

# *Buen- -- Buena Gente:* Repair in the Spanish of the Southwest

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## 1. Introduction

Repair is a phenomenon which we witness every day, consciously or unconsciously, as we interact in conversations. Repair has been defined as the phenomenon in which an emerging utterance is truncated and then restarted or continued with some alteration in the syntactic form, if only including repetition of the repaired segment (Fox & Jaspersen 1995, Sanchez-Ayala 2003). There are different types of repair. In replacing repair, an emerging word is truncated and a different word is used in its place. In recycling repair with modification, some parts of the repaired segment are repeated but other parts are replaced or modified (Fox & Jaspersen 1995, Schegloff 1979). Another common type of repair is pure recycling (Sanchez-Ayala 2003). In pure recycling, the repaired segment (the word that is truncated and restarted) and the repairing segment involve the same lexical item(s). Examples 1 and 2 below show two instances of pure recycling, the focus of the present paper.

- (1) Oh **es -- es--** Colorado es otro estado. [10-8A, 119-120]  
'Oh **it's – it's** – Colorado is another state.'
- (2) No entendía inglés pero **en- -- entendí** lo que ella me dijo y todo. [10-8A, 354-355]  
'I didn't understand English but **I un- -- I understood** what she told me and everything.'

Example 1 shows a case of pure recycling appearing between two completed words, a phenomenon sometimes called a repeat (Maclay & Osgood 1959). In this case, an entire lexical item is uttered and then repeated completely. Example 2 is an instance of recycling occurring within the word in progress, often referred to as a false start (Altmann 1997, Maclay & Osgood 1959). In this case, the word in progress is truncated at some point and subsequently reformulated completely immediately after the truncation. In both cases, the particular stretch of discourse in question has often been considered a disfluency which may or may not inhibit the comprehension of the listener (Altmann, 1997, Clark & Wasow 1998, Fox Tree 1995, Maclay & Osgood 1959). The idea of repair as a 'disfluency' is not, of course, held by everyone, as we will see further on.

The present study will consider instances of pure recycling at the single word level to determine which parts of speech are most commonly involved in repair. This study hopes to make an important contribution to the field of linguistics by showing how patterns of repair occur at a more micro- (word) level and in a language which has received little attention regarding this phenomenon, Spanish.

Research has been done on repair examining the syntactic level of the repaired segment. A study of repair in Madrileño Spanish (Sanchez-Ayala 2003) found that recycled segments most frequently appear locally. That is, repair occurs within phrasal constituents rather than repairing back to the beginning of the main clause in progress. In addition, Sanchez-Ayala found that prepositional phrases most frequently undergo repair, followed by verbal complexes, postverbal NP arguments and to a much lesser extent adjective and adverbial phrases.

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Fox and Jaspersen (1995) also found that repair is not chaotic but rather has syntactic organization. These researchers argue that, as syntax is created during the course of conversation, syntax must allow for the possibility of seemingly ‘ungrammatical’ segments and thus, repair. In addition, Fox and Jaspersen (1995) found that repair in copular verb constructions behaves differently than in regular verb phrases in that repair involving copulas seems to have no significant constraints while regular verb phrases normally experience repair back to the beginning of the finite clause.

In a cross-linguistic study comparing repair at the syntactic level in English and Japanese, Fox et al. (1995) note that the language in question organizes repair according to its own syntactic constraints and furthermore the speakers of the languages use repair interactionally for specific purposes. Thus, different languages may show different patterns of repair but should not show random treatment of the phenomenon. Again, repair is not seen as a disfluency but rather is used as a strategy to achieve interactional goals.

Finally, a study by Maclay and Osgood (1959), which looked at the kinds of words involved in repair, found that false starts (i.e., repair occurring within a word) generally involve lexical items (i.e., nouns and verbs) whereas repetitions of a single word, or “repeats” (i.e., repair occurring between words) is generally found in function words (i.e., prepositions and articles). Maclay and Osgood (1959) found that 71% of the repair in their study involved a single word, while only 17% involved more than one word and the remainder involved only a single phoneme or syllable. In addition, these researchers found that repair generally occurs between constituents rather than within one constituent.

