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'Open' class repair initiators in response to sequential sources of troubles in conversation[☆]

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Abstract

When speakers initiate repair on the talk of co-participants in conversation, they may use repair initiation forms which locate the specific source of trouble (the repairable) in the prior turn; alternatively, they may select forms which treat the whole of the prior turn as in some way problematic. This paper explores the latter, i.e. 'open' forms of repair initiation, e.g. 'pardon?', 'sorry?', 'what?' etc. The analysis here, of a corpus of instances of this kind of repair initiation in naturally occurring telephone conversations, focuses not on the repair management sequence, but rather on the sequential environment in which 'open' class NTRI's are employed. It explores two environments in particular, involving first an apparently abrupt shift in topic, and second an apparently inapposite, or even disaffiliative, response by the other speaker. Analysis of these environments, and of the troubles in 'understanding' which may be associated with them, suggests that troubles generating this form of other-initiated repair shade into matters of alignment or affiliation between speakers (and hence conflict in talk). It also underlines how far 'understanding' is related to the sequential organization of talk.

1. Forms of repair initiation: Some preliminaries

When a participant in conversation has difficulty understanding something another has said, or a difficulty hearing what was said, or figures that what the other said might in various ways be wrong, inaccurate or perhaps inapposite, then he or

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she may – but need not (see e.g., Jefferson, 1988) – take steps to rectify that difficulty by initiating its repair. We refer to a speaker ‘initiating repair’ of the other’s talk in order to distinguish the activity of repair initiation from that of doing the repair itself (Schegloff et al., 1977; Schegloff, 1987).

In the following fragment, for instance, Louise initiates repair of something which might be wrong in what Ken said, but leaves it to Ken to (self-)correct his mistake. (For transcription conventions please refer to the Appendix, p. 98.)

(1) [GTS:III:42:ST] (from Schegloff et al., 1977)

Ken: Hey (.) the first ti:me they stopped me from selling cigarettes was this morning.
(1.0)

→ Louise: From selling cigarettes.

Ken: Or buying cigarettes.

Here, figuring that Ken probably did not mean to say ‘selling’, Louise initiates repair in such a way as to leave it to him to remedy his own mistake, which he does when he corrects it instead to ‘buying’. The device through which she does this, her repetition of the repairable, is one form of what have come to be called Next Turn Repair Initiators (hereafter NTRI’s: Schegloff et al., 1977; Schegloff, 1992). And the way in which, as in fragment (1), the initiation of repair and the subsequent (self-)repair occupy different turns and are done by different speakers is characteristic of the repair sequence associated with NTRI’s. One speaker locates a difficulty in something the other has said, but leaves it – at least in the first instance – to that other to clarify, correct or otherwise repair their own prior turn.

NTRI’s of the kind illustrated in (1) are designed to locate just what it is in the co-participant’s prior turn that the speaker is having trouble with, i.e. the repairable. The following are similar to (1) in that respect.

(2) [Holt:SO88 (II):1:3:6]

Hal: .. an’ Leslie ’t was marv’lous (.) D’you know he had (.) forty nine g’rillas. .hh th-there. (b) (.) br[eeding in ()

→ Lesley: [pf- f- Forty nine wha:t?

Hal: G’rillas.

Lesley: .hh Oh ye:s?

(3) [Holt:88U:1:8:9]

Gordon: ‘Ave you drop’ some biology notes.
(0.4)

→ Dana: Have I wha[t them.

Gordon: [.hh.hhh Dropped theh-them. Los:t.

Dana: Why [ɿ?
[Mislai:d.

(4) [SBL:3:1:7]

Claire: We:ll? in fact that Katherine Sigman said that they hev already go:t uh .hhhh I don't know how many: uh, (0.2) qua:rts o:f uhm .t.hh gizzards the stuff they had f'm the la:::st. yih kno: [w.

→ Marylou: [Of what?

Claire: .t.h (0.2) gi:zzards'n stuff they put in the uhm (o.4) sau:ce?

In (1) Louise located the repairable by repeating that part of Ken's prior turn which contained the trouble source, with some slight stress highlighting the particular word which was the probable error. In each of (2)–(4) the one who initiates repair likewise repeats (in the arrowed turns) a part of the prior speaker's turn, in such a way as to locate a word which they had difficulty hearing or understanding, that word being replaced/indicated by 'what'; thus 'Forty nine wha:t?' in (2) indicates to Hal that Lesley had difficulty specifically with (hearing, 'catching') the word which followed 'Forty nine'. Similarly 'Have I what them.' in (3), and 'Of what?' in (4), identify the source of trouble in the prior turn by reproducing the proximate environment of the trouble source (repairable), and specifying that repairable word by replacing it with the pro-term 'what'. These illustrate a form of NTRI which is designed to locate or specify the source of the trouble which a speaker is having with a co-participant's prior turn.

There is, however, another form of NTRI which by contrast does not locate specifically what it is in the prior turn that the speaker is having trouble with hearing or understanding – that is, which does not locate a specific repairable in the prior turn. In employing this form – typically such objects as 'Pardon?', 'Sorry?', 'What?' – a speaker indicates that he/she has some difficulty with the other's prior turn, but without locating specifically where or what that difficulty is. The following cases illustrate this type of NTRI.

(5) [Holt:SO88:1:8:1]

Lesley: ...they've gone over to the Cat Ash:
(0.3)

Norm: Oh: ri:ght.

Lesley: I don'=if you want to go over there an' see them a:ll?

Norm: I can't I'm dialyzing at the mo:-:ment. he[h

→ Lesley: [Sorry?

Norm: I'm dialyzing at the mome [nt,

Lesley: [hh Oh::

(6) [Heritage:01:2:6]

Ilene: Well we'll see yo [u then,

Jean: [A n : d u h : m : : :
(0.8)

Jean: Ev'body else is well.

(o.4)

→ Ilene: Hmm [::?

Jean: [() thehr a: ll we:ll,

Ilene: Oh ye:s yes ther fj:ne.

(7) [Holt:2:9:2]

Lesley: Didju get my letter,
(0.5)

Mum: Uh yes thank you, I've writ- (.) I've answered it.=

Lesley: =.TCH. Oh yes. Wey (.) Can you work it all out,

→ Mum: Pardon?
(.)

Mum Oh yes. Ye:s yes'v course I could.

(8) [NB:IV:5:2]

Emma: Well [th:a:nk you dear I'll be o:ver.

Gladys: [S o u- eh

Gladys: Alright dear a:nd uh front er back.h
(1.0)

→ Emma: Wu:t?
(.)

Emma: h [huh

Gladys: [I s[ay f:-

Emma: [OH:::: AH GUESS th' FRO:nt. be better?

In each of (5)–(8) a speaker uses a form of repair initiation which indicates generally that she has some trouble with the other's prior turn, those NTRI's being variously 'Sorry?', 'Hmm?', 'Pardon?' and 'What?' (see arrowed turns). One can, of course, speculate about what might likely be causing the difficulty which in each case generates the repair initiation (for example, it seems likely that in (8) Emma might have trouble knowing what Gladys is referring to when she asks '... front er back'). But, most significantly, these NTRI's do not themselves identify the repairable items in the prior turns, or specify the nature of the difficulty which the speakers have in understanding what their co-participants have just said. (Schegloff et al. (1977) noted the differential relative 'strength' of types of NTRI's, in terms of their capacity to locate a repairable; 'open' class NTRI's are the 'weakest' type.) Thus these NTRI's leave open what exactly the difficulty is which the speaker (i.e. the one who initiates repair) is having with the other's prior turn. For this reason, these different forms of NTRI – 'pardon', 'sorry?', 'what?' and so forth – are an 'open' class of repair initiators: then leave 'open' what is the repairable trouble which the speaker is having with the prior turn.

This paper is concerned with the kind of 'open' repair initiators illustrated in (5)–(8). It focuses on some of the sequential environments in which they are produced, in an attempt to account for some of those troubles in comprehension to which speakers may attend in initiating repair through this class of 'open' class NTRI. I should emphasise 'some of', because the analysis here is not offered as a general account for the use of these 'open' NTRI's, for reasons which will be discussed towards the end of the paper. The analysis offers, rather, an account of two particular environments in which 'open' NTRI's are used; and it suggests that these environments are associated with certain kinds of troubles which a participant may have in understanding not so much what the other said, as why he/she said it. Very briefly, it

shows that troubles or difficulties in comprehending, and therefore in responding, may arise from the sequential relationship between the prior (repairable) turn and its prior sequence. Hence the difficulty addressed through some 'open' NTRI's is not a single specifiable repairable item located precisely *in* the prior turn; instead the 'repairable' matter concerns aspects of the sequential connection between the prior turn and its prior sequence. Finally, the analysis offered here suggests that matters of comprehension and repair shade into matters of accord or (mis)alignment between speakers.

This investigation is based on a collection from naturally occurring (British and American) telephone conversations¹ of 'open' class repair initiators, including 'pardon', 'sorry', 'what', 'hey'/'ey', 'hmm'/'mm', 'huh'/'uh', and some phonetic variations of those: instances of 'what's that dear/love' have also been included. They are almost always delivered with questioning intonation (only two out of a sample of fifty cases were not). Instances of other 'miscellaneous' forms of what might be regarded as generalised repair initiators, such as 'I can't hear you' or 'What do you mean by that' have not been included, because such forms give an explicit account of at least the putative trouble which the speaker has, troubles such as having been unable to hear what was said, or not having understood (all or part of) what was said.² The essential characteristic of the 'open' class of NTRI's with which I am concerned here is that they offer no explicit account of the nature of the trouble which the speaker might be having; nor do they give any indication of specifically what it is in, or about, the prior turn that is causing difficulty.

