

## **HOW DO TEACHERS MANAGE TOPIC AND REPAIR?**

Julia Ridley – Whitefields Schools and Centre

Julie Radford – Institute of Education (all correspondence)

Merle Mahon - University College London

### **ABSTRACT**

A case study is presented of a ten-year-old child described as having comprehension difficulties, in conversation with a specialist teacher, a mainstream teacher and a peer. Tape recordings of social talk between the child and the adults and peer were made in the school setting. The data are subjected to detailed sequential analysis, drawing on some of the insights gained into the management of topic and repair by researchers working in the tradition of conversation analysis. We find that both our subject's specialist teacher and the mainstream peer use some helpful devices to extend the topical material produced by the child and to repair 'troubles' in the conversation. We consider the language learning potential of these turns and the implications for classroom teachers working with children with language needs.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The current agenda of inclusion (DfEE, 1998) means that mainstream teachers are assuming greater responsibility for pupils with speech and language needs. This agenda is to be welcomed for many reasons and, for language learning specifically, it creates potentially useful opportunities in terms of the language models available to children with speech and language difficulties from mainstream teachers and peers. However, if such provision is to be effective there is a need to know more about how teachers can best respond to pupils with a language difficulty in the classroom. One of the first concerns is how teachers create opportunities for learners with language needs to access the curriculum. This was exemplified by Martin and Miller (1999) in their collection of studies concerning teachers reflecting on the planning of science and maths. Whilst useful, such studies rarely include elements of reflection on the actual talk that occurs between teacher and learner, in spite of the fact that this is the context in which learning takes place and is likely to be the source of difficulties for such children. There is, however, a small amount of research on the characteristics of talk used by specialist teachers in language units (Sadler and Mogford-Bevan, 1997). This work considers the implications of teacher language on pupils with a language need. Exactly how a specific language difficulty can influence teacher behaviour, and vice versa, is clearly worthy of further investigation.

Specialist language support for mainstream teachers is perceived to be a component of successful inclusion for these young people with specific language needs (Law et al., 2000). The Teacher Training Agency, acknowledging the importance of quality

training for such professionals, has published guidance on training standards in the area of communication and interaction (TTA, 1999). According to the TTA (1999: 17) teachers with additional specialist skills in this area will need to demonstrate that they can ‘modify their own language and communicative capability and behaviour so that they meet pupils’ needs’. It is timely, therefore, to reflect in further detail on the nature of such modifications. Our argument is that teachers need not only to reflect in detail on the way they use language in instructional talk, but also on how they design their conversations with children with language needs.

Since the 1970’s much attention has been paid by researchers to interactions between teacher and learner for **cognitive** gain in the classroom. Vygotsky’s notion of the zone of proximal development has been useful, defined as the gap between what the learner can achieve alone and what can be achieved with assistance (Vygotsky, 1978). In this theory, instruction, including teacher talk, should be just ahead of development, reminding the teacher that interactions alone are not a sufficient condition for pupils to learn. Related to this is Wood’s notion of scaffolding (Wood, 1998) which emphasises the need for contingent support so, for interactions with pupils with a language difficulty, the teacher needs a more detailed description of how supportive strategies will operate.

There is arguably less understanding of how **social** interaction between teacher and learner in school settings operates. In what follows a framework for the analysis of interaction is presented, broadly encompassing the notions of topic and repair. This framework is based on the Conversation Analysis (CA) approach which stems from an ethnomethodological and sociological tradition, and is appropriate for this study

for a number of reasons. In the first place, it derives from a research tradition which is expressly empirical and inductive. The method rejects reliance on intuitive assumption whilst advocating a careful and open-minded attention to detail. Secondly, CA differs from other approaches to the study of discourse with regard to the procedures employed for recognising and describing units of data. These units are conceived as social actions or interactions, such as verbal utterances and other vocal behaviours, non-verbal behaviours, and silences. Rather than imposing a preconceived and arbitrary system of taxonomy onto these units, the units are recognised and described by the same means as they are shown to be recognised by the participants in the talk-in-interaction. Thus, by paying careful attention to both the design and the sequential properties of talk, and by making recourse to the normative procedures by which the participants themselves interpret the talk which they collaboratively construct, a particularly well warranted means of pragmatic analysis is made available (Levinson, 1983; Heritage, 1988; Heritage and Atkinson, 1984; Drew, 1990; Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1995a [1972]).

