



# Organization of Repair Structures in Dyadic Written Exchanges among Facebook Users

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## Abstract

*This small-scale case study examines the organization of repair structures in a small group of Facebook users' written conversation exchanges in an attempt to identify the types of repair employed, and further explores which repair types predominate in the organization of repair structures in participants' written speech. To this end, a small corpus of written chat logs was garnered from ten undergraduate students studying at a UK university at the time of data collection. The data were then descriptively analysed to calculate the number and types of repair structures in this specific case of communication. The findings have indicated that for some particular reasons, not all repair types that can be identified in oral communication were available in written (synchronous and asynchronous) exchanges, and the total number of repair cases amounted to 36. The findings offer some implications for ELT practitioners in respect to the teaching of communication management strategies to English language learners, particularly tailored for written communication. These implications as well as limitations are shortly discussed in the final section of this paper.*

**Keywords:** Repair structures, Facebook, written talk, online interaction, conversation analytic methodology

## Apstrakt

*Ovo istraživanje manjeg obima ispituje organizaciju struktura za ispravke kod pisanih razmena konverzacija male grupe korisnika Fejsbuka kao pokušaj identifikovanja tipova ispravki, i dublje istražuje koji tipovi su dominantni u organizaciji struktura ispravki u pisanom govoru učesnika. Do sada je prikupljen manji korpus logova razgovora deset studenata osnovnih studija koji su studirali na jednom britanskom univerzitetu u vreme prikupljanja podataka. Podaci su analizirani opisno da bi se obračunao broj i tipovi struktura ispravki u ovoj specifičnoj komunikaciji. Rezultati pokazuju da iz određenih razloga nisu pronađeni svi tipovi ispravki koji su prisutni u usmenoj komunikaciji i u pisanim (sinhronim i nesinhronim) razmenama i ukupni broj ispravki je iznosio 36. Rezultati imaju određene implikacije za nastavu engleskog jezika u odnosu na predavanje strategija za upravljanje komunikacijom učenicima engleskog jezika, posebno onih koji se odnose na pisanu komunikaciju. Pomenute implikacije, kao i ograničenja ovog istraživanja su ukratko analizirani u poslednjem delu ovog članka.*

**Ključne reči:** strukture za ispravke, Fejsbuk, pisani razgovor, onlajn interakcija, analitička metodologija razgovora

## 1. Introduction

Thanks to the advent of and development of computers, cell phones, and especially

the Internet in our everyday life, the ways we communicate have dramatically changed. According to the figures of the

Internet World Stats<sup>1</sup>, in November 2015, there were over three billion people around the world connecting to the Internet, and this number of Internet users currently accounts for 46.6% of the world population. The Internet is not only an imperative technology, but also has become the main medium of communication among people, and has already affected the ways people communicate with each other. Conversation is, thus, no longer exclusively a face-to-face act or a simple chat over the phone. Presently, computer-mediated communication (hereafter CMC) appears to be more commonly exercised by individuals, as the Internet creates networking spaces for those who are devoid of exchanging conversations in each other's presence. As in real-life communication, breakdowns also occur in online communication. In this paper, we set out to explore how individuals cope with breakdowns in online platforms, more precisely while exchanging text messages on Facebook. While exploring the ways interactants deal with communication problems, we aim at identifying the types of repair structures they turned to for fixing these problems. First, we would like to begin with a brief discussion of CMC and its fundamental characteristics before moving on to the main study.

### **1.1 Computer-mediated communication (CMC)**

CMC is a communication mode managed via computers and portable devices that combine telephony and computing (e.g. smart phones), and enables people to chat and contact with one another over long distances. As Herring (2001) put it, current CMC is predominantly text-based. Typically, CMC occurs in two manners: either synchronously or asynchronously (Herring, 2001). In synchronous communication, as in such as live chat rooms, MSN, or SKYPE, individuals log in at the same time, and reciprocally send and receive messages instantly, whilst asynchronous communication does not require users to be online at the same time, which means that interactants can contact one another without being concerned with time, as done in e-mailing and blogging (Baym, 2006; Liu, 2007). Baym (2006) also averred that CMC transcends space and time restrictions, and the information can be stored and replicated, as distinct from one-to-one conversations.

Further, CMC has features such as being interactive, non-linear and anonymous (Chang, 2002). In a face-to-face communication occasion, people ordinarily lean towards taking and finishing turns in their exchanges. However, online written communication does not usually abide by this rule, since people can write

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>  
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their opinions and feelings without necessarily observing turn-taking conventions.

### **1.2 CMC compared with face-to-face interactions**

Some scholars have viewed CMC language as reduced and simplified with short sentences while others argue about its length and complexity (Lee, 2001). Etzioni and Etzioni (1999) asserted that unlike online communication which provides people with more access to more people all over the world, face-to-face communication involves fewer numbers of individuals to socialize. CMC provides participants with features to produce limited identity disclosure more than in offline communication, and participants have more time to think about what they communicate and perhaps modify it in online communication. Moreover, CMC interaction helps participants broadcast messages to a group of people at the same time rather than having point-to-point communications (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999).

On the other hand, those researchers who consider web-based interaction a third modality of language may view it as a bridge between the learners" written and spoken skills (Chun, 1994). Davis and Brewer (1997) gave the language used in CMC the term „writing talking" and Crystal (2001) called it „written speech". Crystal

(2001) argued that CMC should be viewed as a "genuine „third medium" (pp. 47-48). Örnberg (2003) similarly argued that CMC is a different mode of communication as a result of the medium. It is not spoken and not written, but the message is typed through the keyboard. It was concluded that CMC results in a different conversation structure from that of face-to-face interaction.

