Managing Trouble Responsibility and Relationships During Conversational Repair
Jeffrey D. Robinson

Using conversation analysis, this article focuses on other-initiation of repair (e.g., What?, I’m sorry?) of trouble speaking, hearing, and understanding. This article shows that the act of managing relationships is an essential feature of other-initiation of repair, and that different practices of repair-initiation can constitute different relational events that have different behavioral outcomes. Specifically, this article: (1) argues that context-free structures of interaction bias practices of repair such that other-initiated repair is vulnerable to communicating a stance that responsibility for trouble belongs to the speaker of the talk that inspired the repair-initiation; (2) discusses the implications of trouble responsibility for interpersonal disalignment and the organization of subsequent interaction; and (3) focuses on open-class (Drew, 1997) practices of repair initiation and argues that the apology-based format (I’m sorry? or Sorry?) communicates a stance that trouble responsibility belongs to repair-initiators, rather than to their addressees.

Keywords: Conversation Analysis; Intersubjectivity; Repair; Relationship; Responsibility; Practice

Communicators frequently experience episodes of miscommunication, a multifaceted concept referring to “any sort of problem that might arise interactionally” due to trouble with speaking—for example, mispronunciation, mis(re)presentation, and
ambiguity—hearing, or understanding (Coupland, Weimann, Giles, 1991, p. 1; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; Zahn, 1984). Because conversation is designed for understanding (Sanders, 2005; Schegloff, 1992), trouble is frequently repaired by communicators. Due to the rules for turn taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), the first opportunity for repair goes to the speaker of the talk that embodies trouble (i.e., to the speaker of the trouble source). As such, most trouble is resolved within the same turn of talk. The next opportunity for repair is provided, in the next turn of talk, to other speakers (Schegloff, 1992). By far the most common way that others deal with trouble is to initiate the process of repair (e.g., *Huh?* or *What*?), which provides trouble-source speakers the opportunity to enact repair themselves (e.g., to correct themselves). This article deals with communication practices used by others to initiate repair.

This article is guided by the perspective of conversation analysis, which is generally concerned with how people create, maintain, and negotiate “meaning.” In contrast (but not necessarily opposition) to approaches that treat communication as a process of information transmission driven by social-cognitive variables (for review, see LeBaron, Mandelbaum, & Glenn, 2003, but note that cognitive approaches can also be concerned with interaction, as with Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000), conversation analysis assumes that: (1) People produce and understand communication primarily in terms of the social action(s) it accomplishes (Sanders, 2005; Schegloff, 1995), such as apologizing (Robinson, 2004) and seeking information (Pomerantz, 1988). (2) Intersubjectivity (or mutual understanding, or communicative coherence) is largely possible because action is socially organized, meaning that it is constituted by orderly, systematic, *practices* of communication that are held in common by members of a society. (3) Practices of action are largely constructed from the *particular composition* of communicative conduct (e.g., words/sounds, gestures, intonation, prosody) and their *sequential position* relative to (immediately) prior conduct (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). (4) The production and understanding of practices of action are not only influenced by traditional forms of “context” (e.g., sex, setting, and self-monitoring), but also by *interactional* forms of context (Goffman, 1983), such as the social structures (i.e., rules) that organize turn taking (Sacks et al., 1974), sequences of action (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), and, relevant to the present article, repair (Schegloff et al., 1977). In sum, conversation analysis seeks to describe the communication practices through which interactants produce, recognize, and interpret their own and others’ actions.

Conversation analysis integrates with, and this article contributes to, work on the *constitutive* view of relationships. Rather than treating aspects of social and personal relationships (e.g., closeness, conflict, and “identity”) as “independent variables with discursive consequences” (Hopper & Chen, 1996, p. 310), the constitutive view treats them as being constituted and reconstituted, on a turn by turn basis, by practices of social action/activity that are jointly constructed by participants (Duck, 1994; Duck & Pond, 1989; Goldsmith, 2000; Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Mandelbaum, 2003; Sanders, 1995; Tracy & Naughton, 1994). This article deals with practices of *other-initiation of repair* (hereafter OIR) that participants use to manage an inherently
relational issue—that being responsibility, or “fault,” for repair-related trouble—and how these practices shape subsequent (i.e., reparative) conduct. Specifically, this article: (1) argues that context-free structures of interaction bias practices of repair such that other-initiated repair is vulnerable to communicating a stance that responsibility for trouble belongs to the speaker of the talk that inspired the repair-initiation; (2) discusses the implications of trouble responsibility for interpersonal disalignment and the organization of interaction; and (3) focuses on “open-class” (Drew, 1997) practices of OIR and argues that the apology-based format (I’m sorry? or Sorry?) communicates a stance that trouble responsibility belongs to repair-initiators. Put differently, the apology-based OIR fosters attributions that the repair-initiation attempt was produced due to a trouble with the repair-initiator’s hearing or understanding, rather than with their addressees’ speaking (regarding attribution theory and conflict; see Sillars, 1980). This article shows that the act of managing relationships is an essential feature of OIR, and that different practices of repair-initiation can constitute different relational stances that have different behavioral consequences.

The Structural Vulnerability of OIR with Respect to Trouble Responsibility

When Goffman (1983) proposed the interaction order, he was referring to social structures, or sets of rules, that independently organize how people talk whenever they interact. Due to the combination of at least two of these context-free structures (Sacks et al., 1974), referred to as progressivity and the organization of repair options, OIR (and now I am not referring to any particular practice of OIR, but rather to OIR as a systemic feature of conversation) is vulnerable to being understood as communicating that responsibility for repair-related trouble belongs to trouble-source speakers. This vulnerability radically affects the meaning of OIR because it biases OIR toward being understood as projecting repair initiators’ interpersonal disalignment with—for example, disbelief in, disagreement with, challenge to, or rejection of—the action being pursued in the trouble-source talk, and this type of understanding can affect how trouble-source speakers’ respond to OIR (Drew, 1997; Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 1987b, 1997; Schegloff et al., 1977).

Progressivity

The normal, or default, relationship between most components of the organization of interaction (e.g., sounds within words, words within turn-constructional units, units within multiunit turns, turns within sequences of action, sequences of action within courses of action, etc.) is that each component should “progress” to the next relevant component immediately after, or contiguously to (Sacks, 1987), the prior component (Schegloff, in press). This feature of interaction has been termed progressivity (Lerner, 1996b; Stivers & Robinson, in press). Behavior that halts progressivity is accountable (Garfinkel, 1967) and thus examined by participants for its interactional import. Relevant to this study, OIR halts progressivity (Jefferson, 1978, 1987).
The Organization of Repair Options

Schegloff et al. (1977) demonstrated a structural (i.e., turn-taking based) preference for self- (vs. other-) repair (i.e., a preference for self correction), and additionally argued for a preference for self- (vs. other-) initiation of repair (see also Zahn, 1984). Supporting this, Schegloff et al. noted that OIR is regularly “withheld a bit past the possible completion of [the] trouble-source turn” in order to allow trouble-source speakers a chance to correct themselves (pp. 373–374; emphasis original). Because OIR halts progressivity and is examined by participants for the import of doing so, and because self-initiated, same-turn repair (i.e., self correction) is the structurally initial and preferred option in an orderly set of socially understood repair options, OIR, which raises the relevance of repair, raises the relevance of self-correction having been possibly bypassed. Thus, even the least specific instantiations of OIR (e.g., Huh?) have the structural potential to raise the relevance of a lapse in competence (i.e., a lapse of self correction) by the trouble-source speaker (see also Jefferson, 1987; Lerner, 1996a). In Brown and Levinson’s (1987) terms, OIR is structurally vulnerable to threatening trouble-source speakers’ positive face by communicating that they are responsible for repair-related trouble.