### **Topic in teacher talk**

The turn structure in classroom talk is widely reported to comprise initiation (turn 1), response (turn 2), follow-up (turn 3) (IRF). It is worth considering here the ‘work’ done by each turn in mainstream classroom talk in more detail. Radford and Tarplee (2000) demonstrate the importance of paying particular attention to how each turn is designed to generate topic in social talk. For example, some types of initiation in turn 1 predict different responses in turns 2 and 3, and the various designs of these turns can serve to keep a topic alive, or lead it to close. However, classroom talk differs

from topic in social talk in that the teacher typically retains control of the topical agenda. Some work has paid attention to the consequences of various ways of designing the first turn, concluding, for example, that the use of questions as initiations predicts responses of different length in contrast to the design of first turn as personal contributions or phatics (Wood et al., 1986; Sadler and Mogford-Bevan, 1997). Several issues are worth exploring in this area, in order to investigate how to provide support for the pupil's language learning in the long term. Firstly, is it a useful measure to examine the length of the pupil's response or is the design of the teacher's turn more illuminating? Secondly, a likely scenario for learners with language needs is that their second turns will be minimal, unclear or incorrect. The teacher's third turn then becomes crucial, and the question is, how can a teacher respond to the second turn in a way that is helpful in terms of development of the topic, thus serving the function of facilitating language learning? Although some attention has been paid to the work of the third turn in talk between children and their parents, (Tarplee, 1996; Mahon, 1997) more information is needed concerning classroom talk with children who have language difficulties.

### **Repair in teacher talk**

Repair is referred to by Milroy and Perkins (1992: 29) as:

‘the many different ways of managing trouble sources in conversation....repair requires a high level of linguistic skill, and can be carried out on the syntax, lexis or phonology of an utterance usually very rapidly in the same turn as the trouble source’.

Repair is of particular interest to teachers working in classrooms where pupils have significant speech and language needs, since there are occasions when the syntax, semantics or phonology of a child's turn is unclear. Several repair types have been documented, depending on who initiates the repair and who carries out the repair. In the case of other-initiated **other**-repair (OIOR), the person who initiates the repair also provides the correction, as in line 3, fragment R1.

#### Fragment R1

1 Teacher what do you think it's for (*holding up a pair of nail scissors*)

2 Pupil it's to. for take our. to take our spelk out (*laughs*)

OIOR → 3 Teacher it's for taking spelks out. Could be

4 Pupil maybe blood miss

Sadler & Mogford-Bevan 1997

In other-initiated **self**-repair (OISR) the initiator of the repair, as shown in fragment R2, a teacher invites the pupil to sort out the trouble alone. This functions as a kind of hint or prompt, but assumes that it is within the linguistic resources of the pupil to repair the original turn.

#### Fragment R2

1 Teacher now you ask me

2 Pupil is him

OISR → 3 Teacher I BEG your pardon

4 Pupil is. is he standing

Some types of repair are shown to be favoured over others in natural conversation (Schegloff et al., 1977). For example, in the talk of adults, other-initiated other-repair (OIOR) is found to be the least preferred option, constituting an explicit correction that may be interpreted as rude. However, there is little research to demonstrate how this preference operates in classrooms. Drew (1981), examining a large body of mainstream classroom data, reports that teachers use a mixture of other-initiated other-repair and other-initiated self-repair, but comments little on the frequency or function of these repair strategies. Sadler and Mogford-Bevan (1997) find that up to half of language unit teachers' repair moves are other-initiated other-repair, the form less likely to be found in adult interaction. They helpfully distinguish between repair turns designed as reformulations and those constituting clarification requests.