The different forms do not occur with equal frequency in my collection: in the sample 50 instances, there were 18 cases of 'pardon', 11 of 'sorry', 8 of 'what' (including 'what's that dear' etc.), and approximately equal numbers of the rest, i.e., 4/5 of each. Despite the different frequency with which they occur, they are treated here as equivalent forms of 'open' class NTRI's, on the grounds that there does not appear to be any differentiation between them in terms of their sequential distribution, the circumstances in which they are characteristically selected, their interactional use or function, or their consequences for the emergent repair sequence.³

¹ I have used principally a collection of telephone recordings made by Elizabeth Holt and her family over a period of about three years, recordings which were transcribed by Gail Jefferson. I am very grateful to the Holts and to Jefferson for these data. Additional data come from a less exhaustive search through the immense corpus of other British and American telephone conversations which are now available to researchers in conversation analysis, transcribed by Gail Jefferson.

² The point of adding 'putative' here is to underline the possibility that, for example, a claim not to have heard is not to be treated as straightforward evidence that the speaker did not in fact hear. This issue is taken up in the concluding discussion here.

³ I mention this because some recent research by Egbert (forthcoming) on the use of the repair initiator 'bitte?' in German suggests that the differential frequencies she discovered in her data between the occurrence of 'hm?'/ 'hah?', 'bitte?', and 'was?' is systematically related to a property of the context in which they were used, namely the spatial configuration of interaction, and the opportunities afforded by spatial configurations for establishing, or preventing, eye gaze. Briefly, Egbert reports that "... 'bitte?' is found exclusively in those dispositions in which speakers have no mutual eye gaze". Hence, Egbert found that 'bitte?' was the form predominantly used in telephone conversations, and in circumstances where participants were co-present but unable to look at one another; whilst 'hm?'/ 'hah?' and 'was?' were used in interactions where participants were co-present and had established mutual gaze.

2. A sequential environment for ‘open’ NTRI’s: Topical discontinuities

In contradistinction to much of the work in the cognitive sciences on speech error and difficulties in comprehension (e.g., associated with syntactic complexity, referential ambiguities etc.), conversation analytic research suggests that the organisation of repair – including forms of repair initiation and the design of turns in which repair is accomplished – has a certain independence or autonomy with respect to the source of the trouble which repair is implemented to resolve. Thus as Schegloff (1987, 1991) has noted, it has seemed appropriate to focus research on forms of repair initiation and their attendant repair management sequences, rather than on the troubles which generated or occasioned repair (Drew, 1981; Frohlich et al., 1994; Jefferson, 1974, 1987, 1988; Moerman, 1977; Schegloff, 1979, 1991, 1992; Schegloff et al., 1977; and from a different perspective Norrick, 1991).

Nevertheless “Clearly, the practices of repair can to some degree be fitted to the type of trouble being repaired” (Schegloff, 1987: 217): and hence there may be some broad relationships between forms of repair initiation, and the kinds of (production and comprehension) troubles in talk which specific repair forms seek to resolve. These relationships are worth investigating, particularly if we are interested in the various sources of misunderstanding and difficulties in comprehension which can arise in talk-in-interaction – and more generally in the underpinnings of discourse coherence (e.g., Brown and Yule, 1983; Blakemore, 1988; Clark, 1992; Hobbs, 1979; Levinson, 1983; Vulchinich, 1977).

Much of the research into ‘mis-communication’ has been concerned with the role of exogenous social and cultural factors/identities, in circumstances where speakers may not share the same cultural – and hence linguistic and inferential – competences (e.g., Gumperz, 1982, 1992; Coupland et al., 1991; for critiques of some aspects of such research, see Schegloff, 1987). However, work in conversation analysis suggests a more proximate source of troubles in talk, namely sequences of actions, and the sequential implicativeness of turns-at-talk (Levinson, 1983; Schegloff, 1987, 1991). Hence we may begin to explore some of the general sources of troubles in talk through investigating the *sequential distribution* of types of repair (initiation): that is, examining the sequential environment in which certain forms or classes of repair initiation are employed might reveal some patterns of sources of trouble in the sequential management of talk (in line with aspects of the inquiries pursued by Schegloff, 1987, 1991). Without wishing to propose a direct or determinate relationship between a specific form of repair (initiation) and a particular type of trouble source – about which more will be said in the concluding discussion – it seems pertinent to investigate the sequential environments in which conversationalists employ this ‘open’ class of NTRI, as a way to begin to identify some of the sources of trouble in comprehension that can arise in conversation.

In what follows, I shall refer to the speaker whose turn is the source of the trouble as speaker A, and the one who initiates repair as speaker B, thus:

Speaker A: [‘Repairable’ utterance]

Speaker B: [Repair initiation, ‘open’ NTRI]

Speaker A: [Repair]

I began to examine, not the relationship between the form of speaker B's repair initiation and speaker A's subsequent repair (the third turn in the above sequence), but rather the 'first' turn in the sequence – the turn in response to which the recipient, speaker B, uses one of the 'open' class NTRI's. A group of cases began to emerge in which the repairable turns occur at what appeared to be topical junctures; that is, at points where speaker A appears to discontinue the topic of the talk thus far, and introduce instead a shift or a change in topic – in response to which speaker B initiates repair. The following is a case in point.

(9) [H:SO88 (II):1:7:7]

Lesley: How are you keeping.

Patrick: Oh I'm very [well thanks?

Lesley: [.h h h h h h Are you- are you keeping yourself busy,

Patrick: Ooo y(h)ε[s m(h)y(h)y goodness. [().

Lesley: [.hhh [Yes I kno:w hhuh heh=

Patrick: =([()

1→Lesley: [.hhh Gordon's at Newcastle no:w,

(0.7)

2→Patrick: Sorry?

Lesley: .hh.tlk Gordon is at New[castle.

Patrick: [Is he, Ye-:s,

At the beginning of this extract, Lesley enquires after how Patrick is keeping and whether he is 'keeping himself busy'; whereupon she then announces (in the first arrowed turn) that Gordon (her son) is 'at Newcastle no:w'. Insofar as this shifts from asking Patrick about himself to Lesley now telling about herself/her family, her announcement is something of a change in the topic, Patrick's response to which is a repair initiation, 'Sorry?'. The following is a similar instance.

(10) [H:SO88:1:2:2] (Gordon is caller; Norm's mother answered, and Norm has just come to the phone)

Gordon: .tch Hi No:rm,

Norm: Hi Gordy,

Gordon: .tch Eh:m (0.4) are you goin' tonight,

(.)

Norm: Mm.

Gordon: .hhh (0.2) Would you mind givin' me a lift[t.

Norm: [No

Norm: that's a'right,

Gordon: .hhh (0.3) Very kind of you.

(.)

1→ Norm: Caught me in the ba:th a [gain.

2→ Gordon: [.p.hhhh Pardon?=
Norm: =heh Caugh[t me in the ba :th

Gordon: [.t .h h .h h Oh(hh) I'm sorr(h)y hee.ye khhhhh Oh

well I sh' let you get back to it,

In (10) Gordon's repair initiator 'Pardon?' is done in response to Norm's announcement (arrow 1) 'Caught me in the ba:th again.': that announcement appears to be a move away from the immediately preceding topic, Gordon's request for a lift to some event to which they are evidently both going that evening. So in each of these cases it begins to look as though a turn in which speaker A produces a rather abrupt shift in the topic occasions the initiation of repair by speaker B.

One aspect of the possible sense of the abruptness of the topic shifts in these examples – and particularly, of the sense which the recipients (speaker B) might have of their abruptness – is that in each case the topic shifts by speaker A are unmarked. Elsewhere in conversation, when a speaker is about to move to a new topic, that may be signalled or marked by a turn-initial component which projects a topic shift in the rest of the turn, as is illustrated in (11).

(11) [Holt:X: (C) :1:1:1:6] (Talking about the death of a mutual acquaintance)

Lesley: S. he had a good inni:ngs did[n't he.

[I should say so:

Ye:s.

(0.2)

Mum: Marvelous,

→ Lesley: .tk.hhhh Anyway we had a very good evening on Saturda:y. ...

Lesley's introduction of a new topic here is prefaced with a lexical marker of topical discontinuity, 'Anyway': such markers are accompanied by some of the prosodic features associated with marked topic changes, notably increased amplitude, raised pitch, and 'hesitancy' (inbreaths, pauses, sound stretches) (Schegloff, 1979; Levinson, 1983: 313; Brown and Yule, 1983: 94–106). In these ways, then, speakers mark that what is about to be said is not related to what went before, thereby instructing recipients not to try to connect this with what was just being talked about; they suspend the relevance of the expectation that a current turn will be linked (topically) to the prior turn. However, in (9) and (10) there is no such prefatory marking of a topical break or shift. Therefore the apparent 'abruptness' of such apparent shifts, from the perspective of the recipient (speaker B), arises from their being 'unannounced'; hence recipients are unprepared for the shift in topic.⁴

⁴ An association between topic-initial turns and repair has previously been noted by Schegloff, who observed that topic-initial turns "very regularly have self-repair in them", and that "[i]f first sentence in topic-initial or topic-shift position does not have self-initiated repair, then with great frequency the next turn involves the initiation of repair by some other" (Schegloff, 1979: 270–271). The kinds of other-initiated repairs which Schegloff identifies in the environment of topical shifts or changes extend beyond the type which is the focus of this paper: for example, the NTRI in (3) occurs in just such an environment.

→ Gordon: ..we c'n get an afternoon (0.4) sunbathin' (0.3) .t.hhhhh So what you reckon.

(.)

Dana: Okee dokeg.

(0.3)

With this in mind, further examination of (9) and (10) reveals an ambiguity concerning the topical status of what I have been characterising as shifts in topic performed in the repairable turns (arrow 1 in each case). In each of these instances, it appears that speaker A may not mark his/her turn as topically disjunctive specifically because that (repairable) turn is designed to connect with or topically develop something in the prior *sequence*, but not necessarily in the prior turn. And for that reason those topical links may happen to be opaque to, or go unrecognised by, the recipient, speaker B – whose difficulty in recognising such sequential topical connections is manifest in his/her initiating repair.

It will be recalled that Lesley's announcement in (9) about her son being 'at Newcastle now', follows, and is a shift away from, her enquiry about her co-participant, Patrick: that enquiry follows arrangements they have been making to meet.

