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Formal vs. functional motivations for the structure of self-repair in German

In the study of self-initiated self-repair in spoken language, there are two main strands of research. In Conversation Analysis, self-repair is perceived as one part of a larger functional resource for dealing with problems in speaking, hearing and understanding (cf. Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks 1977). Adopting a more structural point of view, recent comparative studies in interactional linguistics (e.g. Fox, Hayashi, Jasperson 1996; Fox, Maschler, Uhmann 2009, Birkner, Henricson, Lindholm, Pfeiffer, in prep.) have shown that the syntactic organization of self-repair is influenced by the different morphosyntactic characteristics of the respective languages (e.g. word order, morphological complexity, strength of bonds between constituents). However, it is yet largely unknown to what extent functional motivations compete with the formal motivations mentioned above in determining the syntax of self-repair in a specific language. By focusing on the influence of certain cognitive and interactional needs of speakers and hearers on the structure of self-repair, this paper addresses an aspect of self-repair that has not yet been subject to systematic investigation.

Uhmann's (2001, 2006) *Extended Head Rule* claims that the structure of self-repair in German is determined by a purely syntactic property, namely the functional head immediately c-commanding the repairable. Somewhat simplified, Uhmann's basic assumption is that speakers who carry out self-repair in German start, depending on the respective phrase, with the determiner, preposition or finite verb directly preceding the repairable. However, as my syntactic analysis of 262 instances of naturally occurring self-repair in German shows, the functional head cannot explain the structural diversity in self-repair. In particular, the part of the *Extended Head Rule* which primarily concerns content-word-repairables has profound shortcomings and cannot account for 59% of the examples in my data (see ex. 1 below, where the speaker does not retrace to the preposition 'durch' *through* and thereby contradicts the *Extended Head Rule*).

Therefore, following Du Bois (1985), I will argue that an adequate explanatory model for the syntactic structure of self-repair cannot be based on purely language-internal features, but will have to recognize the interaction of competing formal (morphosyntactic) and functional (cognitive and interactional) motivations. On the basis of several patterns of self-repair that occur in my corpus, I will demonstrate how formal and functional motivations respectively shape the structure of self-repair in certain contexts. An example for the former is the general tendency to retrace to prepositions, which are grammatically important positions in German. The latter include the economic tendency to avoid recycling of polysyllabic constituents in the German front field (see ex. 2 below, where the monosyllabic constituent 'die' *she* is recycled prior to the substitution of the finite verb, and ex. 3, where the polysyllabic constituent 'gartenseite' *garden side* is not recycled prior to the substitution of the finite verb) as well as the use of word cut-off and minimal retraction span to signal error repair to the hearer (see ex. 1 for the prototypical pattern of phonetic error corrections in German). In this type of repair, the otherwise strong formal motivation to retrace to prepositions is regularly overridden by the functional motivation for quick error correction.

These findings suggest that competing motivations, besides their importance for grammaticization in general (cf. Du Bois 1985), are also crucial to the formation of the repair system, which operates within and is constrained by a language-specific grammatical framework, but additionally adapts to the cognitive and interactional needs of participants engaged in the activity of self-repair.

Examples

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(1)

1     HH04: äh es waren auch schon VIEle aus (-)
            uh there were also quite a lot from
2           die also NICH aus hamburch kamen
            who (particle) did not come from hamburg
3           die also durch die FLÜCKlich*(-)
            who (particle) through the (intended noun with phonetic errors)
4           FLÜCHTlingstrecks °h nach hamburch gekommen sind
            refugee treks to hamburg have come


(2)

1     HH04: die kam äh (-)
            she came uh
2           die kommt aus sachsen ANhalt
            she comes from sachsen anhalt


(3)

1   i-mu05: witzigerweise auf der straßenseite is=es HÖher
            funnily enough on the street side it is higher
2           und gartenseite liegt* äh i is TIEfer
            and garden side lies uh is lower
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