### **2. Background: conversation structure and organization**

Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) maintained that "ordinary talk is a highly organized, socially ordered phenomenon" (p. 11). Ample studies have been done to study interaction within conversation analysis, and the interaction has a range of forms different from a conversation. Conversation analysis (hereafter, CA) was founded by Harvey Sacks between 1946 and 1975. It could be defined as "the study of recorded, naturally occurring talk-in-interaction" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 12). The objective of CA is to study a social activity and detect the organization of the interaction. CA deals with utterances, not as language, but as products designed and used for different kinds of purposes, and the analysis of utterances is tied to the circumstances surrounding its production (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). CA provides an interpretation of the process in which one

action turns to another while the interlocutors continue with organizing their interaction. Conversation analysts do not assume a certain organization of the interaction; instead, they discover what organization is followed in a given interaction and try to explain how this organization is accomplished. For example, the use of the word „Hello“ should be described and an explanation of the contextual organization should be provided in order to give it the context-oriented sense. Whether it is the first utterance of a greeting pair or a second one determines if it proposes a following relevant utterance or not (Button & Lee, 1987).

### **2.1 Sources of communication breakdowns**

The organization and the direction of an interaction are dependent on the conversationalists' understanding of the discussion topic. They work out the order of the utterances based on the current context through an analysis of the utterances at hand. In the analysis, multiple questions are asked such as “why that now?”, “what is it?”, and “what does it involve?” in order to be able to figure out the suitable organization of the conversation (Button & Lee, 1987).

However, smooth communication may break down or at least have a kind of disorder if something unexpected

happens. If a speaker produces an utterance which is off the topic of the conversation, confusion will definitely occur (Button & Lee, 1987). Schegloff (2007) pointed out a number of possible troubles that interactants may face in their interaction which will lead to communication breakdowns. One of these troubles is problems in speaking such as grammatical errors, lexical errors, or pronunciation errors. Addressees may fail to hear or mishear an utterance, or misunderstand the intended message. In the end, “everything is, in that sense, a possible ‘repairable’ or a possible ‘trouble-source’” (Schegloff, 2007, p. 100). One of the conversation management strategies is repair (see 2.4. and 2.5).

### **2.2 Repair(s) in spoken language**

When a problem arises in a conversation, a set of practices (repair) is used by conversationalists as a conversational mechanism. Hellermann (2009) defined repair as “the phenomenon that occurs in talk-in-interaction when some aspect of talk is taken by one or more participants in the talk to be troublesome for some reason (misspeaking, mishearing, incorrect information provided)” (p. 114). The concept of repair is wider than error correction, though correction is part of repair, and repair sometimes appears when there is no error made in the

conversation (Schegloff et al., 1977). Some researchers have referred to repair as „meaning maintenance“ (Hauser, 2005), „meaning negotiation“ (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Jack, 2011), or „discourse management“ (Condon & Cech, 1996). Repair is associated with levels of talk: turn-taking, sequence organization, and preference (Liddicoat, 2007). From a CA perspective, repair is the principal resource that conversationalists have at their disposal to maintain intersubjectivity, which is to construct shared meaning (Schegloff, 1992, as cited in Markee, 2000).

### 2.3 Types of repair

Schegloff et al. (1977) distinguished between the repair initiator and the one who makes it. Based on this distinction, a number of repair types could be considered:

**a. Self-initiated self-repair:** the speaker of the trouble source is the initiator of the repair and the one who made the repair to solve the trouble.

Ex.1 B: -then more people will show up. Cuz they won't feel obliged to sell.

Tuh buy.

(Liddicoat, 2007, p. 174)

**b. Self-initiated other-repair:** the speaker's utterance is heard as a trouble source when trying to finish the sentence

using language and gestures, and the teacher communicates what (I) was trying to say.

Ex.2 I: maybe:, (.) w- ehm  
((points to self and several other students))

: three

T: one book for four people?

I: yes?

(Hellermann, 2009, p. 115)

**c. Other-initiated self-repair:** in this type, the recipient of the trouble source indicates the problem and the speaker makes the repair.

Ex.3 A: Hey the first time they stopped me from selling cigarettes was this morning. (1.0)

B: From selling cigarettes?

A: From buying cigarettes.

(Liddicoat, 2007, p.175)

**d. Other-initiated other-repair:** the recipient of the trouble source indicates the problem and makes the repair.

Ex.4 Joy: Kerry's no good. She's haven a fight with Sally.

Harry: Yih mean Sarah dontchuh. Those two are always fightin'

Joy: Yeh. „s a bitch isn' it,

(Liddicoat, 2007, p. 190)

**e. Self-initiation with failure of repair:** the speaker indicates the trouble source but there is no repair made to resolve the problem. (see, Yang, 2005; Schegloff et al, 1977)

Ex.5 Mike: I never heard it eetheh.

(0.7)

Mike: Awl I her- All I- Awl I ree- all you- all//

I ree-

Vic: You knew duh broa//:d. (Schegloff et al, 1977, p. 365)

**f. Other-initiation with failure of repair:** the recipient indicates the trouble source but there is no repair made to resolve the problem (see, Yang, 2005; Schegloff et al, 1977)

Ex.6 Roger: It's kinduva- // kinduv weird.