An Example

Prior research has scantly addressed the notion of trouble responsibility, per se (but see Robinson, 2004; Schegloff, 2005). However, several researchers have observed that certain practices of OIR can communicate repair-initiators’ stance that the responsibility for trouble belongs to trouble-source speakers, and thus can project interpersonal disalignment. One practice might be what Jefferson (1978) called the questioning repeat: a partial or full repeat of the trouble-source turn, which ends with rising intonation, and in which one part of the repeat is vocally stressed relative to its original production in the trouble source (see also Mandelbaum, 2003; Schegloff, 1987b, 1997; Schegloff et al., 1977). For instance, see Extract 1, which is drawn from a group therapy session: Ken’s turn at line 1 initiates a new action and is referring to someone across the street. Here, and throughout subsequent transcripts, trouble-source turns are denoted with “(1→),” OIRs with “(2→),” and repairs with “(3→)” (see Appendix for transcription conventions).

Extract 1: WAITER [GTS:1:2:54]
01 1→ KEN: ‘E likes that waiter over there,
02 2→ AL: Wait- er?
03 3→ KEN: Waitress, sorry,
04 4 AL: ‘At’s better,

Al initiates repair by repeating “Wait- er?” (2→), which ends with rising intonation (symbolized in the transcript by a question mark), and in which the gender-suffix is vocally stressed (symbolized by underlining) relative to Ken’s original version “waiter.” Ken’s responsive turn (3→) contains two responses. First, Ken produces a self correction, “Waitress,” (3→), which displays his orientation to Al’s OIR (i.e., the questioning repeat) as making relevant an error. Second, he produces “sorry,” which is an apology that orients to his commission of, and
accountability for, a possible offense (Robinson, 2004), that being his production of the trouble-source “waiter.” Ken’s apology is also evidence that he understands Al’s OIR as communicating Al’s stance that the responsibility for trouble belongs to Ken, and thus as embodying a type of personal criticism. (Along these lines, the first part of the analysis section demonstrates that OIR makes relevant the management of trouble responsibility.) Al’s subsequent compliment-on-improvement, “At’s better,” (line 4), orients to Ken’s original formulation “waiter” in terms of Ken’s personal failure, and is evidence that Al’s OIR was specifically produced to expose an error by Ken.

**Trouble Responsibility Must be Negotiated**

Initially, one might think that determining trouble responsibility is a more-or-less “objective” matter of correlating the type of trouble (e.g., speaking, hearing, understanding) with the speaker of the trouble source. For example, in Extract 1, one might determine that, because Ken is the speaker of the trouble source and the trouble is nominally one of mis-speaking, Ken is responsible for the trouble. However, virtually any unit of talk that participants orient to as “troubling” can possibly represent more than one type of trouble, and more than one type of trouble can mean that both participants are responsible for trouble. For instance, if Speaker B initiates repair on Speaker A’s soft-spoken turn, the trouble type might be either A’s trouble speaking (e.g., too softly) or B’s trouble hearing, or both. Similarly, if B initiates repair on A’s person-reference term (e.g., Jimmy), the trouble type might be either A’s trouble speaking (e.g., selecting a term that is unknown to B, when another formulation might have been more appropriate, such as My sister’s husband) or B’s trouble understanding (e.g., remembering, recognizing, etc.), or both. In Extract 1, the trouble might be either Ken’s mis-speaking (i.e., using a technically incorrect gender suffix) or Al’s (perhaps motivated) misunderstanding, or both. In sum, trouble responsibility is an interactionally negotiated affair (Pomerantz, 1978).

**Trouble Responsibility and the “Meaning” of OIR**

In at least two ways, the possibility that OIR is structurally vulnerable to communicating repair-initiators’ stance that trouble responsibility belongs to others, and thus to projecting interpersonal disalignment, raises both theoretic and empirical questions about the operation of OIR. First, this type of vulnerability can run counter to the general purpose of repair. That is, on the one hand, repair is systemically designed to dispense with interactional trouble and return participants, as quickly as possible, to the “business at hand.” However, on the other hand, the possible projection of interpersonal disalignment promotes a variety of what Jefferson (1987) called “attendant activities” (p. 65), such as complaining, accusing, ridiculing, admitting, apologizing, and forgiving, all of which threaten to delay a return to the “business at hand.” (This was seen in Extract 1 with Ken’s apology and Al’s compliment on improvement). Second, this type of vulnerability can run counter to the very purpose of communication, which
is the accomplishment of socially recognizable action (Sanders, 2005; Schegloff, 1995). As Lerner (1996a) noted, when interpersonal disalignment becomes relevant, “‘self’ and ‘other’ become consequential for the action that an utterance accomplishes, because one’s position in the incipient dispute will matter for the action accomplished by the utterance” (p. 312; emphasis added). Thus, for at least these two reasons, the occurrence of OIR theoretically mandates the management of trouble responsibility in order to ensure the recognizability of OIR as an action—for example, is What? a request for a repeat due to trouble hearing, a reformulation due to trouble understanding, or a correction due to trouble speaking?

We can predict that communicators have developed institutionalized solutions to potential systematic problems/vulnerabilities presented by OIR. That is, communicators must have developed nuanced practices of OIR that clarify their interactional stance regarding trouble responsibility, and thus their stance regarding interpersonal (dis)alignment. Put differently, OIR, which is structurally vulnerable to communicating repair-initiators’ stance that trouble responsibility belongs to others due to context-free structures of conversation, is predictably always deployed in context-sensitive ways that variously “manage” trouble responsibility, such as claiming that it belongs to “self” or “other,” or perhaps even some combination thereof (regarding context-free and context-sensitive, see Sacks et al., 1974).

A Focus on “Open-Class” OIR

This article generally focuses on what Drew (1997) called “open-class” forms of OIR (e.g., Huh?, What?, I’m sorry?, Excuse me?, Pardon me?, and Say again?). Prior research has found that, although open-class OIRs communicate that there is repair-related trouble, and almost always identify the trouble-source turn, they do not communicate the precise nature or location of the trouble (Schegloff et al., 1977). This research might be (understandably but, in my mind, mistakenly) taken to imply that all open-class formats are functionally equivalent. For example, for the purposes of his study, Drew treated all open-class OIRs “as equivalent . . . on the grounds that there does not appear to be any differentiation between them in terms of their sequential distribution, the circumstances in which they are characteristically selected, their interactional use or function, or their consequences for the emergent repair sequence” (p. 73). However, Drew consciously did not rule out these possibilities, citing Egbert’s (1996) research on differences between Hm? and Bitte? in German. For another example, Schegloff (1997) likened Huh? to “more formal” open-class OIR formats, such as Excuse me?, which he implied were “as strong or weak in claiming no grasp of the trouble source other than that something was said” (p. 512; but see Schegloff, 2005). However, Schegloff’s article specifically encouraged the “situated [vs. solely formal] analysis” of OIR and warned against treating turn-constructional devices, or similar classes of them, “as providing a kind of default analysis of the activity of repair” (pp. 499, 505). This article argues that the apology-based, open-class OIR (I’m sorry? or Sorry?) is a practice for communicating repair-initiators’ stance that the responsibility for trouble belongs to themselves, and in doing so has
implications for participants’ understandings of the type of trouble in play, and thus for the organization of subsequent conduct.