The present study analyzes repair in the form of pure recycling in the Spanish of the southwestern United States, an area where Spanish/English bilingualism is prevalent. As such, this study, although centered on repair in Spanish, can add some cross-linguistic evidence to the literature on repair by analyzing instances in which repair precedes the use of an English-origin word, either through code-switching or borrowing. Silva-Corvalán (2001:272) has noted that use of an English word while speaking in Spanish can be the result of the necessity of filling a lexical gap. She argues that the use of an item in the non-matrix language may be utilized because the word being searched for in the matrix language is infrequent and therefore difficult to access. To lower the cognitive processing load, then, the speaker may use a word from the non-matrix language (Silva-Corvalán 2001:290). Silva-Corvalán (2001:272) also notes that the use of the non-matrix item may be realized because that item is more specific, precise or more transparent than any available word in the matrix language. The present study will consider these factors when looking at instances of the use of English words incorporated into the matrix language, Spanish, and examine if a higher instance of repair occurs in these situations.

As noted earlier, much of the previous research on repair has been done at a larger, syntactic level. The present study is based primarily at the word level in order to investigate the types of words which are involved in pure recycling, thus providing an opportunity to study this phenomenon at a more micro level. Repair at the single word level was adopted for this study as an initial count of repair in the southwestern data (New Mexico-Colorado Spanish Survey, Bills & Vigil 1999) revealed that approximately 75% of all repair involved a single word, roughly the same percentage that Maclay and Osgood (1959) found in their study with English data. In particular, the study seeks to determine if function words or lexical items are most commonly involved in repair in southwestern Spanish and if these words conform to a closed class list or an open class list. In addition, the study will examine if the repair occurs more frequently between two words or within a word and how often repair precedes the use of the non-matrix language. Through analyses of these variables, the study will also seek to determine if a pattern for repair at the word level exists and, if so, will try to answer the question of what motivates this pattern.

## **2. Methodology**

Interviewee responses from six interviews from the New Mexico-Colorado Spanish Survey (NMCOS, Bills & Vigil 1999) were analyzed for occurrences of repair in the form of same-turn, single-word pure recycling. The 16 data files for these six interviews totaled approximately 21,000 words, excluding interviewer speech. The interview format of the data produced guided yet informal conversations between the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewees in these conversations are all native speakers of Spanish who, in many cases, also demonstrate a high level of English proficiency.

The interviewees represent three men and three women ranging from 45 to 88 years of age. The speakers received between two and sixteen years of education and worked mainly in the home or in working-class occupations. The interviews of the NMCOS took place in a wide variety of areas across New Mexico and Colorado, however only New Mexican data is represented here.

A total of 271 instances of pure recycling repair from the interviewees were coded in Excel and analyzed. These tokens were found by loading the corpus files into Monoconc (a concordance program useful for drawing frequency distributions) and searching for truncation markers in the corpus data. In addition to coding for part of speech (POS), the number of syllables in the repairing word were coded to determine the typical length of words involved in repair and to investigate the question of why a word would be more or less likely to experience constituent-internal repair. Furthermore, the constituent space of the repair was coded as either within the word or between words. For instance (3) was coded as constituent-internal whereas (4) was coded as occurring between constituents. Finally, instances of use of an English-origin word occurring immediately after or nearly immediately after an instance of repair were also coded to analyze how often instances of pure recycling precede the use of the non-matrix language.

- (3) **Hac- -- hacían** mucha ropa.  
 'They ma- -- they made a lot of clothes.' [144-3A2, 008-009]
- (4) Yo **nunca – nunca** tomé el curso.  
 'I never took the course.' [102-1A1, 222-223]

To be able to understand the percentages of repair by POS, it was necessary to determine how many words by POS were actually present in the data. To do so, a sample of the interviewee only data from the 16 corpus files was created by loading all 16 data files into Monoconc and obtaining the frequency distribution of all words in the corpus. The results of the word frequency distribution were arranged in order of most frequently occurring to least frequently occurring. These results were then saved as a text file and imported into Excel. In Excel, the sample was limited to words that appeared in the corpus at least 5 times. Of the 21,278 total words in the corpus, the number of individual words with a frequency of appearance of at least five, including verb conjugations, was 375. These 375 words accounted for 11,591 total words in the corpus, or 54.5% of the corpus data. These 375 words were then coded in Excel for POS and later used to compare the frequency of instances of repaired words to non-repaired words by POS (See Table 1). Words excluded from coding were those which could not be ascertained for POS by examining the words independent of their context. Examples of excluded words are *chiquitas* (which could be an adjective or a plural noun) and *trabajo* (which could be a noun or verb). Furthermore, discourse markers such as *ahm*, *mhm*, and *eh* were not included in the study.

