Repairing reference

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Introduction

Languages provide speakers with resources for both referencing and repairing. While referencing is crucial for sustaining intersubjectivity, repairing is crucial for re-establishing intersubjectivity (Auer 1984; Scheglof 1992a; Scheglof et al. 1977). This chapter describes a repair-initiation action that claims that a particular aspect of the prior turn presents “trouble” for its speaker (e.g., understanding the prior turn; for a review of “repair” and its associated terminology, see Schegloff 1992a). The trouble source is treated as being a pro-term/indexical expression (e.g., “it”, “this”, “that”). The repair operation – that is, the interactional move that is performed by the speaker of the trouble source in response to the repair-initiation action being investigated, and that is designed to deal with/resolve the trouble – involves producing a full-reference form/full noun phrase (NP) (e.g., “the folder”, “the token”, “the ticket”) that is relevantly associated with the trouble-source indexical expression. Given that the trouble-source speaker orients to the trouble source as being an indexical expression, and given that the trouble-source speaker resolves the trouble by producing a recipient-designed full-reference form, the repair-related trouble can be characterized as a referent that is (claimed to be) underspecified for the person initiating repair. Languages provide for different types of referents, such as people, places, times, and things. This chapter focuses on a comparative analysis of one repair-initiation action in English and German that always (in our data) is taken by trouble-source speakers as targeting underspecified “thing”-referents. The repair-initiation action being examined is implemented by “Was denn” or “Was.” in German and “What.” in English. (For initial
Repairing reference observations, see Schegloff 1997b; Schegloff et al. 1977; Selting 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1988, 1992). This repair-initiation action can be characterized as seeking specification of a claimedly underspecified referent.

This chapter is organized as follows: After a brief description of the data and transcriptions, the analysis is presented in five steps. First, we show how final intonation plays an essential role in differentiating “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” from open-class repair initiators “Was?”/“What?” delivered with rising intonation (Drew 1997; Schegloff et al. 1977). Second, we analyze cases in both German and English to demonstrate that “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” implement a repair-initiation action that is produced to seek the specification of a claimedly underspecified referent. The third section provides additional evidence that “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” claim trouble with the specificity of an indexical expression by examining repair-initiation turns that contain two succeeding repair-initiation attempts (i.e. doubles; Schegloff et al. 1977). The fourth section contrasts “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” with a different but allied repair-initiation action implemented by “Für Was.”/“For What.”, which receives, as a repair operation, an increment (i.e. an extension) rather than a specification of a referring expression in the trouble-source unit. Finally, the fifth section discusses the commonalities among, and differences between, “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” in terms of range of usage and function. In this section, we also discuss one non-repair-initiation action that can be implemented by “Was.”/“What.”, which is a “go-ahead” to a pre-announcement action. This chapter closes with a discussion of methodological issues related to a comparative analysis.

Data

The repair-initiation implemented by “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” appears to be a relatively rare action in conversation. The German data consist of thirty hours of mundane conversation (eighteen hours of videotaped face-to-face interaction and twelve hours of audio-taped telephone conversation), including two-party and multi-party interaction with speakers from different dialectal regions within Germany. This data produced fifteen instances of “Was denn” and six instances of “Was.” used by others to initiate repair.
The American English data consist of sixty-five hours of mundane conversation (sixty-two hours of audio-taped telephone conversation and three hours of videotaped face-to-face interaction), which yielded a total of seventeen instances of “What.” used by others to initiate repair. The aforementioned numbers do not include instances of “Was denn?”/“What.” (“Was.” is not found) used as “go-ahead” responses to pre-sequence-initiating actions, i.e. instances that do not initiate repair (Schegloff 2007b).

All data were transcribed using the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson and Heritage 1984). As described below, intonation is a constitutive feature of “Was denn/“Was.”/“What.” Unit-final intonation is represented with a period for falling intonation and a comma for slightly rising intonation. In the text, German “Was.” and English “What.” are referred to with periods to reiterate their final-intonation contours. For the German transcripts, each utterance is represented by three lines of transcription: The first line presents the original utterance; the second consists of a word-for-word gloss; and the third provides an idiomatic English translation. When the idiomatic translation corresponds to the gloss, only the idiomatic translation is given. (For reasons to be discussed, Was denn” is idiomatically translated as “What.”). Sound files were analyzed with the acoustic software Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2006).

Final-intonation as a constitutive feature of “Was denn/“Was.”/“What.”

Final-intonation contour is part of action formatting (Couper-Kuhlen and Ford 2004; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 1996; Golato and Fagyal 2008; Schegloff 1998a; Selting 1995) and plays an important role in conveying the precise function of practices of other-initiated repair (Schegloff 1997b; Selting 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1988, 1992). The lexical items “Was denn”, “Was”, and “What”, which are used to implement the practice under investigation, can also be used to implement a different repair-initiation practice: open-class (e.g., “What”). However, in contrast to the practice described in this paper, open-class repair initiators are regularly produced with final-rising intonation, such as “Was?”/“What?” (Drew 1997; Schegloff 1997b; Selting 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1988,
Repairing reference 1992. Furthermore, open-class-repair initiators do not specify what part or aspect of a trouble-source unit is problematic, i.e. they leave “open” the type of trouble in play (Drew 1997; Scheglof et al. 1977). Although repair operations in response to open-class repair initiators can vary (e.g., Scheglof 2004), they frequently take the form of repeats of the trouble source. The following two examples show such a repair operation in response to German “Was?” and English “What?”

(1) Konferenz [Kirsten:1:16:24]

01 K: *hhhh Du [ich wollt dich was-]*
   *hhhh You [I wanted you something]*
   *hhhh You [I wanted to (ask) you]*
02 → R: 
   [Wie lang warsten da?]
   [How long were you there?]
03 K: *Wa?*  
   *Wha’?*
04 (0.2)
05 K: *h Ich war nur [ä:hm]*
   *h I was only [u:hm]*
06 → R:  
   [Wie lang warsten>da<]  
   [How long were you >there<]
07 K: *Nur- bisschen weniger als ne woche.*  
   Only- little less than a week.

