

THE ORGANIZATION OF REPAIR IN YORUBA CONVERSATION

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In any conversational event, co-participants are guided by rules which ensure a smooth conversation. According to Sacks et al. [1974:700] some of these rules are that "one party speaks at a time" and also that "speaker-change recurs, or at least occurs." Quite often these rules are broken as was found in Schegloff et al. [1977] for American English conversation and confirmed by Moerman [1977] for Thai conversation. I argue, therefore, in this paper following Schegloff et al. [1977:381] that if conversation is composed of systems of rules which are integrated, then it will have a source of "trouble" related to the modes of their integration. And if it has intrinsic sources of trouble, then it will have a mechanism for dealing with them intrinsically. I further argue that an adequate theory of the organisation of conversation in natural language in general, as proposed by Schegloff et al. [1977], and in Yoruba specifically, will need an account of the organisation of repair. I suggest that repair mechanisms in Yoruba will include those suggested by Schegloff et al. [1977] and supported by Moerman [1977], namely: self-repair which can issue from self-initiation or other initiation and other repair which arises from self-initiation or other initiation. I conclude that these repair mechanisms are indices of participants' orientation to the making of Yoruba conversational interaction.

1. Introduction

The structural organisation of conversational interaction and the rules which govern such organisation in English has exercised linguists and ethnomethodologists for some time, e.g. Sacks [1972, 1974, 1975], Schegloff [1972, 1976], Sacks et al. [1974], Burton [1981]. Recently, too, the subject has inspired studies in the organisation of conversation in Thai [Moerman 1988] and in Yoruba [Akindele 1989, 1990]. The main strength of these studies is that they have established that conversation is organised on a turn-by-turn basis. That is, one participant talks,

stops, and another starts, talks, and stops. But very often conversation does not proceed as smoothly as it seems. There may be a breakdown in the smooth flow of conversation as a result of a broad range of troubles which include those concerned with speaking, hearing and understanding talk. Such may lead to errors, violations, and troubles being made in the process of interaction. These troubles are not allowed to pass without necessary steps being taken to rectify, convert, or repair them if meaningful conversation is to be achieved. An adequate theory of the organisation of conversation in natural language in general, [Schegloff et al. 1977] and in Yoruba specifically will need an account of the organisation of repair.

This paper, therefore, sets out to examine the notion of “repair”, types of repair mechanisms and their organisation in Yoruba conversation. Further, it seeks to find out the extent to which the organisation of repair in Yoruba can be compared to that of American English or Thai and some other languages of the world. In dealing with this problem of repair, the approach taken is purely ethnomethodological and is modeled upon the theoretical framework of Schegloff et al. [1977] in “Preference for self-correction in the organization of repair in conversation.”

2. Data for the Study

The data for this study derives from audio recording of conversational interaction in different sociolinguistic situations ranging over markets, bars/clubs, parties, the family, and car parks. The group of participants that took part in the conversations were males whose ages range between 20-40 years and females ages 22-40 years. There was no particular reason for making use of these categories of participants except that they happened to be involved in the conversational events that the researcher was interested in at that juncture. All the conversations were recorded with a mini recorder and were done surreptitiously. This is with a view to making the interactions very natural, as experiences have shown that the presence of tape recorders in Yoruba conversational events makes co-participants very uncomfortable and consequently very unnatural in their discourse. The participants were informed about the recordings and the purpose for which they were meant, and they allowed the tapes to be used for the research. Excerpts from the conversational interaction are used to illustrate organisation of repair in Yoruba conversation.

3. On Repair Mechanisms in Conversation

There are quite a few studies carried out on repair mechanisms in conversations. These are the studies represented in Schegloff et al. [1977] on American English conversation and in Moerman [1977, 1988] on Thai conversation.

In their discussion in “The preference for self-correction in the organisation of repair in conversation”, Schegloff et al. [1977:361-362] observe that there are ways by which organisation of repair is carried out in conversation and that these repair

mechanisms are addressed to problems which recur in speaking, learning, and understanding. They discuss some of their findings about several aspects of repair organisation. This is with a view to making clear the distinctions between what they describe as “self-correction and other-correction” [Schegloff et al. 1977:362].