### 3. Results

Table 1 shows the distribution of the repair by part of speech. To be able to compare the number of words repaired by POS, the number of words not involved in repair is included, as is the combined total of repaired and non-repaired tokens. The percentage of repair by POS, arranged from most to least frequently occurring, is listed in the far right column.

Part of Speech Repaired	N Repaired	N not repaired	Total	% repaired
Preposition	61	1493	1554	3.9
<i>que</i> (relativizer, question, subjunctive)	19	508	527	3.6
Article	38	1160	1198	3.2
Adverb	63	1986	2049	3.1
Possessive Pronoun	6	202	208	2.9
Conjunction	35	1475	1510	2.3
Subject Pronoun	8	492	500	1.6
Copula	3	268	271	1.1
Adjective	8	719	727	1.1
Verb	19	1743	1762	1.1
(Reflexive) Clitic Pronoun	5	699	704	0.7
Noun	6	1095	1101	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>11840</b>	<b>12111</b>	<b>2.2</b>

Table 1: Distribution of repair by POS repaired<sup>1</sup>

Table 2 shows the parts of speech repaired and their appearance either word-initially or between words. This table also includes the average number of syllables per word for each POS. Table 2 is organized by the frequency of occurrences of repair between words, from most frequently to least frequently occurring.

Part of Speech Repaired	N Repaired	# Between	% Between	# Within	% Within	Average # syllables
Conjunction	35	35	100.0	0	0.0	1.1
<i>que</i> (rel., question, subj)	19	19	100.0	0	0.0	1
Adverb	63	58	92.1	5	7.9	1.4
Preposition	61	55	90.2	6	9.8	1.1
Article	38	34	89.5	4	10.5	1.1
Subject Pronoun	8	7	87.5	1	12.5	1.6
Possessive Pronoun	6	5	83.3	1	16.7	1
(Reflexive) Clitic Pronoun	5	4	80.0	1	20.0	1
Copula	3	2	66.7	1	33.3	1
Verb	19	8	42.1	11	57.9	3
Adjective	8	0	0.0	8	100.0	1.9
Noun	6	0	0.0	6	100.0	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>227</b>		<b>44</b>		<b>1.5</b>

Table 2: Distribution of repair by place in word

Table 3, included in section 4.3, shows instances of repair preceding the use of an English-origin word, by way of code-switching or borrowing.

<sup>1</sup> Only one case of repair involving a past participle was found (*hecha*). That entry was included with the category of adjectives. Similarly, the one occurrence of repair in a demonstrative subject pronoun (*ése*) was included with the category of subject pronouns.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Analysis by POS repaired

One striking result seen in Table 1 is the small amount of single-word pure recycling present in the data. Only a total of 2.2% of all the interviewee corpus data is involved in single-word repair. Table 1 also shows that, in general, the amount of repair can be divided by categories of content and function words and that only the function words (prepositions, *que*, articles, adverbs,<sup>2</sup> possessive pronouns, and conjunctions) represent over 2% of repair by POS. In the following section a further analysis of function and content word items involved in repair will be treated.

#### 4.1.1. Repair in function words (closed-class items)

Table 1 shows that the parts of speech with the highest frequency of repair are all function words: prepositions (3.9%), *que* (3.6%), articles (3.2%), adverbs (3.1%), possessive pronouns (2.9%), conjunctions (2.3%), and so on. Function words are more grammaticized in that they are more frequent, generalized and abstract. They also are smaller constituents which project larger constituents like nouns and verbs. The six aforementioned function words alone represent 222 of the 271 instances of repair in the study, or 82%. Below examples of repair attested in some of the more frequently repaired function words are given, beginning with the most frequently occurring items.