- (9) [H:SO88 (II) :1:7:6–7] (expanded version)
- 1 Lesley: ..but I will ring early. Alrigh [t?]
- 2 Patrick: [Ye:s, (that's right) more'r less any
- 3 time Sunday Lesley I think except p'raps sometime during the
- 4 morning, uh (.) afternoon o:r very early in the morning w'be fi:ne.
- 5 (0.2)
- 6 Lesley: Yes:.
- 7 (0.2)
- 8 Patrick: I [mean
- 9 Lesley: [uRi-
- 10 (.)

Gordon: .t Good. Good news.

Dana: I'll b(h)ring my biology folder we c'n have a really good tj:me. hheh-h .hh Sorry.
.t.h[h Qkay

Gordon: [mhh-hm-hm:: mh .t.hhhh I[nstructions.

Dana: [U h :

→ Gordon: .hhhh Did yo[u-

Dana: [Q [hh h ()

→ Gordon: ['Ave yo drop' some biology notes.

(0.4)

Dana: Have I what them.

Dana and Gordon are two teenagers who have been arranging 'a quiet afternoon on the beach' at the weekend, as relaxation from revising for upcoming examinations they are both taking. In closing those arrangements Dana makes an ironic quip about bringing along her biology folder (humorously threatening to spoil the fun); which touches off Gordon's topic-initial enquiry whether she has lost some biology notes (he has found some in a locker room at their college). In response to which Dana initiates repair, although with a type of NTRI which, as was mentioned above, locates the repairable item.

About such cases Schegloff notes that "although the repair is done to an element of a sentence and is done within a sentence, in important ways the organizational source of the repair is not the sentence but the topical sequence, for it is in sentences-in-turns characterized by their sequential status and on elements characterized by their topic-relevant status that the repair is done" (Schegloff, 1979: 272, fn. 15). This suggests a line of inquiry relevant more generally, including those instances under consideration here in which an 'open' form of NTRI is employed by speaker B.

- 11 Lesley: Righto then Patrick .hhh (.) An' then p'raps we could arrange
 12 something .hhh that be lovely.
 13 Patrick: That'd be lovel[y].
 14 Lesley: [How are you keeping.
 15 Patrick: Oh I'm very [well thanks?
 16 Lesley: [h h h h h h h h Are you- are you keeping yourself busy,
 17 Patrick: Ooo y(h)ε [s m(h)y(h)y goodness. [().
 18 Lesley: [hhh [Yes I kno:w hhuh heh=
 19 Patrick: =([()
 20 Lesley: [hhh Gordon's at Newcastle no:w,

Patrick's reply (line 17) to Lesley's follow-up enquiry about whether he's keeping himself busy (line 16) is very positive, and done in such a fashion as plainly to suggest some account about what he's been doing to keep so busy. Lesley does not, however, solicit such an account or further topicalise whatever Patrick might have meant to suggest. Instead her response treats his reply about how busy he's keeping as very strongly 'no news' (her responding in line 18 not merely 'Yes', but specifically 'Yes I kno:w', conveys that she understands him to be alluding to doing something to keep busy which she already knows about). Her 'no news' response manages to close the enquiry without further asking Patrick about whatever he might be alluding to in 'Ooo y(h)ε s m(h)y(h)y goodness.', and hence without giving him the opportunity to expand on that.

However, Lesley's apparently sudden and pre-emptive move from asking about Patrick's news to announcing her own news might be associated with her enquiry being made at a point at which the closing of the call is relevant.

- 11 Lesley: Righto then Patrick .hhh (.) An' then p'raps we could arrange
 12 something .hhh that be lovely.
 13 Patrick: That'd be lovel [y].
 14 Lesley: [How are you keeping.

The completion of their talk about arrangements to get together very much implicates the close of the call itself (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). And the closing sequences of calls are an environment in which just such personal enquiries as this are made (Button and Casey, 1984). So it seems that Lesley orients to this being the place to begin bringing the call to a close, her enquiry about personal news being designed as part of the closing sequence.⁵

⁵ Though such enquiries about, for example, one's family are recurrently made in the closing stages of telephone calls (at least in English; in some other cultures they are part of opening sequences, at least in face-to-face encounters), they are also quite commonly the source of difficulties. Recipients of such enquiries commonly respond with an 'open' class repair initiation, as Ilene does in the following example.

[Heritage:01:2:6]

Ilene: Well we'll see yo[u then,

Jean: [A n : d u h : m : : :

(0.8)

Thus it seems that Lesley made her enquiries about Patrick (lines 14, and 16) as the initial move in the conventional news exchanges with which participants routinely prepare to close the call. From that perspective, then, her announcement that “Gordon’s at Newcastle no:w”, (line 20) is not a change of topic away from Patrick’s news to her own: rather, it is a continuation of the reciprocal news exchanges which she initiated as a prelude to closing the call (and hence she does not mark her announcement as a topic change). However, she moves to tell her news about her family (Gordon) without waiting for a reciprocal news solicitation from Patrick: that is, she doesn’t wait for him to reciprocate by asking about how she’s keeping, how her family are etc. This then results in something of an interactional hiatus. Patrick has a basis for orienting to his not yet having been asked about/completed his account of how busy he is; this, together with his not yet having made a reciprocal ‘closing’ enquiry about Lesley, are grounds for her announcement being – from his perspective – unexpectedly topically disjunctive.⁶

Jean: Ev’body else is well.
(0.4)

Ilene: Hmm [:?]

Jean: [() they’re a:ll wɛ:ll,

Ilene: Oh ye:s yes ther fj:ne.

⁶ There are certain parallels between that hiatus in (9), and what happens in the following instance. Again, this occurs after the ‘business’ of the call has been completed, arrangements have been made pertinent to that business, and a move to ‘open up closings’ is introduced by Lesley’s ‘Okɑ:y’ in the first line of the excerpt.

[Holt:2:2:4]

Lesley: Okɑ [:y, Are you alright,

Bond: [()]

Bond: Oh not s’bad thank you Graham had iz (0.4) uh:m op’ration f’iz grɔmmets on Monday, so that put us: um (.) .hh uh:-: (.) yihknow

(0.5)

Lesley: Yes.=

Bond: =() b’t he’s e-’ee geez fjne it (dzn) bother’im a bit So, not s.bad, hgh

Bond .hh [Holiday’s nearly o:ver isn’tit.

Lesley: [Didjuh haftuh stay i ɔ n,

Bond: Hey?

(.)

Lesley: Didjuh haftuh stay in,

Bond: Um only f’the dɑ:y.

This extract illustrates a number of features which are pertinent to the explication above of (9). In the course of moving into closing the call, Lesley makes a generalised enquiry about the other, an enquiry which whilst about ‘you’ is treated as including ‘you and yours’ (i.e. recipient’s family) – hence Lesley’s ‘reciprocal’ news about her son, Gordon, in (9). Then, after Bond’s response to that enquiry (concerning her husband’s operation), Bond and Lesley choose simultaneously to perform different actions, each of their actions being sequentially implicated and relevant next actions in terms of the prior enquiry-response sequence. Bond elects reciprocally to enquire about Lesley (‘holidays’ here referring to school holidays, Lesley being a school teacher – which as it happens Bond has explicitly mentioned just before this extract). However, Lesley chooses instead to ask further about Bond’s husband’s operation (i.e. whether he had to stay in hospital). Here, then, the speakers each implement competing possibilities as regards sequentially implicated next moves: Bond’s enquiry ‘Holiday’s nearly o:ver isn’tit.’ being topical linked, not directly to the prior topic of her husband’s operation, but to the overarching ‘topic’ or activity sequence of which that

In extract (10), also, there are grounds for each of the speakers orienting to different contingencies occasioned by the prior sequence, and hence orienting differently to the action which is relevant in the slot in which Norm makes his apparently topically disjunctive announcement, ‘Caught me in the ba:th again’.

(10) [H:SO88:1:2:2] (Gordon is caller; Norm’s mother answered, and Norm has just come to the phone)

Gordon: .tch Hi No:rm,

Norm: Hi Gordy,

Gordon: .tch Eh:m (0.4) are you goin’ tonight,

(.)

Norm: Mm.

Gordon: .hhh (0.2.) Would you mind givin’ me a lift[t.

Norm: [No

Norm: that’s a’right,

Gordon: .hhh (0.3) Very kind of you.

Norm: Caught me in the ba:th a [gain.

Gordon: [p.hhhh Pardon?=

Norm: =heh Caugh [t me in the ba :th

Gordon: [.t .h h .h h Oh(hh) I’m sorr(h)y hee.ye khhhhh Oh well I sh’ let you get back to it,

As soon as Norm comes to the telephone (his mother answered, and has fetched Norm), Gordon makes a request for a lift (ride) to an event to which they’re both going that evening. Then, after Gordon’s appreciation of Norm’s granting, ‘Very kind of you.’, Norm tells Gordon ‘Caught me in the ba:th again.’ – which as was mentioned above seems *topically* unconnected with the prior request sequence.

Whilst Gordon’s appreciation in some respects completes the request sequence, in certain other respects the topic of the requested ride is still incomplete; they have yet to settle details of the arrangement, particularly concerning what time Norm is likely to leave home and hence will collect Gordon (and indeed they do return to this after this extract). Norm’s announcement that he was in the bath is almost certainly designed, however, to indicate that they should keep any subsequent conversation about those, or any other, pending matters as brief as possible. It is done at the first opportunity he has when he might recognise that they will need to talk more about those pending matters;⁷ and certainly Gordon treats that as indicating they should be

was a part, namely the reciprocal enquiries made during the closing stages of the call. This collides, as it were, with Lesley’s further topicalising the news about the operation: however, in orienting to the completion of her news, and turning to her enquiry about Lesley, Bond was not anticipating Lesley’s continuation. The competition between Lesley and Bond in terms of their performing different sequentially implicated actions coincides with their competing directly for speakership; they begin speaking simultaneously, and complete their turns in overlap. Hence Bond’s ‘open’ form repair initiation is as much consistent with trouble generated by auditory difficulties as with that generated by Lesley’s unanticipated continuation.