Schegloff et al. [1977] also distinguish between the notions of *correction* and *repair*. Correction is said to refer to the replacement of an “error” or “mistake” by what is “correct”. However, “repairs” are neither contingent upon “error” nor limited to replacement. That is, some occurrences of repair do not involve the replacement of one item by another [Schegloff et al. 1977:363]. I shall show this later with the Yoruba conversation corpus.

Two broad types of repair have been proposed by Schegloff et al., [1977]. The first is self-repair. This can arise from self-initiation or other-initiation. The second type is referred to as other-repair, which can arise from self-initiation or other initiation. They contend that although self-initiation and other-initiation of repair in conversation are of different types, nevertheless, they are not independent possibilities. In other words, the two are related and their relatedness is organised in the sense that they operate on the same domains and that their respective domains can be characterized not only as distinct but as ordered relative to each other [Schegloff 1977:370]. It is this type of organization that demonstrates the fact that co-participants really orientate to each other in the process of conversational interaction, namely, that when “errors” are made they are not just allowed to go unnoticed. Rather, such errors are noticed and necessary steps are also taken to “repair” them to enable smooth and efficient communication.

In summarising the notion of repair mechanism, it will be suggested that the tendency for an utterance to attend to those immediately prior to it in conversation provides, following Schegloff et al. [1977], for both analysts and participants, a “proof procedure” for checking how those turns were understood. This would be of little use if there were no device for the correction of misunderstandings, mishearings, and, indeed, non-hearings which repair encompasses. One can, therefore, exemplify the two types of repair mechanisms proposed by Schegloff et al. [1977] by stating that self-repair is the repair done by a speaker without prompting or repair done by the speaker of the problem. On the other hand, other-repair can be considered as repair done by another party or repair after prompting. The following examples illustrate the concepts:

(1) *Self-repair*

- N: She was givin me a:ll the people that
 → were go:ne this yea:r I mean this
 → quarter y' // know
 J: Yeah

[Schegloff et al. 1977:364]

(2) *Other-repair*

- A: Have you ever tried a clinic?
 B: → What?
 A: Have you ever tried a clinic?

[Schegloff et al. 1977:367]

As I shall try to show presently, the range of the phenomena observed under the concept of repair in Yoruba conversation corpus is wide. These include word recovery problems, self-editings, where no discernible error occurred, and error proper.

Moerman [1977, 1988] observed similar repair mechanisms in the Thai conversation corpus which he examined. He concluded that the principles of repair in American English conversation are the same as those which operate in Thai conversation. It will also be interesting to find that the same can be claimed for Yoruba conversation.

4. Organization of Repair in Yoruba Conversation

I have indicated above that repair is organized into self-repair and other-repair. There are, however, certain mechanisms on which the two distinct but related repair types operate. I will discuss each of them in this section and show how they operate in Yoruba conversation. It is, nevertheless, important to show the conventions used in pointing out the repairs in the Yoruba corpus.

- a. → arrow indicates the trouble source or error source
 b. →* arrow with an asterisk points to repair that has been carried out
 c. [indicates simultaneous utterances

To begin with, self-repair that issues from self-initiation can be illustrated as follows:¹

- (3) K: *Njé o ti rí ohun tí o nwá?*
 Q you Pf find thing that you looking for
 ‘Have you found what you have been looking for?’

¹In interlinear glossing, “Q” is a clause initial question marker, “Pf” is a morpheme called “Perfect” by some Yoruba scholars, and “Neg” is a negative marker. “1, 2, 3” refer to first, second, and third person respectively.

L: *Nkò ti rí i.*
 1-neg Pf find it
 'I haven't found it.'

→ K: *Şé o ti ríí ẹ̀wù ẹ ẹ̀m şé o ti*
 Q you Pf see shirt your erm Q you Pf
 'Have you found the shirt...your erm...have you

→* *ẹ ẹ̀m şé o ti ríí şòtòkò ẹ ton sọ nù?*
 your erm Q you Pf see trousers your which be lose
 your erm have you found your lost pair of trousers?'

L: *Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni o şé.*
 yes you thank
 'Yes, thank you.'

