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A ‘Three-Try Rule’ for the Organization of Turn Construction in Talk-in-Interaction

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Sociology

by

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ABSTRACT

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Members of society routinely manage trouble in speaking while conversing with one another; occasionally, they make multiple tries in succession at resolving the trouble(s)-at-hand in the course of constructing turns at talk. In this thesis, I use conversation-analytic methods to examine a collection of fragments of naturally-occurring interactions in which speakers are observed to successively adjust their verbal production of (part of) an ongoing turn. I describe a range of practices that speakers may employ in making such successive tries at delivering turn elements and an array of next actions that recipients of an ongoing try-series may produce in different placements. On the basis of these speakers’ turn-constructional practices and recipients’ responsive action designs, I propose that members orient to three tries as a normative maximum for constructing elements within the same turn and managing the trouble(s) that arises in the process. Lastly, I conclude by considering some implicated aspects of this generic ‘three-try rule’ alongside several lines of research for future investigation.

I. A ‘Three-Try Pattern’ in Speakers’ Management of Trouble in Constructing Turn Elements

The construction of elements of talk, and other conduct, in human interaction are fundamentally structurally projectable and progressively realized (Lerner and Raymond 2021). A current element (a sound, word, manual move, or other unit), as it is being constructed, regularly projects the shape of a next element; and, as the next element is being progressively realized, it is ordinarily constructed in such a way as to be prosodically and grammatically continuous with the just-prior element (cf. Lerner 1996). It is by virtue of these features that we experience ‘smooth conversations’ in most of our daily interactions with other members of society, such as the following extract of a telephone call between two friends, in which Ava is telling Bee her experience of playing basketball at college earlier that day:

- (1) [TG, 00:55-2:04, I] (simplified)
- 01 Ava: I’m so:: tired. I just played ba:sketball today since the
02 first time since I was a freshmen in hi:gh sch[ool.]
- 03 Bee: [Ba::] sk(h)et=
04 =b(h)a(h)ll? (h) [(Whe(h)re.)
- 05 Ava: [Yeah for like an hour and a ha:[lf.]
- 06 Bee: [.hh] Where
07 did you play ba:sk[etball.]
- 08 Ava: [(The) gy]:m.
- 09 Bee: In the gy:m? [(hh)
- 10 Ava: [Yea:h. Like grou(h)p therapy.=You know
11 [half the grou]p that we had la:st term was there and we=

12 Bee: [O h : : : .].hh
 13 Ava: =[just playing arou:nd.
 14 Bee: =[.hh
 15 Bee: Uh-fo[oling around.
 16 Ava: [.hhh
 17 Ava: (And-) yeah so, some of the guys who were better you know went
 18 off by themselves so it was two girls against this one guy
 19 and he's ta:ll.=You know? [.hh
 20 Bee: [Mm hm?

No technical knowledge is required to observe that most of the above stretch of talk is uttered with very few ‘hitches’ and ‘perturbations’ (cf. Schegloff 2000), i.e. progressively realized. Occasionally¹, however, speakers encounter trouble in progressively producing next elements of a turn-at-talk, such that the progressivity in the construction of the element-at-issue, and thereby the turn-in-progress, is halted in some way. In the next fragment, which is an extract of the ensuing interaction immediately after Extract (1), the speakers observably suspend the progressive realization (temporarily), at several places (in bold²), of an utterance-in-progress in managing trouble of some sort they have recognized:

(2) [TG, 00:55-2:04, II] (simplified)

¹ It should be added that for other speakers, often referred to as ‘atypical speakers,’ e.g. those with speech disorders or other medical(ized) conditions, having trouble with producing (specific) elements of talk-in-interaction can be a regular matter, instead of an occasional issue (see e.g. Wilkinson 2019).

² In this fragment and the ones to follow, I use bold face to indicate speakers’ tries of constructing a given turn element, and where relevant, grey shades and/or arrows to highlight focal phenomena that occur before, during, and/or after speakers’ (successive) repair attempt(s).

Without going into its interactional details, three empirical facts can be identified based on the preceding fragment about speakers' practices for managing trouble in constructing elements of an ongoing turn:

- i. While turns-at-talk overall proceed progressively, speakers, sometimes, do recognize and indicate trouble in constructing an element of turn-in-progress, regularly by halting its progressive realization.
- ii. There are at least three generic repair procedures³ available to trouble-source speakers upon suspended construction of a turn element, including (a) *recycling* (part of) the halted utterance and resume (line 35: '**she's al- she's alright**'), (b) *modifying* (part of) the halted utterance and resume (line 46: '**by the t-you know when** I left for school today'), and (c) *directly resuming* without breaching grammatical progressivity (line 37: '**the uh:: hospital**').
- iii. In managing such turn-constructural trouble, speakers may finalize the construction of a given turn element in *two* tries (original try and one repair attempt, e.g. line 46: '**by the t-you know when** I left for school today'), or *three* tries (original try and two repair attempts, e.g. line 21: '**I had- I was- I couldn't** stop laughing'), or even more (a possibility that does not empirically occur in this extract).

³ Cf. Schegloff (2013) on ten operations of same-turn repair as well as Lerner and Raymond (2024) on four elementary forms of adjusting action.

Of the most relevance to our present investigation is the very last observation. Indeed, there has been a vast array of studies in the past on different aspects of the organization of trouble management in talk-in-interaction, since Schegloff et al.'s (1977) pioneering research on 'repair' in conversation analysis⁴. Although speakers recurrently restore the normatively progressive realization of talk quickly and successfully with one repair attempt (Schegloff et al. 1977; Schegloff 1979), it is always a possibility – and an empirical fact as I have shown above – that speakers' use of this self-righting machinery can go wrong itself, or can fail to address the trouble(s) at hand at all. It is this aspect of the organization of repair in social interaction that has received (except Schegloff 1979: 277-280; Lerner and Kitzinger 2012: 112); and it is, then, cases in which speakers address problems with more than one repair attempt, or fail to address them at all despite the repair effort, that I aim to bring to the fore in this thesis.

Casual inspection of such cases suggests that speakers recurrently take *up to three tries* to construct a possibly-finalized version of an element of ongoing turn; that is, a 'three-try pattern' seems to have emerged from speakers' actual practices for managing the aftermath of a failed repair attempt in conversation. This initial noticing finds additional support in Schegloff's (1979) preliminary examination of 'successive repairs' within the same turn. In what follows, I undertake a fuller investigation this 'three-try pattern' and propose that three tries are oriented to by both speakers and recipients as a normative maximum in the construction of elements of turn-in-progress. I first analyze the normative character of the 'three-try pattern' as revealed in speakers' turn-constructive practices for successively managing troubles. Then, I describe how it is that this 'three-try rule' is also upheld in, and

⁴ See, e.g. Kitzinger (2013), for a review of conversation-analytic research on repair.

provides for, recipients' design of responsive actions. I conclude this report by explicating how the present study constitutes a first installment of a larger project and what other possible installments might look like.