⁷ Another possibility is that Norm might simultaneously thereby also account for the delay in his coming to the phone. However, a ‘first opportunity’ to have done that, and the place where such accounts (‘I was just in the garden’, or ‘I was upstairs’ etc.) are generally given, is when on coming to the phone

brief, when in the last turn in the extract he says ‘I sh’ let you get back to it’. So although Norm’s announcement/informing may not be overtly on topic, in the sense that it does not directly pursue whatever arrangements arising from the request have yet to be made, nevertheless it is produced with respect to these projected pending matters (i.e., keeping them brief). Again, as in (9), whilst the repairable turn is not directly (topically) connected with its prior *turn*, it is nevertheless ‘connected’ to the *sequence* of which that prior turn is a part: the repairable turn is a quite properly implicated action in that sequence, albeit, and for quite good reason, not anticipated by the recipient, speaker B, who initiates repair.

Another case which closely resembles (9) and (10) in that respect, and which further illustrates the momentary breakdown in understanding which can occur when speaker A produces a turn which is fitted with, or arises from, the prior sequence, whilst diverging from the topic of the immediately prior turn, is this.

- (12) [Holt:88U;2:1:6–7] (Simplified)
- 1 Arnold: So should I: (.) try’n d_o something th[en,
 2 Lesley: [tch e-ye:s
 3 Lesley: Okay the;n,h
 4 Arnold: An’ I’ll let you know
 5 Lesley: Yes love [ly.hhhhh
 6 Arnold: [‘N you’ll be available about quarter to eigh[t or s[o
 8 Lesley: [g [ih-
 9 Ye::s that’s right, [hhhhh
 10 Arnold: [Yeə:h.
 11 Lesley: My husband always ra:ring to eat, s: [o, .hhhhh
 12 Arnold: [Is ‘e’? Oh good.
 13 Lesley: [Ye:h.
 14 Arnold: [Overy good [then
 15 Lesley: [Yes.
 16 Lesley: .hhh Uh [unfortunately-
 17 Arnold: [Well l e t- let-let’s fix it for that e:vening anyw:y?
 18 Lesley: Sorry?
 19 (.)
 20 Arnold: We’ll (.) we’ll say ye:s for th[e eveni[:ng,
 21 Lesley: [Yes. [O:kay,

As with (9), this example occurs in the context of the participants bringing to a close their discussion of arrangements to go somewhere, with their spouses, for dinner (lines 1–9), and thereby beginning to bring the call to a close. In response to Arnold’s mentioning the time at which he understands Lesley and her husband

he greets Gordon, i.e. ‘Hi, sorry I was just getting out of the bath’. And thus there are links here between what counts as the ‘first opportunity’ to announce that, whether he was finished bathing or is going to go back to the bath, and whether this is designed to account for a delay in coming to the phone or to forestall lengthy talk or other possible topics.

would be ‘available’ (to meet/eat), she accounts for the ‘earliness’ of that time, ‘My husband always ra:ring to eat’, (line 11) – to which she adds ‘unfortunately’ (line 16). This is somewhat akin to Patrick’s ‘Ooo y(h)es m(h)y(h)y goodness’ ((9), line 17), in hinting at a story to be told, in this case about her husband’s predilection for food. In his next turn, however, Arnold ignores whatever ‘unfortunately’ may hint at, and instead continues terminating the arrangements.⁸ Once again, a turn produced to connect with a prior sequence (i.e., completing/closing the arrangements) happens, from its recipient’s view, not to connect with the topic of his/her (i.e., speaker B’s) prior turn.

What begins to emerge from these cases is that speaker A produces a turn which, whilst it might appear to switch to a quite different matter or topic, is *sequentially coherent* from speaker A’s view of the prior sequence (in (9) and (12)) or an unfolding sequence (in (10)). However, because that turn does not refer to or otherwise connect specifically with its prior turn, it may appear to its recipient, speaker B, to be topically disconnected, and hence a source of puzzlement – manifest in his/her initiating repair with an ‘open’ class NTRI. Analytically, then – and here I am paraphrasing Schegloff (1990: 70) – these cases evidence topical divergence or change, from speaker B’s perspective, in the context of a turn produced by speaker A to be sequentially coherent. The opaqueness – for the recipient – of that sequential coherence, possibly arising from or exacerbated by the topical divergence or apparent unconnectedness, is reflected in speaker B’s puzzlement, expressed in his/her repair initiation. Thus each of these instances (and others in my collection) involves the initiation of repair of a prior turn which is seemingly topically disjunctive with what came before – at least, seemingly so from the perspective of the one who initiates repair, i.e., speaker B. The upshot of this is that speaker B may be unable to find a topical link between speaker A’s prior turn, the repairable, and what they had been speaking about in the immediately preceding talk. The participants are on different sequential tracks: the sequential connection which might have generated this ‘next move’ by speaker A, the connection A might have had in mind, is opaque to speaker B – for whom, therefore, the prior turn seems to initiate a new topic, at a point where B might have expected speaker A to have developed or progressed the topic of the prior turn(s).⁹

⁸ Although Arnold includes a topic disjunct marker in the design of his turn in line 17, i.e. ‘anyw_zy?’, this is produced at the end of the turn – in contrast to the turn-initial disjunct markers illustrated in (11). Whilst perhaps there needs to be further research into the different interactional salience of such (discourse) markers in different turn positions, especially turn-initial and turn-final position, it seems likely that they have a ‘reduced’ salience – at least, in terms of their capacity to alert the recipient to a topic shift – when placed in turn-ending position, as here.

⁹ Some other treatments of the relation between repair and conversational cohesion take the non-cohesiveness of a turn at talk for granted. A notable example is the study by Vulchinich, the experimental design of which involved a conversational ‘confederate’ interjecting a deliberately non-cohesive turn, defined as being about a new and unrelated topic, and then seeing what (disruptive) effect that had only he conversation. This study was based on a number of misleading premises, among which was that “If a turn is well formed in every respect except that it is not cohesive with previous talk, and if a remedy sequence is initiated immediately after the non-cohesive turn, then it may be inferred that the remedy sequence is a response to the non-cohesiveness of the turn” (Vulchinich, 1977: 236). This suffers the

3. Repair initiation in response to sequentially ‘problematic’ prior turns

According to the account developed in the previous section, one of the sequential environments in which ‘open’ forms of repair initiation are employed involves a difficulty associated with participants’ alternative orientations as regards their understanding of the sequential ‘fit’ or connection, topically, between the repairable turn (i.e., turn by the prior speaker, speaker A) and the (topic of) the sequence-thus-far. From the perspective of the one who initiates repair, a difficulty in comprehending the prior turn may arise from their not at first being able to grasp the topical connection between what speaker A has just said, and what went before.

This matter of the possible difficulties associated with the sequential ‘fit’ between the repairable turn and the preceding talk can be expanded and developed by considering a second group of cases in which the recipient (speaker B) appears to be puzzled by the repairable turn. In these cases, B’s puzzlement seems to arise not because speaker A changes or shifts topic, but from some more ‘local’ sense of the repairable turn’s lack of ‘appropriateness’ or pertinence in terms of what came before. These cases have in common that, from the point of view of the recipients, the prior repairable turns may appear not properly to take into account – or not to be appropriate next’s to – the prior turn-but-one, i.e., the turn preceding the repairable.

Something like this is suggested by Schegloff’s observations concerning the misunderstandings which arise in this extract from a conversation in which Bonnie has called Jim to ask if she might borrow his BB gun.

- (13) [Schegloff, 1990]
- 1 Jim: ..What I meant was which gun.
 2 (0.5)
 3 Bonnie: Tch! .hhh Oh (0.4) uh::m (0.4) t! .hhh (0.5) well d’j’have a really
 4 lo:ng one,
 5 (0.8)
 6 Jim: A really l:ong one . hh [h
 7 Bonnie: [Yeah.
 8 (0.2)
 9 Bonnie: ’t doesn’t matter what k_i:nd.
 10 (1.0)
 11 Jim: Why:: would you like a really long one.
 12 (0.8)

same drawback as other attempted general ‘theories’ about the types of problems which specific repair initiation forms address and try to handle; and examples shown below in Section 3 illustrate cases in which, under the circumstances Vulchinich outlines, cohesiveness is unlikely to be the difficulty being experienced by the one who initiates repair. But another drawback to this premise is that it takes for granted the character of a turn as being ‘non-cohesive’; naturally, for the experimental design it was necessary for the confederate (‘plant’) to interpose talk about a ‘completely different’ topic – thereby losing sight of the varieties of criteria there can be in conversation for producing a ‘cohesive’ turn, such that a speaker might construct a turn on the basis of one of those criteria, but in a way which is opaque to the other.

- 13 Bonnie: Y'don have a really long one.
 14 (1.0)
 15 Jim: What?
 16 Bonnie: Y- Donchuh have a l- really long one?
 17 Jim: Yea: hhh. A- all I wan' to know why you want a gun,

Here it is apparent that Jim is puzzled at Bonnie's response to his question in line 11, 'Why:: whould you like a really long one'. Briefly, Schegloff (1990) shows that this puzzlement, expressed in his initiating repair in line 15 with 'What?', arises from Bonnie having (mis)understood his question as leading up to rejecting her request (a pre-rejection, perhaps through implying that he did not have a 'really long' gun). However, it appears that Jim asked that question in line 11 not to delay an answer to 'd'ja have a really long one', but to follow up his earlier question 'Which gun' (line 1), in order to decide whether or not to accede to her original request. That is, Jim asked the question literally, just to find out why she wanted a really long gun (note in this respect his clarification in line 17): Bonnie, however, treated the question idiomatically, as implying that he doesn't have one (Schegloff, 1990: 70–71). Hence from Jim's perspective, Bonnie's reply in line 13 is incoherent in terms of his understanding of the question he asked:

"Perfectly coherent sequentially on Bonnie's view of the sequence, it is structurally incoherent in Jim's, even though the topic is (obviously) the same for both, and the utterance is topically coherent with the surrounding utterances on either reading. ... [H]ere we have the possibility of a breakdown of sequence-structural coherence in the context of the integrity of topical coherence." (Schegloff, 1990: 70)

This account serves to introduce a significant group of instances in my collection of 'open' class NTRI's, which involve the initiation of repair in response to turns which exhibit, at least for their recipients, some variously problematic relationship with their prior turns. That is, whilst the repairable turns may be topically related to their prior turns (i.e., a previous turn by speaker B), they are in various ways sequentially ill-fitted. A rather transparent example is the following.