#### Prepositions (N=61)

- (5) Por ejemplo **en -- en** el valle era el.. Día de San Miguel. [144-3B2, 496-497]  
'For example **in – in** the valley it was St. Michael's Day.'
- (6) Pero yo estaba muy contenta haciéndolo **por -- por** mis hermanos. [117-1A3, 378-379]  
'But I was very happy doing it **for – for** my brothers.'

Prepositions accounted for the greatest amount of repair by POS (3.9%) and show a tendency for repair between words (90.2%, see Table 2). This tendency for repair between words is most likely due to their highly monosyllabic nature as seen by their low average number of syllables (1.4).

#### Articles (N=38)

- (7) Ese me trujo también **un -- un** canasto. [10-8A, 534-535]  
'That one also brought me **a – a** big basket.'
- (8) Y **ése -- ése** sí está traducido en inglés y en español. [102-3A2, 238-239]  
'A **that one – that one** is translated into English and into Spanish.'

Articles were frequently involved in repair (3.2%). Again their tendency for repair between words (89.5%) was due to their nearly monosyllabic nature (average number of syllables = 1.1).

#### Adverbs (N=63)

- (9) Yo **nunca -- nunca** tomé el= .. curso. [102-1A1, 222-223]  
'I **never – never** took the= .. course.'
- (10) Nunca hemos tenido una tradición **como -- como**= muchos países tienen tradiciones. [144-4B2, 122-123]  
'We've never had a tradition **like – like**= a lot of countries have traditions.'

<sup>2</sup> In the present data, all of the tokens of adverbs found to participate in repair are function words (i.e., *cuando*, *donde*, *no*, *ya*)

Adverbs accounted for 3.1% of single-word repair. In total, 92.1% of adverbs showed repair between words, although their average number of syllables per word was only 1.4.

### Conjunctions (N=42)

- (11) Vinieron entre los primeros pobladores **porque -- porque** los perseguían. [144-4B2, 435-436]  
'They came among the first settlers **because – because** they were being persecuted.'
- (12) Pasteles y= cositas así **y -- y** también algunas veces un poco más. [144-3B2, 294-295]  
'Cakes and= little things like that **and – and** also sometimes a little more.'

Conjunctions accounted for 2.3% and showed 100% of all instances of repair between words, due again to their highly monosyllabic nature (average number of syllables = 1.1).

To summarize, function words accounted for 238 of the 271 cases of repair in the present data, or 87.8%. Of these 238 function words involved in repair, 92% occurred between words. The average number of syllables per word for function words was 1.1.

#### 4.1.2. Repair in content words (open-class items)

Of all of the tokens of repair in the study, only 12.2% are content words. Of these 33 tokens, 25 experience word-internal repair (75.8%). The average syllable length of the content words involved in repair is 2.6. Below are examples of repair for the open-class items found in the NMCROSS data: verbs, adjectives and nouns. Repair in copular constructions with the verb *ser* is also included in this section.

### Verbs (N=19)

- (13) **Hac- -- hacían** mucha ropa. [144-3A2, 008-009]  
'**They ma- -- they made** a lot of clothes.'
- (14) **En- -- Entiendo** más de lo que hablo. [20-1A1, 324-325]  
'**I un- -- I understand** more than I speak.'

As can be seen in Table 1, verbs were rarely involved in recycling, appearing only 1.1% of the time compared to their non-repaired usage. Their higher syllable count (average = 3, see Table 2) lent this word type to a higher amount of word-internal repair (57.9%).

### Copula *ser* (N=3)

- (15) Pero el Antonio me acuerdo que **era -- era** medio abogadito también. [144-4A2, 183-184]  
'But I remember that Antonio **he was – he was** sort of a little lawyer too.'
- (16) Oh **es -- es--** Colorado es otro estado. [10-8A, 119-120]  
'Oh **it is – it is** – Colorado is another state.'
- (17) Nuestra fe **e- e- es** una cosa im- -- [144-4B2, 095]  
'Our faith **i- i- is** something in- --'

Two of the three copular constructions with *ser* showed repair between words (examples 15 and 16) while one instance of repair occurred word-internally (example 17). Again, the monosyllabic nature of these tokens favors between-word repair, although word-internal repair is possible and does occur in monosyllabic words. Due to the small amount of tokens of repaired copular constructions, it is not possible to comment on the findings by Fox and Jaspersen (1995) that copular repair does not tend to follow any certain patterns. However it is interesting to note that only three instances of repair

involving the copula *ser* were encountered, far fewer than the number of main verbs which were involved in repair.