(2) IMPOSSIBLE [Marcia and Joe]

01 M: *He’s just imposable.*
02 J: *Did juh tgl im that?*
03 (0.4)
04 M: *What?*
05 J: *D’=juh tgl im that?*
06 (1.4)
07 M: *No.*

In response to “Wha?” and “What?”, Rita and Joe respectively produce verbatim repeats of the entirety of their trouble-source units (compare lines 6 and 5, respectively, with line 2 in both cases). There are occasions when open-class repair initiators are
treated as dealing with reference trouble, as evidenced by responses that are “replacements of ‘specialized’ reference terms – whether technical ones, recognitional ones, uncommon ones, or others – by ones designed to be more accessible, better recipient designed, and so forth” (Schegloff 2004: 96–98). For example, see Extract 3, supplied by Schegloff (2004: 97).

(3) SPC, NYE, 6 [NTRI #130b)]

01 → A: Do you have some church affiliation, now?
02 B: What?
03 → A: Do you belong to a church now?
04 B: No I went to church I haven’t been ...

In contrast, “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” are not delivered with strong final-rising intonation. Furthermore, as shown below, “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” always (at least in our data) target reference trouble of a particular type, i.e. underspecification.

![Pitch vs Time Graph]

Figure 4.1 Open-class repair German “Wa?”
The intonation contour of “Was denn” ranges from final-falling to final-slight-rising, where the slight rise neither exceeds that of the unit’s initial pitch nor reaches the pitch ranges seen in “Was?/‘What?’” Figures 4.1–4.5 exemplify the waveforms, spectrograms, and pitch contours of different practice classes of other-initiated repair presented in this chapter, beginning with open-class repair initiation (Figures 4.1–4.2) and ending with “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” repairs (Figures 4.3–4.5).

“Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.”: A practice of other-initiated repair

As a preview, our argument is that, when co-participants use “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” as a repair initiator, trouble-source speakers understand it to claim that trouble-source units themselves contain a “thing”-referent that is underspecified for the co-participant and, thus, to request its specification. The trouble

Figure 4.2 Open-class English “What?”
Figure 4.3 Underspecified referent repair initiation (URRI) German “Was.”

Figure 4.4 URRI German “Was denn.”
sources are almost always, but not necessarily exclusively, pro-
terms/indexical expressions. Before beginning the analysis, two
conceptual/definitional issues need to be addressed. First, although
“thing”-referents are commonly real-world physical objects (e.g.,
photo album, parking token, airplane ticket), they can also be more
abstract objects, such as sources of humor and characterizations
of events. In our collection of “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” that
implement repair initiation, the trouble source is never a person,
place or time referent. Second, we chose the term “underspecified”
for the following reasons. Repair operations consist of producing
full-form “thing”-referring expressions that correspond to index-
ical “thing”-referring expressions in trouble-source turns. Thus,
trouble-source speakers orient to the trouble, as made relevant by
“Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” as being one of underspecification
for the people who initiate repair. In addition, we provide evidence
(in the form of “doubles”; see below) that interactants who initiate
repair orient to “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” as being produced to
target reference-underspecification trouble. Thus, the characterization “underspecified” is drawn from participants’ orientations, and “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” involve a claim to be experiencing reference-underspecification trouble. Importantly, we do not use the term “underspecified” to suggest that, during the production of trouble-source units, their speakers necessarily design them to contain underspecified referents, as in the case of puzzles (although this can be the case).

During the following analysis, readers’ attention is drawn to:

1. the distinctive unit-final intonation contours of “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.”, which either fall (in the case of “Was.”/“What.”) or only slightly rise (in the case of “Was denn”);
2. the trouble-source units, whose grammatical structure embodies “thing”-referents in form of pro-terms or indexicals;
3. the repair operation, which involves trouble-source speakers specifying trouble-source referring expressions and thereby orienting to them as having been somehow underspecified.

In each extract, trouble-source units are labeled with Arrow A, “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” with Arrow B and repair operations with Arrow C.

This section begins by examining German data, including two cases of “Was denn” and one of “Was.”, and then proceeds to examine three English cases of “What.” Extract 4 is drawn from a family get-together involving Martha, Fina, Elfi, Laura, and Bärbel, who have been looking at pictures and singing songs from a book with memorabilia. Prior to this segment, in line with the activity of reminiscing, Laura is looking for a folder with photos she brought. Laura has first asked Martha where the folder is, to which Martha has referred her to Elfi, who refers Laura to Fina, whose response is displayed in line 1. In line 4, Bärbel is the last one being addressed in Laura’s search for the photo folder. Bärbel has been sitting at the table, displaying listenership.

(4) MAPPE [CAE2 5:20]

01 F: Ick häff hier mix liggen.
I have here nothing lie.
I have nothing lying here.
Repairing reference

02 (1.0) ((M, F, and E looking for photo-folder))

03 F: Nee nee nee nee.
    No no no no.

04→a L: Bärbel du hast se zuletzt gehabt.
    Bärbel you had it last have.
    Bärbel you had it last.

05→b B: Was denn,
    what PRT,
    “What.”

06→c L: Die mappe m- oder hab ich die
    The folder w- or have i it
    The folder w- or did i have it

07 ((Bärbel leans forward and reaches out for the folder on the
table between herself and Laura))

The trouble-source unit, “Bärbel du hast se zuletzt gehabt.”/“Bärbel you had it last.” (line 4), contains the direct object “se”/“it.” It is marked for grammatical gender, case, and number to correspond to the locally initial form, “die mappe”/“the folder” (feminine, accusative, singular). In response, Bärbel initiates repair with “Was denn,”/“What.” (line 5). The unit-final intonation slightly rises, but this rise does not reach the same height as the unit’s pitch onset. Laura responds by specifying the trouble-source referring expression in that she produces its full-reference form, “se”/“it,” as “die mappe”/“the folder” (line 6), thereby treating “Was denn,”/“What.” as seeking such specification. This repair operation successfully resolves the trouble in that Bärbel reaches for the folder and hands it to Laura. The larger activity of searching for the photo folder is thus also completed. Here, like almost all other repair-initiators, “Was denn,”/“What.” is treated as a post-first insertion sequence (Schegloff 2007b), where it serves to resolve trouble in order to continue a larger course of action.