II. The Normative Character of the ‘Three-Try Pattern’

In further inspecting cases containing three or more turn-constructual tries (i.e. two or more repair attempts within the same turn), most common are the ones in which the speaker produces a third try as the *bona fide* last try. Those three tries, as a small selection of such cases demonstrate below, can take different trajectories⁵:

(3) [Joyce & Stan, 03:44-03:56]

01 J: Why don'tchoo: go into Westwoo:d, (0.4) and go to Bullocks.

02 (1.2)

03 S: Bullocks? ya mean **that one right** u:m (1.1) tch! (.) **right by**

04 **thee: u:m** (.) **whazit the plaza? theatre::**

(4) [BBC Radio 4:Woman's Hour:20240111, 10:52-11:01]

01 Naz: ... m:y jo::b is to ave:nge Za:ra::.

02 .hhh >Anduh thuh< sa::me ti::me .hh

03 help (0.2) syste::ms .hh **to-to-to** cha:nge. ...

(5) [Stephen Hendry vs. Tian Pengfei]

01 SH: **Wha' wudju**=uggg >**Wha' wu**=How **wudju**:.<

(6) [Stephen Hendry vs. Tian Pengfei]

01 SH: ... I-ts very ↑lucky tuh >**have thuh-have this-have this**

⁵ A fuller report of the trajectories one can take to produce three tries at a bit of talk is in preparation for future publication. For now, I may simply note that (i) trajectories of speakers' successive repair attempts may be represented in such schemas as 'A-B-C' (Extract 9) and 'A-B-AB' (Extract 8); and (ii) whatever trajectory a series of tries take, trouble-source speakers make it clearly inferable in these cases that they are struggling with constructing one *same* bit of talk – and are committed to delivering it up.

02 **suppor'** becuz i-< .hhh i's:: comple'y differen'
 03 to thuh:: thuh suppor' (.) en thuh UK:.

(7) [Debbie & Shelley]

01 She: .hh an' I said b- to be real honest with you:
 02 I have to decide do I wanna spend this money
 03 becuz if Mark was goin' .hh he was gonna pay
 04 **fer- fer m- a lot of it,** cause he won money
 05 playing footba:ll.
 06 Deb: Uhuh

(8) [BBC Radio 4:Woman's Hour:20240311, 13:46-14:01]

01 Emm: Yes:. Lots of questions to be **an- as- an:swered and a:sked=**
 02 =>it seems< .hhhh this morning.

(9) [BBC:Framed:Rachel Casey:20240220]

01 Rac: .hhhh AN::DZ (.) listen we know: (.) >Judd does< no' like
 02 losing.=>Thez **a LOTTA pe-EV' RY-nob' dy**< wants to lo:se bu'
 03 Judd in particular ...

For some investigators, the three-try pattern observed in speakers' management of turn-constructional trouble may reasonably appear to hold statistical significance of some sort. While its statistical status might well be worth determining, our core interests here are to describe speakers' and recipients' practices for producing and interpreting a series of tries at constructing a given turn element, and analyze what they can tell us about participants' own understanding of the significance (or non-significance) of such a three-try pattern to their

social life. In the rest of this section, I describe a range of turn-constructural practices employed by trouble-source speakers in producing such three-tries-in-a-series, aiming to show that cases such as Extracts (3) – (9) above do *not* just happen to have three tries, but rather, ‘three tries’ are a practically-accomplished phenomenon and oriented to as a *normative maximum* for constructing an emerging turn element.

A. Display (Extra) Discretion When Producing a Third Try

The array of practices I will describe are arranged along their placement in a ‘try-series’ which consists of two specifiable positions: (i) before and/or during an imminent third try, and (ii) after a possibly-failed third try. In the former position, speakers may display discretion – sometimes, extra discretion, relative to the production of the prior two tries – in producing a third try, as if it is their ‘last chance’ to deliver up the turn element at issue. This is primarily done by way of three prosodic devices.

First, speakers can deploy *intra-turn silence* to indicate ‘last-try discretion.’ Such silence can be unfilled where there is simply no hearable sound, as in Extract (10) (see ->b); or, it can be filled – that is to say, speakers hearably make some verbal noise (e.g. *uh*, *mm*, *eh*) as though they are ‘thinking out loud,’ as in Extract (11).

(10) [Case 40_Wade:retranscribed]

01 PY: ->a TCH=.HHHHH UH:M: (0.2) **HOW-** (0.2) **WHA' KINDSUV THINGS**
 02 **make you feel-** ((volume gradually diminishes))
 03 ->b (1.0)
 04 PY: tch!
 05 ->b (0.7)
 06 PY: SO: **HOW DO YOU FEEL.**

(11) [BBC:Saturday Breakfast:20250305]

01 EO: .hhhhh >Good mornin'< ten to se:ven on five live Saturday

02 Break↑fast,=Therz uh growing issue in Bristol uv people living

03 in va:nz on thuh stree:t. .hhhh ina ↑open area call' thuh

04 daw::nz an' ↑elsewhere across thuh city. .hhh **Estimates now:**

05 uh-uh-**Estimates**-#eh:::eh-#>**Theriz an estimate**< **now:** th-around

06 >°uh-°seven hundred< va:nz in caravanz .hhhh across its

07 area. ...

Also, note that in (10), it is not just the pure presence of a silence that matters, but also its extended length relative to that of the brief pause between the first and second tries (i.e. two tenths of a second; see ->a).⁶

Second, *breathing* is another comparable device. In next fragment, it is specifically a six-tenth second of in-breath that is being deployed right before the beginning of a third try (effectively last try).⁷

(12) [BBC Comedy of the Week]

01 NA: ... Can you explain: **why ei ai::** (0.3) tch! => **why ei ah-<**

02 .hhhhh/ (0.6) **why::** (0.3) **e:i a::i:** (0.3) i::s >such a ho'

⁶ Cf. Extracts (11) and (12).

⁷ Note that this fragment is extracted from a supposedly-scripted comedy podcast. It, therefore, does not naturally occur in the same sense, or to the same extent, as the other cases I examine here. Yet, it does show that script-writers' incorporate into script-writing their acute observations of how people naturally trip over pronouncing words in successive manners and the ordinary comical character of it – and that is partly how audience/listeners come to understand these scripted interactions and appreciate the comedies within them (see also Whitehead et al. 2025: 100).

03 topic< ↓at thuh moment.↓

Lastly, speakers can display discretion through an *enunciation* of the in-progress third try. As shown in Extract (13) below, such an enunciation can be achieved through a combination of prosodic adjustments, including slower tempo, higher volume, emphasis, and elongation, whereas its most prominent auditory feature is that nearly every sound of the unit being enunciated is clearly pronounced. Still, the prosodic technicalities of the lay term ‘enunciation’ await further specification.

