

¡Mueve la Almohada! ¡Levante la Cara!
(Move the pillow. Lift your head)
**An Analysis of Correction Talk in Mexican and
Central American Parent Child Interaction**

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The paper examines parent children interaction in Mexican and Central American families. The paper focuses on the forms of discourse parents adopt to correct children's speech and non-verbal behavior. The majority of the time parents employ unmodulated corrections and bald imperatives to direct children's behavior. When modulated forms of language are employed, it is done in the context of teasing. The paper also illustrates how children respond to corrections of their speech and behavior. Children exhibit an epistemological stance i.e., a display of knowledge most of the time and do not necessarily model correct forms of behavior in their subsequent turns.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines verbal and non-verbal communications employed in working-class Mexican and Central-American families to correct children's behavior and speech patterns. These interactions are examined across a range of settings including homework activities and workplaces. The paper will demonstrate how the interactional phenomena labeled "other-correction" and "other-initiation" of repair by conversation analysts (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977) are achieved in adult/child interactions. They draw a distinction between the two forms of correction. In the first case correction is done by another speaker and in the second instance a trouble source is located by the other speaker and correction is subsequently done by the speaker of that which is being corrected. The following examples illustrate these phenomena:

Other-Correction

Ben: Lissena pigeons.
(0.7)

Ellen: Coo-coo:: coo::

Bill: Quail, I think,

Ben: Oh yeh?

Trouble Source

Ben: No that's not quail, that's a pigeon,

Other-Correction

Other-Initiation

Ken: 'E likes that waider over there,
 Al: Wait-er?
 Ken: Waitress, sorry,
 Al: 'At's bedder,

Trouble Source
Other-Initiation
Self-Correction

In this sequence the other initiator (Al) locates the trouble whereas the speaker of the trouble source (Ken) self-corrects.

In addition, the paper examines how parents correct children's non-verbal behavior through the use of directives and gestural modeling. The paper also illustrates how correction in non-verbal behavior parallels correction in verbal behavior. Peter Weeks (1996) suggests, in his study of correction in music rehearsals, that music directors model pieces of music for the musicians. He labels this form of non-verbal correction as "illustrative expressions" (IE). He suggests that illustrative expressions bear similarities to overt corrections of verbal behavior as in both instances correct forms of behavior are modeled. In this study, when parents corrected children's non verbal behavior they illustrate correct forms of behavior as well.

The paper also examines the manner in which the children respond to parent's corrections. The majority of the literature on children's socialization in Latino communities (Alvarez, Shannon, & Vasquez 1994; Eisenberg, 1982; Valdez, 1996) emphasizes parent's role in the educational process of their children but does not discuss children's stance with their parents. This study will discuss children's various positioning in their interaction with the parents.

The findings presented in this paper contrast with some of the other studies done with respect to correcting. For example, Bellinger and Gleason (1982) in their study of *Sex Differences in Parental Directives to Young Children* point out that middle class mothers prefer to employ conventionalized indirect directives with their children: *Would you...., Can You*. The manner in which Latino caregivers employ directives also contrasts with Japanese caregivers whose directives include statements of obligation, for example 'You must go back a little more' and statements of prohibition "If you throw that kind of thing it's no good" (Clancey, 1986). While the Latino parents do not couch their directives in these forms, they do modulate their directives and corrections, in some instances in the way of teasing, use of other-initiations and polite "vi" forms.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study consist of 20 hour video-recordings in natural settings collected in the course of ongoing fieldwork in Latino communities in South Central Los Angeles. Ten two parent families with children of ages six and seven were part of the study. Each family was videotaped twice. Examples of either 1) other-correction or 2) other-initiation of repair in verbal and non-verbal exchanges between parents and children were analyzed.

UNMODULATED FORMS OF CORRECTIONS

Other-corrections

The following two sequences will demonstrate examples of other corrections which led to self correction by the child.

In the following sequence the mother is helping four of her children with their homework. One of the children makes a phonological error. The mother stops the activity in progress to correct the child's error and this becomes the explicit focus of attention.

- (1)
- | | | | |
|---|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Rolando: | Te voy a leyer este libro.
<i>I will read you this book</i> | Trouble Source |
| 2 | Mother: | "Leer" se dice.
<i>Read one says</i> | Other-Correction |
| 3 | | ((to the child))
Leer Di "Leer."
<i>You should say read</i> | Other-Correction |
| 4 | Rolando: | Leer (.2) leer.
<i>Read (0.2) read</i> | Self-Correction |
| 5 | Mother: | Traza aquí
<i>Trace here</i> | |

The standard pronunciation is "leer" whereas the child says "leyer." The mother models the correct answer for him. She calls attention to the correct form by putting stress on the vowels in the word "leer." Furthermore, she prompts her child in line # 3 "Di" (say) to correct the child's utterance. This is consistent with Eisenberg's findings (1982) in her study of language acquisition of Mexican-American children that the prompt "di" is employed by Mexican parents to correct the form or meaning of utterances of their children. In this particular sequence, the mother employs "di" to remedy the child's phonological error. Note that the mother makes unmodulated corrections and uses a bald imperative, "di", to correct the child's error. This interaction contrasts with Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks' (1977) observations of other-corrections in adult conversations where this type of correction is often modulated through the use of hedges, qualifiers, pauses, and other markers of uncertainty.