Reformulations, they argue, can fulfil a useful function in terms of language learning by expanding the pupil's utterance, rather than functioning as an overt correction (see line 3, fragment R1). This may be likened to the processes of syntactic or semantic expansion found in parent-child interaction (Garton, 1992). Indeed, in turn 4 when the child says 'maybe blood miss' he is not copying the teacher's repair 'it's for taking spelks out', so the teacher's turn does not function as an enforced repetition.

Equally important for working with pupils with language needs is the use of clarification requests. Brinton and Fujiki (1987) list six types of clarification requests that achieve different work according to how much scaffolding they provide the listener. Neutral requests such as 'pardon' provide no support, whereas specific or direct requests can function as a supportive device when they help to indicate the precise nature of the problem to the child. Sadler and Mogford-Bevan (1997) found

that this type of support was occasionally used by language unit teachers (see fragment R2 above).

Repair sequences such as re-formulations and clarification requests are a particular feature of the talk in this study. This occurs since the child has specific comprehension and expressive language difficulties that present challenges for her conversational partners.

### **Purpose of the study**

In broad terms the study aims to describe how the interactional behaviour of a child with a comprehension difficulty influences the talk of her conversational partners. It also aims to describe what the partners in talk do to keep the conversation going smoothly. More specifically the study attempts to address the following two themes. First, in relation to the management of topic in children, how do the teachers and the child's peer design their turns to respond to the topic generated by the child, and what are the implications for the talk that follows? Next, when there are trouble spots in the conversation what devices are used to carry out repair work, and what are the potential differences between these designs?

### **METHOD**

This is a case study of a ten-year-old girl called Lopa whose first language is English. Lopa is described as having a specific language impairment characterised by both receptive and expressive difficulties. Receptively, the speech and language therapist



reports problems following complex instructions and understanding the meaning of words. Expressively, the grammatical structure of sentences is limited, although she is able to provide a lot of information. These difficulties have implications for the listener in terms of topic continuation and are the source of troubles that necessitate repair and clarification. Lopa has attended a special school for pupils with specific language difficulties since the age of five, although currently she attends her local mainstream school on two days a week. An indication of her cognitive ability is that she reads fluently and uses appropriate strategies to tackle unknown words.

The data consist of recordings of talk between Lopa and three familiar conversational partners: the teacher from the special school (fragments TS1-4), the teacher from the mainstream school (fragments TM1-4) and a friend (Clare) from the mainstream setting (fragments MP1-3). Lopa has known each of the teachers for approximately four months and was invited to select the friend herself. Clare was aged 10;2 years and had no reported language difficulties. Each dyad was recorded over two 20-minute sessions on audio and video-cassette. The special school teacher and Lopa were recorded alone in a small teaching room, whilst the other recordings took place in an office in the mainstream school.

A photograph album was used as an initial device to start the conversations. The subjects were told that they could talk about the album as much as they liked while being free to talk about any other topic as the conversation progressed. The researcher ensured that the subjects understood the nature of the task before commencing by asking the children to repeat back the instructions.

Initially, large segments of the talk were transcribed and scrutinised for patterns in the data. As salient features such as use of the third turn became apparent, specific fragments were analysed according to procedures used by conversation analysts. As was explained above, this analysis uncovered detail regarding the design of turns at particular points in the sequence of talk and the significance of these features in relation to earlier and later turns. In the analysis presented below, particular attention is paid to:

- a) the design of third turn receipt of pupil topic
- b) the repair turns made by the teachers and by the peer.

## **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Fragments of interactions are presented in order to illustrate the styles of the three conversational partners. Following the presentation of each fragment, the design of the third turn is explained with a description of the work achieved by its syntax and semantics.

### **Specialist language teacher (TS) and Lopa**

TS uses several devices in the third turn to respond to Lopa, depending on her understanding of Lopa's contribution:

Fragment TS1 (talk about Lopa's cousin, Hamera)

- 1 Teacher lovely and how old is Hamera she looks a lot older than you
- 2 Lopa um:::um:::twenty five
- 3 Teacher she's about twenty five oh right that's good (.) (*coughs*) what...

