Word Search Sequences in Scientific Discussions: Giving Talks in Georgian

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We discuss how word search is organized during self-initiated forward-oriented repair in scientific discussions on the example of Georgian. Originally, research on the problem of organization of repair in conversation was initiated by Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks in [4]. In the forward-oriented case, the trouble source is yet to be produced: The speaker is still searching for a word. Greer in [2, 3] gives a four-step prototypical form of word search sequences in bilingual interaction. We argue that a similar form is maintained in the context of scientific discussions, even in monolingual cases.

The cases we analyze are quite common in discussions about research, when the trouble source in the turn-in-progress appears either due to its complexity, or due to a borrowed item without an adequate representation in the current language. The examples below are taken from the following context: A researcher A gives a presentation about some results in Unification Theory [1] (a subfield in the intersection of mathematics and computer science). Not everybody in the audience is an expert in this field. Therefore, A presents the results carefully, trying to avoid specific jargon and use more general, conventional mathematical terminology. It leads to certain situations when instead of using a specific term T, A has to use a longer sentence that either recalls the definition of the term, or gives its intuitive explanation, or provides its translation when T is in a different language. However, A has troubles to immediately come up with such a long explanation/translation. Therefore, he starts specifying the trouble source in the form of T, even if it does not tell much the audience. It may be accompanied with some placeholders, to indicate that the speaker is in the process of word search. It may also be accompanied with an eye contact or gaze to somebody in the audience, say, to a person B who, from the point of view of the speaker, is more familiar with the topic than the others. (Such a bodily conduct is more likely when A tries to find/recall a translation of T.) Then B might either indicate (e.g., by nodding) that she understood what A means by T, or might even provide a repair, especially if the trouble source is related to a translation of T. After that, A returns to the discussion about T, providing the explanation in his own words or reusing the repair provided from the audience.

Example 1 below illustrates the case when the specification of the trouble source is in the current language. Although the example is in Georgian, such a pattern can be observed in presentations in other languages as well. Here the filler *əmm* marks the start of the word search, and *egret ċodebul-i* ('so called') indicates the beginning of the specification of the trouble source: *usasrulo ṭipis* ('of infinitary type'). With *anu šegviʒlia vačvenot* the speaker returns to the prior discussion, explaining what kind of equational theory he is talking about:

(1) am eḳvacionaluri teori-is... əmm... is egret ċodebul-i usasrulo
this.OBL equational theory-GEN... hmm... it.NOM so called-NOM infinite
ṭip-isa-a... anu šegviʒlia vačvenot, rom mis qvela amoxsnad
type-GEN-COP... that.means we.can we.show.SUBJ.it that it's every solvable.OBL
unipiḳaci-is problema-s amonaxsn-ta minimalur-i srul-i simravle akvs da
unification-GEN problem-DAT solution-GEN.PL minimal-NOM complete-NOM set.NOM it.has and

zog-i aset-i ṗroblem-is-tvis, magalitad, ai, romel-i-c slaid-ze-a,
some-NOM this.kind-NOM problem-GEN-for for.instance like which-NOM-ADD slide-on-COP
es simravle usasrulo-a.
this.NOM set.NOM non.finite.NOM-COP
'This equational theory..., hmm, it is of so called infinitary type... which means that we can prove the existence of the minimal complete set of unifiers for all its solvable unification problems and show that this set is infinite for some of those problems, e.g., for the one on the slide.'

Example 2 below shows forward-oriented repair when the trouble is caused by an attempt of translating the term 'matching' from English into Georgian. It is a tradition in Georgia to use Georgian terminology in academic discourse, or, at least, Latin or Greek versions if there is a problem with an adequate translation: For instance, the term 'projection' (in geometry) is translated as *gegmili*, 'line' becomes *c̣rpe*, 'unifier' is *unipiḳaṭori*, 'bijection' is *biekcia*, and 'prism' translates into *ṗrizma*. Professors encourage their students to use such translations in their presentations. However, in the working process researchers might still use (mostly) English terms if they are shorter than their Georgian counterparts, or if the proper Georgian translation does not exist.

In Example 2, *A* wants to use a Georgian word for 'matching', but does not immediately recall it. He uses codeswitching with *mečing-*, strengthens the impression of word searching by the placeholder *rakvia*, and directs gaze to a colleague in the audience hoping to mobilize help from her. After getting in response the Georgian term *šetanadeba*, he continues to speak, using the response to produce the repair solution *šetanadeb-is ṗroblema-ze*.

(2) roca ganṭoleb-is ert-i mxare cvlad-s ar šeicavs, mašin unipiḳacia
when equation-GEN one-NOM side.NOM variable-DAT NEG it.contains.it then unification.NOM
daiqvaneba... əmm... mečing-is... rakvia... šetanadeb-is ṗroblema-ze
it.reduces hmm (Eng.)matching-GEN whatchamacallit matching-GEN problem-on
'When one side of the equation contains no variables, then unification reduces to... hmm, whatchamacallit... the matching problem.'

Abbreviations: ADD = additive particle; COP = copula; DAT = dative; GEN = genitive; NEG = negative; NOM = nominative; OBL = oblique; PL = plural; SUBJ = subjunctive.

References

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