**Method and Data**

Methodologically, conversation analysis inductively examines data from naturally occurring interaction and represents an emic (vs. etic) approach that prioritizes interpretations that are displayed, and oriented to, by participants themselves (Heritage, 1984; LeBaron et al., 2003). Data were generated from transcripts of 121 phone calls between American acquaintances, six videotapes of American acquaintances having dinner and playing games, 135 phone calls between British acquaintances, 174 videotapes of American primary-care physician—patient visits, 590 videotapes of American pediatrician—patient visits, 25 phone calls between American physicians, and 60 phone calls of British general-practice physician—patient visits, representing approximately 150 hours of interaction. A complete review of these transcripts generated 101 cases of the apology-based, open-class OIR and 22 cases of other practices of repair initiation in which the action of repair was associated with that of apologizing. Given that 67% of these cases were drawn from institutional (vs. ordinary) contexts, the apology-based format appears to be a relatively uncommon and “formal” practice of open-class OIR (Schegloff, 2005). All cases were transcribed by the author using Gail Jefferson’s notation system (in Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Appendix) and retranscribed by a second trained conversation analyst to ensure the reliability of the transcripts (e.g., words, sounds, and pauses, their sequencing, etc.; Roberts & Robinson, 2004).

**Analysis**

The analysis does not begin by focusing on the apology-based, open-class OIR, but rather leads up to its analysis by focusing on a different, but related, practice: apologizing for OIR. Apologizing for OIR is a practice for communicating self-responsibility for repair-related trouble and is evidence that participants orient to managing trouble responsibility during OIR. The analysis then proceeds to examine the apology-based OIR.

**Apologizing for OIR**

According to Goffman (1971), persons constantly monitor acts, retrospectively and prospectively, for their virtual (or possible) offensiveness. As Goffman put it, actors “imagine . . . one or more ‘worst possible readings,’ that is, interpretations of the act that maximize either its offensiveness to others or its defaming implications for the actor” (p. 108). Jefferson (1987) noted that repair-related trouble can be accountable as a virtual offense after being publicly exposed. Jefferson examined cases where OIR was responsible for exposing repair-related trouble and prompting accounts, as in Extract 1, where Al’s OIR “Wait- er?” exposes Ken’s error and prompts his apology “sorry.” Alternatively, this section demonstrates that repair-related trouble can also be accountable as a virtual offense, in terms of trouble responsibility, prior to its public exposure.
Apologizing is a practice by which speakers claim personal responsibility for the commission of a possible offense (Robinson, 2004). Whereas the trouble type for trouble-source speakers is typically their own speaking, that for overhearing coparticipants can be either trouble-source speakers’ trouble speaking or their own trouble hearing or understanding. In the following cases, for OIR producers, the claimed offensive event is not merely that of having to initiate repair, but having to do so because of their own personal trouble hearing or understanding. In addition to Extract 1 (above), the following cases provide more (and more convincing) evidence that the notion of trouble responsibility is relevant for OIR producers.

See Extracts 2–3, both of which are drawn from American pediatric visits. In each case, the OIR turn (2→) contains two ordered parts: (1) an apology (I’m sorry), which is produced with falling intonation (symbolized in the transcript by a period); which is immediately followed by (2) the open-class OIR What?, which is produced with rising intonation (symbolized by a comma and question mark, respectively). In Extract 2, the child has just been physically examined for a rash.

Extract 2: RASH [RMS:27:23:08]

01 MOM: And since they (0.2) do spo:rts an’ (. ) they’re exposed
to so many different ki:d(s) (‘ey)
03 (1.0)
04 DOC: .mtch Tha:it’s true.
05 (2.9) ((gazing at and writing in medical records))
06 1→ KID: Did I show you (th’) one on (th’) top of my shoulders.
07 (0.3) ((DOC raises head up to gaze at KID))
08 2→ DOC: I’m sorry. what.
09 3→ KID: >Did I show< you thuh one on thuh top of my shoulders.
10 DOC: Yeah.

Extract 3 is drawn from the beginning of a visit.

Extract 3: INSURANCE [RMS:15:12:12]

01 DOC: What’s your insrance.
02 MOM: hh Uh::: Atlantic Care?
03 (.)
04 1→ DOC: Thru:gh uh#: # uh:::h health care
05 1→ [partners or (. ) (physicians’) associates.
06 KID: [{(making noise while playing with toy)}
07 2→ MOM: Uh: (.) ( ). I’m [sorry. what?
08 MOM: [{(gazing at DOC)}
09 (0.2)
10 3→ DOC: Physicians’ associate(s) or health care par(t)ners.
11 (0.3)
12 MOM: I don’ kno:w.

Insofar as What? can alone perform the action of repair initiation (e.g., see Extract 4, below), speakers are accomplishing a different type of OIR action by first apologizing. (Again, these apologies are not themselves OIRs.) In at least two ways, the apologies in Extracts 2–3 have a prospective character. First, as apologies (and Extracts 5–6, below, provide evidence that these are apologies per se), they claim personal responsibility for the commission of, and thereby index, a possible offense (Robinson, 2004).

Second, all things being equal, talk is normally understood as being responsive to immediately prior conduct (Schegloff, 1992). The apologies in Extracts 2–3 are not clearly understandable as being responsive to OIR-producer offenses made relevant
by prior conduct. This is so in two ways. First, the apologies follow trouble-source
speakers’ questions (1 ←), which, as actions, do not implicate the apologizer in an
offense that would otherwise make an apology relevant; for example, these questions
do not embody accusations, which make apologies relevant (Robinson, 2004).
Second, although each apology is immediately adjacent to a bit of response delay by
OIR producers, this delay does not clearly embody an OIR-producer offense that
would otherwise make an apology relevant. For example, in Extract 2, during the
child’s question (1 ←), the physician is writing in (and gazing at) the medical records.
Immediately upon completion of the child’s question (and during the response delay
at line 7), the physician raises his gaze from the records toward the child, which
displays the physician’s understanding that he was addressed and projects a shift in
engagement from the records to the child (Robinson, 1998). Insofar as it is the kid (at
1 ←) who technically interrupts the physician’s activity of writing, the physician’s
slight response delay (line 7) does not (clearly) display an offense on his part (repair-
related or otherwise). Admittedly, things are less clear in Extract 3. The mom’s “Uh:
( ) ( ).” (line 7) is produced while gazing at, and hunting inside, her purse. Although
this response delay displays her understanding that she was addressed and projects a
response upon finding her insurance card, it might also be interpretable as projecting
her “failure” to be able to relevantly answer the physician’s question (1 ←).
Importantly, though, the mom’s response delay does not (clearly) display a repair-
related offense, yet this is what she ends up apologizing for (see below).

To summarize, the apologies in Extracts 2–3 are prospective in the sense that,
although they index an offense, they do not clearly index a particular offense. Prior
research has demonstrated that, when one speaker merely indexes an event, yet when
the precise sense of that event is not immediately available from prior conduct, this
sense is often “something that has to be discovered subsequently as the interaction
proceeds” (Goodwin, 1996, p. 384). Similar to Goodwin’s (1996) analysis of
prospective indexicals, prospective apologies have the turn-taking feature of projecting
further talk and are not transition relevant. In Extracts 2–3, this projectability is
highlighted in the following way: Despite the fact that the apology units are designed
to come to places of possible syntactic and intonational completion (and thus to
places where next speakers might otherwise come in to speak; Sacks et al., 1974), and
despite the fact that apologizers complete their apology units gazing at their
addressees (and thus select them as next speakers) (Sacks et al., 1974), their addressees
nonetheless withhold entry and apologizers continue to produce more talk. Furthermore,
the talk that prospective apologies project is understood to elaborate the sense/nature
of the offense indexed by the apology. In Extracts 2–3, apologizers immediately
proceed to initiate repair with What?; the following section describes how this is a
possible offense.