In the above example the child incorporates the mother's correction in his utterance. However, there are instances when children do not necessarily emulate

their parents' corrections in this manner. In the following sequence the parent corrects the child's word choice and the child makes the correction, but does so by expanding upon the parents' utterance.

(2)

1	Jon:	Despues de aquí dónde va a ir? <i>After here where are you going to go?</i>	
2	Field Worker:	A enseñar ingles. <i>To teach English</i>	
3	Jon:	Para hombres. <i>For men</i>	Trouble-Source
4	Mother:	Para <u>adultos</u> . <i>For adults</i>	Other-Correction
5	Jon:	Y mujeres, y hombres. (.5) <i>And women and men</i>	Outcome
6		<u>papás</u> , <u>mamás</u>	

The mother other-corrects the child's word choice in line 2. She calls attention to the correct word choice by framing part of the child's utterance "para" and drops the incorrect word choice. The child then self-repairs his earlier utterance; however, he does not incorporate his mother's correction in his utterance but expands upon his own prior utterance: *y mujeres, y hombres, papás, mamás*. The fact that he uses "y" (and) further indicates that he ties talk to his prior utterance. This is also an example of co-construction where the mother and child jointly elaborate the term *adultos*. The child begins with a narrow definition i.e. *para hombres* (the men); the mother other-corrects him by stating a more inclusive term *para adultos* (for adults). The child then figures out the classes of membership included in the term "adultos," and thus includes women in line 6: *y mujeres, y hombres, papas, mamas* (and women and men, fathers, mothers.) Note that the child exhibits his agency in this interaction, i.e., he modifies his prior utterance but does not include the parent's exact form of correction in his turn.

In this example the child corrects his errors. However, there are instances when children do not make repairs in their subsequent turns. In most cases parents persist and maintain a strong position whilst correcting their children's verbal and non-verbal behavior. The following two sequences will illustrate this.

In segment 3 the mother is in the midst of a homework activity with the children. One of the children brings over some alphabet cards to the camera which he had brought home from school. The mother attempts to explain that these cards were given to the child by his teacher. The child, Miguel, contradicts his mother

saying that they were given by one of the *muchachas* (girls). The mother interjects and states that it was not a girl but a teacher who had given him the cards. Even though the child disagrees, the mother insists upon the use of the word *maestra* (teacher).

- (3)
- | | | | |
|----|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Mig: | <i>((brings cards to the video camera))</i> | |
| 2 | Mo: | Son letras que dio la <u>maestra</u>
<i>Are letters which the teacher gave</i> | |
| 3 | Mig: | No. La <u>muchacha</u> me dio las cartas en la librería.
<i>No. The girl gave me the cards in the library</i> | Trouble Source |
| 4 | Mo: | Pues eso es <u>maestra</u>
<i>Then that is the teacher</i> | Other-Correction |
| 5 | Mig: | No.
<i>No</i> | Polarity Marker |
| 6 | Mo: | Si. Es <u>maestra</u> .
<i>Yes she is a teacher</i> | Other-Correction |
| 7 | Mig: | No. Es <u>ayudante</u> .
<i>No she is an aide</i> | Polarity Marker+
Repetition of
Trouble Source |
| 8 | Mo: | El ayudante <u>pues</u> es maestra también
<i>The aide then is a teacher also</i> | Other-Correction |
| 9 | Mig: | Es una <u>muchacha</u> que enseña
<i>Is a girl who teaches</i> | Repetition of
Trouble Source |
| 10 | | a esto en la librería
<i>this in the library</i> | |
| 11 | Mo: | Es <u>maestra</u> también.
<i>Is a teacher also</i> | Other-Correction |
| 12 | Hugo: | No <i>((smiling))</i>
<i>No</i> | Polarity Marker |
| 13 | Mo: | Toda la gente están allí son <u>maestras</u>
<i>All the people there are teachers</i> | Other-Correction |
| 14 | Mig: | otra otra
<i>other other</i> | |

There is much disagreement between the mother and child about forms of address, i.e., *muchacha* (girl) or *maestra* (teacher). The child insists upon using the word *muchacha* to refer to the teacher's assistant, whereas the mother uses the categorization *maestra* (teacher). In line #7 the polarity marker *No* prefaces the child's turn displaying a strong position. The child uses a possible categorization: *ayudante* (aide). However, the mother discredits his form and states that the aide is also a teacher, and the attention shifts from one child to another, Hugo, who also says "No" smiling. Note that both mother and child display their expertise stance throughout the sequence as both parties argue over correct categorization.