(13) [GR:SOC185E:#3]

01 GR: hhh Gividuh liddle depth by talkin’ abou’
02 thuh stadasmis-STADA=u:↑s:- .mthhh (0.2) uh=(h)n(h)n(h)
03 <STA:TIC misconception.> ...

B. Register Failure or Reset after a Possibly-Failed Third Try

Moving to the other specifiable position, as their production of a third try observably runs into trouble, and with the prospect of potential failure, speakers may reset the ongoing turn construction or instead register its failure. In choosing either route, speakers explicitly acknowledge a third try as the normative ‘right boundary’ of a try-series for constructing a given turn element.⁸

Below, two fragments illustrate speakers’ registering of failure upon a self-interruption of a third try-in-progress. In both cases, an expletive is uttered. In Extract (14), the speaker

⁸ Cf. Schegloff’s (1979) discussion on different types of repair initiator as the ‘left boundary’ of a repair.

registers recognition of a failure with a change-of-state token ‘oh’ *before* negatively assessing it as evident in the expletive (‘shit’); whereas in Extract (15), the speaker declares a lack of knowledge in finalizing the construction of the ongoing turn-constructional unit (‘I dunno’) *after* negatively assessing the failure with the expletive (‘fuck’).

(14) [Schegloff et al. 1977: 364, Ex. 8]

01 C: C’n you tell me- (1.0) D’you have any records
 02 of **whether you- whether you- who you sent-**
 03 Oh(hh) **shit.**

(15) [Beebadoobee:AM Interview:20240808, 38:26-39:22]

01 Zan: Okay.=**Star’ wi’ thuh- star’ wi’ thuh one tha’-** (0.2)
 02 **star’ wi’-**
 03 (0.6)
 04 Zan: **Fuck** I dunno;

Alternatively, speakers may continue to work out a successful try instead of aborting the turn-constructional effort altogether. Yet, rather than produce a try that formally resembles a fourth try, thereby violating the ‘three-try rule,’ speakers routinely begin a brand-new try, and in turn, a brand-new *try-series* which that now-first try possibly initiates. In resetting the ongoing construction of a turn element after exhausting three tries, speakers may use one or more of the following devices:

First, speakers may use *reset initiators*, such as ‘look’ in Extract (16), and ‘I’m saying that’ in Extract (17).

(16) [Joe Biden Interview:20220918]

01 SP: How would you say your mental focus i::s.

02 (0.5)

03 JB: Oh it's focused.=ha ha he he he he .hhh

04 **I'd say it's-I think it's-I-I haven't-**

05 .hh Look. °.hhhh **<I have trouble even m::entioning>**

06 (0.3) even sayin' to myself ...

(1. 'I'd say it's-' -> 2. 'I think it's-' -> 3. 'I-I haven't-' **RESET INITIATOR** ->> 'I have trouble even mentioning')

(17) [BBC:The Everyday Hustle:20240212, 19:18-19:36]

01 HK: ... so my las' big job >waz wi'thuh big< te:ch company:,

02 .hhh izza' thee: kinduv job >zat< <young people>

03 .hhhh duh- >.h so thuh kinduv< jo:b >thuh futuruv< wo::rk

04 .h hazn' even been-°u-haz-izn' even the:re a' th==

05 =°(>ohmuhnod<) womy tryna say ° .hhh I'm sayin' tha' .hhh-

06 thuh way thuh- thuh way thee worlda work iz goi:n' .hhh izza'-

07 (0.2) **>theh no' even created ye'**=so< <young people> ...

(1. '(the future of work) hasn't even been-' -> 2. 'has-' -> 3. 'isn't even there at the-' **RESET INITIATOR** ->> 'they're not even created yet')

Second, speakers may use *silence*, as in the 0.2-second pause in Extract (18) and the half-second pause in Extract (19), both after three failed tries and before a new, finalizing try (see also the 0.4-second pause in Extract 20).

(18) [The Late Show:Kristen Wiig]

01 SC: .hh um: [uh: >e- e- uhh< you- I just- I just wanna point out,

02 KW: [.hhh
 03 SC: earlier you said "muh- my: my former:" (0.2)
 04 "my boyfriend at the time," (0.2) you said.
 05 (.)
 06 KW: ↑Oh no no, I meant- (.) cuz he's now my husband.
 (1. 'my-' -> 2. 'my:' -> 3. 'my former:' SILENCE ->> 'my boyfriend at the time')

(19) [YouTube]
 01 Rep: ... Tony Abbott still needs to be
 02 erecte- ele- .hh er- (0.5) felected fi::rst?f ...
 (1. 'erecte-' -> 2. 'ele-' -> 3. 'er-' SILENCE ->> 'elected')

Third, speakers may use *novel tries*. In Extract (20), the fourth try 'la:s' calendar yir' is hearably novel in that it uses a novel determiner ('last') distinct from the ones used in the prior three failed tries ('this' and 'that').

(20) [Stephen Hendry vs. Neil Robertson, 03:54-04:01]
 01 NR: I had that record righ'? Eve-°uh- eve' year
 02 sin[ce two thousand 'n' six,
 03 SH: [Yeah yeah.
 04 SH: >You've [won a tour.=yeah.<]
 05 NR: [Ya I've wo]n a tournament.=
 06 = 'N' this tha' waz- this °c- (0.4) la:s' calendar yir waz
 07 fir:s' one I didn'?
 08 SH: Yeah.
 (1. 'this' -> 2. 'that was-' -> 3. 'this c-' ->> [NOVEL TRY] 'last calendar year was')

C. Practices for Minimizing a Failed Third Try

The preceding subsection describes two alternative practices available to speakers for managing possible failure of a third try (thereby, of the whole try-series to which it belongs) including admitting failure and initiating reset. Those practices can be seen as practical solutions that speakers have contrived to address a precarious status of an ongoing third try, either of which – whether to ‘advance’ (resetting) or to ‘retreat’ (registering failure) – nevertheless implicates an *actualization* of the third try’s possible failure at prior moments. As consequences, speakers may still be facing the ensuing accountability of having failed to deliver a turn element within a *first* maximal series of three tries, which they have either (temporarily) abandoned or managed to finally produce after a reset. Notice then, in the following fragments, how the trouble-source speakers from Extracts (14), (15), and (19) above display recognition of such implicated accountability in their ensuing conduct:

(21) [Schegloff et al. 1977: 364, Ex. 8]

- 01 C: C’n you tell me- (1.0) D’you have any records
02 of **whether you- whether you- who you sent-**
03 Oh(hh) shit.
04 G: What’d you say?
05 C: -> I’m having the worst trouble talking.