In line three the teacher repeats part of Lopa's turn, 'twenty-five', thus showing Lopa that her turn has been understood. The design of this turn is extended to include additional syntactic and semantic features. There is grammatical expansion by using the subject of the sentence 'she' and a contraction of 'is', thus representing the full grammatical structure of the sentence. Use of 'about' is interesting; it could be a response to Lopa's use of 'um', indicating awareness of her potential problems in being exact about the age. In this sense it functions also as a semantic expansion, suggesting a subtle adaptation of the meaning of the sentence.

In fragment TS2 Lopa uses 'alphabet' in line 2 to describe the toys in the picture. While this is not a totally inappropriate answer to the initial question, it may be considered incomplete, and the teacher indicates awareness of a trouble by using 'oh' in the next turn. She then, without explicitly stating that Lopa is incorrect, takes the opportunity to provide a more complete version of the sentence by saying 'it's an..' as well as offering the full vocabulary item 'alphabet game'. A pause follows in which Lopa has an opportunity to repeat or upgrade her own contribution. Since she fails to do this, the teacher continues with an increase in volume, which functions as a preliminary to a change of topic.

Fragment TS2 (looking at a photograph of Lopa and her brother playing with toys)

- 1 Teacher what's your brother playing with (.) what's that
- 2 Lopa um alphabet
- 3 Teacher oh it's an alphabet game (.) RIGHT LOVELY GREAT should we go on to another one...

In the next example (TS3), the pauses and use of fillers ‘um’, ‘ah’ in line 2 indicate that Lopa is having some difficulty formulating the answer to the teacher’s question, possibly because of its open-ended nature. In line 2, the teacher provides the missing verb in the next turn and leaves a pause for Lopa to continue the topic that she has begun in line 2. When Lopa does not continue her topic, the teacher repairs this lack of expansion by designing her turn to move towards a topic shift.

#### Fragment TS3

- 1 Teacher what do you what did you like best about Mauritius
- 2 Lopa um the wedding and um (.) ah (.) umm:: the friends there
- 3 Teacher seeing all your friends (0.1) would you like to go and live there?
- 4 Lopa yeah

From these three fragments, it appears that the specialist language teacher designs her third turns mainly as reformulations of Lopa’s second turns. These reformulations act as expansions, and ostensibly provide a language learning opportunity for Lopa.

Fragment TS4 represents an example of topic initiation by Lopa, so it falls to the teacher in line 2 to receive the topic and establish it as a subject matter for joint discussion.

#### Fragment TS4

- 1 Lopa Angena’s gone to stay to Mauritius now
- 2 Teacher she’s gone to stay in Mauritius now
- 3 Lopa yeah=
- 4 Teacher =right

- 5 Lopa and the and [then  
→6 Teacher [is she going to live there all the time now  
7 Lopa yeah  
8 Teacher oh right

Lopa uses an inappropriate word in her initiation, so the specialist teacher engages in a sequence of repair activity designed to sort out the ambiguous preposition 'to' in line 1. In line 2, the teacher repeats the basic sentence structure whilst substituting the pronoun 'she' in subject position. Lopa treats this as an understanding check since there follows agreement 'yeah' in line 4. At the same time the teacher carries out a subtle repair of the incorrect preposition, achieved without placing additional stress on 'in', so she does not seem to be using the turn with the sole aim of correction. Lines 3 and 4 indeed suggest that any repair issues are resolved, but when Lopa attempts to continue in line 5, the teacher interrupts, orienting to her hesitation and pursuing further repair. Line 6 is therefore designed to continue the repair from line 1 by clarifying the length of Angena's stay in Mauritius and Lopa provides an acceptance of this as the correct interpretation in line 7. This repair work has taken 8 turns to achieve and is characterised by two explicit attempts by the teacher to clarify the meaning of Lopa's turns.

From these fragments it can be seen that the TS structures her repair turns in such a way as to provide language learning opportunities for Lopa, by using reformulations. Of interest here is the length of repair sequence (8 turns). When topic is initiated by Lopa (fragment TS4) as opposed to the shorter sequence (3-4 turns) when topic is initiated by the teacher (fragments TS1, TS2, TS3). The next section will examine the talk between the mainstream teacher and Lopa.