[Ifẹ̀, 1988, recorded conversation in a home between two 23 year old male friends.]

In turn 3, there occurred the trouble-source where participant K started by saying ẹ̀wù 'shirt' but quickly changed to şòkòtò 'trousers' in turn 4, where the repair takes place.

An instance of self-repair which arises from other-initiation is illustrated by example (4).

(4) B: *Ñjé o ti rí Ayò ló'ni?*
 have you Pf see Ayo today
 'Have you seen Ayo today?'

F: *Rára.*
 no
 'No.'

→ B: *Ọ̀ré mi yii fẹ ẹ gbèsè.*
 friend my this want eat debt
 'My friend wants to run into debt.'

→* F: *Rára, Ayò fẹ kú.*
 no Ayo wants death
 'No, Ayo wants to die.'

[Ifè 1988, recorded conversation between two colleagues aged 30/32 in a club]

In the example, participant B initiates the interaction which F responds to. In turn 3, there occurred the trouble source where B says that Ayo wants to run into debt, and F, who is the other participant, quickly changes to 'to die'. The other-correction is an indication that Ayo's problem is heavier than what B conceives it to be.

Just as occurs in American English [Schegloff et al. 1977], other-repair can issue from self-initiation in Yoruba conversation as shown in the following example:

(5) T: *Mí ò mo orúkọ ilé işé rẹ gaan,*
I Neg know name house business his exactly

'I don't know his business name,

→ *ó ñjé kí se Ògo Olúwa ni?*
it Q not is Glory God is-it

is it not **God's Glory?**'

→ G: *Rárá, Ìbùkún Olúwa ni.*
no blessing God is

'No, it's **Blessing of God.**'

T: *O şeun, Ìbùkún Olúwa ni.*
you thank Blessing God is

'Thank you, it's **Blessing of God.**'

[Ibadan 1987, recorded conversation between two relations ages 35/40 at a party]

In the example, speaker T commits an "error" of an uncertainty about the name of a business he is talking about in turn 1. In turn 2, his co-participant G "corrects" the error by stating the right name of the business in question.

Other-repair that arises from self-initiation can be exemplified as follows:

(6) D: *Lati ìgbà tí a ti dé níwá àwọ́n*
 from time-that we Pf come looking for they

ọmọ́dẹ̀ yẹn kiri ọgbà.
 children those about garden

‘Since we came we’ve been looking for those children in the garden.’

R: *Bẹ̀yeni, a kòsì ti ri wọ́n.*
 yes we Neg Pf find them

‘Yes, we’ve not found them.’

D: *A sì ti níwáa yín kiri lati ìgbà yẹn.*
 we also Pf looking for you about from time that

‘We’ve been looking for you since.’

→ R: *Hun uh, a níṣe re kiri.*
 mhun mn we doing playing about

‘We’ve been playing around.’

→* D: *Uh huh, a níṣe ranù kiri látàárọ̀ ní.*
 uh huh we doing playing about from-morning it-is

‘We were just messing around since morning.’

[Ife 1988, recorded conversation between friends ages 20-22 in a family]

The two broad types of repair mechanisms, namely, self-repair and other-repair illustrated above are each manifested in various ways in Yoruba conversation. In other words, there are several markers of each of the mechanisms observable in Yoruba interaction. I will discuss and exemplify these markers in the following section.

5. Markers/Features of Self-initiated Repairs in Yoruba Conversation

Schegloff et al. [1977] observe that self-initiated repairs can be identified by the position of their initiations in conversations. In the case of the Yoruba corpus, self-initiated repairs have their initiations placed in three main types of positions. First, they may be placed within the same turn as their trouble source. Second, they can be placed at the turn's transition place. Third, they may be placed in the third turn after the trouble-source turn. These placements are illustrated as follows:

5.1. Occurrence at the same turn as trouble-source

(7) T: *Şe wa duro ðémí nílé?*
 Q you wait for me at home

Mi ò ni lòju ìşéjú má'rún.
 I Neg be present minutes five

'Can you wait for me at home? I'll be back in five minutes.'

K: *Ó dára.*
 it good
 'Okay.'