- (14) [Holt: 2:9:2]
 1 Lesley: Didju get my letter,
 2 (0.5)
 3 Mum:: Uh yes thank you, I've writ- (.) I've answered it.=
 4 Lesley: =TCH. Oh yes. Wey (.) Can you work it all out,
 5 Mum: Pardon?
 6 (.)
 7 Mum: Oh yes. Ye:s yes'v course I could.

Mum's response to Lesley's enquiry about whether she had received her letter (line 1) is to confirm that she did receive it, and has answered it (line 3). Lesley's subsequent enquiry about whether she (Mum) could 'work it all out', causes Mum some momentary difficulty (lines 5–7), the basis for which is, perhaps, that if she

answered the letter, then it follows that she ‘worked it out’. Hence Lesley’s enquiry in line 4 might appear to be problematic or inapposite as a response to Mum’s prior answer insofar as it fails to take properly into account the implications (as regards ‘working it out’) of her (i.e., Mum’s) prior answer (notice in this respect Mum’s reply in line 7 that ‘of course’ she could work it out).

A second example is similar in some respects to the example cited above from Schegloff.

- (15) [Holt: SO88(II):2:8:7–8]
- 1 Mum: ..c’z she gets someone’take her home you see so she’s alright
- 2 Lesley: Oh sh- so she still comes t’ chu:rch does she in the eve[n]ings?
- 3 Mum: [Oh yes c’z
- 4 someone takes her h-all the way ho:me.
- 5 Lesley: .hhh hOh:.
 6 Mum: So:, hhm:, h[ɪm so she’s alright,
- 7 Lesley: [.hh
- 8 Lesley: That’s a bit’v’n imposition though isn’tit?
- 9 (0.3)
- 10 Mum: What dear?
- 11 Lesley: .hhhh
- 12 (.)
- 13 Mum: Well they don’t seem t’mind, hm
- 14 (.)
- 15 Lesley: .tch uh Don’ take you home though do they.
- 16 Mum: eh heh huh
- 17 (.)
- 18 Mum: We-:ll?
- 19 Lesley: .t.hhhhhh
- 20 Mum: They would if I: p-if I:-: pre[ssed for it?
- 21 Lesley: [.hhhhhhhhhhh
- 22 Lesley: Ye:s:.
- 23 Mum: B’t I do:n’t huh hm:.
 .

Just before this fragment Mum has been explaining to Lesley that, because it’s getting dark earlier, she’s no longer going to church on Sunday evenings, a change which will result in her no longer having her friend to tea on Sunday afternoons. From what Mum has said (line 1), Lesley gathers that this friend (referred to as ‘she’) is continuing to go to church in the evening (line 2). Mum confirms that she (the friend) is, through repeating, almost identically, her explanation in line 1, i.e., that she’s able to do so because she gets a lift back from church, adding just as she did before ‘so she’s alright’ (line 6).

There are alternative possible ways in which ‘so she’s alright’ might be understood; it might either be, literally, a summary of her friend’s good fortune in being able to continue to go to church in the evenings; or it might be taken idiomatically, to convey something of a complaint, implying a contrastive ‘she’ in the sense that

her friend is taken care of (looks after herself), but that she (Mum) isn't. It appears that in her observation 'That's a bit 'v'n imposition though isn't it?' (line 8), Lesley takes up the second of these alternative understandings, that is the complaint-implicativeness of Mum's explanation – and notice that a particular warrant for her observing that it is an 'imposition' might be Mum's formulation in line 1 that her friend 'gets someone' take her home' (that changing in line 4 to 'someone takes her'). The point of Lesley's incipient complaint here becomes evident in line 15.

It is apparent from her repair initiation in line 10, 'What dear?', that Lesley's complaint-relevant response is problematic for Mum. Whether or not she 'intended' to sow the seeds from which Lesley might recognise and make explicit the complaint on her (Mum's) behalf, Mum is seemingly puzzled by Lesley's response to her having, literally, only reported the arrangements which enabled her friend to continue going to church in the evenings (without her having 'intended' to convey or imply any criticism of this arrangement). Hence, as in the example from Schegloff above, a problem arises from alternative possible understandings of an earlier turn by speaker B. It appears that speaker A (Lesley) orients to an implicit, idiomatic interpretation of what speaker B (Mum) said, and thereby to the sequential implications of that interpretation. Speaker B, on the other hand, orients only to the literal, perhaps more 'innocent' reading of what she said, and hence has difficulty understanding speaker A's response.¹⁰ In this example, then, Mum appears to have difficulty finding the sequential connection between Lesley's complaint-relevant observation, and her own prior turn(s).

The next example begins with the first exchanges between Gordon, the caller, and William, whose mother answered the telephone.

(16) [H:SO88:1:1:1]

William: Hello

Gordon: .tch Hi William how's the guitar playing going.=

William: :Oh not too ba: [d at [the moment [n o:.

Gordon: [p [.tch .tch [Played- (.) recently?

(0.5)

→ William: Sorry?

Gordon: .tch Have you done any: . hhh thing for the school recently?=

William: =No:- no (.) not (.) not since that last failure,

Gordon opens the conversation with the enquiry 'how's the guitar playing going': it is his subsequent enquiry 'Played- (.) recently?' to which William responds with a repair initiation, 'Sorry?'. William's reply to Gordon's initial enquiry, 'not too ba:d at the moment', can be taken to imply that he has 'played' his guitar recently. Given that implication, William might assume that it would be clear from his previous

¹⁰ Of course, Mum does this at the 'official' explicit level of the talk; though this may, perhaps, have been motivated by a disingenuous strategy on Mum's part. That is, she treats her explanation as unmotivated, innocent of the complaint implications that Lesley finds in it – whether or not Mum in fact felt this grievance, and was hinting at it for Lesley to find and express on her behalf.

reply that he has ‘played’ recently: in which case Gordon’s subsequently asking him whether he has played recently appears not to take into account what he (William) has just said. Hence William might be puzzled as to what Gordon might mean by ‘played’. Of course it turns out from Gordon’s repair ‘Have you done any:.hh thing for the school recently?’ that by ‘played’ he meant ‘played a gig’: hence there is a referential ambiguity concerning ‘played’ (as between ‘played a gig’ and merely ‘played’ as in ‘practiced’). But up to the point of his repair initiation, and before the particular sense in which Gordon meant ‘played’ is clarified, the opaqueness of Gordon’s question ‘Played- (.) recently?’ arises from its apparently not taking account of William’s answer to Gordon’s initial enquiry.

Thus (14) and (16) resemble one another inasmuch as Mum and William, respectively, initiate repair on a turn which might have appeared not to take cognizance of what was implied in what they said in their prior turns (at least, on William’s then-current understanding of ‘playing’ in (16)). The sequential connection between the repairable turn and its prior turn(s) is similarly problematic in the following case. Just before this fragment, Lesley has bemoaned the expense of household repairs (the cost of having a chimney lined, and repairing a drain), a topic which Mum pursues thus:

- (17) [Holt:2:9:10]
- 1 Mum: I’m not planning any big (0.2) any big things this (0.2) repa:rs
 - 2 this yea:r,
 - 3 Lesley: No:. Well-
 - 4 Mum: I’ve j:s had my k:tchen painted bu[t
 - 5 Lesley: [.h Well there’s no point in it
 - 6 if you don’t need it. is there.
 - 7 (0.3)
 - 8 Mum: What’s that love,
 - 9 (0.3)
 - 10 Lesley: There’s no point in spending money if yih don’t need IT.

It is evident that Lesley’s turn ‘Well there’s no point in it if you don’t need it. is there.’ was begun in response to Mum’s first utterance in this extract. Lesley begins ‘No:. Well-’ (line 3), but cuts off to leave her turn uncompleted when at that point (line 4) Mum qualifies her original assertion. Following that qualification Lesley resumes (line 5), repeating ‘Well’ and going on to complete her endorsement or support of Mum’s not planning any big repairs. Hence Lesley’s turn, the repairable, was originally designed as a response to Mum’s initial turn in the fragment; but it is delayed in its production by a further turn in which Mum qualifies – one might almost say, contradicts – her previous assertion. So now Lesley ends up saying that ‘there’s no point in it if you don’t need it. is there.’ apparently in response to (at least, in the slot after) the turn in which Mum announces that she’s just had her kitchen painted. Lesley’s turn was not, of course, designed as a response to that prior turn by Mum: it was designed as a response to Mum’s prior turn-but-one, and happens to get ‘misplaced’ – a sequential mischance which results in Mum hearing a

response which is plainly not fitted to, or which once again does not take into account, the adjacently prior turn in which she (Mum) has just announced she had her kitchen painted.

The confusions or puzzlement associated with the repair initiations in (13)–(17) are comparatively bland, in the sense that the repairable turns may appear to be ill-fitted to their prior turns through some quite innocent mischance – for example, in (16) that William could not know that Gordon meant ‘played’ to refer to ‘played any gigs’, and hence might reasonably have thought that he’d already indicated that he had played recently; or in (17) that Lesley had designed her response to affiliate with what Mum had said two turns before, and not with Mum’s intervening turn (notice also that Lesley’s remark in (15) line 8 is similarly designed to affiliate with Mum). The following cases, though, become progressively less innocent. The cases up till now have involved a certain lack of contiguity – at least from the perspective of the one initiating repair – between the repairable and its prior turn(s). In the following cases, however, that lack of contiguity becomes instead a matter of a certain lack of alignment between the participants: these begin to reveal that speakers may initiate repair in circumstances where they perceive that their co-participants do not fully align or affiliate with them.