Extract 5 is drawn from a videotape of a dinner conversation. Prior to this extract, Sybille and Annette have been talking about parking tokens that local businesses distribute when customers exceed a certain spending limit. Three other speakers are present, including Bernhard, who has up until now been engaged in a side conversation (not displayed in transcript).
At line 1, Sybille asserts that Annette should have received a token for purchasing a corkscrew, “da hättst=es kriegen müssen.”/“there you should have got it.” Grammatically, Sybille’s “es”/“it” is a direct object of this trouble-source unit. The real-world referent of the pro-form is clear to the addressee Annette, who is responding in line 2 with a headshake and who is not initiating repair. However, Bernhard initiates repair with “Was denn,”/“What,” which has slightly rising final intonation (similar to Extract 3, above). At line 4, Sybille responds by specifying the trouble-source referring expression, “es”/“it,” as “die stadette.”/“the token.” Bernhard’s repair initiation is perhaps not surprising as the turn at line 1 was not addressed to and thus not designed for him. As Lerner (2004: 163–4, 178) noted, turns designed for an addressed party can be problematic for non-addressed parties and hence result in repair. Repair initiation (like Bernhard’s in this case) can be a practice for entering already ongoing conversations or moving out of schisming (Egbert 1993, 1997a).

For a final German example, this time of “Was.”, see Extract 6, which is drawn from a coffee-table conversation, at which two women named “Susan” are present and a third is referred to (line 4). Prior to line 1, one of the two co-present Susans (and the only Susan featured in Extract 6) has been the center of attention. When she asked for the sugar pot, other co-participants commented that she is the only one taking sugar with her coffee. Susan responded by disclaiming that she typically takes artificial sweetener for weight reasons; therefore, her taking of sugar is a potentially sensitive topic. The request sequence of asking for sugar and
the topic of taking sugar are complete when Georg launches his turn at line 1, which is addressed to the weight-conscious Susan. Note that Georg’s turn contains the indexical “das”/“that.”

(6) Zucker [CAE1 3_20] (simplified)

01→a G: Du Sue das ham die susans
You Sue that have the susans
Sue! That seems to be something

02 wohls so an sich.=
PRT like that with them.=
the Susans have in common.=

03→b S: =Was.=
=What.=

04→c G: =Zucker. Sue in Ahaus die nimmt auch zucker=
=Sugar. Sue in PLACE she takes also sugar=
=Sugar. Sue in Ahaus she always takes sugar too=

05 S: =Nee ich nehmd eigentlich süßstoff
=No i take PRT sweetener
=No i usually take sweetener

At lines 1–2, Georg points out that “die Susans” “the Susans” share “that.” Grammatically, Georg’s “das”/“that” is the direct object that refers to a shared habit (i.e. not a real-world object as in the previous examples). At line 3, Sue initiates repair with “Was.,” which is produced with final-falling intonation. Georg responds by specifying his referring expression: “Zucker. Sue in ahaus die nimmt auch zucker”/ “Sugar. Sue in Ahaus she always takes sugar too.” This operation is successful in that the trouble in understanding is resolved, as can be gleaned from Susan’s rejecting response at line 5.

Georg’s turn is interesting in the following ways. It reopens an already closed topic which is sensitive to Susan; it implies that “all” Susans take sugar although the second co-present Susan does not; and it ignores the first Susan’s explanation that she usually takes sweetener. Note also that Georg turn-initially singles out the first Susan as addressee (“du Susan”). Given these features, we may speculate whether his use of the indexical is designedly underspecified and that he sets Susan up to initiate repair and thus taking a bait. The bait would consist in insisting that she has the habit of taking sugar although she says she usually takes sweetener. Georg
would thus imply Susan has lied, and, in addition, he covertly draws attention to Susan being overweight. In response, Susan insists that she usually takes sweetener, thus rejecting Georg’s assumption, but by initiating repair she has already taken the bait. Such cases where the trouble source may potentially be designed as underspecified are rare. Our collection contains two such cases. While these two cases could entail a bait or puzzle, they are nevertheless treated as repair initiations.

The repair-initiation action accomplished by the German “Was denn”/”Was.” is paralleled by that of the English “What.” For the first of three English examples, see Extract 7, which is drawn from a three-way telephone call between a mother, father, and their young-adult son who no longer lives at home. At lines 1–3, the mother reminds her son that he and his sister are supposed to provide their parents with a list of desired Christmas presents.

(7) Ticket [CF:5051]

01 M: Uh:m I nges you gu:ys to:uh:(0.2) start (.)
02  wgrkin” on your (0.2) Chrjs’mas ljs;=small
03    duh big, please, for each of you;=
04 S:  =M[m:that’s rjlght.
05 M:  [Uh:( )- ]
06 M:  We’re gunna go:to[: ]
07→a S:  [Wel][you got thuh big one.
08 (0.5)
09 S: .hhhh (0.2) ( )=
10→b D: =Wha[. ]
11 M:  [Wel]-
12 ()
13→c S:  Thuh- (-) thee:=uh:ticket.
14 ()
15 M:  Mm;=
16 D: =Q[h ]
17 M:  [W]e’ll °(th)-° some- (-)
18 D: °#Ye[ah,#°]
19 M:  [That ]’s somewhat. .hhhh Uh:m ()
20 >you=know< >we’re gunna< go: to:
21 Spokane “n another week or
22 so so (. ) I’d like tuh start l0okin.”
23 (0.7)
24 S: °(Oh)-° Okay. L’l=uh I’ll thnk about it.