## **Mainstream teacher (TM) and Lopa**

Following fragment TM1, there is an analysis of how the mainstream teacher designs her turn (line 3) to respond to the topical material offered by Lopa in second turn.

Fragment TM1 (looking at photos)

- 1 Teacher who's this person
- 2 Lopa my brother
- 3 Teacher your brother what's your brother's name
- 4 Lopa Baber

In the third turn, TM repeats part of Lopa's turn, taking the form of repetition of a single clause element. TM's use of 'your brother' does the job of receiving Lopa's answer, and the rearrangement of 'your' contrasted with 'my' provides a useful model of appropriate deixis within the noun phrase. However, there are two further features of interest here. First, there is notably no pause that would provide Lopa with an opportunity to say more about her topic, the teacher proceeding immediately with a closed question. Next, turn three is not used by the mainstream teacher to expand Lopa's contribution, in contrast to TS in fragment TS3, line 3, therefore not providing Lopa with a further language learning opportunity.

Examples TM2 and TM3 illustrate how the mainstream teacher designs her repair turns.

Fragment TM2 (*talk about the age of Lopa's brother*)

- 1 Teacher how much older do you know
- 2 Lopa um (0.2) about two metres I think
- 3 Teacher oh two metres (0.1) oh dear do you think that's the tape...

In TM2, Lopa may have difficulty understanding the teacher's question, as indicated by her use of 'um', her pause and adding a hesitant 'I think'. The teacher, by repeating Lopa's answer 'two metres' verbatim, gives it the status of a correct response. She does not use this turn to initiate repair of what appears to the analyst to be a trouble source. She prefaces her turn with 'oh', which could indicate surprise at Lopa's answer. There is possibly an opportunity for Lopa to self-repair when the teacher pauses after her repetition of 'two metres', but following the pause, there is a technical hitch which appears to end the conversation. However, no attempt seems to have been made by the teacher to clarify Lopa's response, in contrast with the specialist teacher (fragment TS2).

Another example of this is seen in fragment TM3:

Fragment TM3

- 1 Lopa that's where the wedding was
- 2 Teacher ah ah and where was the wedding
- 3 Lopa well about a few: : about a few years ago
- 4 Teacher ah ah
- 5 Lopa that's my cousin and that's my other one and...

In TM 3 Lopa introduces the topic of weddings in the first line without specifying the exact place of the wedding, making her sentence rather ambiguous. The teacher responds with a clarification request in line 2. Lopa's response in line 3 indicates a clear misinterpretation of the question word, understanding 'when' for 'where'. The

opportunity to initiate repair of this is not taken by the mainstream teacher in line 4. Instead, she says 'ah ah'. Lopa continues to talk about the wedding 'that's my cousin...' in line 5, indicating that she has taken the mainstream teacher's 'ah ah' as an acknowledgement of the appropriacy of her turn in line 3.

From these two examples, it seems that the mainstream teacher does not use her turns to initiate repair of what appear to be misunderstandings. In the next fragment (TM4) there are several trouble spots in the conversation (turns 2,4,6) and several attempts by the teacher to clarify further details (turns 3,7,9).

#### Fragment TM4

- 1 Teacher ok tell me about this one
- 2 Lopa that's this one has had a festival
- 3 Teacher what's the festival
- 4 Lopa the festival when you take this one (*points to photo*)
- 5 Teacher um
- 6 Lopa all the way to along straightaway and lock the door and come to the river to come
- 7 Teacher when is this festival
- 8 Lopa um (.)
- 9 Teacher what is the festival about
- 10 Lopa I think it's about um (.)
- 11 Teacher is there a story to it
- 12 Lopa no we just go and pray that's all
- 13 Teacher ok=



14 Lopa =that's my mum

The teacher's questions remain unanswered as there is little orientation by either the teacher or Lopa to the syntax and semantics of previous turns. For example, in line 7 the teacher overlooks the topic extension made by Lopa in line 6, and Lopa's incomplete sentence in line 10 is left unresolved. The closed question in line 11 may be designed by the teacher in order to predict an easier 'yes' or 'no', and move the conversation to a close.