The next case is from a call in which Emma has telephoned, among other things, to thank Margy for a luncheon party which she gave – in response to which Margy suggests ‘getting together’ more often (first turn in the fragment). Emma takes this up, beginning as though going to make a suggestion for a lunch date, ‘Wul why don’t we: (go to Coco’s ...)’; but she restarts the turn in such a way as to change it to an invitation to treat Margy and her mother to lunch, ‘why don’t I take you’n Mo:m up there tuh: Coco’s. someday fer lu:nch’.¹¹

(18) [NB:VI:Power Tools:4]

Margy: W] haftuh do tha [t more o[:ften.

Emma: [h h h h h [Wul why don’t we: uh-m:=why don’t I take you’n Mo:m up there tuh: Coco’s. someday fer lu:nch. We’ll go, buzz up there tu[h,

Margy: [Goo:d.

→ Emma: Ha:h?

Margy: That’s a good deal. .hh- .hh:

Emma: =En I’ll take you both [up

Margy: [No::: we’ll all go Dutch.

In responding to Emma’s suggestion/invitation for lunch with ‘Goo:d’ – which is the repairable turn in (18) – Margy chooses to treat Emma’s prior turn as a suggestion to get together for lunch, rather than an invitation to treat them to lunch (i.e., pay for lunch). ‘Good’ might be a quite appropriate response to a proposal or suggestion,

¹¹ For a general account of self-repairs involving re-starting turns, see Schegloff, 1987. And for more on the syntactic and ‘action’ consequence of self-repair, much along the lines of this instance, see Schegloff, 1979.

but not to an invitation, for which some form of appreciation and acceptance is fitting (e.g., ‘That would be lovely, thank you’). This involves the discriminative character of second pair parts in adjacency pairs (see Sacks, 1992), according to which ‘Good’ selects the ‘suggestion/acceptance’ adjacency pair, rather than that of ‘invitation/acceptance’. There is enough ambivalence displayed in the self-repair through which Emma makes her invitation, and perhaps sufficient ambiguity in her formulation ‘take you’n Mo:m up there tuh: Coco’s’ (‘take you up’ as in ‘drive you up’, or ‘buy you lunch’), to give Margy grounds for responding as though Emma had made a suggestion rather than an invitation. However, in this respect, and as further evidence for Margy’s having initially selected which action-implication to attribute to Edna (i.e., attributing the action of ‘suggesting’ in preference to that of ‘invitation’), it is notable that despite Emma continuing to use that formulation when she repeats her invitation, ‘En I’ll take you both up’, this time Margy very plainly takes that to be an invitation to treat her and her mother to lunch, in her rejection ‘No::: we’ll all go Dutch.’

At any rate, the trouble Emma has with Margy’s ‘Goo:d’ is that it is not the appropriate response to the action she evidently intended to make, i.e., an invitation: hence, it might indicate that Margy has misunderstood her prior turn, i.e., her intended offer to treat them. By now it should be plain that the reason for suggesting that Margy’s response and Emma’s repair initiation are not entirely innocent is that Margy may be perfectly aware that Emma is making an invitation, but is choosing to treat it as though it had been just a proposal (and in doing so, may be avoiding being presumptuous). And Emma may quite understand that that’s what Margy is doing, and therefore initiates a repair sequence in which a second opportunity is given for the invitation to be addressed. From the way in which the repair sequence unfolds it is pretty clear that there is exactly this struggle between them over whether it is a suggestion or an invitation. But it is also evident, and this is the central point here, that in initiating repair on Margy’s response, Emma is treating that response as not properly fitted – as an inappropriate response – to the action which she intended her turn to be heard as doing, i.e., an invitation. Here, then, repair initiation is being employed in circumstances in which we can begin to detect – and more importantly, speaker B (Emma) can detect – a certain lack of alignment between the participants.

A lack of alignment¹² is similarly evident in the following extract from a call in which Emma has called her daughter, Barbara, to tell her that her husband, Barbara’s father, has ‘walked out’ on her (Emma is staying at their home down by the beach; her husband has ‘walked out’ by returning to their home in the city). This is a few days before Thanksgiving, when evidently Barbara and her family are due to stay with her parents (see Barbara’s last turn in the extract, lines 18–90).

¹² Among others, Zahn has also referred to alignment in relation to the study of repair; but he appears to mean by ‘alignment’ simply the matter of ‘adequate understanding’ between participants (‘... repair episodes serve both interpretive and coordinative alignment functions’ (Zahn, 1984: 65). At any rate, he does not seem to consider cases of the kind discussed here, in which alignment shades into matters of agreement, affiliation and the like.

- (19) [NB:IV:7:4]
- 1 Emma: .hhh En I: talk'to'im la:s'night I been kinda sick about it an:d
 2 .hhhhhh uh::: It's a pro:blem I-ah'll ah'll tell you when I see:
 3 you ah mean it'll work out I kno:w,hh I don't know whether
 4 we're gonna s::eperate I: don't know what the who:le thing's
 5 a [bout hh
 6 Barbara: [Oh: really?
 7 Emma: .hhh [hh
 8 Barbara: [Is this been goin' on lo:ng er wha:t.
 9 Emma: OH::: I DON'T KNOW I JIS' CA:N'T SEEM TO SAY BLUE
 10 IS BLUE HE AR:GUES WITH ME ER:: (.)
 11 SOMETHING EN: AH: DON'T DO THIS RI:GHT'n THAT
 12 RI:GHT. .hhhhh I NEED hhHE:L:P.hh
 13 (.)
 14 Emma: EN BARBRA wouldju CA:LL 'im toni:ght for me,h
 15 (.)
 16 Barbara: Ye:ah,
 17 Emma: .h HU:H?h
 18 Barbara: Well if he doesn't co:me I won't uh::: (0.2) dra:g (.) Hugh an
 19 everybody do:wn

There is here rather clearly an issue about whether Barbara will affiliate or sympathise with this trouble of her mother's. Although it is not pertinent to explicate this in detail here (see Drew and Holt, 1988), we can see that Barbara responds to Emma's troubles, including the quite dramatic 'I don't know whether we're gonna s::eperate' (lines 4–5), in a manifestly neutral, unaligned fashion – responding as a news recipient ('Oh: really? Is this been goin' on lo:ng er wha:t', lines 6 and 8) rather than as a troubles recipient (Jefferson, 1980, 1988). So, for example, Barbara does not respond with any overt form of sympathy (e.g., 'Oh what a shame' or 'Oh how awful for you').

The way Barbara withholds any overt sympathy or affiliation with her mother is particularly evident in her response to Emma's plea in line 14 (it is delivered in a distinctly 'pleading' tone) to call her father, to find out whether he intends to join the family for Thanksgiving.

- 14 Emma: EN BARBRA wouldju CA:LL 'im toni:ght for me,h
 15 (.)
 16 Barbara: Ye:ah,
 17 Emma: .h HU:H?h

Barbara's minimal and less-than-enthusiastic agreement (line 16) to her mother's request to call her father displays a degree of unwillingness; and in her repair initiation in line 17, Emma appears to treat Barbara's agreement as questionable or in doubt.¹³

¹³ For an account of the disagreement implicativeness of minimal agreement tokens, see Pomerantz, 1984, especially p. 77.

Thus Emma initiates repair in response to the absence of the preferred, more positive agreement that she might have expected to her plea for help. Emma's analysis of her daughter's unwillingness is, of course, confirmed in Barbara's response in lines 18–19, in which she not only fails to indicate any greater willingness to help by calling her father, but also specifically declines what she takes to be her mother's implied request – to urge her father to come down for the Thanksgiving holiday to be with all the family. Anyway, from Emma's perspective, Barbara's response in line 16 – the repairable turn – is problematic insofar as it is only a grudging agreement, and thereby insufficiently willing or sympathetic (the implications of her lack of willing might be, for Emma, that she cannot rely on Barbara to do all she can to help, when she speaks to her father). As in (18), speaker B (here Emma) initiates repair on a turn which exhibits speaker A's non-alignment with her.

A final case illustrating repair initiation in the environment of some evident non-alignment between the participants is (20), in which Marylou and Claire are complaining about the difficulties selling at fund-raising functions for a women's group, and particularly with getting people to buy the produce (they complain about how 'fussy' people are about what they'll buy and how much they are prepared to pay). At the beginning of this extract they are quite plainly in agreement about these difficulties.

(20) [SBL:3:1:9]

- 1 Marylou: No:. This little petty selling stuff isn' fit for the birds.
 2 Claire: Yeah becuz I ass th[e neighbours they look et
 3 Marylou: [Ah'm not a doo:r ringer en I: I jus:t can't.
 4 I don'know.
 5 Claire: Well, I don't like to a:sk th'people
 6 I kno:w ei [ther:.
 7 Marylou: [n : N o? becuz you: they sorta feel obligated.=
 8 Claire: =.khhhh Ye::ah? I: uh (.) ask my neighbour a:n' uh (.) she
 9 uh f-firs' she said she would c'z w'had'm mark'do:wn so .hhhh
 10 (.) .m.t she bought one la:st year'n so when ah went'n took it
 11 out she didn' wannit becuz it wz sli:c'. Wul ih wz sli:ced la:st
 12 yea:r.
 13 Marylou: M[m: hm?
 14 Claire: [.hhhhhhh But I mean it's jis something theh you [f e e l like
 15 they-: : :
 16 Marylou: [b't see I
 17 didn' ev'n know it was sli:ced.
 18 Claire: Hu:h?
 19 Marylou: I din' ev'n know it was sliced ah wz so shocked when I put the
 20 knife in ennit jus' fell o:ff?=hu-u[huh huh [huh
 21 Claire: [Ya:h [It's th:at's u-ther all
 22 individj'lly sli:ced.