Dan: heh

(2.0)

Roger: Whadda you think.

(2.0)

Ken: Hm?

Roger: Forget it.

(Schegloff et al., 1977, p. 365)

Self-initiation and other-initiation are correlated with the participant who identifies the trouble source in the conversation (Liddicoat, 2007).

#### 2.4. Repairs in face-to-face communication

Much of the literature on negotiation of meaning and the strategies employed in interaction has focused on face-to-face interaction between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs). To illustrate, an early study on repair (Schegloff et al. 1977) suggested that all other initiated repair (OIR) occur in the turn following the trouble-source turn. Later, Schegloff (1992) proposed the fourth position as another location for OIR. Further work (Schegloff, 2000) described a number of locations in which OIR could be delayed later than the next turn position. These positions of OIR among native speakers were compared with OIR by non-native speakers (Wong, 2000). He claims that CA is based on the context of the participants and, hence, is a powerful tool to study interaction. One of the repair initiation forms is the 'open' class which was investigated in the sequential environment in the framework of the repair management sequence (Drew, 1997). The analysis of such environments suggests that this class occurs with troubles of alignment or affiliation between speakers. The practices of conversation which are associated with the action of repair initiation such as questioning and repetition forms were examined

(Schegloff, 1997) and further actions were explored for these practices.

### **2.5. Repairs in written communication**

To the best of our knowledge, so far, few studies have been carried out to investigate repair structures, i.e. meaning maintenance, in written communication via CMC. Thus, we should note that this scarcity of research in this area has been our main motivation for conducting this current research in the first place. Our review of the relevant literature has shown that overall, researchers have conducted multitude numbers of studies on the strategies used by interlocutors to negotiate meaning in face-to-face interaction. Spoken language has thus received much more attention than written language in a/synchronous electronic interaction.

To date, only four studies, have been carried out to examine repair organization in CMC written mode using chat programs. For instance, Örnberg's (2003) study found that the structure of written conversation differs from the oral form. This study was based on three mechanisms of conversation organization: turn-taking, repair, and sequencing. Face-to-face conversations have a different organization sequence from CMC, in which the adjacency pair question-answer is dominant. This is because of the

addressing problems as well as the posting delay. In another study, Yang (2005) reported the results of a study conducted on the Chinese academic discussion via Web-based conversation. It was found that web-based conversation has similar repair structures as those in oral conversation. In addition, his study indicated that CA is a powerful tool for analysing web-based interactional communication. Lee (2001) examined NNSs' use of negotiation strategies in online interaction. It was found that this online use is similar to its use in everyday oral interaction. Focusing on various conversational features, e.g. turns, turn-transition space, repairs, adjacency pairs and sequence organization, Schönfeldt and Golato (2003) undertook a comparative study which looked at the interactional organization of a German Web chat program, comparing it to the interactional organization of ordinary conversation. They determined that the interactional organization of the Web chat program differed from that of ordinary conversation, mostly due to the nature of the chat program, which is more constrained compared to ordinary conversation. Namely, interactants in Web chats cannot establish visual and aural engagement with each other. As the researchers further averred, interactants are solely required to recourse to written

messages and sequential ordering in order to organize the repair structures.

It is hoped that this study will add to the literature in this area where there is currently scarcity of empirical research, by examining how CMC users deal with communication breakdowns on Facebook and whether the ways they resort to for overcoming the repairs are akin to those they apply in face-to-face communication. The analysis of the CMC data in our study is expected to add to the limited number of studies in this area. However, the literature on repair in face-to-face conversations is going to be used to discuss the differences in repair organization of dyadic written exchanges and one-to-one verbal exchanges. In light of the above discussion, the current study is structured around the following research questions:

1. What types of repair structures are employed by Facebook users in one-to-one written a/synchronous exchanges?
  - 1.1. Does any type of repair structures employed by Facebook users predominate in the data? If so, what are the potential reasons?

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Research design**

In this research, we took a qualitative case study approach involving in-depth analysis

of written chat logs from a small sample of Facebook users. According to Luck, Jackson and Usher (2006), case study refers to “a detailed, intensive study of a particular contextual, and bounded, phenomena that is undertaken in real life situations” (p. 104). This definition considerably matches our research purpose, which is to gain a thorough understanding of how repairs are put to work when the mode of communication shifts to written exchanges. Therefore, our aim is to seek particularities within the data rather than to attempt at extrapolating of our findings.

#### **3.2. Participants**

A form of snowball sampling, a method for purposive sampling (Patton, 1987), was used to select students, some of whom were already our acquaintances. We contacted our acquaintances at first at the onset of our sampling process. We then asked them for names of additional students, i.e. their friends who they think might be interested in taking part in our study. The new participants were also asked to provide some other students who are likely to be willing to participate in the study, and we repeated this process until we reached a sample size from which we could collect saturated data (Ruane, 2005). At the end of the sampling process, we reached ten undergraduate students in spring 2012. The rationale behind taking undergraduates as sampling was due to

the fact that “most graduate students ... do not log in on a daily basis” owing largely to their busy time schedule for research and writing up (Bosch, 2009). We particularly targeted students due to the following practical reasons: (1) they were easy to recruit as we shared the same socio-cultural environment, (2) they were more willing to share their private text messages with us, and (3) some of them were already our acquaintances. All these factors facilitated our recruitment process and enabled us to obtain a large quantity of data in a relatively short span of time. Additionally, each of our participants has had a Facebook account for at least five years and has been using it on a daily basis for quite a long time. All of the participants’ level of English proficiency was between B2 and C1 according to the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001) as they already satisfied the university entry requirements before their admission to their respective academic disciplines by at least getting a minimum score of 6 on IELTS.