After the son merely acknowledges (but arguably does not agree with) his mother’s reminder/request (Lindström 1997), “Mm: that’s
right.” (line 4), the mother pursues his agreement by beginning to account for needing the list (line 6; see the mother’s later pursuit at lines 20–22, especially her repeat of “we’re gunna go to . . .”). The mother’s request contains an implicit potential offer to buy “big” gifts (lines 2–3, “small duh big”), and, at line 7, the son interrupts her by saying that a large gift has already been agreed upon, “Well you got thuh big one.” Here, the son refers to an as-of-yet-unnamed “big” present with “the big one” (which turns out to be an airplane ticket). Grammatically, “the big one” is the direct object in this trouble-source unit and is a placeholder that is specified in the repair operation with “thee: =uh: ticket.” (line 13). In other words, the reference in the trouble-source unit is a more “granular” reference form (Schegloff 2000a) than the reference form in the repair operation. In this case, “the big one” is treated as being underspecified by the dad, who initiates repair, but not by the mom, who displays that she understands “the big one” by beginning to respond at line 11, “Well-,” which is comparable to how she rebegins at line 17, “We: ll.” At line 10, the dad initiates repair with “Wha: t.” (which is produced with final-falling intonation). The son responds by specifying “the big one” with “thee: =uh: ticket” (line 13). There is evidence that the dad’s “Wha: t.” constitutes repair initiation. At line 16, his “Oh,” which sequentially is a third-positioned action relative to the repair sequence (Schegloff 2007b), claims a change of state from unknowing to knowing (Heritage 1984). And, at line 18, the dad responds to the son’s “Well you got thuh big one” by partially discounting it with a (delayed and) dismissively produced “#Yeah.,” thereby treating the “Wha: t.” as having delayed the progression of the son’s claim in order to better understand it. (The mom similarly dismisses the son’s claim at lines 11, 17, and 19.)

For a second English example, see Extract 8, which is drawn twenty-seven minutes into a telephone call between Sue and her boyfriend Max. Sue has initiated all of the major topics and has done a majority of the talking.

(8) Phone (CF:6507)

| 01 S: .hhh Anyway there’s nghtng on you(r)- mgre | 02 on your mnd js there. |
| 03 (0.4) | |
| 04 M: Uh:ngr really. | 05→a S: h=Oh:.=hh (.).hhh (and) a:re- (.). are all our |
Although Sue’s action at lines 1–2 solicits additional conversational topics (Button and Casey 1984), it is grammatically designed to prefer (and thus presume) a “No”-response. Given that Max has not previously initiated any major topic, Sue’s turn can be heard as an interpersonal complaint regarding Max’s lack of enthusiasm or interest in terms of talking to her (for in-depth research on complaints, cf. Heinemann and Traverso, forthcoming; Yoon 2006). In the wake of Max’s (delayed) agreement, “Uh: not really” (line 4), Sue asks/accuses: “are all our conversations gunna end up like this” (lines 5–6; note the extreme-case formulation “all our conversations”; Pomerantz 1986). Grammatically, Sue’s “like this” is an adjunct (in the form of an adverbial expression of manner) and refers to the immediately prior sequence of action (at lines 1–4). In response, Max initiates repair with “Wha:t.” with final-falling intonation (line 9), to which Sue responds by specifying what she “meant” (see line 10, “I mean”) by “this.” That is, she specifies her complaint by providing a characterization of how the call has “ended up” (lines 12–14). Max orients to his “Wha:t.” as having initiated repair on Sue’s turn and thus as having delayed its progression to better understand it, by subsequently responding to it by defending himself: “Well >you know< you gotta understand th’t I’m: kind=of a little ti:red” (lines 16–17).

For a final English example, see Extract 9, which is drawn from an American telephone call between two college students, Carla and Rich.

(9) Humorous [UTCL:D08]

01 C: Peet’s a:ways there. ((i.e. at the apartment))
02 R: °Y°:eah he is.=
Repairing reference

03 C: =B’t your never there. ((i.e. at the apartment))
04 (1.6)
05 C: (No:pe)
06 (1.0)
07 R: Hh hh [hh “hh” ]
08 C: [Where are] you. on thuh phone,
09 R: .hhhh ((laugh-relevant inbreath))
10 C: ↑What’re you↓ saying?
11 R: .huh ((laugh))
12 (0.4)
13 C: Tell me:.
14 R: .hhh hh=heh (0.5) .huh (0.2) Nothing I’m
15 ↓a j’st- I find it humorous.
16→b C: ↑What.↓
17→c R: Just (tw)- listening duh you.
18 C: What I sa:id?
19 R: Yes.
20 C: Peet’s always the:re,
21 R: Yes. an’ I’m never ‘ere.
22 C: So where are you.

When Rich fails to respond (at line 4) to Carla’s assertion that Rich is never at his apartment, “B’t your never there.” (line 3), Carla produces a candidate response (for Rich) that aligns with her position: “No:pe” (line 5). After a long gap of silence at line 6, Rich laughs, “Hh hh hh “hh”” (line 7), and continues laughing at lines 9, 11, and 14. Perhaps because of Rich’s displayed lack of attention (i.e. his failure to respond at line 4), or because Rich’s laughter (at line 7) is disjointed from prior talk (i.e. lines 1–5, which neither participant oriented to as being funny), Carla begins to suspect – evidenced by her chastising question “↑What’re you↓ saying?” (line 10) and its pursuit “Tell me:.” (line 13) – that Rich might be talking to, and laughing about something with, his roommate Peet. Rich ultimately answers Carla at lines 14–15: “Nothing I’m j’st- I find it humorous.” Grammatically, Rich’s “it” is the direct object of this trouble-source unit. As a pro-form, “it” is analyzable as being underspecified relative to its full-reference form, which is the source of what Rich finds humorous. Indeed, as the repair operation to Carla’s “↑What.↓” (line 16), Rich responds by specifying the humor source: “Just (tw)- listening duh you.” (line 17).