T: *Èr ẹẹm ó ti ẹ lè ma to bẹẹ.*
 er erm it Pf ? may Neg equal thus
 'Er erm it may not be up to that.'

K: *Şe ẹẹ şe' a lè ẹẹ ẹm*
 Q er Q we may er erm

→ *Şe mo le maa mu ọtí mi?*
 Q I can fut. drink drink my
 'Can I go and be having my drink?'

T: *Bẹ̀èni.*
 'Yes.'

[Ife 1987, recorded conversation between a guest and a host ages 35/40 in a family setting]

In turn 3 in the example, participant K commits an error in his initiation and the source is the plural form *a* 'we' instead of the singular pronoun *mo* 'I'. Realising this, he quickly corrects himself, hence in the same turn the use of the singular *mo* 'I'.

5.2. Occurrence at turn's transition space/place.

(8) M: *Wọn sì ẹr wọn si kun gbobgo 'lèkùn wọn yẹn.*
 they did er they did paint all door pl. those
 'They er they painted all the doors.'

→ M: *Ohun tí mò nsọ ni-pé, wón fi òdà kun gbogbo wón*
 thing that I say is-that they use paint paint all them
 ‘What I’m saying is that, they painted all of them.’

→* *Wón f-òdà funfun kùn wón.*
 they use-paint white to paint them
 ‘They painted all of them white.’

D: *Bẹ̀ni.*
 ‘Yes.’

[Akure 1987, recorded conversation between friends ages 28-30 at a bar]

Turn 2 in the example is the transition relevance place or the grammatical boundary where the next speaker is expected to take over the talk. but at that juncture occurs an error of lack of specificity in the type of paint used for the doors. The error is immediately corrected by the production of *òdà funfun* ‘white paint’ which is a more specific term.

5.3. Occurrence at third turn to the trouble-source turn.

(9) → S: *Olórí oko náà yoo si gba ètọ tirẹ.*
 boss farm the enrich also take share his
 ‘The boss will take his own share.’

N: *Mun whm.*
 ‘Uh huh.’

→* S: *Mo ní, ohun ti mo nsọ ni pe yóò gba owó tirẹ.*
 I say thing that I say is that he will take money his
 ‘I said, the point I’m making is that he will take his own share of the money.’

N: *Òótọ ni.*
 truth is
 ‘That’s true.’

[Ife 1987, recorded conversation between two colleagues ages 30/34 at a car park]

Turn 3 is the trouble-source turn and that is where the correction of the error has been effected. The error is made in turn 1 by referring to *ètò* 'share', a general term, rather than the specific term *owó* 'money'.

Apart from these, self-initiations within the same turn (which contains the trouble-source) use a variety of non-lexical speech perturbations such as *hèn ẹn*, *uh huh*, *mm hun*, *e em*, and so on, to signal the possibility of repair initiation immediately following as in (10).

(10) T: *Ñjé o ti rí ọkùnrin tí mo júwe fun ọ?*
 Q you Pf see man that I describe for you
 'Have you seen the man that I described for you?'

→ B: *Nkò iti ri obìrin, hèn ẹn ọkùnrin ti o nwi yẹn.*
 I-Neg Pf see woman er erm man that you talk that
 'I've not seen the **woman**, er erm the **man** whom you described.'

T: *Ta ló ba mi ri àjàkọ mi?*
 who is-he with me see writing pad my
 'Who has seen my writing pad?'

→* B: *Èmi kò mọ ibi tí o fi ìwé er-er àjàkọ rẹ sí.*
 I Neg know place that you put book er-er writing your it
 pad
 'I didn't know where you ever placed your book er-erm your writing pad.'

[Abeokuta 1987, recorded conversation between two sisters ages 21-24 at a family lunch]

6. Markers/Features of Other-initiated Repair in Yoruba Conversation

Other-initiated repairs in Yoruba conversation use a group of turn-constructive devices which are themselves linguistic. These include *huhn*, *ẹn hèn*, *kílódé*, *kí ló wí*, as in the following:

(11) J: *Şé wà tún jà?*
 Q you do-again fight
 'Will you fight again?'

→ L: *Hu'hn?*
 huh
 'Huh?'