### Adjectives (N=8)

- (18) Oh= los **p-** -- **primero** por supuesto. [144-4B2, 148-149]  
'Oh= the **f-** -- **first** ones of course.'
- (19) Pues ahí estaba .. **li-** -- **libre**. [144-3B2, 146-147]  
'Well there he was .. **fr-** -- **free**.'

As with the verbs, adjectives also showed only 1.1% of involvement in repair compared to the number of adjectives which did not undergo repair. Interestingly, adjectives showed 100% occurrence of repair within words even though their average number of syllables was quite low (1.9). Only three of the eight adjectives involved in repair were monosyllabic (*dos*, *tres*).

### Nouns (N=6)

- (20) Eran todos **ho-** -- **hombres**. [20-1A1, 238-239]  
'They were all **me-** -- **men**.'
- (21) Y cuando mis **he-** -- **hermanos** vinían en la escuela, ellos comían. [117-1A3, 231-232]  
'And when my **bro-** -- **brothers** came from school, they would eat.'

As we saw above in the adjectives, nouns too showed 100% of repair word-internally, although their average syllable count was more similar to that of verbs (2.8 syllables/word).

## 4.2. Summary of POS and place of repair

Function words show the highest frequency of repair and the most instances of repair between words. Of the function words, 219 of 238 experience repair between words, or 92%. This figure, however, is not surprising when considering that the average syllable length of these function words is 1.1. The monosyllabic nature of the words obviously does not lend itself well to creating repair within a word. Although repair word-internally was found to be possible, it was quite rare. Furthermore, the low semantic value of function words may allow the speaker a more convenient opportunity to stall for time and plan the following segment of speech before arriving to the semantically heavier words. This may suggest that function words, as smaller constituents, are used as an ideal place for a speaker to select or plan the following, larger constituents such as nouns and verbs. Further investigation on this topic could address this possibility from a cognitive standpoint more directly.

When examining the content words, we see that 24.2% of repair appears between words. Of the 25 verbs, adjectives and nouns involved in repair, 75.8% of the instances of repair occur word-internally. For verbs, we see that just over half of all repair was found within the word in progress (11/19, or 58%) and for adjectives and nouns, every occurrence of repair was found word-internally (8/8 and 6/6, respectively). I propose that repair is found more word-internally in the case of nouns, verbs and adjectives because they are longer when considering the syllable length. The average syllable length of the nouns, verbs and adjectives together was 2.6. Clearly, there is more phonetic and morphological substance to these words and therefore they have a higher possibility to experience repair word-internally.

### 4.3 Repair preceding use of an English-origin word

Considering the strongly bilingual population of the southwestern United States, and in large part of the speakers represented in this study, it is important to consider how repair interacts with bilingual linguistic phenomena such as code-switching and borrowing. That is, does repair occur frequently in situations in which the speaker works between both Spanish and English? Thus, the frequency of single-word pure-recycling preceding the use of an English-origin word, either in the form of code-switching or borrowing, was studied (Table 3).

Part of Speech Repaired	English-Origin Word
Preposition	3
Article	3
Adverb	1
Conjunction	1
Verb	1
Possessive Pronoun	0
Subject Pronoun	0
Copula	0
Adjective	0
(Reflexive) Clitic Pronoun	0
Noun	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>

Table 3: Repair preceding an English-origin word

Clearly there are few instances in which repair preceded the use of an English-origin word (only 9 cases of the 271 cases of repair analyzed, or 3.3%). Prepositions and articles, once repaired, each preceded 3 occurrences of an English-origin word, while adverbs, conjunctions and verbs preceded only one instance each. The nine cases of repair involving a subsequent English-origin word or phrase are seen below. Note that only two of the six speakers exhibited this phenomenon and, furthermore, seven of the nine cases (77.8%) were uttered by the same speaker. The nine cases of repair preceding an English-origin word are shown below in examples 22-30.