To review Extracts 4–9, “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” are produced with either clearly falling intonation (in the case of “Was.” and “What.”) or with non-strong-rising intonation (in the case of
“Was denn”), which differentiates them from open-class forms (Drew 1997). The trouble sources are pro-terms or indexical expressions (e.g., “it,” “that,” “this”; in the data), adverbial expressions of manner (e.g., “like this”), and placeholder nouns (e.g., “the big one”) that refer to “things,” which include not only real-world physical objects (e.g., photo album, parking token, airplane ticket), but also more abstract objects (e.g., a source of humor, a characterization of a telephone call, and a habitual physical action). “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” implement repair initiation by halting the forward progression of a prior course of action (regarding progressivity, see Lerner 1996) in order to deal with a particular type of referential trouble, i.e. its claimed underspecification. “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” are responded to with specifications of referring expressions. The referring expression in the trouble sources may or may not have been used in sequentially proximate prior environments, including the prior turn.

Further evidence: The case of “doubles”

So far, we have examined formal features of the repair initiators “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” and their uptake by co-participants. These results are strengthened by observations of a special kind of context in which “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” can occur, and that is when they are produced in the same turn with another repair-initiation action. In such multi-unit turns (called “doubles” by Schegloff et al. 1977), the second repair-initiation attempt is typically “stronger” (more specific) than the first in terms of locating the trouble source. In doubles, “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” are placed first, followed by stronger confirmation requests of candidate specifications of trouble-source referring expressions. For a German example, see Extract 10, which is drawn from a dinner-time interaction.

(10) WEIN [Fischessen_1.31.10] (simplified)

01→a A:  Ptz ptzptzptz “der” is lecker. der g- der
Pts pts pts “itDEM” is tasty. that- p- that
Pts pts pts “that one”’s tasty. that- p- I

02→a  schmeckt mir am besten von allen.
tastes to me the best of all.
like that one best of all of them.
Repairing reference

03 B: Ja?
Yeah?

04 A: [Mh “hmm”]
[Uh “hum”]

05→b D: [Was denn. ] [Dieser wein hier?]
[What PRT. ] [This wine here? ]
[ “What.” ] [This wine here? ]

06→c A: [((Points at wine))]

07→c A: mb “hmm”
uh “hum”

08 (0.5) ((D starts turning bottle to read label))

As context, two minutes prior to Extract 10, the interactants discussed what they would drink next. Annette had suggested continuing to drink another bottle of the same white wine, whereas Sybille had suggested a bottle of red wine. In Extract 10, at lines 1–2, Annette produces an extreme-positive assessment (Auer andUhmann 1982; Pomerantz 1984) of the same bottle of white wine that she had suggested earlier: “Der schmeckt mir am besten von allen”/“I like that one best of all of them.” Annette produces a slight head nod toward the bottle of wine during the production of “der”/“that one.” Grammatically (in German), Annette’s “der”/“that one” is the subject. Note that the German “der” has the same form as the article “der” in “der Wein”. Annette’s “der”, “that one” relies on a demonstrative determiner to refer to a referent indexically (Hanks 1992). In spoken German, this form is often used as a pronoun (i.e. instead of “er”) or as a demonstrative (i.e. instead of “dieser”). German grammar thus provides for an indexical form which is not easily translated directly into English. At line 5, David treats the referring expression as being underspecified by initiating repair with “Was denn” (line 5), but then immediately following it up with a request for confirmation of a candidate referent: “Dieser wein hier?”/“this wine here?” David’s candidate solution, “Dieser wein hier?” is grammatically congruent with the pronoun “der” in the trouble-source turn in that both are morphologically marked for the grammatical gender masculine and case-marked for the nominative. In moving from “Was denn” to a
candidate solution, David displays an orientation to his own “Was denn” as doing the job of targeting a “thing” referent in need of specification to him. Note that Annette similarly orients to the function of “Was denn”; that is, immediately after its production, and before David produces his candidate solution, she specifies her “der”/“that one” by pointing at a specific bottle of wine. Thus, in doubles with “Was denn,” the second repair-initiator offers a candidate specification of the troublesome indexical.

For an English example, see Extract 11, which is drawn from a phone conversation between Joe and his mother. Prior to this fragment, Joe and Marsha have discussed a variety of topics dealing with Marsha. Deep into the call, Joe asserts that “he can’t talk very long” (line 1). With a delayed “by thuh way” (line 3), Joe orients to his assertion as being “misplaced” relative to prior talk (Schegloff 1984, 1987c), and, at lines 6–7, Joe returns to prior talk by producing a summary assessment of it.

(11) Stanford (Marcia and Joe)

01 J: Oh we can’t talk very long ‘cause I’as jus’ talkin’ tuh gr’a ma.
02 (0.4)
03 J: by thuh way.
04 (0.4)
06→a J: But this sounds like=ay- very interesting situation you’re in you’re in here.
07 (0.2)
08 
09→b M: What. Mi::ne?
10→c J: Ye:ah.
11 (0.5)
12 J: With Stanford rsearch an’ everything.
13 (1.4)
14 M: Oh I myself am auditioning for Ca:melot
15 this June.

In the trouble-source unit (lines 6–7), Joe’s “this,” in combination with “a very interesting situation,” alludes to, and thus is analyzable as being underspecified relative to, a particular “situation”. After a slight pause (line 8), Marcia initiates repair with “What.” (line 9), targeting “this” in the trouble-source turn, and then immediately follows it up with a request for confirmation of a candidate domain of “situation”, “Mi::ne?”, which attempts to clarify the nature of the “interesting situation” being referred to. Here, Marcia displays
Repairing reference an orientation to her own “What.” as doing the job of targeting an underspecified referring expression. Joe treats Marcia’s request for confirmation as such by first confirming, “Ye:ah.”, and then by supplying a particular situation: “With Stanford research an’ everything.” (line 12).

