

Papaefthymiou-Lytra, Sophia. 1989. 'Conflict in communication vis a vis repairing in the foreign language classroom.' *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 5 (43-67).

CONFLICT IN COMMUNICATION VIS A VIS REPAIRING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM¹

Sofia Papaefthymiou-Lytra

University of Athens

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ: Σ' αυτή την εργασία εξετάζονται οι ομοιότητες και οι διαφορές του "λάθους", ως χαρακτηριστικού στοιχείου της διαπροσωπικής επικοινωνίας και της επικοινωνίας στην τάξη, με βάση έξι κατηγορίες στα πλαίσια της ανάλυσης της διαπροσωπικής επικοινωνίας και της εθνογραφικής ανάλυσης της σχολικής πράξης. Στη συνέχεια, εξετάζονται διεξοδικά, οι πρακτικές δυνατότητες της εφαρμογής των πορισμάτων αυτών στην ξενόγλωσση τάξη με βάση μια επανεξέταση του ρόλου του δάσκαλου της Ξ.Γ. και την ανάγκη να εκμεταλλευθούμε τα λάθη των σπουδαστών της Ξ.Γ., όχι μόνο για παιδαγωγικούς σκοπούς στην διδασκαλία/μάθηση της Ξ.Γ. αλλά και ως μέσον άσκησης στη χρήση επικοινωνιακών στρατηγικών χρήσιμων στη διαπροσωπική επικοινωνία.

1. Introduction

Language learning and language teaching are very complex activities which require constant questioning and analysis of the learning/teaching situation. An important question very often asked by researchers and teachers is: How does the social and interactive context of the FL classroom affect language learning qualitatively and quantitatively, especially in view of the fact that we teach the foreign language for communication purposes? (cf. Seliger and Long, Introduction, p.v. 1983).

In order to evaluate classroom discourse and introduce real world communication practices in the language classroom, we must look very closely at the structure and the language of natural conversation and compare it with the structure and the language of the classroom. It follows that com-

ble exploitation of repairing as a vehicle to introduce more natural communication practices into the language classroom. It is the aim of the present research to investigate how this may be achieved. The foreign language classroom, in particular, is in need of such practices. After all, it suffers from freer communicative use of the target language with less emphasis on formal correctness (Chaudron, 1988: 132-153). In this paper, therefore, through comparison and contrast I will try to pinpoint similarities and differences between conflict and repairing as far as the *practices* and the *language* employed are concerned. By doing so I propose to suggest a way for reconciling the two in an attempt to introduce more real world conversational practices in the foreign language classroom and train learners in using the L2 more effectively in verbal encounters regardless of the overall approach to teaching the teacher may be following in the classroom. It is not my aim to discuss current pedagogical approaches to errors in general (cf. Doff, 1988: 186-197), nor to deal with learner repairing in pair and group work.

3. Data Collection

Classroom discourse data are based on research conducted in the Greek foreign language classroom with reference to English as a foreign language. Ten tapes collected in the Greek foreign language classroom were transcribed and analysed discursively in an attempt to discover the strategies for repairing used by teachers and learners. All teachers but three involved were non-native speakers. The native speaker teachers live and work in Greece.

4. Data Collection: Methodological Considerations

In a descriptive and evaluative study such as the one reported here, a critical step is the selection of a framework within which conflict in communication and error in the classroom can be viewed. A second important step is the establishment of categories which will reflect basic distinctions in the data collected.

Concerning research methodology the present research falls within the realm of ethnographic classroom studies and interaction analysis studies aiming at describing the parameters involved in repairing and their mutual interaction when choices are to be made by users of the language in class or in natural communication encounters. The categories against which data will be analysed are as follows:

1. who initiates repair
2. who acts
3. strategy employed in terms of overtness or covertness
4. affect demonstrated
5. language employed
6. role relationship indicated.

5. On Conflict in Communication

Research on communication has revealed that certain factors pertain to all instances of communication regardless of language and culture.

One important factor that characterizes communication is *conflict*. Conflict most frequently arises from one of the following four factors which, so to speak, also influence the occurrence of repair to resolve conflict in formal or informal settings.

1. Intelligibility and interpretability as a result of lack of shared knowledge between participants.
2. Misunderstandings between participants due to face (distance, power and rank – see Brown and Levinson, 1978).
3. Conversational rhythm and tempo.
4. Unhearings or mishearings due to physical or environmental factors.

Consequently, conflict arises from a misunderstanding of what has been said or intended, or from a conflicting claim to the same resource, or from a refusal to enter expected role relations. Verbal parameters which are likely to relate to conflict include sentence length, topical sequence, intensity and variation. Somatic behaviour, particularly facial expression and gestures may also lead to conflict (Allen and Guy, 1978: 239-240).