Our study differs from the similar ones in terms of the number of participants involved in the study (e.g. Yang, 2005, N=400; Örnberg, 2003, N=20; Lee, 2001, N=40) mostly because of its qualitative nature. However, what relates to the nature of our research is the amount of data garnered from these participants rather than the numerical majority of the participants. All our respondents were students at undergraduate level of various disciplines of a UK university. Table 1 summarizes our participants’ demographic background.

**Table 1. Demographic information about the participants**

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	4	40
	Female	6	60
	Total	10	100
Nationality	Turkish	3	30
	Polish	4	40
	French	1	10
	Dutch	1	10
	Arabian	1	10

Participation in the study was voluntary, and no pressure was put on them to

get involved in it (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). Invitation to the study was made via

e-mail messages from the researchers, face-to-face requests, and by calling them one by one; namely, with a set of mixed-recruitment methods. Participants were contacted wherever and whenever they can be reached physically or via phone calls, e-mails and such-like ways. The reason in doing so is the assumption that “the sample is like the population on certain characteristics” (Jackson, 2011, p. 102) i.e. being a Facebook user, logging on frequently, and studying at an undergraduate level, more or less being in the same age range, to name but a few.

### 3.3. Research setting

Up to now, Facebook has served as a well-controlled research setting to a number of researchers from different domains since it became a widely-used social networking site by millions of people. As was to be expected, researchers in linguistics have not remained indifferent to its presence as a potential research setting, for Facebook also works as a channel of communication to a high degree and its operation is based on language, primarily written. Those scholars who took Facebook as a research setting in relation to the issues regarding language learning and teaching, concentrated on posts shared in „Facebook groups“ (e.g. Yunus et. al., 2011), and examination of „user profiles“ (e.g. Bosch, 2009).

Therefore, we felt motivated to base our setting on ‘text-based messages’, merely one of the numerous facilities offered by Facebook for its users to chat instantly or asynchronously, which has not hitherto served as a research setting, as far as we know. Previous studies having attempted to apply the techniques of conversation analysis to web-based communication have revolved around „discussion boards“ available on the web (Yang, 2005) and log files obtained from discussions having occurred “in a virtual environment called Active Worlds” (Örnberg, 2003, p. 5). In contrast to the settings of these studies, which allow for chatting with many friends at the same time, our setting is constrained to one-to-one text-based online conversations without any engagement of a third party.

### 3.4. Data collection and analysis

Instead of creating a Facebook group and getting students to enrol in these groups to produce web-based texts, as already observed in some studies (e.g. Yunus et. al., 2011) or canalizing our participants to discussion groups on different web pages (e.g. Yang, 2005; Örnberg, 2010; Lee, 2001), we decided on collecting existing data from our target sample for the reason that our interest lies more in naturally occurring

web-based conversation. Only in this way, was it feasible for us to approximate our investigation of written conversation to that of ordinary speech interaction with respect to CA.

Data collection process included three steps. First, each participant was contacted in a variety of ways ranging from personal meetings to contacting them via e-mails. They were informed about the scope of the study (i.e. research aims, research questions, data collection procedure, and anonymity and data storage) along with firm assurance that the data they provided would be exclusively used for the purposes of the research project. Secondly, being informed of the essentials of the study, they were requested to compile their text-based Facebook messages (as log files). The third stage was concerned with the provision of the amassed files to the researchers. The total amount of data from participants was collected in two weeks' time and the data were sent to the researchers' e-mail addresses.

The selection of the methods for data analysis relied on the definition of our main research object, i.e. the analysis of the repair structures employed in written communication among users of Facebook. To this end, following Yang (2005), we opted for implementing some techniques of CA by applying them into web-based written-talk along with an appropriate set

of transcription conventions so that the repair structures that occur in text-based messages might be clearly displayed to the reader. Nevertheless, studies particularly seeking to inquire about the perceptions of students regarding the use of Facebook, and its educational values rather than working on the data produced by users of Facebook (e.g. Kabilan et al., 2010; Akyıldız & Argan, 2011; Mazman & Usluel, 2010) usually employed qualitative and quantitative techniques for data analysis by looking at, for instance, mean scores, percentages, standard deviations, with the help of special statistical software packages, prominently by using SPSS.

There are no standardized or fixed conventions for studies that employ CA. The decision of identifying relevant conventions is the responsibility of the researchers. What is important, as maintained by Mackey and Gass (2005) is that "[t]ranscription conventions should match the object of inquiry in the study" (p. 223). Bearing this crucial point in mind, we decided to adopt the subsequent transcription conventions, by following Yang (2005):

**Table 2. Transcription conventions followed in the analysis of the data**

(( ))	comment by researchers
(...)	data removed by researchers
<u>underline</u>	foregrounds the related parts that are being examined
:	turn start
S1/S2/S3...	speaker IDs

#### 4. Results

The total number of pages of the data pool was 157. The data pool consisted of 10.887 words and 985 turn takings among participants. For the coding process, the data were divided into three equal parts. In this manner, each researcher was held responsible to code more than 50 pages. After each researcher finished their coding, the coding schemes were exchanged among researchers to cross check each other's codes. During the coding process, each member of the research project was unaware of the other's coding. This was done with the aim of establishing inter-coder reliability, with three coders categorizing the data into different types of repair structures.

