes his/her utterance in the same turn.

c. Repetition of Indefinite articles

(28) "Ss! Shut up! Listen!" They were mouse-still. "I thought I heard a - a sort of knocking," said the bull.

[Harry Porter and the Goblet of Fire, Rowling, J.K.]

d. Repetition of Prepositions

(29) "But you're behind - very behind - on dealing with curses, said Moody. "So I'm here to bring you up to scratch on what wizards can do to each other. I've got one year to teach you how to deal with Dark -"

[Harry Porter and the Goblet of Fire, Rowling, J.K.]

There are no repetitions of indefinite articles and prepositions in Vietnamese conversations.

Table 2 below is the summary of strategies of self-repair and the frequency of its presenting from 113 English conversations and 120 Vietnamese conversations.

Table 2. Strategies of Self-Repair in English and Vietnamese Conversations

Strategies	English		Vietnamese	
	Occurrence	%	Occurrence	%
1. Trouble source correction	13	11.5	10	8.3
2. Searching for a word	12	10.6	15	12.5
3. Hesitation pauses	24	21.2	48	40
4.False start repairing	8	7.1	0	0
5. Immediate lexical changes	6	5.3	0	0
6. Repetitions	50	44.3	47	39.2
Total	113/300	100	120/300	100

The table shows that two strategies such as *Hesitation pauses* and *Repetitions* are used more frequently than other strategies. Both of these strategies help speakers

gain more time to think and express their thoughts more clearly. The strategies of *Trouble source correction* and *Searching for a word* are also used a lot in two languages. There are no *morphological trouble source repair*, *false start repairing*, *immediate lexical changes*, *repetitions of indefinite articles* and *repetitions of prepositions* in Vietnamese, due to linguistic features.

5. Conclusion

The results of the survey show that English and Vietnamese conversations contain nearly all of the features of positions and strategies of self-repair according to the theory of Schegloff et al. There are two positions namely *within the same turn* and *after the next turn* (including *third turn repair* and *third position repair*) and six strategies such as *trouble source correction*, *searching for a word*, *hesitation pauses*, *false starts repairing*, *immediate lexical changes* and *repetitions of self-repair*. However, there are no *false start repairing*, *immediate lexical changes*, no *phonological* and *morphological trouble sources* in Vietnamese conversations. The similarity of positions of self-repair in the two languages indicates there is a unity of mechanism for the organization of language in social interaction. The differences in strategies show that each language always has some its own features of formation and grammar.

The results of the research can be applied to teaching English and Vietnamese conversations. The features of the positions and strategies of self-repair help learners have a good look at how to solve the problems causing communication breakdowns from the speakers.

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