(22) [Beebadoobee:AM Interview:20240808, 38:26-39:22]

- 01 Zan: Okay.=**Star’ wi’ thuh- star’ wi’ thuh one tha’-** (0.2)
02 **star’ wi’-**
03 (0.6)
04 Zan: Fuck I dunnoç

05 -> ((Both Zan and Bea (the other participant) laugh))

(23) [YouTube]

01 Rep: ... Tony Abbott still needs to be

02 ~~erecte-~~ ~~ele-~~ .hh ~~er-~~ (0.5) ~~felected~~ fi::rst?f

03 -> Uh::m: .hhhh (.) u:h: fwe need to vote him in

04 -> before any of this happens.f

In the first two fragments, the trouble-source speaker, after announcing failure of a third attempt, attends to the *non*-delivery of a turn element within three tries by formulating the situation as their ‘worst trouble talking’ in Extract (21), and laughing about the unresolved trouble and/or their recognizable incompetence in speaking (in company with their recipient) in Extract (22). This, in the third fragment, is achieved by overcorrection: The news reporter in Extract (23) provides a reformulation (‘we need to vote him in before any of this happens’) of part of the news just reported (‘Tony Abbott still needs to be elected first’), having evidently delivered in success the turn element at issue upon reset (cf. above analysis of Extract 19).⁹

Therefore, given the accountability of failing a try-series (by virtue of failing a third try), while speakers can indeed manage such a failure by admitting to it or resetting, it is no surprise to find in their inventory another set of practices particularly designed for minimizing the possibility of a failed third try in face of trouble in the first place. Two of

⁹ While Bolden et al. (2022) document a range of practices for exposing the error in self-repair, the practice of overcorrection here (i.e. reformulating an evidently successful repair resolution) is, interestingly enough, hearably deployed to cover or erase the prior repair resolution – and potentially the embarrassing error associated with it.

such ‘preventative practices’ are deployed *after* a possibly-failed or uncommitted second try, in place of an otherwise third try.

*On the one hand, speakers may formulate the trouble(s) that the prior two tries have attempted to resolve, thereby providing a relevant place within the ongoing turn for recipients to possibly opt to proffer a candidate solution.*¹⁰

(24) [SF 2, 12:59-13:26]

((‘Mark has called to complain about not being invited to a party Bob is involved in planning. Lengthy discussion transpires. Near the end of the conversation.’ (Schegloff 1979: 265)))

01 MAR: ... Well I wasn’t I didn’t fee:l like I wu:z::

02 ah .hh wt’s the wo:rd. uhm=

03 BOB: =rebu:ffed?,=

04 MAR: =.hh-.hh rebu:ffed,h

05 .

06 .

07 .

08 MAR: Uh::mhh I didn’t feel rebu:ffed,

Here, after two failed tries (‘I wasn’t’ and ‘I didn’t fee:l like I wu:z::’), Mark explicitly acknowledges trouble in finding a word describing his possibly delicate¹¹ inner feelings (line 02), which opens up a relevant place for Bob, the recipient, to possibly collaborate. Bob,

¹⁰ This practice is by no means specific to the domain of interaction and the placement I examine here. The intelligibility of relevance for a collaborative try and its sequential organization is enabled by a more generic organization of collaborative turn sequences (see Lerner 1991, 1996, 2004).

¹¹ Cf. Lerner (2013).

then, does take up the opportunity to proffer a candidate word ‘rebu:ffed’ (line 03), and Mark repeats it suggesting possible acceptance (line 04). Shortly thereafter, the acceptance becomes official as Mark produces a finalized try of the previously-troubled turn construction, utilizing the exact same word (line 08).

On the other hand, speakers may revoke the relevance of the turn element under repair, thereby averting the very possibility of failing its delivery at the normatively last try.

(25) [Schegloff et al. 1977: 366, Ex. 21]

01 L: I read a very interesting story **today**.

02 M: uhm, what’s that.

03 L: w’ll not today, **maybe yesterday**, **aw who knows when**,

04 huh, it’s called Dragon Stew.

Here, L first announces having ‘read a very interesting story’ (line 01) but seems to recognize an error of the date of this event (line 03) as they could/should have instead begun recounting the story in response to M’s prompt (line 02).¹² Notice that after rejecting the original date (‘today’), a second date is provided but not without qualification (‘*maybe yesterday*’), adumbrating the persistence of a ‘memory trouble.’ Rather than attempting to

¹² The present report has, up to this point, focused on repairs within the same turn. Yet, here the second and third tries technically occur in the third turn (line 03), rather than the same turn as the first try (line 01). That being said, third-turn repairs formally resemble transition-space repairs which are a sub-type of same-turn repairs (Schegloff 1997), and indeed, the second and third tries in this case are designed as if they were produced in the same turn as the first – that is, in a manner that does not attend to the sequential implicativeness of the recipient’s response at line 02 until after the try-series at line 04. Certainly, a strictly same-turn case would be ideal, and a third-turn case is included here – until such ideal cases become available – to illustrate the contour of a particular practice that can well be deployed in the same turn.

recall the date for a third time (or proceeding with the doubtful one), at line 03, L incorporates an otherwise stand-alone, ‘no-solution’ declaration into a proper third try by using a repair preface (‘or’; Lerner and Kitzinger 2015) and a noun-like relative clause (‘who knows when’).¹³ In effect, the trouble-source speaker in this case does *not* fail the delivery of a turn element, but rather avoids the very possibility of such failure at the normatively last try by methodically renouncing the relevance of its delivery.

The third and last preventative practice is deployed in a later position, i.e. upon possible failure of a third try. Before showcasing this practice, let me first clarify the term ‘possible failure’ which has largely been left unexplained in the above analysis. ‘Possible failure’ of a third try, as with the term format ‘*possible X*’ in conversation-analytic literature,¹⁴ refers to the situation in which a third-try-in-progress *can* be inferred by recipients (and thereby analysts) as already failed. Consider, for example, some of the speakers’ public displays of trouble producing a third try in the data I have discussed above:

- Extract (14): **whether you- whether you- who you sent-**
- Extract (15): **Star’ wi’ thuh- star’ wi’ thuh one tha’- (0.2) star’ wi’-**
- Extract (17): **hazn’ even been-°u-haz-izn’ even the:re a’ th-**
- Extract (18): **muh- my: my former:**
- Extract (19): **erecte- ele- .hh er-**
- Extract (20): **this tha’ waz- this °c-**

¹³ See Extract (15) above for a comparison.

¹⁴ Cf. Schegloff (1996: ft. 8; and 2006).