Apologizing for OIR Communicates Self-Responsibility for Trouble
There are two types of evidence that, in Extracts 2–3, repair initiators are not
prospectively apologizing for initiating repair with What?, but rather for having to
initiate repair due to some “cause” (i.e., trouble type) that they claim (through the
apology) to be their own fault. Two types of evidence are provided: (1) Responses are repeats. (2) When prospective apologies are followed by repair-related offense accounts, these accounts involve “fault” on the part of OIR producers.

**Evidence 1: Responses are repeats.** In Extracts 2–3, recipients of [apology + What?] treat it as a practice for communicating that trouble responsibility belongs to repair initiators by repeating (3 →) the trouble-source turn/action (1 →). By redoing the same action in the same way, repeating the trouble source claims that it was both understandable and “appropriate” in its original form, and thereby strongly delimits the trouble type to that of the repair-initiator’s hearing. For example, in Extract 2, the child produces a verbatim repeat of his entire turn (including turn-final intonation). Note also that his repeat is relatively enunciated (symbolized in the transcript by the removal of the parentheses relative to the trouble-source turn), which is an additional practice for repairing hearing trouble. In Extract 3, although the physician’s repeat transposes “Physicians’ associate(s)” and “health care par(t)ners”, it does not include any other forms of alteration. Note also that his repeat is produced relatively more loudly (symbolized in the transcript by underlining), which, like enunciation, is an additional practice for repairing hearing trouble.

In order to appreciate a repeat of the trouble source as being a particular type of response that displays a particular understanding of the trouble in play, it is necessary to contrast it with other types of responses that display different understandings of OIR as an action. For example, compare the responses in Extracts 2–3, in which OIRs were constituted by [apology + What?], with that in Extract 4, in which the OIR is simply constituted by [What?] (i.e., in which there is no prospective apology). Extract 4 is drawn from an American telephone call between two girlfriends, Nancy and Hyla.

**Extract 4: HAIR (HG:II)**

01 NAM: Anything else to report?
02
03 HYL: Uh:...m:: (0.3) getting my hair cut tomorrow,
04 NAM: Oh <really?>
05 HYL: Ye:[a:h,]
06 1→ NAM: [Oh (fuh fgo:d?/so soo:n?)
07
08 2→ HYL: Wha:(t)?
09 3→ NAM: ‘Cause ’member you said you [were gunna m]ake
10 HYL: [ >.hhh< ]
11 3→ NAM: an appo[intm’n.]
12 HYL: [Oh: y]ea#h.=u# I-=>you kno(h)w wha’c I
13 th(h)ought you sai:d, .h
14 NAM: {W[ha:']}]
15 HYL: [<Por f]oo:d:=hh[hhhhhhhh ]
16 NAM: [(e=huh,) (.) huh huh]
17 HYL: >.hhh< Qh fer foo:d?=ehh [h h]eh >.h<
18 NAM: .[hhh huh]
19 HYL: (So I sez) wh[a:’=h]
20 NAM: [ Su:rl]e she’s crea:okin’ up thuh kid’s
21 crackin u(h)p

In response to Hyla’s OIR “Wha:(t)?” (2 →), rather than repeating her question—which was apparently “intended” to be “so so:n?” (1 →)—Nancy provides a justification for asking it: “‘Cause ’member you said you were gunna make an
app:ointm’n.” (3→). This is evidence that Nancy understood “Wha:(t)?” as communicating both that Hyla heard Nancy’s question, and as projecting that Nancy’s question was possibly unwarranted. That is, Nancy understands Hyla’s OIR as a form of interpersonal disalignment communicating that Nancy is responsible for the repair-related trouble. Indeed, Hyla subsequently claims that her OIR “Wha:(t)?” (see line 19, where Hyla says “(So I sez) wha: =h”) was produced under the auspices of having heard Nancy produce a nonsensical question (i.e., one that would have constituted an interactional “offense” and would have been Nancy’s “fault;” see line 15, where Hyla reports having heard “<For food. >”), and Nancy subsequently orients to this hypothetical scenario as representing her commission of such an offense (see line 20, where Nancy refers to herself and says “she’s cra:ckin’ up”). In sum, a comparison of the OIRs in Extracts 2–3 (i.e., prospective apology + What?) with that in Extract 4 (i.e., What?) provides some evidence that prospectively apologizing for the OIR What? is a practice for communicating that trouble responsibility belongs to OIR producers.

Evidence 2: Repair-related offense accounts. A second form of evidence comes from cases where prospective apologies are immediately followed by repair-related offense accounts. In all of the following cases, accounts involve “fault” on the part of OIR producers. For the first of three examples, see Extract 5, which is drawn from the end of an American pediatric visit; at lines 3–6, the physician is explaining prescription usage.

Extract 5: PRESCRIPTION [RMS:36:32:02]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>DOC: Here’s a samp:le if you get into trouble on thuh wee: kend:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>MOM: Okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 1→</td>
<td>DOC: [Each little bo:ttle? which is po:der? (. ) makes a dose?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>KID: [ ((talking))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>(0.8) ((Kid talking))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 1→</td>
<td>DOC: [One bo:ttle (. ) a day.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>KID: [ ((talking))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>(1.6) ((gazing at physician))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 2→</td>
<td>MOM: I’m sorry. I was listen[ing to her. [(not you)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 3→</td>
<td>DOC: [I know. [I wrot: e it].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 3→</td>
<td>DOC: I could tel: l you couldn’t (hear me), [one bottle] a day,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>MOM: [Thank you.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extract 6 is drawn from a telephone call in which two physicians are discussing the appropriateness of surgery on a child’s ears, and here deal with the presence of fluid.

Extract 6: FLUID [10:9(28.41)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>D1: &gt;.mch=.hc Does he have= a fluy:id?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 1→</td>
<td>D2: .hhh (.) He: was mm:: (. ) he had had fluid I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 1→</td>
<td>saw him yester:day he did not have any fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 1→</td>
<td>he had fluid Fri: des.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 2→</td>
<td>D1: I’m sorry &gt;I=couldn’t&lt; *suh &gt;{(speak up)}&lt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 3→</td>
<td>D2: [He had ] fluid Fri:day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 3→</td>
<td>&gt;when ‘is pediatrician&lt; saw ‘im.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 2→</td>
<td>D1: I’m I’m sorry. I can’t hear you’= jus: have to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 2→</td>
<td>speak up a little bit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 3→</td>
<td>D2: He: ha: id fluid Fri:day I&lt; think it was Friday when ‘is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 3→</td>
<td>pediatrician saw ‘im.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>D2: .hh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 16   | D1: [Uh huh,
Extract 7 is drawn from a citizen’s telephone call to the emergency services (911).

