

Thesis title: Conversational repair in adult-child interaction: a descriptive study

Abstract

Research has demonstrated that young children possess a remarkable capacity for learning (Salonen & Laakso, 2009). Accordingly, interactions between informal and formal educators (i.e., parents and teachers) and young children, as well as those among peers, are critical for supporting childhood development across a range of domains, including literacy, vocabulary acquisition, gross motor coordination, sensory integration, and interactional skills. One key component of acquiring interactive skills involves the management of conversational repair. In social interactions, young children frequently encounter difficulties in speaking, hearing, or understanding due to their still-developing linguistic capacities. These difficulties, referred to as trouble sources or repairables, are often addressed through repair practices initiated either by the speaker (i.e., the child) or by interlocutors (i.e., adults and peers) (Schegloff et al., 1977). While prior research has documented children's ability to self-repair from as early as two years of age (Clark, 1982; Forrester, 2008; Scollon, 1979), their capability to identify and target specific elements of speech for repair often relies on external feedback or stimuli (i.e., other-initiated repair) from teachers, parents and peers (Salonen & Laakso, 2009). Adult mediation in particular scaffold children's efforts to revise and repair their talk in alignment with normative expectations of language and social activities (Salonen & Laakso, 2009). Despite the established role of adult intervention in supporting repair, less is known about the intersection of these two trajectories, namely, how children's self-repair attempts transition into moments where adults step in to mediate. This gap thus creates an academic imperative to investigate the systematic patterns of child-led repairs both in spontaneous instances and in those mediated by others. This research then aims to describe and understand how children carry out self-repair in interactions involving adults at home and in the classroom context. It is guided by three research questions: (1) What self-repair operations do children implement in adult-child interactions? (2) How do non-vocal resources facilitate talk in children's self-repair operations in adult-child interactions? and (3) How do children's self-repair attempts transition into adult-mediated forms of repair? These questions aim to clarify the collaborative nature of self-repair mechanisms, highlighting both child-led and adult-scaffolded contributions from a comprehensive multimodal perspective, as they unfold within the moment-by-moment interactional contingencies. The research is expected to reveal the dynamic process through which young children engage in moment-to-moment monitoring and adjustment of language production, as well as their collaborative efforts with adults in managing trouble sources. Such insights not only serve as a critical indicator of the emerging metalinguistic awareness and social-interactive skills in typically developing populations (cf. van Lier, 1998) but also provide a valuable benchmark for identifying and assessing children with language impairments (Salonen & Laakso, 2009; cf. McTear & Conti-Ramsden, 1992; Salmenlinna, 2005). The findings are also anticipated to yield practical implications for key stakeholders such as parents, teachers and speech pathologists by informing potential future pedagogical strategies and interventions for children's language development (Radford, 2009).