As a result of long discussions, and analyses of the data time after time, we identified a total number of 36 repair cases from the main body of the data (see Table 3). These 36 cases consisted mainly of the following types of repair structures: other-

initiated self-repaired (OISR), self-initiated self-repaired (SISR), other-initiated other-repaired (OIOR) and finally other-initiated with failure (OIF). These findings answered our main research question which is concerned with the types of repair structures utilized by Facebook users in their written exchanges. As the findings demonstrated, two types -self-initiated with failure (SIF) and self-initiated other-repaired (SIOR) - out of six types distinguished by Schegloff et al. (1977) in face-to-face communication were missing in our online communication. Obtaining these findings, we managed to answer the sub-research question that deals with the predominant repair structures applied by our participants in resolving communication breakdowns. Below is a table which summarizes the types of repair cases of the participants, and the overall distribution of these cases across the data analysed in percentages.

**Table 3. The types of repair cases and their overall distribution**

Repair Type	Frequency	Percentage
Other-initiated self-repaired	17	47
Self-initiated self-repaired	12	33
Other-initiated with failure	5	13
Other-initiated other-repaired	2	7
Self-initiated other-repaired	0	0
Self-initiated with failure	0	0
TOTAL	36	100

As can be seen from Table 3, the most common repair cases are OISR types and following this, SISR, OIF and finally OIOR types come successively in terms of the number of repair occurrences. Excerpts taken from the data are presented in the next section to illustrate the detected repair cases along with brief explanations by the researchers.

#### 4.1. Repair structures in web-based communication

It was found that four of the six types of repair structures discussed in the literature review section of this paper, have been employed by our participants. Excerpts 1-7 below illustrate the four main trajectories or repair structures found in the analyses:

##### Excerpt 1: Self-initiated self-repair

01 S 1: yeah  
 02 commons  
 03 google the commons dude  
 04 S 2: what will you there  
 \_\_\_\_ ((trouble source))

05 what will you **do** there ((repair made))

06 is it near to the avenue campus

07 S 1: google the cowsherd

08 its quite near

In this extract, the trouble source was produced by S2 (line 4). S2 asked S1 what he/she was going to do in the common by posting "what will you there". At the same time, S2 also realized that he/she forgot to put a verb in his/her sentence (line 4). To make it clearer for the recipient (S1) in order to avoid misunderstanding, he/she re-wrote the sentence by adding a verb "do" in the sentence (line 5). In this case, this is self-initiated self-repair because S1 (self) initiated the trouble source (line 4) and also made the repair himself/herself (line 5).

##### Excerpt 2: Self-initiated self-repair

01 S 1: and that's what you work with if you play poker  
 02 S 2: a probability has got luckiness

03 yeah okay lets me ask you a  
question  
04 if you got for example ace ace  
05 yeah  
06 and someone in your table  
07 just put all in  
08 what will you gonna do at that  
moment?  
09 even the flop is not  
opened ((trouble source))  
10 **I mean the flop doesnt come**  
**yet** ((repair made))  
11 ?  
12 S 1: you will call (...)

This extract is another example of self-initiated self-repair. S1 and S2 were chatting about probability and luckiness in terms of playing poker. In this extract, the trouble source was produced by S2 (line 9) and it was also repaired by S2 (line 10). Here Speaker 2 stated that "the flop is not opened" (line 9). He/She realized that the

**Excerpt 3:** Other-initiated other-repair (...)  
((repair made))

01 S 1: good thing is  
02 i dunno  
03 ....  
04 that i can travel for free atm  
((trouble source))  
05 S 2: what? ((first  
repair initiation))

recipient (S1) may find it confusing and tried to clarify his/her sentence.

06 what is atm?  
((second repair initiation)  
07 **at the moment** ((repair  
made))  
08 probably this :D

In this extract, the trouble source was made by S1 (line 4). He/She employed the abbreviation "atm" instead of writing the full words. To clarify what "atm" refers to, S2 then initiated a repair twice. The first time, S2 repeated that item ("atm", as stated in line 4) to elicit the meaning when he/she posted "what?" (line 5). To make sure that S1 understood the point, he/she made decision to ask the question to S1 directly to avoid misunderstanding or any confusion (line 6). When S 1 did not make the repair, S2 made the repair himself/herself by giving the definition of "atm" (line 7).

**Excerpt 4:** Other-initiated Self-repair

01 (...) and my last erasmus party  
was really shit  
02 Which one? ((repair initiation))  
03 **the one at café parfait on**  
**Thursday** ((repair made))  
04 I think it is always the same  
these Erasmus parties

Extract 4 is an example of other-initiated repair. Schegloff et. Al. (1977) argued that positions of repair are associated with repair initiation. Hence, each position is devoted to repair initiation by a particular participant to result in self- initiation or other-initiation. The problem in this extract was indicated by the recipient in the second position (line 02) (See section 2.4.2 above). S2 employed one form of turn-constructive devices to initiate repair in second position. A question word is used to form a clarification request to find out which party the other participant was referring to. This form of repair initiation indicates a problem in the previous turn, and also what kind of problem it was. The speaker of the original turn (S1) immediately resolved the problem (line 03).