Apparently in support of Marylou's complaining about the selling they have to do for fundraising ('This little petty selling stuff isn' fit for the birds'), Claire reports

that her neighbour at first agreed to buy a cake which was marked down in price, then declined to take it because ‘when ah went’n took it out she didn’ wannit becuz it wz slī:c’ (lines 10–12). Her complaint about her neighbour’s change of mind is that she should have known it was sliced because she bought one of the same cakes last year and they were sliced then. Overlapping with Claire’s continuation, Marylou explains that she also didn’t know it was sliced (lines 16–17) – to which Claire responds by initiating repair, ‘Hu:h?’ (line 18).

A possible basis for Claire’s repair initiation here is that she might not have heard the beginning of Marylou’s utterance, owing to their speaking simultaneously, lines 14–17. But in this respect, note that their happening to talk in overlap is associated with Marylou having withheld (in line 13) any affiliative response to Claire’s complaint. Thus Claire continues, line 14, already in the absence of support from Marylou (after an opportunity she had in line 13, for example, to express indignation on Claire’s behalf at her neighbour’s change of mind) – but gives way in the course of Marylou’s delayed and now overtly disaffiliative response in lines 16–17.¹⁴

Marylou’s response is disaffiliative in this way: in the context of Claire’s immediately prior complaint, Marylou’s explanation that she also was misled is close to support of Claire’s neighbour’s position. She is not at all aligning with Claire’s complaint against her neighbour, but rather offers some confirmation of how the neighbour might reasonably have thought that the cake was in a whole piece. So that whilst Claire might have expected an affiliative response from Marylou, by way of a continuation of their mutual and collaborative complaints about how unreasonable people are, in the course of which she’s told this story about her neighbour, instead Marylou apparently sides with the neighbour. Once again, the co-participant’s ‘dis-preferred’ response to speaker A’s (Claire’s) previous turn is met by speaker A’s repair initiation. However, in this case one needs to be cautious about treating the

¹⁴ There is a pattern associated with incipient ‘disagreement’ by recipients, a pattern illustrated in a collection which Jefferson put together for an exercise in conversation analysis. In response to an assessment, or somesuch remark by first speaker, recipient/second speaker makes no response, i.e. there is a silence; following which, both speakers begin speaking simultaneously, or nearly simultaneously. Here are two cases from Jefferson’s collection.

Ava: It’s only f’fifty minutes anyway,
(0.6)

Ava: [A:nd uh,

Bea: [.hh W’I I’ll see.

Fanny: Well, of course I think we all knew that she- that she was sj:ck.
(0.5)

Fanny: But [eh no-

Betty: [But we nevu^h thought she was ez sick ez she was.

The first speaker, having begun in such a way as to indicate a continuation of his/her first turn (i.e. with a conjunction in turn-initial position), quickly drops out of the overlapping talk, leaving the recipient/second speaker to complete a turn which indicates that he/she has some doubt (qualification etc.) about what first speaker said (hence their having delayed a response is associated with their ‘disagreement’ with first speaker; Pomerantz, 1984). What occurs in (20) is very like this pattern, except that Marylou ‘delays’ her qualified, doubting response, not by silence, as in the two illustrative cases here, but by merely acknowledging Claire’s complaining assessment, with the minimal token ‘Mm hm?’. She further delays (in comparison with these cases) her qualification until well into Claire’s subsequent turn.

repair initiation unambiguously as being a way of dealing with Marylou's dispreferred response to her (Claire's) complaint; given the overlap noted above between the repairable turn and its prior turn, there is that alternative account for Claire's repair initiation. I shall return to this issue in the concluding discussion.

In each of the instances reviewed in this section, (13)–(20), speaker B initiates repair with an 'open' class NTRI in response to a prior turn by speaker A which is in some fashion problematic – not in terms of its topical connection with what came before, as was the case in (9), (10) and (12), but in terms of its 'appropriateness' as a response to what speaker B said in the turn prior to the repairable. The sense in which speaker B may perceive the prior (repairable) turn not to be an appropriate response varies from the quite innocent, in instances such as (14)–(17), through to those in which speaker B has grounds for suspecting A's lack of alignment – thus suggesting that matters of repair shade into incipient differences or conflict between participants. But whatever the particular or local sense of (in)appropriateness that may occasion the repair initiation, each of these instances occurs in a sequential environment in which there is something problematic – and hence potentially puzzling, for speaker B – about the apparent lack of fit between the repairable turn and his/her previous turn.

4. Discussion

In the section above, I have been developing a sequential analysis of the use of 'open' class NTRI's – but not, however, along the lines more usually associated with studies of repair sequences in conversation. That is, I have not investigated here the 'repair management' sequences initiated by 'open' class NTRI's, and through which troubles in talk are resolved. Instead, I have investigated the sequences prior to, or leading up to, the employment of this class of NTRI. Following this track, two kinds of sequential environment in which 'open' class NTRI's occur have been described. First, one in which the repairable turn does not appear to connect referentially with its prior turn, and hence from the recipient's perspective seems to be topically disconnected with what was being talked about. Analysis reveals that such apparently topically disjunctive (repairable) turns were designed by the co-participants (speaker A) to connect with, or develop sequentially occasioned activities; however the absence of any overt referential connection may render those sequential links to an ongoing activity opaque, and hence puzzling, to the recipients, particularly as they have grounds for treating the topics of their prior turns as incomplete. The second type of environment is one in which the repairable turn, although manifestly connected topically (referentially etc.) with its prior turn, is somehow inapposite or inappropriate as a response to that prior turn (though the specific nature of that inappropriateness, and hence sense of the repairable's problemativeness for the recipient, is locally variable).

It should be emphasised that the finding reported here, concerning two sequential environments associated with 'open' class NTRI's, is not a general account for all instances of the occurrence of such forms of repair initiation. It is clear that 'open'

class NTRI's are used in many other circumstances besides those identified here. Perhaps the most familiar such circumstance is one in which there is quite clear evidence that speaker B's problem is straightforwardly that of not having heard what speaker A said. For example, cases such as the following occur not infrequently, in which the auditory problem for speaker B arises from two people happening to speak to him/her simultaneously.

- (21) [Holt:M88:2:1:8]
- 1 Mark: Uh:m Lesley's been teaching the whole'v this yea:r?.hhhh
 2 Uh:: she went in to do uh:: uh a couple a'weeks: for uh:: .hh
 3 teacher who had s- back trouble 'n: this teacher had such seve:re
 4 trouble that she finished up h .hhhh uh:m she's only- she's (0.4)
 5 gunna stop hh (.) eeyuh e-the end'v this::: uh m:q:nt.h .hhh
 6 [hhhh
 7 Lesley: [Well tell'er I may not b[e able to come cz there's so m'ch t'do at
 8 Dwayne: [Oh what fr'm t a k i n g over from'er
 9 Dwayne: [() o r w h at.
 10 Lesley: [s c h o o :l. To the wedding.=
 11 Mark: =SORRY?
 12 Dwayne: Is is Lesley taking o:ver from her or what.

Mark is talking to Dwayne on the telephone when, in line 7, Lesley, Mark's wife, who is co-present in the room, asks him to tell Dwayne something: as she does so, Dwayne begins (line 8) simultaneously to ask Mark a question about what Mark had been reporting in lines 1–6, resulting in almost complete overlap between what Lesley is telling him, and Dwayne is asking him (lines 7–10). This rather dramatically and clearly illustrates the way in which auditory problems can generate repair initiations (Mark's 'SORRY?' in line 11). Of course, auditory problems are not restricted to circumstances in which a third party 'interrupts' the talk between two speakers: for instance, overlapping talk between speakers A and B may itself create auditory difficulties – a possibility which was discussed in the context of (20).

[from (20)]

- 14 Claire: .hhhhhhh But I mean it's jis something theh you [f e e l] like
 15 they-: : :
 16 Marylou: [B't see I
 17 didn' ev'n know it was slj:ced.
 18 Claire: Hu:h?

The overlap between Claire's turn in line 14 and Marylou's in line 16 raises the possibility that Claire's repair initiation in line 18 is occasioned by her not having heard the beginning of Marylou's turn in line 16, rather than that she heard Marylou as disaffiliating with her complaint, as proposed above. This is only a reminder of what is perhaps the canonical sequential source of trouble which can generate 'open' class NTRI's, namely overlapping talk resulting in one participant not having heard what the other said.

However, although that may be the canonical source/form of troubles associated with ‘open’ class NTRI’s, that cannot either be a general account for the occurrence of such NTRI’s. Many of the cases analysed above illustrate ways in which a speaker may initiate repair, not apparently because he/she has not heard or understood what was said, but because what was said was in some fashion inapposite. This is most plainly evident in cases in which one speaker initiates repair in order to correct some aspect of the propriety of what the other speaker said, notably in the very familiar way adults initiate repair in response to utterances by children which do not accord with expected standards of politeness. One example will, perhaps, be sufficient to illustrate the kinds of cases which occur with considerable frequency in adult–child interaction, in which adults respond with ‘Pardon/what?’ etc. to children’s requests which have not been accompanied with ‘please’.

(22) [Johnstone:14:068]

Child: Put on th’ li::ght

(0.9)

Mother: Pa:rdo:n

(.)

Child: Put on the light please

(.)

Mother () better

A further example serves to illustrate the ways children can mobilise and exploit – perhaps by way of parody – the very use of this form of NTRI to which they are so regularly subjected.

(23) [Denchar:E:538:544]

Mother: Mhairi will you take the:se things

(0.6)

Child: Wha:t

(1.8)

Mother: Come on quick

(.)