**Extract 7: 911 [Call 2 (1,6)]**

01 911: A::n’ what’s your na:me.
02 CIT: 
03 )
04 Susie Lambornino?
05 911: Amberzino? [>( )]<
06 1→ CIT: ey:: en oh::,
07 (1.2)
08 2→ 911: I’m sorry. I couldn’t hear ya—there’s so much ngise there
10 → it’s- (0.3) zee ay what?
11 3→ CIT: Ell ay e:m, ... ((continues to repeat spelling of name))

In Extracts 5–7, the prospective apologies (2 →) are immediately followed by repair-related offense accounts cast in terms of the apologizer’s personal failure of listening/hearing: “I was listening to her. (not you)” (Extract 5), “> I = couldn’t- < . . . I can’t hear > you” (Extract 6), and “I couldn’t hear ya” (Extract 7). These accounts provide evidence that these apologies are oriented to, by OIR producers, as ones for their own personal repair-related trouble (i.e., hearing). Supporting this, the repairs (3 →) display trouble-source speakers’ understandings of the trouble type as one for which OIR producers were personally responsible. For example, in Extract 5, the physician says “I could tell you couldn’t (hear me),” (line 11), and then produces a verbatim repeat the final turn-constructional unit of the trouble-source turn, “one bottle a day,” (compare line 11 to line 6). In Extract 6 the physician initially produces a verbatim repeat of the final turn-constructional unit of the trouble-source turn. “He had fluid Fri:day” (line 8), and, compared to the original “Frídee.” (line 5), the repeated “Fri:day” is enunciated (symbolized in the transcript by the colon and conventional pronunciation).

**The Apology-Based, Open-Class OIR**

The practice of apologizing for OIR (analyzed above) provides analytic leverage for understanding the focus of this article, which is the apology-based OIR. Extracts 2–3 and 5–7 provide evidence that OIR producers orient to the relevance of trouble responsibility by prospectively apologizing for having to initiate repair when the trouble is claimed to be their own fault, and that both OIR producers and recipients orient to apologies as a practice for both accounting for OIR-related trouble and projecting OIR. This latter point regarding projectability is highlighted in Extracts 5–6, where the addressees of the prospective apologies begin to enact repair (3 →) prior to the completion of the offense account, and thus before the production of an explicit repair initiator (but arguably only after a place where the offense is projectable as a repair-related trouble; i.e., “I was listen . . .” and “ > I = couldn’t- < . . . sUh . . .”, respectively). Although the apologies in Extracts 2–3 and 5–7 may project the action of repair initiation, they do not themselves constitute a first-order practice of repair initiation. However, there is a practice of open-class OIR that is composed solely of an apology-based unit of talk: Sorry? and I’m sorry? (see Drew, 1997; Robinson, 2004; Schegloff, 2005).

At least one constitutive feature distinguishing apology-based, open-class OIRs (and their first-order reparative nature) from prospective apologies is unit-final intonation.
Out of the 101 apology-based OIRs in the data, 100 (99%) are completed with rising intonation; the single outlying OIR is interrupted, and thus not completed. In contrast, prospective apologies are always completed with level or falling intonation. In line with this, Schegloff (1997) examined units such as What, When, and Where, which can be used to either initiate repair or perform other functions. Schegloff found that, when these units are completed with rising intonation, they halt progressivity and initiate repair, whereas when they are completed with falling intonation, they progress talk/action by inquiring into the nature of the referent (see also Drew, 1997).

This study argues that the apology-based OIR is a practice for communicating repair-initiators’ stance that trouble responsibility belongs to themselves. There are at least two type of evidence involving responses and repair-related offense accounts.

Evidence 1: Responses are predominantly verbatim repeats. For two examples of apology-based OIRs, see Extracts 8–9. Extract 8 is drawn from an American phone call between a citizen-customer and an estate-sale manager.

**Extract 8: COUCH [North Hills:2]**

```
01  CUS: Do you 'ave eh:- (.) couch for sale?
02  EMP: Yes we do.
03  CUS: Oh okay.
04  (0.4)
05  1→ CUS: Eh: (.) what color is this.
06  (.)
07  2→ EMP: I’m sorry?
08  3→ CUS: <What color> is th[is.]
09  EMP: [What] color is it that you’re looking
10  for.
```

Extract 9 is drawn from an American nurse–patient interaction.

**Extract 9: ALLERGIES [N:17:02]**

```
01  1→ NUR: What’re you here for today?
02  (.)
03  2→ PAT: I’m >sorry,<
04  3→ NUR: What are you here for tod[ay]?
05  PAT: [Uh:] allergies.
```

In each case, recipients of the apology-based OIR treat it as a practice by which OIR-producers claim a hearing trouble (i.e., claim personal responsibility for the trouble) by responding with *verbatim repeats* (3→) of the trouble source (1→). Additionally, as in Extracts 2–3 and 6–7, the repeats in Extracts 8–9 are enunciated, which further orient to the trouble as one of hearing: In Extract 8, “<What color>” is produced relatively more slowly and loudly (symbolized by the carrots and underlining, respectively), and in Extract 9, “What are” is the full-form version of “What’re” and “here” is produced relatively more loudly.

By verbatim repeat, it is meant that the repair (3→) involves reproducing the trouble source (1→), in whole or in part, word for word, without reordering, adding, or reformulating words/phrases within the repeated portion. Verbatim repeats can be contrasted with other ways of responding to OIR, such as replacing the trouble-source action with a different action (e.g., Extract 4, where Nancy replaces her question with a justification), or somehow revising the trouble source and/or its action, such as
elaborating its anaphoric references, reformulating its words/phrases, or upgrading/downgrading its epistemic "strength" or "force" (see Schegloff, 2004b). All of these types of responses—which are being produced by speakers of the trouble source—differ from verbatim repeats because, in containing some revision of the trouble-source unit and/or its action, they stand as possible (but not definitive) evidence that trouble-source speakers understood apology-based OIRs as communicating the need for some type of revision; that is, as communicating repair-initiators’ stance that trouble responsibility belongs to trouble-source speakers (vs. OIR producers).

One way to test the claim that the apology-based OIR is a practice for communicating repair-initiators’ stance that trouble responsibility belongs to themselves (vs. trouble-source speakers) is to run a binomial probability test, the null hypothesis being that initial responses to apology-based OIRs are equally likely to be either verbatim repeats or nonverbatim repeats. In the present data, there are 81 cases suitable for such an analysis (see Note 6 for why the remaining cases are unsuitable). Of these 81 cases, 50 (62%) exhibited initial responses that were verbatim repeats and 31 (38%) exhibited initial responses that were nonverbatim repeats. Verbatim repeats occurred significantly more often as first responses to apology-based OIRs than non-verbatim repeats \( (p = .04) \); this is evidence that apology-based OIRs are typically understood as claiming repair-initiators’ trouble hearing, and thus is one (but only one) type of evidence that apology-based OIRs communicate a stance that the trouble type is one for which repair-initiators are responsible (i.e., their own hearing trouble), rather than one for which their addressees are responsible (e.g., speaking trouble, which we would expect to result in nonverbatim-repeat responses involving some type of replacement or revision of the trouble source).

Of course, there were 31 cases that did not exhibit verbatim-repeat responses. However, such deviations can frequently be explained by contextual idiosyncrasies. For example, see Extract 10 (and also Extract 13, below), which is drawn from a British phone call between an out-of-hours (i.e., on-call) physician (who is at home) and a citizen calling on behalf of his friend. In this case, that the caller responds to the apology-based OIR by revising the trouble source is a function of the fact that the OIR establishes a new local sequential environment that virtually prevents him from repeating the trouble source.