**Excerpt 5:** Other-initiated Self-repair

01 S1: How much could you depend?  
 02 S2: like 10 pound or something  
 03 S1: Just buy a bottle of wodka and you re sortes ((trouble source))  
 04 S2: sorry |  
cant understand? ((repair initiation))  
 05 S1: **Sorted** ((repair made))  
 06 S2: you mean I will buy a bottle of wodka (...)

S1 gave a suggestion to S2 but the last part of it was incomprehensible. S2 then indicated the problem of misunderstanding. Schegloff et al. (1977) pointed out that, normally, other-

initiation first emerges no sooner than the second position. The form of repair initiation used to indicate a problem in the previous talk is not one of the forms listed by Liddicoat (2007) for other-initiation purpose. However, it is undeniable that S2 stated clearly that the utterance is not understandable. Having this new form other-initiation, it could be concluded that this form is presumably appropriate for CMC. S1 produced a repaired form of the trouble source found in the original turn.

**Excerpt 6:** Other-initiated with Failure

01 S1: ill take the U2B  
 02 you can take that tooo i guess..  
 03 S2: okay lets saay we will meet in the city centre in front of junk at 11 ((trouble source))  
 04 S1: from across the stile or at junction ((repair initiation))  
 05 S2: is it allright for you? ((failure of repair))  
 06 S1: okay  
 S2 suggested a place in the city centre to meet S1. This place was unrecognizable by S1, which represents a trouble source of misunderstanding to the recipient. An attempt was by S1 to clarify this misunderstanding of the previous talk by making a clarification request. This time, two possible options for the intended place were given to form the clarification request. Clarification request is one of the functional categories of conversational repair. In other words, it is one of the

forms of repair other-initiation (Markee, 2000; Goodwin, 1981; Lee, 2001).

**Excerpt 7:** Other-initiated with failure

01 S 1: Hehe  
02 Ill just come when I'm ready and  
call you yeah?  
03 S 2: yeah  
04 S 1: call my number which is start  
0771 ((trouble source))  
05 S 2: The turkish  
one? ((repair initiation))  
((end of conversation with repair  
failure))

The two participants in the conversation are arranging a meeting and they determined that the way to find each other at that location is to give a call. S1 gave the phone number for S2 to call. However, S2 found the utterance of S1 problematic. The problem here in this extract is a problem of understanding. To clarify this misapprehension, S2 produced one of the frequent forms of repair initiation in the second position. This form involves the use of „you mean“ and a possible understanding of the previous talk (Liddicoat, 2007). Actually, S2 dropped „you mean“ and just introduced a possible understanding of which phone number was meant by S1 in an attempt to indicate the trouble source. Failure in providing repair emerges when S1 did not respond to the repair initiation made by S2. This failure is clearly shown by the discontinuation of the conversation.

## 5. Discussion

This section focuses on the interpretation and discussion of the findings and attempts to draw sustained, explicit comparisons between CMC and face-to-face data in regards to organization of repair structures. In this section, we also return to our main research question and the sub-question for a thorough discussion, often connecting our discussion back to the literature above.

### 5.1. The main research question and the sub-question

The main research question sought an answer to the question of what types of repair structures are employed by Facebook users in one-to-one written a/synchronous exchanges. The main research question was answered by finding that there were four types of repair structures existing in the participants' organization of repair cases in their written communication. In response to the sub-question which was addressing the predominant types of repairs structures in participants' repair organization, it turned out that among the four types of repair structures identified in the data, the predominant types were OISR and SISR. Further discussion relating to the repairs types identified, including the predominant and the missing ones, is given below at

length, starting first with the discussion of the most frequently used repair types.

**5.1.1. The most frequently used types of repair: (OISR) and (SISR)**

As mentioned earlier, the type of OISR was the most frequently used in CMC by the participants in our study and the calculation of its frequency reached the highest number ( $f= 17$ ) amongst the other used types of repair. In addition, the second highest number in the frequency of those repair types used by our participants emerged to be the type of SISR ( $f= 12$ ). These two types are almost close in the number of times of occurrence in the web-based written language. In the following paragraphs, some interpretations will be given for achieving the biggest numbers for these two types, in particular in our data of CMC.

It is evident in the types of OISR and SISR that the students have something in common. Self-repair is a shared characteristic between these two types of repair. Hence, a possible reason for the resulting high frequency of these two types is due to the nature of the environment of communication those participants are using. In this kind of environment, the first participant in a conversation who produces the trouble source is the only one who knows how to clarify the meaning of the message included in the first turn. Since they use CMC environment, where they cannot see each other's facial expressions

or body language to determine the sequence of turn taking or the intended meaning in the other's communication, possible misunderstandings may occur, and the first responsible one to clarify the intended meaning is the first participant who produced the trouble source. As a result, self-repair occurs the most irrespective of whether the repair was self-initiated or other-initiated, and that is usually done to avoid possible communication breakdowns.

As was explained earlier, misunderstanding is highly expected in web-based environments, especially when the mode of communication is grounded in written language, a normal reaction for the second participant is to indicate that there was a trouble source in the turn of the first participant which is typically followed by having the repair made for the given trouble source in the following relevant turn. Schegloff et al. (1977) claimed that other initiation normally occurs in the next turn which gives time for the repair to be made in the third turn and this is clearly seen in the use of OISR repair types by our participants. Having this misunderstanding and the consequent behaviours of the participants to avoid any breakdown in the communication gives us a sound basis to justify the high frequency of the use of OISR by the participants.