Child: Yer not saying plea::se=

Mother: =(No:: (.) just take one)

Such instances highlight the point that a speaker may select an ‘open’ repair form in such a way as to *claim* not to have heard (or understood) what the other said, in circumstances where the repairable trouble is manifestly not a problem of hearing etc., but rather one associated with the propriety of the prior turn – here, the absence of appropriate forms of politeness.¹⁵

¹⁵ The use of ‘Pardon’ etc. as a reminder to a child to say ‘Please’ has become so conventionalised that this sometimes results in occasional misunderstandings, such as the following:

My purpose in this reminder about the variety of circumstances in which speakers may select ‘open’ class NTRI’s – ranging from those in which speakers evidently have troubles in hearing the repairable turn, through to cases in which it is plain that the trouble concerns the propriety of what they heard the other say – is to emphasise that there can be no general account for the selection of ‘open’ class NTRI’s. As was mentioned earlier, there is no single, determinate relationship between a particular source or kind of trouble, and this (or any other) form of repair initiation (Schegloff, 1987: 216–217). The kinds of sequential environments associated with ‘open’ class NTRI’s identified in this paper simply add to our knowledge about the sources of troubles which this form of NTRI may be mobilised to handle.

There are several implications to be drawn from my account of these sequential environments. First, it suggests that ‘understanding’ in conversation goes beyond co-participants recognising the literal sense of each other’s turns: a further condition for their contributing to discourse (Clark, 1992; Clark and Schaefer, 1987) is that they ‘understand’ the sequential connection between the prior turn and activities being managed in previous turns; which is, of course, fundamental to discourse cohesion/coherence, and more generally to the conversation analytic approach to intersubjectivity (Schegloff, 1990, 1992). Hence there are cases cited above in which it is likely that speaker B ‘understood’ what the other said, in a literal sense, but could not find a sense of the repairable’s coherence or sequential or ‘activity’ connectedness (see (9), (10) and (12)). In this respect it may be significant that the subsequent repair by speaker A, in which A only repeats (or repeats with little modification) the repairable turn, generally does not provide the recipient (i.e. speaker B) with any more substantial information etc. from which to arrive at an ‘understanding’ of the repairable turn. All that the repair initiation and repair sequence give speaker B is more time, perhaps in which to find the sequential link that he/she was at first unable to recognise.¹⁶

[Gatt:A:218:751]

Child: (Pull up) the ro:pe with thi:s do:wn
(0.9)

Mother: I beg your pardon
(.)

Child: Plea:se
(1.1)

Mother: No: I don’t understand what you’re saying=what

¹⁶ This is, perhaps, apparent in instances where the speaker who initiated the repair does not wait for, or need, a repair by the other in order subsequently to answer. In these extracts, for example, Mum and Emma, respectively, initiate repair; but they then proceed to answer the question each was asked, before waiting for their co-participants (Lesley and Gladys) to do a repair.

[from (7)]

Lesley: =.TCH. Oh yes. wgy (.) Can you work it all out,

Mum: Pardon?

(.)

Mum: Oh yes. Ye:s yes’v course I could.

[from (8)]

Emma: Well [th:a:nk you dear I’ll be o:ver.

Gladys: [S o u- eh

Secondly, it is important to distinguish the use of a repair form which implies a *claim* not to have heard or understood the prior repairable turn, from the actual, probable or possible cognitive states of a speaker thus initiating repair. This was, of course, suggested by Sacks' observation that claims not to have heard can be employed as a device in interaction, enabling speakers to avoid doing an action which might properly go in that slot, but without simply ignoring what they properly ought to do (Sacks, 1992; Fall, 1964 lectures 6–7; see also Drew, 1995). At any rate, the point is that the use of 'open' class repair initiators need not correspond with the actual cognitive states of not having heard or understood.

This has implications, I think, for the analytic status to be accorded to the proposal, mentioned above in the introductory section, that there is a 'natural ordering' of forms of other-initiated repair, "based on their relative 'strength' or 'power' on such parameters as their capacity to 'locate' a repairable"; and that there is a 'preference for stronger over weaker initiators" (Schegloff et al., 1977: 369). In some formulations of this 'natural ordering' of repair initiators, there is the suggestion that what is being proposed is a cognitive basis for selecting a particular type of NTRI – most notably in Clark's model of what it takes to produce a ratified contribution to discourse, involving a principle of 'minimising effort' in remedying troubles in understanding. According to this principle, if a speaker has difficulty hearing or understanding only part of what the other said, "he ought to indicate the parts he did hear, or the parts he didn't hear, or request O's help in reaching states 2 and 3 (correct hearing and understanding)" (Clark and Schaefer, 1987: 29). Thus, the argument goes, an 'open' class NTRI is used only in last resort; because it will require the complete re-presentation of the original and troublesome utterance and therefore take the most effort to remedy, this class of repair initiation is used only when the speaker has not heard or understood enough of the troublesome turn to repeat any of it.¹⁷

Clark's account of this principle, and the role it plays in his model of contributing to discourse, is generally formulated in terms which are compatible with avoiding claims about participants' actual cognitive states. Nevertheless, it is important that we should exercise caution in this respect, and not treat forms of repair initiation which 'presuppose', 'imply' or 'indicate' that a speaker has not heard enough of

Gladys: Alright dear a:nd uh front er back.h

(1.0)

Emma: Wu:t?

(.)

Emma: h [huh

Gladys: [I s [Ay f:-

Ema: [QH:::: AH GUESS: th' FRO:nt. be better?

¹⁷ An account which in certain respects is similar seems to be implied in the experiments reported by Valian and Wales (1976). These aimed to test whether speakers had knowledge about underlying (transformational) syntactic structures, and focussed on whether subjects repeated or clarified their original utterances in response to an experimenter's 'What?'. The design and interpretation of these experiments rest on the assumption that 'What?' is that form of repair which is naturally associated with those syntactic distortions which result in such psychological complexity as to impede an understanding of the entire sentence.

the prior turn to repeat any of it (Clark, 1992: 155; Clark and Schaefer, 1987: 29) as indicating that *in fact* the speaker did not hear (or understand) what was said (for an egregious example of the failure to exercise such caution, see Zahn, 184: 59). One cannot, in other words, treat what is perhaps the canonical use of ‘open’ class NTRI’s as representing the cognitive basis for its being employed. The significance of the finding of this report is to suggest that ‘open’ class NTRI’s are a device, in the sense Sacks meant, the employment of which is associated with moves in interactional sequences. This device is *designed to convey* that the difficulty affects or permeates the prior (repairable) turn as a whole. In the sequential environments identified above, e.g. when from the recipient’s perspective it appears that the speaker has rather abruptly changed topic, there are grounds for the recipient treating the repairable trouble as not localised in a specific word or phrase in the prior turn, but rather as a matter which arises from the inappositeness or inappropriateness of the turn itself. It is important, however, not to go beyond that, and treat the ordering of repair initiation forms as offering a general, cognitive explanation for speakers’ selecting such ‘open’ class NTRI’s, e.g. along the lines that speakers only select this form of repair initiation if they have not heard or understood sufficient of the prior (repairable) turn to be able to repeat all or part of it – especially bearing in mind that ‘understanding’ may involve more than the literal understanding of what was said.

Finally, it is clear from the analysis above that in many instances of troubles addressed through ‘open’ class NTRI’s the trouble source is not to be found ‘in’ the prior turn: the trouble source lies, rather, in the perceived lack of ‘fit’ between that turn and its prior sequence. The recipient, speaker B, may perfectly well hear and ‘understand’ what was said in the prior turn, i.e. may well know what the other said; the difficulty or the hiatus arises from B’s perception that what the other said is problematic or inapposite – in sequential or activity terms. In the kinds of instances reviewed here, from speaker B’s perspective speaker A may have appeared to have shifted topic abruptly, or might have failed to produce a sufficiently fitted or affiliative response to the prior turn. Thus the trouble is sequential in character, and involves the repairable turn’s sequential fittedness or appropriateness. In such cases repair initiation appears to be associated with the speaker not understanding how the previous speaker came to say that here, or ‘where we are in the talk’ (in the case of those NTRI’s in the environment of apparent topic shifts); or with trying to correct what the speaker regards as having been an inapposite action on the part of the other. Hence, for these cases at least, the trouble sources are sequential rather than sentential/utterance-based: this suggests an alternative focus on comprehension and lack of comprehension in naturally occurring talk, away from reference, deixis, syntactic complexities and the like (e.g. Valian and Wales, 1976), and instead towards the role of a turn at talk in its sequential context.

Appendix: Transcription notation

The transcriptions in this paper conform as closely as possible to standard orthography. The transcription notation system was developed by Gail Jefferson, and is generally used in

conversation analysis. A full account is given in J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage eds., *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: ix-xvi. A summary of the symbols used in this paper is as follows:

Aspects of the relative timing of utterances

Intervals either within or between turns, are shown as pauses in tenths of seconds, thus (0.7). A discernible pause which is too short to be timed mechanically is shown as a micro-pause, thus, (.)

Overlaps between utterances are indicated by square brackets, the point of overlap being marked with a single left-hand bracket, thus:

Dana: Have I wha[t them.
Gordon: [.hh.hhh D]ropped theh-them.

Contiguous utterances, where there is no discernible interval between turns, are linked by an equals sign, thus:

Gordon: Hi William how's the guitar playing going.=
William: = :Oh not too ba:d.

Characteristics of speech delivery

Various gross aspects of speech delivery are captured in these transcripts by punctuation symbols (which, therefore, are not used to mark conventional grammatical units) and other forms of notation, as follows:

- . A period indicates a falling tone.
- , A comma indicates a continuing tone.
- ? A question mark indicates a rising inflection (not necessarily a question).
- : The stretching of a sound is indicated by colons, the number of which correspond to the length of the stretching, thus. 'put on the' li:::ght'.
- .h Inhalation is shown by a stop, followed by 'h', the length of the inhalation being indicated by the number of h's.
- h. Outbreath is shown by 'h' followed by a stop, the length being indicated by the number of h's.
- (hh) Audible aspirations are indicated in the speech in which they occur (including in laughter);

Other audible sounds are represented as closely as possible in standard orthography, e.g. .Tch for a click.

Sound stress is shown by underlining, those words or parts of a word which are emphasised being underlined thus:

Gordon: Hi William how's the guitar playing going.

Particularly emphatic speech, usually with raised pitch, is shown by capital letters (other than, as conventionally, at the beginning of turns), thus:

Emma: OH::: I DON'T KNOW I JIS' CA:N'T SEEM TO SAY BLUE IS BLUE...

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