Extract 10: NEBULIZER [DEC;1:2:17]

```
01  DOC: .hnhhh An'=ng:w 'as 'e ggt='i:s (.) he's got (a f::)='(u)-
02   on: 'm (ha) [sn]t 'e.
03  CLR: [ Yeah. ]
04  CLR: (Well/Will) [I put='im on] that straightaway.
05  DOC:  [ .hnhhh ]
06  (0.2)
08  CLR: I='no will I put 'im on it.
09  (0.3)
10  2→ DOC: Sorry?
11 3→ CLR: u- I haven't put 'im on it ye(t).=I- (. ) just di:ved
12   out tuh get a phg:ne like.
```
After the caller confirms (“Yeah,” line 3) that his friend has a nebulizer (i.e., a breathing machine that delivers medicine to the lungs), the caller asks: “(Well/Will) I put = ’im on that straightaway” (line 4). The physician hears “Well . . .” vs. “Will . . .” and misunderstands the caller as asserting a position; the caller actually says “Will . . .”, asking a question. The physician displays his misunderstanding at line 7 when he asks “An’ how’s that helped.” At line 8, the caller initiates third-turn repair with the canonical [No+Repair] format (Schegloff, 1992): “no will I put ’im on it.” The key observation is that, in response to the physician’s “Sorry?” (2 →), a verbatim repeat of the turn format of the trouble source (i.e., No+Question) is no longer able to repeat the turn-formatted action of the trouble source. That is, at line 11, the No-component of the third-turn repair, which originally functioned (at line 8) to reject the physician’s displayed misunderstanding at line 7 by virtue of being sequentially adjacent to it, would now be adjacent to the physician’s “Sorry?” and would be susceptible to a different understanding (i.e., rejecting the OIR, not the misunderstanding). Likewise, the “Question” portion of the third-turn repair (at line 8) relied, for its understanding as the repair component, on its being in third position relative to the caller’s original question at line 4. Thus, at line 11, the caller is “forced away” from repeating the turn format of the trouble source and opts instead to revise it with an assertion: “I: haven’t put ’im on it ye(t).” Although the assertion is a different type of turn-formatted action, it similarly accomplishes unmitigated correction; in fact, this assertion may have been what the patient abandoned at line 8 (i.e., the cut-off “I-” may have been the beginning of “I: haven’t . . .”). In sum, that the caller does not respond with a verbatim repeat (at 3 →) cannot be used as evidence that he understood the apology-based OIR as communicating the physician’s stance that trouble responsibility belonged to the caller.

Evidence 2: Repair-related offense accounts. In addition to distributional evidence, in every case where producers of apology-based OIRs provide reasons for having to initiate repair, those reasons involve “fault” on the part of OIR producers. For the first of two examples, see Extract 11, which is drawn from a British phone call. Christine claims to have initiated repair due to her own trouble hearing: “I couldn’t hear you very well.” (* →).

Extract 11: COULDN’T HEAR YOU (Field:1:1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHR:</th>
<th>MOM:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Hello::,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>°Hello:::.\°</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>(. )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>1 →</td>
<td>°(Christine?)\°</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>(. )</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>2 →</td>
<td>Sorry:.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>(. )</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>3 →</td>
<td>Christine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>(. )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>* →</td>
<td>Oh yeah. sorry.=I couldn’t hear you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>* →</td>
<td>very [well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>°(Oh:)\°</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a second example, see Extract 12, which is also drawn from a British phone call.
At line 6, Kevin initiates repair with “sorry?” and Leslie treats this as making relevant a response by immediately breathing in, “.hhh” (line 7), which projects a turn of talk (Schegloff, 1996). However, as Leslie prepares to respond, Kevin continues speaking and informs Leslie that his wife (i.e., Kim) is currently speaking to him: “uh Kim’s just saying something” (line 6). Kevin’s continuation stalls the phone call (line 8) and interdicts Leslie’s response, which is abandoned. Note that Kevin’s continuation is an account for having to initiate repair in terms of his own personal distraction (i.e., his wife talking to him on his end of the line).

Sequential Positioning and “Claiming”: Another Deviant Case
Two final, but important, points need to be made, albeit briefly due to space limitations. First, although the focus of this article’s analysis has been on the particular composition of OIR units, participants’ understandings of the “meaning” of OIR are additionally shaped by its sequential positioning (among other factors). Second, the use of apology-based OIRs does not mean that speakers actually believe that they are personally responsible for repair-related trouble. Rather, the apology-based OIR is a social practice (vs. an expression of an internal state) that speakers use to claim trouble responsibility. In order to elaborate on these points, see Extract 13, which is drawn from the opening of a British phone call between two women. Here, the caller, Margaret, misapprehends Leslie’s voice as that of a child and requests to speak with “Mummy” (1→) (i.e., with the child’s mother).

In response to Leslie’s “Sorry?” (2→), Margaret replaces the trouble-source action (i.e., her request to speak with “Mummy” at 1→) with a different action, that being an inquiry into her addressee’s identity: “who = is it speaking” (3→). Margaret’s replacement displays her understanding that her original request (1→) may have
been inappropriately designed for its recipient. This case is deviant in two ways. First, Margaret’s replacement (3→), compared to a verbatim repeat, is evidence that she understood “Sorry?” (2→) as communicating Leslie’s stance that trouble responsibility (i.e., speaking) belongs to Margaret (vs. Leslie, as has been argued). Second, Leslie’s subsequent “It’s Mummy.” (line 11) is post-hoc evidence that she did, in fact, hear the trouble source (i.e., Margaret’s initial request).

Regarding the first of two points to be made, Leslie’s “Sorry?” (2→) is not sequentially positioned after Margaret’s “is Mummy there,” (1→), but rather after Leslie’s extended silence (0.8 seconds) at line 4 in which she accountably does not respond to Margaret’s request (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Remember that OIR is regularly “withheld a bit past the possible completion of [the] trouble-source turn” in order to allow trouble-source speakers a chance to correct themselves (Schegloff et al., 1977, pp. 373–374; emphasis added). Although Schegloff et al. never operationalized “a bit,” the present data suggest that it might range between 0.1 and 0.4 seconds (see Extracts 8–11). Considering all 32 cases of ordinary (vs. institutional) talk conducted over the phone—because Extract 13 is such a case, and because both institutional and nonvocal activity (e.g., physicians’ writing) can create, and account for, delay in producing OIR—two (6.2%) involved no delay, seven (21.9%) involved 0.1 second delay, seven (21.9%) involved 0.2 second delay, four (12.5%) involved 0.3 second delay, and four (12.5%) involved 0.4 second delay. Thus, 0.1–0.2 seconds was the median delay, and 75% of the cases involved 0.4 second delay or less. Given this, Leslie’s 0.8 second delay (line 4) is accountably longer than the “bit” normally provided to allow for self-correction, and thus communicates something different/additional, such as: a struggle to “process” the prior turn, and thus some “access” to the prior turn that nonetheless resulted in the need for repair. (There is evidence that Leslie heard the trouble source; see above). Finally, note that Leslie’s “Sorry?” (2→) provides Margaret with an additional voice sample with which to recognize Leslie (Schegloff, 2004a), and thus with an extremely rare piece of additional material during open-class OIR with which to recognize her own error (i.e., misidentifying Leslie at 1→). So, in Extract 13, Margaret’s nonrepeat response to the apology-based OIR, and thus her understanding of it as an action, is explained by more than the OIR itself, including its sequential positioning relative to the trouble source and the unique contextual contribution of the OIR (i.e., a voice sample) to the determination of the trouble (i.e., misidentification).