Two observations are relevant here. First, speakers' indications of trouble are achieved through some form(s) of prosodic change, including cut-off, elongation, and/or decreased volume. Second, the inference that an ongoing third try is failed is always subject to corroboration, or contradiction, by speakers' next bits of talk or next turn-constructual 'moves.' The few cases above, as their ensuing talk suggests, are all ones in which a possibly-failed third try is later *actually* failed. Below, however, I find other ones in which a self-interrupted, possibly-failed third try at prior moment is nonetheless successfully brought to completion at next:

(26) [PSG vs. Barcelona]

01 NA: ... THUH MOST OF IT >IT IS IN< MO:ST
 02 O- (0.4) PHEN- (0.3) f:an (.) TASTIC WAY:.
 03 WHA:DUH STRI:KE. ...

(27) [ALZ-19]

01 Kat: ... [.h That's] why **we fou::nd** (0.2)
 02 well **you: found** o:r **you:** (.) **cho:se**
 03 when we looked at pla:[ce:s]

(28) [GR:SOC185E:#2]

01 GR: ... He use two spesh- two: spuhs:- (.) ugleh
 02 <two::> .hhh=mtch! <co::mplementary accounts> for how we
 03 manage this. ...

Returning to our focus, Extracts (26) – (28) also illustrate a third practice for minimizing a failed third try; that is, *speakers may simply continue to bring the halted third try to*

completion and thereby deliver the projected turn element. Notice, further, that in these fragments the second part of the third try is constructed as grammatically continuous with the first. This practice of continuous turn construction is vitally important, because it shows speakers' orientation (or 'intention' as recipients/observers see it) to completing an unfinished third try, instead of starting a new fourth try which would thereby exceed the three-try maximum. Arguably, it is just by virtue of this orientation that speakers employ the same practice of increment yet at a different placement to 'legally' extend/modify a possibly complete third try, as seen in the fragment below:

(29) [Chinese Whispers:20240328, 14:11-14:33]

01 NI: ... thuh way in which: (.) a multiplicity: .hhh (.) au::f

02 entitie::: s:ǝ >yino<=provincial::: (.) public security

03 bureaus state security bureau::s .hhhh <were: ta:ski:ng> (0.3)

04 thee:z compani:es .hh to::: (.) collect a wide ran:ge auf

05 intelligen:ce: un:: en-differen'-°u-differen' compani:es.

06 (0.3)

07 NI: (ah/un) differen' countries I'm sorry:, .h >an'-an'<

08 compani:es ...

Here, the speaker 'reopens' the possibly complete third try ('different countries') with a conjunction word ('and') and conjoins it with the second try ('[different] companies').

III. The ‘Three-Try Rule’ as an Interactional Resource for Recipients

As the first empirical part of this thesis, the previous section departs from the initial noticing of a ‘three-try pattern’ in which speakers are observed to commonly produce *up to* three tries when constructing an element of the turn-in-progress, and subjects this observation to a fuller examination of *how* speakers actually produce a series of turn-constructive tries in the course of managing the trouble(s) which those tries are designed to resolve. I have described a wide range of practices deployed by trouble-source speakers, for displaying discretion before/during an imminent third try and managing a possibly-failed third try respectively. Further, I have discussed a set of ‘preventative practices’ for minimizing actual failure of a third try. Those practices primarily show that three tries are not just a pattern that is discoverable in the aggregation of data, but also – and more significantly – are oriented to by speakers as a *normative metric* in constructing a given element of ongoing turn in single episodes of talk-in-interaction. In short, what originally appears as an analysts’ discovery of a ‘three-try pattern’ can now be observed as speakers’ practiced knowledge of a ‘three-try rule.’

The current section continues the investigation by looking into the interactional achievement of the three-try rule from the angle of recipients. As the analysis that follows demonstrates, recipients of a try-series-in-progress also display an expectation that speakers’ ongoing construction of a turn element will be finalized upon a third try, if the prior two (could) evidently have failed. Recipients show such an orientation by using the three-try rule as a resource to produce a range of responsive actions. *What* those actions are, as well as *where* they are implemented, are all made relevant and intelligible by reference to a third try as a normative place for a projected turn element to be delivered.

A. After a Possibly-Failed Second Try: Produce a Continuer or Proffer a Solution

The first two possible responsive actions that recipients can accountably produce are done when a second try shows signs of trouble, and thereby possibly signs of failure. *One such action is producing a ‘continuer’ by reference to the possible failure of a second try and the normative expectation of a successful delivery at a third try.* In the next fragment, after A shows disfluencies in uttering ‘minnellium’ (an incorrect pronunciation for which A admits she often mistakes ‘millennium’) for a second time at lines 03 and 04, B prompts a completion of that half-begun word at line 05.

(30) [BBC:Saturday Breakfast:20240824]

((Prior to the transcript, Radio Presenter B has commented on the word ‘advocacy’ as his ‘Achilles heel.’ Below, Radio Presenter A responds by talking about her ‘Achilles-heel’ word.))

01 A: Mine’s minn-
02 (0.4)
03 A: **min-**
04 (0.4)
05 B: ->a Go o:n,
06 A: ->c **minle-**
07 (0.2)
08 B: ->b Ye[ah;
09 A: ->d [le:nnium.=
10 B: =Oh millele:nnium.
11 A: I wan[na say minne:llium.
12 B: [Okay,

13 A: >Anit[s< no' th[a'.]

14 B: [Mm:===[Ah]::: [rih'.]

15 A: [Yeah]:_ =

16 B: =↑Its justuh::↑ li'le thing

17 ↓in thuh head some[times isnit.↓

18 A: [(h)nh hnh hnh

The phrase ‘Go o:n’ (->a) by the recipient of a possibly-failed second try resembles those prototypical, one-word continuers that Schegloff (1982) observed (e.g. ‘uh-huh,’ ‘mm-hm,’ ‘right’), such that it indicates the recipient passes on an opportunity to speak in a silence of the ongoing turn – a permissible albeit unprojected place to enter within current turn (Lerner 1996) – and gives the trouble-source speaker a ‘go-ahead’ to complete the turn element as a next try. The third try, however, once again runs into trouble at line 06. Notably, the trouble-source speaker finally resolves the trouble by producing a (nearly) grammatically continuous try which brings the possibly-failed third try to completion (compare ->c and ->d¹⁵). The use of this incrementing practice, as previously discussed in II-C, further evidences the upholding of the three-try rule in speakers’ conduct.

Apart from producing a continuer, another option for recipients in face of possible failure of a second try is proffering a candidate try. If the prior choice is to pass on an opportunity to speak and leave space for the trouble-source speaker to fully deliver the turn element at a third try, by proffering a candidate try, recipients are now capitalizing on such

¹⁵ Compare also →a and →b, in which B, the recipient of the try-series, now hearably initiates a repair on the still-incomplete third try with a moderately-rising ‘yeah,’ (cf. III-B below) changed from the continuer ‘go on’ which, upon the second try, previously cleared out turn space for the trouble-source speaker to continue working out the turn element-in-progress without necessarily indicating problems with understanding.

an opportunity, not only to speak, but also to co-construct the final shape of a turn element in the making.