- (22) Pero pronto pescas **el** – **el** *lingo* no? [102-1A1, 241-242]  
'But soon you catch **the** – **the** *lingo* you know?'
- (23) Yo gradé **del** -- **del** *high school* no? [102-2B1, 092-093]  
'I graduated **from** – **from** *high school*, you know?'
- (24) Porque teníamos **munchos ah** -- **munchos ahm** – *neighbors*. [117-1A2, 102-104]  
'Because we had **lots ah** – **lots ah** – *neighbors*.'
- (25) **El** -- **el** *language* de ellos era .. inglés. [117-1A2, 178-179]  
'**The** – **the** *language* of theirs was .. English.'
- (26) Tenían su class **de**—**de**—**de**—**de** *bilingual*. [117-1A2, 398-401]  
'They had their - - - *bilingual* class.'
- (27) Ya **el eh** -- **el eh** -- Ronny and Leroy were already in high school. [117-1A3, 518-519]  
'Already **the eh** – **the eh** – *Ronny and Leroy were already in high school*.'

- (28) **Que** – **que** nunca *I never gave up*. [117-1A3, 616-617]  
**That** – **that** never *I never gave up*.'
- (29) Porque **tuve** – **tuve** *three girls*. [117-1A3, 640-641]  
 'Because **I had** – **I had** *three girls*.'
- (30) **En** – **en** – ah=, *nineteen eighty five*. [117-1A3, 663-665]  
**In** – **in** – ah=, *nineteen eighty five*.'

As noted earlier, Silva-Corvalán (2001) has proposed that use of an English-origin word may be motivated by the existence of a lexical gap in the matrix language or for psycholinguistic factors such as difficulty in remembering a low frequency word in language A and therefore using a word from language B as a way to reduce the cognitive load involved in producing the utterance. Furthermore, a speaker may use an English-origin word for ease of expression. Considering examples 22-30 above, we see that the English words used, in general, have everyday counterparts in Spanish, with the notable exceptions of examples 22 (*lingo*) and 28 (*gave up*) which have a jargon and phrasal-verb quality, respectively. Given that the majority of the examples do not represent low frequency words in Spanish, it is safe to say that the use of an English word in these cases was, in general, not done to fill lexical gaps. Considering these findings, I would argue that single-word pure-recycling does not predict the use of an English-origin word and that the instances shown in 22-30 above are most likely done to ease the cognitive load of the expression.

## 5. Conclusion

Function words are involved in repair more than content words, likely due in general to their low semantic load. In addition, repair involving function words occurs mainly between constituents, almost certainly due to the short, mostly monosyllabic quality of these words. These findings are very similar to those of Maclay and Osgood (1959) from their study of repair in English. The higher frequency of repair in function words may indicate that a speaker is taking advantage of the low semantic quality of items such as prepositions to initiate repair in an attempt to gain time to plan for the following segment of speech of higher semantic value. This would help explain why content words experience much less repair in the form of pure-recycling: simply put, once these words have begun to be uttered they have already been premeditated sufficiently as to not require repair mid-utterance. Pauses required for planning of subsequent speech can be mediated by repair in the function words. The fact that lexical items show more word-internal repair, especially in the case of verbs, nouns and adjectives, is likely due to the fact that they are longer words, on average more than twice the length in syllables as the closed-class words investigated in this study. With the longer phonetic quality of the words often comes a greater amount of morphology which lends itself to the possibility of word-internal repair.

Finally, these data show that cases of single-word pure recycling precede very few occurrences of English-origin words. This result does not suggest that repair is done because of uncertainty of the Spanish word. Due to the low number of tokens in this study, however, this result requires further investigation.

In conclusion, the level of grammaticization, semantic load and length of words appear to predict patterns of single-word repair in Spanish of the Southwest. Just as there is organization of repair at the syntactic level as found in previous research, the results here indicate that repair is not random across parts of speech and word classes but that there is a pattern to repair at the lexical level as well.

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