A contrasting practice with a similar form: “Für was.”/“For what.”

The function of “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” can be put into relief by examining a different, but allied, repair-initiation action: “Für was.”/“For what.” The comparison of these two different repair-initiation actions is presented to shed further light on the unique function of “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” In Extracts 4–9, repair-related trouble was associated with referring expressions contained in trouble-source units themselves. Alternatively, we will now discuss one other way in which repair-related trouble can be associated with referents. In these cases, none of the referring expressions in the trouble-source action are treated as presenting “trouble,” but, rather, the trouble-source action presupposes a referent (e.g., an elaboration of a direct object), and the knowledge/understanding of this referent is necessary to adequately “grasp” the trouble-source action. This alternative type of reference trouble can be dealt with by an alternative repair-initiation practice, “Für Was.”/“For What.”, which prompts (Lerner 2004: 169) the prior speaker to elaborate a prior utterance. The trouble-source utterance is syntactically complete, and the repair operation in the form of an increment provides pragmatic completion. For a German example, see Extract 12. The trouble-source unit is Oma’s announcement: “Ich hab’ jetzt’ wieder ‘nen neues rezept gekriecht’/“I have now gotten another prescription again” (line 4).

(12) Für was (Oregon 1A_1:38)

01 M: =.hh Wie oft musst’n zur krankengymnastik. =.hh How often must+you to+the physical therapy. =.hh How often do you have to go to physical therapy.

02 O: Äh dreimal die woche °ne.° Uh three times the week °PRT.° Uh three times per week you know.
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03

04a→ O:  *Ich hab’ jetzt’ wiede’ nen neues rezept  gekriecht,*
I have now again a new prescription got,
I have now gotten another prescription again,

05b→ M:  Für *was.*
For What.

(0.5)

06 M:  *Ach  so  f[ür die gymnastik.*
Oh i see f[or the therapy.

[ ]

07c→ O:  *[Für die krankengymnastik.*
[For the physical therapy.

Grammatically, Oma’s “rezept”/“prescription”, is the direct object. Based on the analysis of Extracts 4–9 (above), to initiate repair with “Was denn”/“Was.” would be to claim that “rezept”/“prescription,” is itself underspecified. However, Markus initiates repair with “Für was.”/“For what.”, which alternatively claims that the trouble-source unit elided a referring expression necessary for his understanding and solicits an increment (Schegloff 1996b; 2001) to the trouble-source unit. In this case, Markus’s “Für was.”/“For what.” is responded to with an elaboration of the direct object (i.e. the source mandating the prescription). Both participants orient to this as the repairable. Oma responds by producing a grammatical increment to her trouble-source question that supplies a new referent: “die krankengymnastik”/“the physical therapy” (line 7). Prior to Oma’s response, Markus himself claims that he has resolved the trouble with “Ach so”/“Oh I see” (Heritage 1984; Golato and Betz, 2008), and then repairs the trouble with “für die gymnastik”/“for the therapy,” which displays his understanding of his “Für Was.”/“For What.” as seeking an elided referring expression.

For an English example, see Extract 13, in which the trouble-source unit is Ada’s question at line 6.

(13) Loan (CH:4365)

01 A: .mtch So:u- (.I=s- I:was thinking
02 of sen|ding mom an’ da:d (.uh:m about a
03 M: [.hhh]
04 A: hundred bucks.
05 (.)
06a→ A: .hhh Does that sound reasonable to you,=
Repairing reference

07b→ M: =For What.
08 (0.9)
09c→ A: Off of what I owe them.

Grammatically, Ada’s “that” (line 6) is the subject. Based on the analysis of Extracts 4–9 (above), to initiate repair with “What.” would be to claim that “that” is itself underspecified and seek its specification, such as a recharacterization of Ada’s proposal at lines 1–4. However, Max initiates repair with “For what.”, which alternatively claims that the trouble-source unit elided a referring expression necessary for his understanding and solicits an increment to the trouble-source unit. Similar to Extract 12 (above), Max’s “For what.” seeks an elaboration of the subject (i.e. Ada’s reason for sending the money). This is oriented to by Ada, who responds by supplying her reason, “Off of what I owe them.” (line 9).

(The) Difference(s) between “Was.” and “Was denn”

As mentioned in the introduction, there is an easily describable difference in form between “Was denn” and “Was”. “Was denn” contains the particle “denn” and is delivered with an intonation contour that ranges from falling to slightly rising. “Was.” does not contain a particle and is always delivered with clear final-falling intonation. Given these form features, German “Was.” is akin to English “What.” However, distributionally, when used to initiate repair, “Was denn” (75 percent of corpus) occurs much more frequently than “Was.” (25 percent of corpus). Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, similar to English “What.”, in German only “Was denn” is used to accomplish a specific nonrepair function, namely a “go-ahead” action to pre-sequence-initiating actions (Schegloff 2007), such as a summons, preannouncement, and story/joke preface (see examples below). In our data, we found no cases of “Was.” used as “go-ahead” action, suggesting that “Was.” is reserved for repair-initiation actions only. Such distributional and action-based differences suggest that “Was denn” (1) is the more generic, common, or default form relative to “Was.”; and (2) may be the more appropriate equivalent of English “What.”

What follows are two examples of pre-announcements (Terasaki 1976) that are relevantly responded to, and progressed, by “Was denn”/“What.”, respectively. As Schegloff (1997b) argues, there is
not a one-to-one correspondence between practices and actions, and, in the following cases, “Was denn”/“What.” are not used to implement repair initiation. For a German example, see Extract 14, from an interaction between two adults and two children, with one of the children beginning to tell a story.