As for the interpretation of the high frequency of the use of SISR in our data, it

was suggested by Schegloff et al. (1977) that self-initiation is more possible to occur than other-initiation and that self-initiation is more preferred to employ in face-to-face communication. In the findings of this study, on the one hand, this kind of preference is clearly reflected in the high frequency of the occurrences of SISR in CMC. On the other hand, OISR was more frequent in our data than SISR which is in stark contrast with Schegloff's suggestion. One reason could be attributed to this contrast, namely to the difference in the different interactional organization of face-to-face verbal interaction and distant written-based communication, as pointed out by Schönfeldt and Golato (2003). In face-to-face communication, the speaker can see the recipient's facial expressions and body language, and can accordingly tell that a need for repair is raised and, thus, makes the repair to fix the troublesome communication. However, a participant in CMC cannot determine what the other participant feels or what troubles he/she might face in communicating. This makes the first participant unaware of possible sources of communication breakdown which yields to having the second participant indicate the trouble in the communication. Therefore, other-initiation was found to be used more than self-initiation in CMC in our case.

### **5.1.2. The least frequently used types of repair: (OIOR) and (OIF)**

As the findings revealed, the most common types of repair organization coming after the OISR and SISR types were OIF (f= 5) and OIOR (f= 2). Nevertheless, their frequency of occurrences was too low to be compared to those of the SISR and OISR types (f= 29 in total). The following will be, therefore, a discussion on why such types of repairs had a limited presence among the participants and how they differed from the other types of repair structures in participants' attempts to deal with the trouble sources. While both types of the most frequent repairs, irrespective of who initiated the trouble source, were resolved through self-repairs, (by the "self", the current speaker, rather than the "other", interlocutor), the least frequently used repair types were both based on other-initiation of repair, generally seen on the second and fourth sequential positions which was in line with the cases in face-to-face communication.

In cases where other-initiation of repair is in question, the speaker of the trouble source (i.e. self-initiator) is not aware of the fact that there is a trouble in the written utterances produced by himself/herself that somehow hinders conveying the right message or offering a clear understanding to the receiver (=other). Therefore, in such

a case, other-initiation could function as “a diagnosis of the trouble source” (Svennevig, 2008, p.1). As is known, in an English conversation, parties utilize a wide range of forms of other-repair initiators to raise a problem through initiation. Our OI attempts comprised mainly “understanding checks”, a common form of other-repair initiators.

As seen, any party other than the “self”, however, might feel obliged to initiate the troubles resulting from “recurrent problems in speaking, hearing and understanding” (Schegloff et al., 1977, p.361) to understand the current speaker. In our case where we focused on written web-based communication, there is no question of speaking and hearing problems, but only problems based on understanding were encountered by the parties who are not the source of trouble. Other-initiated troubles (OIT), according to the results of our analysis resulted in three ways: they were self-repaired (see the discussion above in 5.1.1), other-repaired or remained unrepaired with failure for various reasons. In the following discussion, we will address the last two instances, of other initiated other-repaired and other-initiated with failure.

Other-initiated other-repaired instances occurred in the written events where the trouble sources made by the “the self”

were voiced by “the other” through repair initiations and repaired by “the other”. Unlike ordinary conversations, OIOR cases in CMC allow for more than one initiation and finally result in other-repaired cases (for further detail see Excerpt 3). This might be because in CMC parties have more wait time for their interlocutors to write their statements than they do in real conversation to utter. Moreover, there is no overlap in CMC, and thus, conversation flows with clear turn-takings. However, there is an issue of concern in CMC OIOR structure, which is to get a feedback from the trouble causer confirming the correctness of OIOR instances, for it is only the trouble causer who knows the exact message, word(s), phrase(s) or whatever the problem causing element is. What “the other” generally does is to interpret the written utterances with his/her own resources to come to an understanding that will make sense for him / herself. If the repair initiated and repaired by “the other” is verified by the party of the trouble source, then it would be right to say that the repair is successfully made; otherwise, the repair ends up with failure, to which we will turn our attention in the rest of this section.

As maintained by Schegloff et al. (1977), the failure in resolving the trouble sources is twofold: it is either issued from self-initiation or other-initiation. No occurrences of repairs of self-initiated with failure

appeared in our findings, which were not in line with other studies of CMC dealing with repair organization (see, e.g. Örnberg, 2003; Yang, 2005). However, there were five instances of other-initiated with failure. For OIF cases in CMC, there might be several reasons. However, in our data, the other-initiations were largely based on direct requests for clarifications of ambiguous written utterances and these requests sometimes did not receive any response from the trouble causer who clarified the ambiguity or the speaker just shifted the topic of the conversation without paying attention to the previous line (see excerpts 6 and 7 above). One possible explanation of this type of repair might be that the self considers the initiated trouble trivial and accordingly applies a pragmatic strategy named “let-it-pass” (Firth, 1996) perhaps with the purpose of keeping interaction flow without a breakdown for a tiny matter which does not contribute to communication a lot. Another reason is likely to be that since the parties could not see and hear each other, lack of attention can lead them to miss some of the lines of written utterances, which by contrast less frequently occurs in verbal utterances, i.e. face-to-face communication.