J: *Şé wà tún bá yen jà?*
 Q you do-again with him fight
 'Will you fight with him again?'

L: *Rárá.*
 'No.'

J: *Ñjé o ti rí egúngún yen?*
 Q you Pf see masquerade that
 'Have you seen that masquerade?'

→ L: *Kíni?*
 'What?'

J: *Şe o ti rí egúngún yẹn?*
 Q you Pf see masquerade that
 'Have you seen that masquerade?'

L: *Rárá.*
 'No.'

[Ife, 1987, recorded conversation between two sisters ages 21-28 in a family setting]

Another type consists of the question-oriented words such as *níbo?*, *táni?*, *nígbàwo?*, used to initiate repair, e.g.

(12) a. M: *Mo fé lo jẹun.*
 I want go eat
 'I want to go and eat.'

→ P: *Níbo?*
 'Where?'

M: *Ní Shilos.*

at Shilo's
 'At Shilo's Canteen.'

[Ife 1988, recorded conversation between students ages 22/23 at a car park]

b. A: *Òkan nínú àwọn ọ̀rẹ́ yin bere ẹ.*
 one among plural friend your asked you
 'One of your friends asked of you.'

→ N: *Táni?*
 'Who?'

B: *Rẹ̀mí ni.*
 R. it's
 'It's Remi.'

c. D: *Adé berè yin délé.*
 A. ask you at home
 'Ade asked of you.'

→ T: *Nígbàwo?*
 'When?'

D: *láàrọ̀ lágogo mẹ̀wa.*
 in morning at hour ten
 'Ten o'clock in the morning.'

[Akure 1987, recorded conversation between a brother and sister ages 30/24 at home]

There is also a partial repeat of the trouble source turn, plus a question word such as *mo tani?*, *gogbo kini?*, *ki lo tun ku?*, as illustrated below.

(13) A: *Ñjé o mọ olórí àwọn olè yẹn?*
 Q you know leader plural robbers those
 'Do you recognize the leader of the gang of robbers?'

→ F: *Mọ tani?*
 know who
 ‘Know whom?’

A: *Olóri àwọn olè tó fọ bánkì náà.*
 leader pl. robbers who broke bank the
 ‘The leader of the robbers who robbed the bank.’

F: *Rára o.*
 no emp.
 ‘Not at all.’

A: *Ẹ́jẹ́ wọ́n tí ẹ́ rí gbogbo owó tí wọ́n jí?*
 Q they Pf ? find all money that they stole
 ‘Did they recover all the money stolen?’

→ F: *Gbogbo kíni?*
 all what
 ‘All of what?’

A: *Gbogbo owó tí wọ́n jí.*
 all money that they stole
 ‘All the money stolen.’

F: *Ò ù o.*
 it not-be emp.
 ‘Not at all.’

[Ibadan 1988, recorded conversation between colleagues ages 40/30 at a club house]

There can also be another type of other-repair initiation. This is signified by such expressions as *ohun ti o fe so ni...?* ‘thing that you want to say is...?’ plus a possible understanding of prior turn, as in (14) below:

(14) F: *Kí ló dé tóo fī gbé epo yẹn sílẹ́?*
 what is-it happen that-you do carry palm oil that on ground
 ‘Why did you put down the palm oil?’

→ A: *Ṣé òróró lo fẹ wí?*
 Q vegetable oil you want say
 ‘Do you mean vegetable oil?’

F: *Bẹ̀èni òróró.*
 Yes vegetable oil
 ‘Yes, vegetable oil.’

[Ife 1987, recorded conversation between mother and daughter ages 40/15 at home]

In discussing further the features of repair mechanism in Yoruba conversational corpus, three types of trouble sources can serve to display that the trouble sources, as in American English conversation, [Schegloff et al. 1977], do have repair initiated from each of the set positions previously mentioned. These are word replacement, repairs on person-reference, and repairs on next-speaker selection.

Word replacement is defined by Schegloff et al. [1977] as the replacement of an item with another in the trouble source turn. It is initiated at several locations in the conversation. These include replacement within the same turn as trouble source for self-initiated repair as in (15), at transition space following trouble source as in (15b), and at next turn for other-initiated repair as in (15c).