From these fragments, it appears that the mainstream teacher does not provide language learning opportunities for Lopa, as evidenced by the way she designs her turns.

### **Lopa and peer (Clare)**

Lopa's friend, Clare, from the mainstream school uses several devices in the following extracts to extend and repair Lopa's turns, as illustrated in fragment MP1:

Fragment MP1 (talk about a pop group photograph)

- 1 Clare what is your favourite (.) one in the spice girls lady girls  
2 Lopa um I like I like sport sport spice  
→3 Clare sporty mine's mine's baby and sporty (.) is that is that a river there

Clare's use of the single word 'sporty' in line 3 constitutes a reformulation using the correct vocabulary (partial repetition) to indicate that she has understood Lopa's answer to her question, and that the answer is appropriate. At the same time this

reformulation functions as an other- repair by providing an upgraded version of the word. Clare keeps the turn in line 3 by offering a personal contribution 'mine's baby and sporty' whereas she could have opted to ask Lopa another question. Following a pause during which Lopa does not take the opportunity to continue about favourite spice girls, Clare changes the topic by asking a question '...is that a river there?'.

An example of how Clare deals with a potential difficulty is illustrated in fragment MP2:

Fragment MP2 (*talk about tea plantations in Mauritius*)

- |    |       |   |
|----|-------|---|
| 1  | Clare | and where's this  |
| 2  | Lopa  | this is when it this is looks like pla::nts but they look like tea= |
| →3 | Clare | =they're tea aren't they  |
| 4  | Lopa  | yes   |

The potential difficulty occurs in turn two, when Lopa has problems formulating the syntax of her contribution. Clare's turn three is latched, indicating an orientation to Lopa's difficulty in line 2. Clare's turn is then designed as a partial repetition of 'they' and 'tea' but within a correct grammatical model of the sentence. She adds an understanding check 'aren't they' which serves the purpose of satisfactorily clarifying the meaning, as seen in Lopa's agreement 'yes' in turn 4. Overall this is a smoothly achieved repair, in a single turn, resulting in a cohesive sequence of talk.

Extract MP3 illustrates how tenacious Clare can be in her quest for clarity:

Fragment MP3 (*discussing Lopa attending both a mainstream and special school*)

- 1 Clare what do you like about this school (*mainstream school*)
- 2 Lopa well I like the place I know it's near it's nearer my house
- 3 Clare why do you go to Central (*special school*)
- 4 Lopa it's sometimes it's very long it's a long way like my aunty is (0.1)
- 5 Clare but why do you GO:: to Central (0.2)
- 6 Lopa well because of me (0.3) first let's start the first time the first time  
when I was small my mum took me to Central

In line 2 Lopa provides a satisfactory answer to Clare's question in line 1, enabling Clare to pursue her line of questioning about schooling in line 3. However, Lopa does not give a clear response to the question in line 3: she refers to distance rather than the reason for going to the school. Clare initiates a repair by designing her next turn in line 5 to repeat the question with particular emphasis on the verb 'GO'. She also allows a slight pause to give time for Lopa to formulate a response. In line 6 Lopa's use of 'well', a pause and a reformulation suggest that Lopa is trying to explain herself (still unable to supply the answer). Whilst this sequence reflects Lopa's specific language difficulties, it also indicates how her friend makes use of repair strategies to attempt to understand Lopa. In these attempts, the friend provides opportunities for language learning.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This paper presents a detailed examination of the social talk of a ten-year-old pupil, Lopa, who has receptive and expressive language difficulties. The analysis has focused on how her teachers and a peer design their third turns to receive the topic generated by Lopa, as well as the devices they use to carry out repair of troubles in the

talk. In what follows, a summary of the strategies employed by each conversational partner is presented, and, bearing in mind that the data are illustrative rather than representative, there is also some tentative discussion of the implications for the teaching and learning of language.