### 5.1.3. The missing types of repair in CMC data: (SIOR) and (SIF)

As to the repair types that did not emerge in our study, there was a commonality between them, which was both of their initiation from “the self”, namely, self-initiated attempts. In SIF cases, the customary procedure stems from the lack of repair by the person who produces utterances to be repaired and then initiates but leaves unrepaired. Such cases may tend to occur due to the speaker's own will of not dealing with the repair though she/he already initiates the repair. However, as we observed in our data analysis, self-initiations for repairs always resulted in repairs by the speaker. Therefore, we could not identify any failure issued from self-initiation. This might be explained as follows: the repairs initiated by the self were repaired in the same turn without delay and this is demonstrated by the high frequency of SISR ( $f = 12, 33\%$ ) of all the repairs occurrences. Unlike verbal conversation, CMC based on writing can be rightly claimed to leave less room for failure, for it is fundamental for the other to have a clear understanding. Otherwise, there is no other chance for the interlocutor to interpret the written utterances since she/he cannot see the facial expressions, body language of as well as paralinguistic features produced by the speaker.

SIOR cases, in their essence, require the interlocutor to make the repair, initiated by the party who produced the written statements. The trouble sources of the self-issued repairs are likely to be difficult to repair by the parties who are the recipients of the written messages. The reason is that “other-repair is highly constrained and from a social point of view creates a risk of interlocutor’s losing face, this being something to avoid, if possible” in face-to-face interaction (MacDonald & Atkinson, 2000, p.178). This, as well, applies to web-based interaction in that the other tends to avoid engaging in resolving the trouble initiated by the self in a written environment in order to save face of both parties concerned.

### 6. Conclusion

This study explored the types of repair structures applied by a small number of Facebook users in respect to written communication. The chosen conversations were one-to-one text-based messages in English only. The lingua franca communication held in the data at hand was transcribed by the use of certain transcription symbols. Some techniques of CA were applied to the data in order to find out what repair structures are used by Facebook users. By referring to the relevant literature, a comparison between the four types of repair structures used by

our participants and the two missing types of repair in our CMC data, and those used in face-to-face communication was done to identify the differences between these two kinds of communication and the differences were discussed further. We also discussed why some types of repair structures were missing in our text-based data.

The findings of the study offer some implications, specifically for pedagogical practices. Firstly, as discussed above, repair structures in written and verbal communication tend to take different forms and are organized in distinct manners mostly due to the nature and mode of communication. It is imperative that for successful communication to occur between one-to-one interactions, be they face-to-face or written through CMC, learners of English get some training in relation to using communication management strategies, including repair mechanisms. Secondly, ELT practitioners should be aware of the fact that their students no longer solely depend on face-to-face interactions to practice their English but also can make good use of virtual environments for the purpose of ameliorating their English in real life situations with a diverse group of speakers. Teachers should make some efforts to vary their classroom activities including the use of chat programs, particularly to help students hone their

writing skills, and create more room for students to engage in effective communication while using social networking sites and some smartphone applications tailored for language improvement in general.

While interpreting the findings of the current study, one should bear in mind that the study has several limitations. First and foremost, the small amount of data led to the absence of some types of repair structures, which were seen in high frequencies in similar studies. For example, Yang's (2005) study calculated a total number of 351 repair cases from 1525 postings written by the participants, including all types of repair cases reported by Schegloff et al. (1977). And in addition to them, he found some other types of repair cases, only typical to written communication, which have not thus far come out in face-to-face conversation analysis.

As another important limitation of the study, it should be mentioned that our study aiming to identify repair organization in written CMC only focused on one social networking site, namely, Facebook, due to its popularity and ordinariness among university students. Had we included data from other social networking sites, the results might have been different; perhaps, we could even have identified the repair types that we missed out in our study, and could even find some types which do not

ordinarily exist in face-to-face conversation. Similarly, our setting, unlike, discussion boards, did not allow more than two parties to engage with each other, which might also have affected our results. Usually, interaction among individuals occurs in groups, small or large, but including at least more than two people in many cases. This also affects the nature of interaction because it is expected in face-to-face communication that parties will overlap with each other; latching and interruptions will occur and, in effect, this would result in more repair cases as compared to the written CMC which has no room for overlapping, latching and direct interruption. In our case, investigating the data gathered from groups rather one-to-one conversations might help us to identify repair types at different positions as distinct from those put forward by Schegloff et al. (1977) since there would not be clear turn-takings between the parties. Therefore, for example, a trouble issued from the self might be repaired by "the others" (more than one interlocutor) not only "the other" since there would be more interactants both to initiate and provide resolution in group.

Considering the dearth of research into the organization of repairs in written communication in the literature, we, however, strongly believe that the results and implications of the present research

not only add new knowledge to our understanding regarding the factors influencing effective written CMC beyond prospective groups of people (CMC users), but also provide some clues about the potential areas of communication problems when parties do not see each other and cannot make use of paralinguistic features when trying to decode messages conveyed in conversation exchanges in the written mode. Last but not least, we suggest that training in repairs for written as well as

spoken interaction as a type of communication strategy should be part of the English language teaching curriculum. We also aver that similar studies with a larger corpus should be undertaken with non-native English speakers and native English speakers due to the possibility that some of the repair types are more typical among non-native speakers than native speakers, which, we believe, could be interesting to consider in future research.

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