(15) a. K: *Ègbón mí sí nǐbá miwí fún ohun tó sèlẹ̀.*
 brother my also blame me for thing that happen
 ‘My brother blamed me for what had happened.’

A: *Hun mn, nítorí kìnì?*
 huh mn because what
 ‘Why?’

→ K: *Nítorí iwà ìṣe, hẹ̀n ẹ̀m àìsédéédé wọ̀n.*
 because conduct doing er erm bad behaviour them
 ‘Because of the behaviour, er erm their **misbehaviour**.’

A: *Uh huh.*
 ‘Uh huh.’

[Abeokuta 1987, recorded conversation between friends ages 30/34 at a bus stop]

b. D: *Mó ti lọ rí ògá mi.*
I Pf go see boss my

‘I’ve gone to see my boss.’

T: *ẹh ẹn, kí ló ní kóo ẹ?*
er hem what is-it-he say that-you do

‘What did he ask you to do?’

→ D: *Wọn ní ki nlọ ra iwé miran,*
they say that I-go buy book another

iwé yẹn kan náà
book that same the

‘He said I should go and buy another book, the same book.’

[Ife 1988, recorded conversation between colleagues ages 28/30 at a car park]

c. H: *Ojà tí mo kówá pọ̀ púpọ̀.*
goods that I bring very many

‘The goods that I brought were very many.’

M: *Bẹ̀ẹ̀ni.*

‘Yes.’

→ H: *Mo ti ra ìdajì wọn.*
I Pf buy half them

‘I’ve **bought** half of them.’

→* M: *ta ìdajì wọn.*
sell half them

‘**Sold** half of them.’

H: *Mo ti ta ìdajì wọn.*
I Pf sell half them

‘I have sold **half** of them.’

[Ibadan 1988, recorded conversation between business associates ages 35/40 at a club house]

It seems clear from the foregoing discussions and illustrations that one important point about the repair mechanism in Yoruba conversation like the English corpus already investigated by Schegloff et al. [1977] is that self-initiated repairs yield self-correction, and opportunities for self-initiation come first. Other-initiated repairs also yield self-correction in Yoruba conversation. The opportunity available to others to initiate repair is used to afford the speaker of a trouble source a further opportunity to self-repair in Yoruba conversation. This supports Schegloff et al.'s [1977:376] observation on American English conversation.

Having explored the repair mechanisms in Yoruba conversation, the other questions that arise are how some of the mechanisms are used in preference to others: who initiated repairs? I will examine these issues in the following section.

7. Preference Organisation of Repairs in Yoruba Conversation

A thorough examination of the Yoruba conversation corpus suggests that there is a preference for self-repair over other repair. The illustrations that have been given above point to this claim. Quantitatively, out of a total of 150 repair mechanisms analysed from the Yoruba conversation corpus, 120 were self-repair while the remaining 30 were other-repair. That is, 80% of the repair mechanisms were self-initiated while 20% were other-initiated repair. This observation corroborates the results of the studies carried out by Schegloff et al. [1977] on American English conversation corpus and Moerman's [1977] work on Thai conversation.

In the case of the category of participants who most often initiate the repairs, it was observed that participants who occupy the higher role in the interactional event as a result of age or achieved status do this in Yoruba conversation corpus. Once they initiate the repairs, they leave them for the speaker of the trouble-source to actually accomplish the repairs. For instance, participants L, T, F in examples (11), (12b), and (13) respectively are occupants of higher social positions as a result of age and achieved status. Indeed, an examination of the Yoruba conversation corpus shows that the occupants of the higher social position initiated 70% of the other-repair while the occupants of the lower social position initiated the remaining 30% in interaction with their equals and persons of higher status.

8. Conclusion

The consideration of the notion of "repair" and its organisation in Yoruba conversation suggests that repair is a phenomenon of talk that is vital to the smooth organisation of conversational structure. First, it clears the source of misunderstanding or mishearing that may likely occur in the conversation. Second, it indicates that co-participants orient to one another in the making of conversation.

The study also suggests that repair may be considered as a kind of discourse universal. It is only the management of it or its structural organisation that may vary from one culture to another.

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