In relation to receipt of topic in turn three, the principal device used by the specialist teacher is to provide an expansion of the turn produced by Lopa (TS1-3). This takes the form of a complete noun phrase or a fuller syntactic version of turn two, by adding the missing grammatical features such as pronoun, copula, noun or verb. There are also additional semantic features in two of the examples that refine the meaning of Lopa's turn. A further design used by the specialist teacher to receive Lopa's topic is re-formulation of the prior turn (TS4:line 2) in which the syntactic structure remains the same but lexical items are substituted. This design in effect provides a model of the appropriate pronominal substitution for 'Angena' as well as a subtle repair of the preposition.

The mainstream teacher, on the other hand, restricts her turn three response to a partial repetition and there are few additional syntactic or semantic features (TM1-2). The immediate use of a closed question (TM1) further constrains the options available to Lopa in her next turn. This sequence in particular is reminiscent of the typical initiation- response-evaluation (IRE) structure of classroom talk, despite the fact that this talk took place outside the classroom and orients to topics of Lopa's choice and experience.

Lopa's peer, Clare, uses a partial repetition of Lopa's turn to receive her topic (TM1), but there are two additional features. First, like the specialist teacher, she provides an upgraded version of part of the noun phrase, for example 'sporty' in fragment MP1. This simultaneously accomplishes a repair without overt rejection of Lopa's contribution. Second, rather than next ask a question, as did the mainstream teacher, she continues with a personal contribution, in a genuine exchange of opinion with Lopa.

In terms of how the various participants respond to troubles in Lopa's turns, we find that both the specialist teacher and the peer use a form of other repair (OR). The specialist teacher repeats Lopa's sentence whilst substituting the incorrect preposition, placing no prosodic emphasis on the error (TS4), whilst Clare presents an upgraded version of Lopa's adjective. The specialist teacher and the peer also use other initiated self repair (OISR) in the form of specific clarification requests that help to focus Lopa on the element of the talk that was the source of the trouble (TS4: line 7; MP3: line 5). Indeed, the design of Clare's turn includes prosodic emphasis on 'GO' that could be helpful to Lopa by providing semantic focus for the repair. By contrast, there are instances within the data when the mainstream teacher makes no attempt at repair and the trouble remains unresolved (TM2-3). On an occasion when repair is initiated (TM4) she does not follow through Lopa's responses with further requests for clarification.

Given the restrictive nature of the data, we feel that the findings presented here must be treated with caution. Whilst they were typical examples within the data collected, it is unknown to the researchers whether or not these devices are typical of the

behaviour of the participants in other contexts for talk. Furthermore, making generalisations from dyadic talk about photographs to the classroom situation could indeed be problematic, not least because the teachers here have no overt agenda relating to curriculum content. What we feel is important from these data, nonetheless, are the issues raised for teaching and learning by the contrasting designs used by these conversationalists.

With respect to receipt of a child's topic, the strength of a design that includes additional syntactic and semantic features is not only that it presents a model for language learning, but that it builds directly on the material provided by the child, whilst partial repetition alone does not. Strong evidence of the effectiveness of this strategy would be subsequent use of part of the teacher's contribution in the child's later turns, unfortunately lacking within our data. Likewise, certain designs of repair are arguably more useful for language learning than others. For example, other repair not only provides an appropriate language model but offers a *contingent* response, placed as it is following the child's turn, and drawing principally on the resources of this turn. Pitched in this way within the child's zone of proximal development (ZPD) it functions not so much as a correction but as a contingent scaffold (Vygotsky, 1978, Wood, 1998). The design here is crucial, however, rejection formats that give outright negative feedback to the child could be damaging to the child's self-esteem and confidence as a communicator (Saxton, 1997). Similarly, other initiated self repair designed as a specific request for clarification provides scaffolded support in the form of specific feedback about appropriacy. Failure to repair, on the other hand, not only risks confusion between the teacher and child, but represents a lost opportunity for this contingent support.

Using conversation analysis, because of the level of detail it entails, has enabled us to uncover features of the structure of the talk between Lopa and her interlocutors.

These insights may be useful to classroom teachers and others who have contact with children with specific language difficulties, when they reflect on how to design their talk following topic initiation by the child, or when they consider how to respond to trouble spots in the interaction.

Word length: 5637 (includes data extracts)

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