(14) Weisstduwas (SandL_T1_0.22.48)

01→a S: Un weißt du (.) was,  
    An you know (.) what,  

02→b A: Was denn,  
    What PRT,  

03→c S: Und die (n) (name) hat(te) auch  
    And the (name) has/had also  

04 mal ihre ((2 syll.)) her ((2 syll.))  

05 A: [Ja? [Yes? [Really?

Extract 15 is drawn from an English telephone conversation between two sisters, Kathy and Janet, the former of whom is planning a vacation to Cabo San Lucas and has been searching for reasonably priced airline tickets.

(15) Cabo (Sister Calls.2)

01→a K: An’ then uhm guess what.  

02→b J: What.  

03→c K: ’Cause I called ‘er because  

04 .hh Kaytlent found uh::m (0.2)  

05 things for a hundred an’ fifty.  

06 to go duh Cab[o.]  

07 J: [.H]HHH She di:d?

In both Extracts 14–15 (above), line 1 involves the first part of a preannouncement sequence, which initiates a course of action and solicits a response. Similar to many preannouncement sequences, these (see “Arrow A”) project the presence of announcables without
Repairing reference explicating them. Here, they are alluded to by “Was denn” and “What.”, respectively, which refer to actions or events. These pre-actions function to frame their projected announcements as “news” for recipients (Terasaki 1976) and make use of underspecified referents (actions or events in the lives of the interactants) to which the preferred response “Was denn,”/“What.” then engenders the actual announcements. At line 2 in both examples, “Was denn”/“What.” functions as a second-part “go-ahead,” which is oriented to as such by pre-announcers when they proceed to deliver their announcements (lines 3–4 and 3–6, respectively), thereby explicating the referring expression. Rather than halting the progressivity of the pre-announcement sequence, “Was denn”/“What.” propels the course of action.

Extracts 14–15 were presented for two reasons. First, the interactional achievement of “Was denn”/“What.” as second pair parts of a pre-announcement sequence is different from initiating repair, while they share the feature that they request more specification. In response to both functions, a reference is “unpacked.” Second, our preceding comparison of pre-announcement go-aheads and repair initiators sheds light on a hypothesis of how “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” may differ in their repair initiation function. In German, relative to “Was.”, “Was denn” is the more default repair-initiation form, and it may be the case that “Was.” is doing something unique. This aligns with Thurmair’s (1991: 382) observation that German w-Fragen (wh-questions) typically contain the modal particle “denn”. and that such questions without “denn” are marked. All of this, though, begs the question of what “denn”’s uniqueness might be in the context of repair-initiation. Because we have too little data to pursue this hypothesis further, we offer some speculative possibilities.

An initial way of getting at differences between “Was denn” and “Was.” is to examine aspects in which they do not differ. Our limited data suggest no differences in terms of idiolectal and dialectal factors, nor medium (i.e. telephone vs. co-present interaction), nor number of participants (i.e. two or more), nor distance between the trouble-source referring expression and the reference form to which it (sometimes) connects back. There also seems to be no difference in preference organization, i.e. “Was denn” and “Was.” can target trouble-source units which are preferred or dispreferred.
Regarding this last observation, however, relative to “Was denn” both native-speaker authors of this chapter (Maria Egbert and Andrea Golato) perceive “Was.” as sounding more “terse.” Their vernacular understanding is also expressed by research in linguistics, which reports that “denn” makes utterances friendlier and possibly less blunt (Durrell 1992; Helbig 1988: 107; Hentschel and Weydt 1983: 266; Schwitalla 2003: 153).

One subtle difference might exist at the sequential level. In each of our six cases of “Was.”, the trouble source is always the unit immediately prior to “Was.” In our fifteen cases of “Was denn”, this is so for thirteen cases, but there are two cases in which the trouble-source unit is farther removed. Thus, it is possible that the effectiveness of “Was.” relies on a more proximate relationship between itself and the trouble-source unit, whereas “Was denn” may remain effective given a more distant sequential relationship. We speculate that the particle “denn” serves to claim that repair-initiators have a general sense of intersubjectivity amid the need for reference specification. Such a sign of general intersubjectivity would not be necessary with “Was.” because the trouble source is immediately prior.

Although more research on actual conversation is necessary, the aforementioned speculation is in line with linguistic descriptions of the function of the particle “denn”. When “denn” is used in questions, linguists have argued that it indicates that such questions refer to immediately prior talk (Dittmann 1980; Franck 1980: 222; Helbig 1988: 107; Thurmair 1989: 164, 166), and thus are not asked “aus heiterem Himmel” (“out of the blue”) (Zifonun et al. 1997: 1219). The particle “denn” is also said to target things that are known, or assumed to be known, by hearers (Helbig 1988: 107). Along these lines, Franck (1980: 225) argued that “denn” is frequently used in utterances that request further explanation before its speakers are able to respond to the content of the utterance (i.e. in repairs).

**Discussion**

Given the important relevance of referencing to intersubjectivity, it makes sense that the organization of repair provides conversationalists with specific practices for repairing reference-related
Repairing reference troubles. Lerner (2004: 180–181, footnote 25) noted that there are multiple practices with which speakers can deal with “inadequate or insufficiently complete or a not yet response-ready turn that has reached possible completion.” Our small collection of thirty-eight instances from a corpus of ninety-five hours suggests that there is a specific category of repair initiation designed to request specification of “thing”-referring expressions which the repair-initiating speaker claims to be underspecified and thus inhibiting full understanding. In German and English, this can be realized with “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” produced with nonrising intonation.

This chapter extends prior research on German (Selting 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1988, 1992) and American English (Schegloff et al. 1977; Schegloff 1997b) by comparatively analyzing one particular type of repair initiation that requests the specification of “thing”-referents that are somehow embodied in the components of trouble-source units themselves. This practice was implemented by “Was denn”/“Was.” in German and “What.” in English, produced with either final-falling or slight (but not strong)-rising final intonation. Future research needs to examine other types of trouble-source specific repair initiators, including those that target person, place, and time-referring expressions (such as “Wo.”/“Where.”, and “Wann.”/“When.”) (See Schegloff et al. 1977, for comments on English “Where”, see also Lerner 2004).