Regarding the second point to be made, we can understand Leslie’s use of the apology-based OIR (vs. any other practice of open-class OIR) as being strategic. Sorry? is a practice by which Leslie communicates a stance—that is, socially claims—that trouble responsibility belongs to herself, even though there is evidence that she heard the trouble source. It is unknowable if Leslie did, or did not, understand the “intended” meaning of the trouble source and recognize it as Margaret’s error. By actively claiming trouble responsibility for herself, Leslie enacts a form of politeness by indirectly supporting Margaret’s positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).
Discussion

From its inception, conversation-analytic work has addressed itself to how practices of naturally occurring interaction are socially consequential, generally, and relevant to personal relationships, specifically. However, relative to the types of data frequently examined by communication scholars, these practices tend to be microscopic details of talk that make up the “seen but unnoticed’ backgrounds of commonplace events” (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 180). For example, almost forty years ago, Sacks (1967/1992) and Schegloff (1968) showed how the form, prosody, and sequential positioning of “How are you” sequences in the openings of telephone calls are involved in myriad forms of relational (re)constitution, and this focus on relationships has continued to the present day, as when Bolden (in press) showed how the discourse particles “so” and “oh” that preface topic initiations claim that such topics will be other attentive and self attentive, respectively. These types of findings have wide ranging theoretical and empirical implications for the study of (at least) the nature of “tactics,” “scripts,” and “routines” in relational communication (e.g., Kellerman, 1995). Indeed, Berger (2005) recently identified “social interaction routines” as a future direction of research in interpersonal communication.

This article dealt with practices of OIR (Schegloff et al., 1977) and used a conversation-analytic approach to argue that context-free structures (or rules) of interaction (Sacks et al., 1974)—specifically, those of progressivity and the organization of repair—bias OIR toward being understood as communicating repair-initiators’ stance that responsibility for repair-related trouble belongs to their addressees (i.e., to trouble-source speakers). This bias can affect the “meaning” of OIR by having it project interpersonal disalignment, which, in turn, can affect the organization of subsequent reparative conduct. For example, if trouble-source speakers understand themselves (vs. repair initiators) to be blameworthy for the trouble, they can be more likely to revise (e.g., correct), rather than repeat, the trouble source, and to engage in other types of accounting behaviors, such as apologizing (e.g., Extract 1). This article suggests that the context-free rules that organize OIR do not appear to be inherently neutral in terms of their implications for social and personal relationships. Rather, an inherent feature of OIR in context (i.e., in actual, situated use) is the management of relationships via the management of trouble responsibility. This article argued that the apology-based, open-class (Drew, 1997) OIR format (I’m sorry? or Sorry?) is a context-sensitive practice for managing trouble responsibility by communicating repair-initiators’ stance that trouble responsibility belongs to themselves, rather than to their addressees.

This study extends knowledge of OIR in at least four ways. First, Schegloff (1997; see also Schegloff et al., 1977) argued that open-class OIR is the “weakest” form of OIR “in the sense that it displays the least grasp of the problematic utterance which is its target, and in the sense that it gives the least help to its recipient in locating what the trouble-source is, and what the trouble with it is” (pp. 505–506; emphasis added). Insofar as the apology-based format is a practice for communicating self responsibility for trouble, it delimits the nature of the type of trouble to that of
repair-initiators’ hearing or understanding, and thus may not be as “weak” (in the same way) as previously thought. Second, and relatedly, although there is a substantial independence between practices of OIR and trouble types (Schegloff et al., 1977), the apology-based format is yet another example of how “the practices of repair can to some degree be fitted to the type of trouble being repaired” (Schegloff, 1987b, p. 217; emphasis added). Third, OIR has previously been taken to “locate problems of hearing and/or understanding as ‘obstacles’ [to the progression of talk]” (Schegloff et al., 1977, p. 379; emphasis added). This study suggests adding “problems of speaking” to this list, because there is evidence that particular practices of OIR—such as questioning repeats (e.g., Extract 1) and certain enactments of What?—can constitute practices for communicating that trouble responsibility belongs to addressees. Fourth, practices of OIR are practices for implementing action, and it is sometimes mistakenly assumed that OIR solely implements the action of initiating repair; that is, the action of repair for repair’s sake. However, when Schegloff wrote “The action, or actions, [of OIR] include (among possible others) initiation and solution [of repair]” (1997, p. 504; emphasis added), he recognized that OIR can simultaneously implement other actions, such as “doubt, non-alignment, disagreement, challenge, rejection, etc.” (p. 505). Through the action of apologizing for having to initiate repair, the apology-based OIR is claimedly self-accusative and can be a practice for preserving trouble-source speakers’ positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

This study has at least three limitations. First, this study does not address vocal and nonvocal practices that can accompany the composition of virtually any verbal practice of OIR, but that nonetheless can participate in the “meaning” of OIR and its management of trouble responsibility. For example, this study does not address phonetic features of OIR-responses, or their relationships (see Curl, 2005; Selting, 1996). There may be phonetic ways of producing and responding to OIR that manage trouble responsibility, such as communicating accusation, astonishment, sarcasm, and so on. Furthermore, this study does not address nonvocal features of OIR, such as thrusting one’s head forward and “presenting an ear” to communicate a lack of hearing, or furrowing one’s eyebrows to communicate misunderstanding or disbelief.

Second, in addition to the proximity of OIR from the trouble-source turn (Extract 13), there are many other features of prior conduct that might affect persons’ understanding and deployment of OIR, at least in terms of trouble responsibility. For example, in the face of open-class OIR, if the trouble source is completely overlapped by other talk, certain types of trouble (e.g., hearing) may be more prima-facie relevant. Even participants’ orientations to their respective levels of epistemic authority may matter (Koshik, 2003).

Finally, although other types of OIR were examined—such as the questioning repeat (Extract 1), [apology + What?] (Extracts 2–3), [apology + repair-related offense account] (Extracts 5–7), and What? by itself (Extract 4)—the present arguments are systematically supported only for the apology-based, open-class OIR (I’m sorry? and Sorry?). Future research needs to examine other practices of OIR for the social action(s) they accomplish, for their comparative relationship to the
apology-based OIR in terms of trouble responsibility, and for their relational functions. For example, despite Extract 4, this article does not systematically support the argument (which may, or may not, be true) that the open-class OIR What? is a practice for communicating repair-initiators’ stance that trouble responsibility belongs to trouble-source speakers, that it does so “more than” the apology-based OIR, or that it is a practice for actively communicating interpersonal disalignment. Similarly, despite Extract 1, the present arguments have not been systematically supported for the questioning repeat, even though it is a practice for claiming that repair initiators (at least) heard (if not understood) the trouble source, and thus for eliminating at least one type of trouble for which repair-initiators are responsible. Nonetheless, this article has laid out, and partially defended, the notion of trouble responsibility during OIR, suggesting that OIR is a rich region of interaction in which to study the constitution and management of relationships and intersubjectivity.

Notes

[1] Note that a conversation-analytic approach does admit that relational structures can transcend individual interactions (Millar & Rogers, 1976; Sigman, 1991), and that variables exogenous to interaction (e.g., sex, race, emotion, and relational history) can affect both the process of communication and its understanding by participants. However, conversation analysis imposes particular methodological conditions for proving such claims (Schegloff, 1987a).

[2] Trouble hearing is accountable as a virtual offense at least because the rules for turn taking are designed to motivate listening (Sacks et al., 1974). Additionally, trouble understanding is similarly accountable at least because actors share, rely on sharing, and (all things being equal) trust one another to implement common practices of meaning-making (Garfinkel, 1967); this trust includes the fact that communication is guided by the principle of recipient design: “The multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the coparticipants” (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 727).

[3] That these types of apologies do not clearly index a particular offense is highlighted by two additional observations. First, these types of apologies occur with apparent equal frequency in non-face-to-face settings, where there is no embodied evidence of offense, and they appear to operate in the same fashion. For example, see Extract A, which is drawn from a phone call between two physicians. Here, D2’s prospective apology “I’m sorry.” (2 →), which precedes the OIR “eight two one,” is produced immediately adjacent to the trouble source (i.e., without delay; 1 →).