(31) [SF 2, 12:59-13:26]

01 BOB: .t .hhhh Okay Mark en uh::: yihknow, a (.) thous'n
02 ->a pard'ns.=fer yer- the oversight.
03 (0.2)
04 MAR: .t .hhhh=
05 BOB: =(Or [is it)
06 MAR: [Oh:. uh no:. Well I wasn't I didn't fee:l like I
07 wu:z:: ah .hh wt's the wo:rd. uhm=
08 BOB: ->b =rebu:ffed;
09 MAR: =.hh-.hh rebu:ffed,h
10 .
11 .
12 .
13 MAR: Uh::mhh I didn't feel rebu:ffed,

Here, the trouble-source speaker (Mark) observably encounters trouble while producing a second try which is indicated by the stretches of the copular word ('I didn't fee:l like I wu:z::') right before the turn element at issue is hearably due. The turn element due, as noted previously on Extract (24), is projected to be in the form of a word by Mark's explicit formulation of a word search under way ('wt's the wo:rd.'). Not only is the *form* of the imminent element inferable, but the recipient (Bob) is arguably able to make a 'confident guess' of its *content*. Note, in and through the current turn construction at lines 06 and 08, Mark is responding to, and precisely, declining Bob's apology at lines 01 and 02. Thus, Bob

has reasonable access to the word Mark is searching for as it projectably is his feeling about ‘the oversight’ (->a) as claimed in Bob’s apology (i.e. not inviting Mark to a party). So, compared with Extract (30) where the recipient has no or restricted access to the word being sought for, the recipient in this case arguably does, to both the form and content of the word, and indeed manages to proffer a candidate word (->b) after the trouble-source speaker shows trouble in the second try, to assist in an expected, successful delivery at a third try.

B. After a Possibly-Failed Third Try: Initiate Repair or Forestall Current Turn

While the prior subsection describes two responsive actions designed by reference to the three-try rule upon a possibly-failed second try, the next two subsections examine actions recipients accountably take after a third try. First of all, I consider the situation in which the trouble-source speaker is showing difficulties with progressing the ongoing third try, thereby foreshadowing possible failure. *In such a situation, recipients may choose to initiate a repair before trouble-source speakers’ potential self-initiated reparative effort such as resetting and incrementing.* See Extract (21) – repeated below as (32) – for an example:

(32) [Schegloff et al. 1977: 364, Ex. 8]

01 C: C’n you tell me- (1.0) D’you have any records
 02 of **whether you- whether you- who you sent-**
 03 Oh(hh) shit.
 04 G: -> What’d you say?
 05 C: I’m having the worst trouble talking.

On the speaker's side, I have already noted above C's demonstrable respect for the three-try rule by means of admitting failure as the third try is beset by some trouble (line 03) and acknowledging an accountable lapse of social competence (line 05). Here, on the recipient's side, I may note not only the sheer presence of G's other-initiation of repair (line 04), but that it is not produced until the trouble-source speaker exhausts the three-try 'allowance.' Insofar as G *could* have, but did not, initiate a repair when C indicated trouble in the first two attempts, the other-initiation of repair was *withheld*. The withholding of other-initiation suggests that the recipient has yielded to the trouble-source speaker to resolve the turn-constructional trouble by themselves within the normative 'time limit' (i.e. three tries), and only initiates a repair at a placement in which the three tries are evidently exhausted while a (full) delivery of the projected turn element is still pending.¹⁶

The preceding choice of initiating repair after a possibly-failed third try may further suggest, that recipients in those situations are having trouble in understanding an unfinished current turn and the action(s) being accomplished therein, and more crucially, are unable to rely on *an* understanding of whatever has been said so far – and whatever is projected to be said – to realize the sequential implicativeness of current turn, or simply, to move forward by producing a relevant next action. *When such a preliminary understanding is treated by recipients as reliable, however, they may reflexively choose to forestall the current turn*

¹⁶ See Schegloff et al. (1977: 372-374) for a related discussion of the withholding of other-initiation of repair in next-turn position until current turn reaches a possible completion, and regularly a bit *past* that place. Here, in the context of successive tries at constructing a turn element within the same turn, recipients seem to orient, in a context-sensitive fashion, to a possible *depletion* of the three tries for current try-series as a relevant metric for ordering a potential next-turn other-initiation of repair relative to same-turn repair.

altogether and produce a next action upon a possibly-failed third try. The following fragment is a case in point.

(33) [Stew Dinner, 09:17-10:31]

((Cindy went to a school trip during the day; at family dinner, she is asked by her dad to describe 'this thing' to him as in line 01.))

01 DAD: [Describe this thing to me,
02 CIN: Uh:m_ .h It was fu:n?,
03 (0.3)
04 DAD: No_.
05 (.)
06 DAD: You're gonna h(h)afta
07 do uh lot [better than that.]
08 MOM: [Well **she's-**] **she'll s- she's-**
09 DAD: -> Hey [(shh:)]
10 MOM: [(just starting.) [°She's just starting.°
11 DAD: -> [Don't: defend 'er:,
12 DAD: [I wanna hear this from °her.°
13 MOM: [() ((high pitched mumble??))
14 MOM: °She'll do fine,°

Several aspects can be noted of how this interaction is sequentially organized, in relation to Dad's forestalling of Mom's current turn at line 08:

- i. Mom's current turn at line 08 does not reach a possible completion – or has just begun, one might argue – but it *does* arrive at a possible-failure place of a third

- attempt (thereby the whole series of attempts to which it belongs) at formulating what Cindy is or will be doing ('she's- she'll s- **she's-**').
- ii. As Mom's third turn-constructive attempt is cut off, Dad intervenes to pre-empt her potential continuation of the current turn and responds with a preliminary understanding of it at lines 09 and 10. His oppositional response ('Don't: defend 'er:;'), apparently, reveals his treatment of Mom's turn-so-far as recognizably defending Cindy despite being incomplete.
 - iii. Dad may be seen as 'interrupting' Mom; indeed, in face of Dad's intervention, Mom's increment to the half-begun third try ('just starting.')17 and re-assertion of the whole try ('°She's just starting.°') at line 10 display an orientation to her right to speak within her turn space (cf. Lerner 1989). However, Dad's early response nevertheless is positioned where Mom has possibly 'used up' the three-try allowance,¹⁸ and his early understanding of Mom's action is *not* observably rejected as she picks up the incomplete turn.

To recapitulate, I have described two other actions that recipients can take in response to trouble-source speakers' successive tries at constructing a given turn element. Recipients can initiate a repair on the projected, yet unfinished, turn element, or intervene to produce an early response. Both actions are methodically positioned upon possible failure of a third try, which are made justifiable by reference to the third try as a normative place for the turn

¹⁷ Cf. Extracts (26) – (28) and (30) above.