For now, we consider the term “thing” (as in “thing”-referent) to be an analytic one. In the data, “things” include not only real-world physical objects (e.g., photo album, parking token, airplane ticket), but also more abstract objects (e.g., a source of humor, a characterization of a telephone call, a habitual physical action, and an action/assertion). Future research needs to explore in more detail how members orient to persons, places, times, and “things.”

As argued most forcefully by Selting (1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1988, 1992), our analysis reiterates that intonation is an important, constitutive feature of practices of other-initiated repair. As suggested by our analysis of “Was denn”, when languages provide particles, they too can be constitutive features of repair initiation.

Relative to the distribution of previously analyzed classes of other-initiated repair, such as open-class initiators (Drew 1997), rising-intoned interrogative words (e.g., “Who?”, “When?”, “Where?”), and various types of repeats and reformulation of trouble
sources (Sacks and Schegloff 1979), “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” repair initiations seem to be rare. This rarity might be explained by the presence of a set of first-order conversational practices and preferences regarding reference that obviate the relevance of “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” For example, the preference for self-correction (Schegloff et al. 1977) and the associated practice of “try-marking” (Sacks and Schegloff 1979) tend to preclude the need for “others” to initiate repair, for example, through iterations of trouble-source unit completion, recipient silence, and same-speaker continuance (Heritage 2007). Furthermore, there is a preference for using recognitional reference forms (at least when referring to persons; Sacks and Schegloff 1979), which, in our data, are not targeted by “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” Finally, there are practices regarding the use of locally initial and subsequent reference forms that promote intersubjectivity (Schegloff 1996a). Thus, “Was denn”/“Was.”/“What.” are only “needed” when other conversational safeguards have “failed.”

Our findings add to the growing evidence that at least the context-free, structural organization of repair outlined first for English (Schegloff et al. 1977; see also Schegloff 1992a), and replicated for Thai (Moerman 1977) and for German (Egbert 1996), seems to be universal. Our findings further suggest that different languages (in our case, German and English) may contain similar linguistic and intonational resources (in our case, the lexical item “Was.”/“What.” produced with falling intonation) to accomplish similar repair-initiation actions.

**Methodological issues in conducting a cross-linguistic analysis**

One conversation analytic goal is to analyze how linguistic resources are used in talk-in-interaction to achieve social actions, thus contributing to a theory of social order. Since languages provide different resources, cross-linguistic research contributes to the theoretical question of what dimensions of human sociality are universal and what are specific to particular linguistic communities (see the introduction to this volume, see also the collection in Enfield and Stivers 2007, and here in particular, Hanks 2007 and Levinson 2007). Given this theoretical relevance, we would like to make transparent how methodological decisions and procedures in conducting a comparative analysis may influence the analysis.
and thus potentially impact the theoretical development. We are addressing how the role of English as data and as a lingua franca in the conversation-analysis community may shape our findings.

Similar to many other comparative studies, the present chapter analyzes the commonalities and differences of one phenomenon across two languages. All cross-linguistic studies on repair have taken English as the basis for comparison, for example, Moerman’s (1977) analysis of repair in Thai, Egbert’s (1996, 2002) work on repair in German, Kim’s (1993) study of generalized other-initiated repair in Korean, or Sidnell’s (2007a) analysis of repairing person reference in a small Caribbean community. When doing so, it may be tempting to look for those formats that have been found for English, yet it is vital that the researcher remain open for all kinds of formats, including ones not attested in English. Similarly, it may be tempting to compare items across languages based on form congruities (e.g., downward intoned German “Was.” and downward intoned English “What.”). However, the present chapter has shown that more can be gained by comparing functions of utterances, i.e. actions across languages. Similarly, our analysis cautions against translating utterances based on (perceived) phonological or lexical correspondences. For example, based on having similar lexical forms, linguistic meanings, and prosodic shapes, one might be biased toward translating the German “Was.” as the English “What.” In contrast, our analysis suggests that the German “Was denn” is a more appropriate translation because it and the English “What.” are more similar in terms of the actions they accomplish. That is, unlike the German Was., the German “Was denn” and the English “What.” accomplish both repair initiation and go-ahead responses to pre-sequences. In sum, we suggest that translations be based on an analysis of action, sequential placement, and function rather than on perceived form congruities (for a similar argument, see Betz and Golato, 2008).

Many comparative studies show that it is difficult or impossible to accurately translate interactional data into English. Even when a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss is provided with the transcript, the original language is not fully represented. One way that a reader of English can be made aware of this dilemma is by leaving words such as particles in the original language within the English rendering (Sorjonen 2001). This works well for highlighting the focal phenomenon, yet it would render a transcript illegible if used for all
items which lack an appropriate translation. Descriptions of what the English translation does not capture can be cumbersome for the reader, and the researcher is forced to find a balance between focusing on the relevant features of the phenomenon and to what level the nature of the data can be sustained.

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Notes

1 “Repair” is defined as the mechanism by which trouble in speaking, hearing, and understanding is claimed and resolved (Schegloff et al. 1977).

2 We intentionally avoid the terms “locally subsequent” (vs. locally initial) and “non-recognitional” (vs. recognitional) because they have only been empirically verified with regard to person-reference, and this chapter deals with thing-reference (but see Golato 2005 for a discussion of locally initial and locally subsequent forms for thing-references in German).

3 Here and in other data samples we chose to summarize stretches of the interaction which would have been too long to display.

4 We would like to thank Emanuel A. Schegloff for drawing our attention to designedly underspecified references.

5 The idea that our knowledge of talk-in-interaction in most languages may be shaped by what is already described for English is due to the history of the field, whose first-generation researchers have reported profound results mainly on English. Therefore, taking English as a basis of comparison is more a decision due to the history of science than to scientific reasoning.