Extract A: [Boyd Tymp - Chancellor P2:6 (22.26)] - RT: CM

01 D2: What’s thee eight hundred [num’er.]
02 1 → D1: [ .hh] It’s uh eight hundred
03 1 → D2: eight two o:ne, (.) oh on:e fi:ve oh:
04 2 → D2: I’m sorry. eight two o:[ne ]
05 3 → D1: [Yeah.] eight two o:ne
06 (0.2)
07 D1: Oh one fi:ve o:h,
08 D2: <Oh one five oh.>

Second, prospectively apologizing, in this type of sequential position, is not reserved for the action of OIR, but for myriad possibly offensive actions. For example, see Extract B, which is drawn from an American phone call. Here, Ann prospectively apologizes, “I’m sorry”, for having to refuse Kammy’s request to speak to Sally Murdock.
These extracts, along with Extracts 2, 6, and 7 (in text), indicate that, although there are cases in which prior (often visible) conduct may provide participants with ways of determining that a prospective apology specifically indexes an OIR-related offense, this is by no means always the case.

[4] Regarding Extract 6, one might argue that D1’s “>(speak up) <” (line 7) and “y < jus’ have to speak up a little bit.” (lines 11–12)—which arguably accuse/blame the trouble-source producer D2—are counter evidence to the present argument because they claim that trouble responsibility belongs to the trouble-source producer (vs. repair initiator). However, note that, in each case (i.e., lines 7 and 11), the first/initial account for the apology, and the account most proximate to the apology, is a formulation of the repair-initiator’s personal failure to hear: “ >l=couldn’t- <” (line 7) and “I can’t hear >you” (line 11). The management of trouble responsibility within a turn of talk is not static, nor is it dichotomous in terms of whether trouble responsibility is claimed to reside with “self” or “other.” The possibility that prospectively apologizing (for OIR or other actions; see Note 3, Extract B) is a practice for claiming personal responsibility for a possible offense does not preclude apologizers from subsequently, and thus contingently, “spreading” or redirecting responsibility to other participants, as seems to happen in Extract 6.

[5] In particular cases, verbatim repeats involved the omission of unit-initial and unit-final objects (frequently, turn-initial and turn-final objects) from trouble sources, such as discourse particles (e.g., So, Now, Well, Oh, Actually, etc.) and tag questions. Schegloff (2004b) observed that the function of these objects frequently depends on their sequential positioning relative to immediately prior talk/action, and that the same objects frequently do not serve the same function outside of such locations. Because, relative to trouble sources, responses to open-class OIRs are in different sequential locations (e.g., unit-initial objects are now adjacent to OIRs), unit-initial and unit-final objects in trouble sources are frequently omitted in responses to OIRs because they are not longer relevant in the same way.

[6] Three types of cases were excluded. First, there were cases where the trouble source (1 →) was not hearable/transcribable, and thus where it was not possible to determine if the repair (3 →) was a verbatim repeat. Second, there were cases where apology-based OIRs were Nth (e.g., second) repair-initiation attempts in a series of attempts to repair a same trouble source. For example, see Extract C, which is drawn from an American pediatric visit; at line 1, the physician’s “you two” refers to the mother and the father.

Extract B: HELP [UTCL:A8]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>ANN: May I help you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>KAM: Yes, uh is Sally-uh Murdock available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>→ ANN: I’m sorry Sally: uh is not here this afternoon she works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>in the mornin’ she’ll be here tomorrow [may someone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>KAM: [Well- u-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>ANN: help you?=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>KAM: =Yes uh-. ) yes I’ll talk t someone else?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extract C: SICK [RMS:2053]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>DOC: (D’s) he go-da school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>MOM: Ye:ah he goes to: Sandillio (.) day care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>(3.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>1 → DOC: A::::nd you two aren’t sick. huh?=hhh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>(.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>2 → MOM: Hm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>1 → DOC: .hh You two aren’t sick.-hh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2'→ MOM: I’m sorry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3 → DOC: Y:ou two. (.) have[n’ been °sick with cold[s. (right?)°]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>MOM: [ No no (no) [But=I ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>know he’s &gt;one of °is&lt; teachers is out with strep throat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here, there is a bias for the mother’s second OIR attempt, “I’m sorry?”, to be understood specifically as not displaying hearing trouble because the physician treated the mother’s first attempt, “Hm?”, as such by repeating (1’ →) the trouble source (1 →). These types of cases were excluded because the apology-based OIR is not understood on its own, but relative to responses to first-OIR attempts.

Third, there were cases where the apology-based OIR was not the OIR ultimately responded to. That is, the apology-based OIR is the first OIR attempt, but it gets pursued, prior to turn transfer, with another type of OIR. For example, see Extract D.

**Extract D: TOPERZNA [RMS:38:35:04]**

01 DOC: With him (.) I don’t see any sign of bacterial infection right now.
03 (0.3/.hhh)
04 DOC: So: m: [y ]
05 MOM: [Th]ey almost (.) thought there was uh:m (.)
06 1→ toferi:ne toe- (.) [
07 2→ DOC: [I’m o>sor’y,<<]
08 (0.8)
10 2’→ DOC: What?
11 (0.7)
12 3→ MOM: Toferįna. (.(English))

The physician initiates repair with, “I’m o>sor’y, <<” (2 →), but, prior to turn transfer (and after the long silence at line 8 where the mother “fails” to respond), he reinitiates repair with “What?” (2’ →). These types of cases were excluded because the sequentially implicative action was no longer an apology-based OIR.

**References**


Bolden, G. (in press). Little words that matter: Discourse markers “so” and “oh” and the doing of other-attentiveness in social interaction. *Journal of Communication*.


Appendix: Transcription Conventions

01  Left-justified numbers: Line numbers referred to in text.
1→  Numbers with arrows following line numbers: Reference points for readers referred to in text.
LES: Abbreviated name with colon: Speaker identification (e.g., LES = Leslie).
.   Period: Falling intonation.
,   Comma: Slightly rising intonation.
?   Question mark: Strongly rising intonation.
underline Underlining: Increased volume/amplitude relative to surrounding talk.
[overlap] Brackets: Onset and offset of overlapping talk.
( ) Parentheses with a period: A pause of less than 0.2 seconds.
(0.2) Parentheses with numbers: Silence measured in seconds and tenths of seconds.
:   Colon(s): Preceding sound is extended or stretched; the more the longer.
.h Superscripted period preceding h’s: Inbreaths; the more the longer.
.sound Superscripted period preceding sounds: Sounds produced while inhaling
h   H’s: Outbreaths (sometimes indicating laughter); the more the longer.
>fast< Greater-than/less-than signs: Talk with increased pace relative to surrounding talk.
<slow> Less-than/greater-than signs: Talk with decreased pace relative to surrounding talk.
Cut-  Word/sound followed by hyphen: Preceding sound is cut off/self-interrupted.
=   Equals sign: Words/sounds are latched or ran together with no silence.
#word# Number sign: Words/sounds are produced with vocal fry (i.e., frog voice).
"soft" Degree signs: Talk with decreased volume relative to surrounding talk.
hah/heh Laugh token: Relative open or closed position of laughter
↑word↓ Up arrow/down arrow: Talk with increased pitch relative to surrounding talk.
↓word↑ Down arrow/up arrow: Talk with decreased pitch relative to surrounding talk.
(that/hat) Filled single parentheses: Transcriptionist doubt about talk.
((Cough)) Filled double parentheses: Scenic details or an event/sound not easily transcribed.
(   ) Empty parentheses: Words/sounds that are not hearable/understandable.