¹⁸ The precise onset of Dad's turn, which results in overlapping talk with Mom's increment to prior unfinished turn, is also reminiscent of what Jefferson (1983) called 'recognitional onset' as well as 'progressional onset' of overlap.

element to be finalized – should the prior two tries have evidently failed. The analysis of both of these two possibilities suggests that recipients are oriented to speakers of trouble source as rightly having a maximum of three tries to deliver a turn element, and intervening actions (calling for a repair; forestalling turn-in-progress) are normatively withheld until speakers have possibly failed to deliver the element at issue in three tries.

C. After a Possibly Successful Third Try: Topicalize it or Register its Possible

Completion

As the third try remains our focal placement in the present subsection, I further discuss recipients' responsive actions upon a possibly successful third try by trouble-source speakers – that is, when speakers of a current turn have evidently managed to deliver the projected turn element without showing any signs of trouble (e.g. cut-off, sound stretches). Again, two possibilities are observed in the data. *For one, recipients may simply register possible completion of the third try and the whole three-try series devoted to a successful delivery of the turn element in question.*

In some cases, I find an uptake by the recipient positioned after the speaker's successful third try at constructing a given turn element, but it is not unequivocal to determine whether such an uptake is necessarily produced *by reference to* the third try, since the possible completion of the third try overlaps with that of the whole turn – and the action it implements. The arrowed line in each of the next three fragments illustrates uptakes of this sort:

(34) [BCC 539 3:54]

01 Clt: Now I just want to ask do you know

05 SHA: [So-
 06 SHA: °Okay,°

In Extracts (34) and (35), the turn element being constructed in three tries happens to be the projectably *last element* ('... a nasty attack of + **[disease]**' as in 35), or *second-to-last element* ('... one seventy was a + **[degree descriptor]** + **noun**' as in 34), of the current turn. In Extract (36), it is the *whole turn* that becomes a locus for successive revisions, all of which are hearably designed to get a neighboring diner to move from the couch to the floor. No matter how large (or small) a unit those turn elements are, as an attempt at delivering them reaches a possible completion, so does the turn-in-progress – of which those elements are a constituent positioned at a transition-relevance place (Sacks et al. 1974). As a result, the recipient's subsequent acknowledgement may be done by reference to a recognition of the action the speaker has possibly completed, no less than that of the three-try series which simultaneously reaches a possible completion.

A different case, however, might be made for the following fragment:

(37) [Call 320 Tape A4 Side A Bess]
 01 B: And there was another (.) person (.) family across:
 02 (.) well woman 'n partner 'n moth[er]=
 03 C: -> [Mm]
 04 B: =acro:ss the: cubicle from me .hhhh and when they
 05 heard that we were having (.) problems they said
 06 'how did you manage to get your papers'
 07 C: [Mmhuh mhuh mhuhmmhuh]=
 08 B: [How did you get out]

Here, B is introducing the protagonist(s) of a story clearly under way at lines 01-02, which has undergone three versions ('person' -> 'family' -> 'woman and partner and mother'). As C produces an acknowledgment token 'Mm' at line 03, B's third try is one sound (the consonant 'er') away from a possible completion whereas the turn and/or the storytelling it launches is apparently not yet finished.¹⁹ In addition, different from Extracts (34) or (36) where the prior two tries are self-interrupted before they could be fully articulated, B's full (albeit being refashioned as unfinalized) delivery of the first two attempts in Extract (37) arguably does allow for the recipient to register (cf. Extract 35). It is, then, the fact that the recipient *could* but does not register prior recognizable tries, and the precise placement of their minimal uptake before the current turn reaches a possible completion, that suggests the recipient is not just registering a person reference, or a possibly complete *turn*, but a *possibly-finalized* person reference that has gone through three tries.

That recipients can and do register possible completion of a try-series has evidentiary bearing on recipients' close monitoring of speakers' progress in constructing current turn, and a specifiable locus of this monitoring is when speakers' series of turn-constructive tries is possibly finalized.²⁰ Tentative results of the monitoring may not only afford attentive hearers opportunities to register a try-series' possible completion, but also allow for further responsive actions particularly by reference to a successful third try as the normatively final

¹⁹ Note also that the presence of an element produced beyond the second try 'family **across:**' provides another piece of evidence for the recipient (and analysts) to infer that there is still more to say/hear of the current turn even if the third try ('woman 'n partner 'n mother') comes to a possible completion.

²⁰ Or when the try-series is possibly failed as shown in the prior subsection.

version – which speakers would expectably take to the construction of subsequent elements of the same turn, and/or subsequent turn-constructional units. In light of this, let us consider two last fragments:

(38) [BBC:UkraineCast:20240404, 20:56-21:28]

((DC = David Cameron – the then-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the UK; IR = Interviewer from the BBC podcast 'UkraineCast.'))

01 IR: .hhhhh We:: (.) o'viously can talk to you
 02 >all morning= 'n' we know you< have to: go::?
 03 I also have a few quick questions o:n:
 04 (.) >Isarel< (.) an' Ga[za. (0.2) [Ca:n you TA-]
 05 DC: [.hhhh [This IS U]KRAINE=
 06 =[CAST.=
 07 IR: =[I know;
 08 DC: =↑SO: I'M-I'M NO' DO:ING I'M DOING THA' later.=
 09 =SO[: I'M **AFRAID** I MIGHT: you know uh:::=
 10 IR: [↑Okay.
 11 DC: =I'm >**afraid** tha<t's: (0.3) yi'o (0.8)
 12 **we roughtuh** [time. >Wehrouh[time.< [Sorry.
 13 IR: -> [>(TELL ME ABOUT) TIME. [THAT'S WHAZ [GONNA
 14 -> SAY. DO WE HAVE TIME [fuh< a:nything (or)]
 15 DC: [.MHHH We DON' REA:LLY.] =↑NO.=I'M
 16 GONNA DO:=I've-I've gotta do uh(p)-uh(p)- uh po:ll:.
 17 (1.5)
 18 DC: later.

(39) [SOC108ST:S25:#1]

((The following is an excerpt of an interview that a college student conducted with their fellow student for a course assignment. The interviewee (IE) below has just begun, per the interviewer's (IR) request, to recall an event that defines their college experience or changes how they view other people.))

01 IE: [.hhh An' so >I wazins< la:b
 02 (0.4)/((IE sniffs))
 03 IE: an::d- (0.6) >msk< somebody-a guy#::..# <a why #guy:.>=
 04 IR: -> =(h[hnh-nh A why ma]n.)]
 05 IE: [Meta fa(h)ct(h)!]=.hh]=
 06 IE: =fA whh[y man:,=k(h)h! [Cauc(h)asi(h)an!=
 07 IR: [Caucasian [°ghuy.
 08 IE: =mhmh Fa: ' che' !£=[.HHHH
 09 IR: [HE-HE-HE!
 ((IE continues with their story.))