There is evidence consistent with this hypothesis that the necessary condition for natural conversation to take place is *modification* not of linguistic input per se (length and syntactic complexity of utterances, lexical diversity, etc.), but of the *interactional structure* of NS-NS communication. The latter type of modification is achieved through use of such devices (or strategies) as repetition, rephrasing, pre-sequences, various forms of questioning such as clarification requests, restatements etc. aiming at resolving conflict (cf. Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977; Jefferson, 1974; Goffman, 1976, among others). In natural verbal encoun-

ters, communicators do not normally correct errors others make. But they do indicate in other ways that the message was not received clearly, thus leading the speaker to repair his/her utterance in some way.

There are three types of correcting in real discourse: self-repair; initiated self-repair and other-repair. *Self-repair* is the outcome of the speaker's insecurity concerning self-expression or of conflicting cognitive problem-solving processes in action. The ratified speaker initiates the repair and acts on it. The social roles reflected are those of equals in interaction, the listener's attitude is that of a tactful well-meant partner whose ultimate aim is to save face and the definition of the situation (cf. Goffman, 1976).

Initiated self-repair, on the other hand, is induced by the listener's reaction — verbal or non-verbal — to the speaker's linguistic or non-linguistic behaviour. The listener initiates the repair but the speaker acts upon it. Finally, *other-repair* is induced by the listener's reaction — verbal or non-verbal — to the speaker's linguistic or non-linguistic behaviour. The listener initiates the repair and acts on it.

However, in communication, of the three basic types self-repair and initiated self-repair seem to predominate. Repairing is never overtly corrective unless the relationship between interlocutors is such that repairing will not be viewed as a breach of social convention. Other-repair is a dominant feature of communication when one of the participants is in a learning situation or in an inferior position, for instance. Of the three types mentioned I shall only deal with the last two in this study.

The effectiveness of the strategies that speakers adopt in their efforts to create involvement and to cooperate in the joint activity for the development of specific themes and avoidance of conflict depends on their *control over* a range of communicative options and on their knowledge of the signalling potential that these options have in alluding to shared history, values and shared obligations (Gumperz, 1982: 206-207). In real life situations, Gumperz, 1982, argues, learning of discourse or communication strategies is most successful when outside conditions exist which force interlocutors to disregard breakdowns of communication and stay in contact.

Repair processes to resolve conflict, however, presuppose an interruption. On discussing interruptions and the interpretation of conversation, Bennet, 1981: 185, writes that interruptions to resolve conflict are a spe-

cial case of some clash between two or more persons within the framework of human discourse, which need not be verbal only. Interruptions can be seen as accidental or deliberate; cooperative or antagonistic; non-serious or serious, offensive or non-offensive, etc. The quality and intensity of *affect* and *role* centred around one or a set of interruptions can vary across the whole range of the potential depth of human capacity for affect and for role-taking or for role-making in social encounters (cf. Turner, 1962).

Role and affect in repair allow us to distinguish initiated self-repair and other-repair further. This differentiation is based not only on an examination of *who* initiates correction to overcome conflict and *who* acts, but also on the *affect* demonstrated in the linguistic realizations employed and on the *psychological* and *social roles* speakers indicate through their language behaviours.

Initiated self-repair is distinguished into two types. The first type I have called initiated self-repair *overtly* realized. In this case, the listener makes it overtly clear that he/she has not understood the speaker's intent or has not heard the speaker by employing such overt expressions as: "Try again". "I don't understand", "I can't hear you". Overtly realized self-repairs are to be found between partners of unequal social or work position. They can also be used in encounters where speakers are very intimate to each other, i.e. close friends of all ages, husband and wife, lovers. (cf. Tannen, 1987; also Sifianou, 1987). The second type I have called initiated self-repair *covertly* realized. The listener makes it covertly clear that the speaker's message has not been understood or received thus requesting a rerun of his/her utterance. In this last case expressions of the kind "Pardon?", "Can you repeat what you were saying?", etc. are used. Participants express tact and affect towards one another, and they try to save face (cf. Goffman, 1976).

Finally, *other-repair* is also realized in two different kinds. In other-repair *overtly* realized the listener interrupts the speaker and takes the floor without allowing the first ratified speaker to self-repair. He/she provides the correct utterance or information, thus replacing the first ratified speaker. In other-repair *covertly* realized, the listener does not openly interrupt the speaker but provides the correct item or the missing information tactfully while the first speaker is officially holding the floor, thus helping him/her to go on (cf. Duncan, 1974).