Note, first, that Extracts (38) and (39) differ in some apparent respects including the type of interactional occasion (interview for podcast production vs. for course assignment) and how interlocutors are potentially related to each other (podcast host-guest vs. college student peer-peer). The two fragments are also distinct in two specific aspects from our analytic viewpoint; that is, the trouble-source speakers are taking part in successive attempts at constructing turn elements that are of different unit types, and that serve different interactional functions. That is:

- i. DC in (38) is observably having trouble constructing a declination of the interviewer's prior request for raising additional, off-topic questions (cf. lines 01-04).

The turn element at issue here, from ‘I’m afraid I might’ (line 09) to ‘I’m afraid that’s’ (line 11) and to ‘we are out of time’ (line 12), is projectably a sentence that serves to decline the request.

- ii. In contrast, IE in (39) has taken three tries to possibly decide on a reference to a character that is introduced into their ongoing storytelling (line 03: ‘somebody’ -> ‘a guy’ -> ‘a white guy’). The person reference in the works is clearly a noun (phrase) that is treated as unrecognizable to the recipient.²¹

Despite all the differences, it is nevertheless common across the two fragments, that the trouble-source speaker is possibly finalizing a third try without showing any signs of trouble as the recipient starts speaking, and the recipient responds to the successful third try by doing more than simply registering its completion. In (38), the recipient is evidently using the third try as a ‘springboard’ to re-issue the request that has just been declined therein (lines 13-14); whereas, in (39), the recipient is treating the third person reference as a source of tease, or ridicule, by first laughing about and then repeating it (line 04).²² Whatever each of the recipients is specifically doing in their response, *their conduct is evidentiary for a second possibility of acting upon a possibly successful third try – that is, in a word, to topicalize it.*

Either to topicalize or register a possibly successful third try, as I have analyzed here and

²¹ Cf. Sacks and Schegloff (1979).

²² If in Extract (38) the recipient is not so much topicalizing the third try, as responding (pre-emptively) to and possibly exploiting the speaker’s excuse for declining the prior request to pursue it, in Extract (39), however, the recipient is clearly making a (side) topic out of the third version of the reference to this ‘somebody’ before the speaker continues their primary project of telling the story – i.e. what this ‘somebody’ did, how the speaker was involved, how the story is to do with the interview question, etc..

above, relies on – and further maintains – recipients’ understanding of a third try as a normative ending point for a series of tries at delivering a given turn element.

IV. Concluding Remarks: Larger Project, More Contexts

Chronologically, the present study started with a casual reading of Schegloff's (1979) discussion on 'successive repairs' in service of two goals of his paper: advocating the idea of speakers' conduct of revising speech-as-it-progresses being part of what he called 'syntax-for-conversation,' and showcasing how an investigation of such conduct might proceed and such repairing practices can indeed be as orderly as the conventionally-understood syntax. In there, an initially uninteresting (to me) observation reads:

Although not common, two successive repairs on a same repairable, yielding (together with the repairable) *three tries* at that bit of talk, are not rare. (Cases with more than two repairs on a same repairable are the harder to find the more repair segments are involved.) (277; emphasis mine)

In this thesis, I take that observation seriously as a starting point for a whole investigation in which I have shown exactly how the visibility of 'three tries at that bit of talk' in aggregated data is a result of both speakers' and recipients' practices with an orientation to three tries as a normative maximum for constructing a turn element in single fragments of interaction. In short, the investigation started with an unmotivated observation of a 'three-try pattern' as seen in speakers' conduct of managing turn-constructual troubles, and now, the evidence shown points to a proposal of a 'three-try rule' – a rule that speakers use as a normative metric to conduct themselves before, during, and after a third try, and that recipients use as a framework to interpret speakers' conduct and design their responsive actions at such places alike.

The analyses presented above, however, should be seen as a first installment of a larger project on the organization of successive repairs built up on earlier scholars' preliminary yet foundational observations (Schegloff 1979; Lerner and Kitzinger 2007, 2012). The sheer number of interactional details in the fragments shown alone, which are largely left un-discussed or under-discussed in this thesis, suggests a promising potential that invites further investigations. One area of possible interest is the 'mirroring' aspect of context-free features of the three-try rule already examined, i.e. how it is that the three-try rule is applied sensitively to the unfolding contexts of particular interactions and persons (or categories of persons) therein (cf. Whitehead et al. 2025: 39-42). My preliminary analysis indicates that the three-try rule can be modified to a stricter 'two-try rule' which is constitutive of a certain class of social categories that normatively require sustained fluency in speaking, including radio presenter, lecturer, and match commentator.²³

Another companion aspect to the structural organization of successive attempts of turn construction and trouble management on which I focus here, is the 'trouble' questions. Such relevant questions can be posed as: What are some recurrent sources of trouble that speakers are managing in and through producing a second and/or third try at a turn element? If multiple troubles are being managed, how are they related to each other? And, how might different trajectories of try-series bear on different (types of) trouble sources and relations between them? To some (or some aspects) of these questions, there are already some initial answers (cf. Lerner and Kitzinger 2009; Zheng 2024), but clearly, still much awaits further examination particularly based on context-sensitive analysis of single cases.

²³ Anecdotally, for members of some related categories, e.g. master of ceremony, an even stricter 'no-repair rule' might be treated as operative.

Moreover, this report, along with the proposed larger project, obviously comes with a research assumption; that is, as the thesis's title suggests too, whatever is said of the three-try rule should be applicable to humans of all kinds – humans practicing all cultures, speaking all languages, and belonging to all societies/communities. This ambitious assumption, or rather, principle of research, has been proved to be prudent in conversation-analytic literature (see e.g. Schegloff et al. 1977; Moerman 1977; Zhang 1998). As such, the three-try rule should not be, at least at initial stages, treated otherwise – for example, as only a social norm relevant to English users. Fruitful as this assumption may be, evidence still needs to be shown to establish the validity of such a cultural-universal claim. Early results from a separate investigation of Mandarin data reveal similar procedures deployed by Mandarin users to produce and interpret a series of tries at a same turn element. Again, to robustly establish a universal claim requires further specifications of Mandarin data, and possibly, evidence from data in other languages too.

A last possible offshoot of the present study is the question of whether the three-try rule reported has any bearing on other social organizations. It seems that in the course of human history 'three' has evolved into an oriented-to metric for organizing a variety of social activities. Some, as with constructing elements within the same turn, are chiefly talk-based, such as constructing a list (Jefferson 1990) and pursuing an answer to a question (Heritage 1984: 248). Others are still organized through conduct-in-interaction, but not so much through *talk*-in-interaction, including the 'three-miss rule' in snooker, the 'three-strike rule' in baseball, and the 'three-chance rule' in some auctions – just to name a few. Therefore, future research might be directed at exploring this potential 'metaphorical relevance' of the

three-try rule to the social organization of other talk- or non-talk-based practical activities of the human species.

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