Note that in this sequence all of the participants display their expertise with regard to the correct form of address. The mother demonstrates her expertise in language use whereas the children claim to be knowledgeable in school matters. However, all of the participants retain their positionings. The children do not act as passive recipients of the imparted knowledge nor does the mother accept her children's choices. Field (1994), in her study of other-correction in children's discourse, illustrates how other-corrections in children's conversations serve to index a stance on speaker B's part toward speaker A's communicative competence. She states, "a direct consequence of this implication appears to be that speaker A refuses to accept, or acknowledge as true the correction" (p. 215). In the last two examples the children do not incorporate their parent's corrections in their turns. This may indeed be because they do not want to admit communicative incompetence to their parents and others present.

Correction of Non-Verbal Behavior

Parents and children maintain strong positions in correction of non-verbal behavior as well. Parents use bald imperatives and model correct forms of behavior for their children. Weeks (1996), in his study of correction talk during music rehearsals suggests that modeling of correct behavior is analogous to correction of verbal behavior as in both cases correct behavior is modeled. The following segment illustrates these viewpoints.

(4)

- ((father has the child on his lap))
- | | | | |
|---|---------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1 | Father: | ¿Dónde está el pescado?
<i>Where is the fish ?</i> | |
| 2 | Jess: | Aquí (<i>hits the fish tank</i>)
<i>Here.</i> | Trouble-Source |
| 3 | Father: | No (.5) El tiburón
<i>No the shark</i> | Polarity Marker+
Correction |
| 4 | | Mira mira el tiburón
<i>Look look the shark</i> | |

5		<i>((points to the fish in the tank))</i>	Gestural Modeling
6	Jess:	Aquí <i>((hits the fish tank))</i> <i>Here</i>	
7	Father:	No. No ¿dónde está el tiburón? <i>No. No where is the shark?</i>	
8	Jess:	Aquí. <i>Here</i>	
9	Father:	¿Dónde está el tiburón (.4) dónde? <i>Where is the shark (.4) where?</i>	
10	Jess:	<i>Aquí</i> <i>((hits the fish tank))</i> <i>Here</i>	Trouble Source
11	Father:	Con su dedo (.4) ¿dónde está el tiburón? <i>With your finger (.4) where is the shark?</i>	Verbal-Expression
12	Jess:	Aquí aquí <i>Here. Here</i>	
13	Father:	No <i>((looks at the child))</i>	Polarity Marker
14		Con su dedito <i>((holds her hand))</i> <i>With your little finger</i>	Multimodal Correction
15		<i>((points to the fish in the tank))</i>	
16		¿Dónde está el tiburón? <i>Where is the shark?</i>	
17		<i>((holds her hand and guides her finger towards the fish))</i>	Multimodal Correction
18		¿Dónde está el pescado? <i>Where is the fish?</i>	
19		Aquí. Mire <i>Here look</i>	Verbal Directive
20	Jess:	<i>((hits the fish tank with her palm))</i>	Repetition of Trouble Source
21	Fa:	No les pegué <i>Don't hit them</i>	Verbal Directive

22	Jess:	<i>((hits the fish tank))</i>	
23	Fa:	No les pegué. <i>Don't hit them</i>	Verbal Directive
24		<i><u>((holds his hand up))</u></i>	
25	Jess	<i><u>((hits his hand))</u></i>	Repetition of Trouble Source
26		<i>((drops his hand))</i>	
27		<i>((hits the fish tank))</i>	
28	Fa:	No los pegué. <i>Don't hit them</i>	Verbal Directive
29	Jess:	<i>((points to the fish))</i>	Self-Correction
30	Fa:	Ya más así <i>All right more like this</i>	Accepting Comment
31		¿Ya te vas? <i>Are you going?</i>	
32	Jess:	<i>(gets off her father's lap)</i>	

The father employs explicit directives to correct the child's behavior. He other-corrects through the use of bald imperatives in lines 11, 21, 23, and 28: *con su dedo* (with your finger-instead of the hand) and: *no les pegué* (don't hit them.). Directives are also used repetitively to call attention to the trouble source. The father employs several non-verbal cues in concurrence with his verbal instructions to direct the child's attention to the fish. In line 5, he points to the fish in the tank, in line 14 he looks at his child, in line 17 he holds her hand and helps guide it toward the fish, and in line 24 he holds his hand up to protect the fish tank. Ultimately, the child uses her finger to point to the tank. In this sequence note that although the child correctly responds to the father's question "*Dónde está el pescado*" (Where is the fish) with *Aquí* (here), the father does not accept this answer but insists upon specificity: i.e. accurately pointing to the fish tank versus hitting the tank.

He acknowledges her correct behavior in line 30: *Ya más así* (All right like that). In this sequence both child and parent maintain strong positions, but eventually the child complies.

MODULATED FORMS OF CORRECTIONS

Other-Initiated Repair in the Context of Teasing

Although in most cases parents correct children's speech in unmodulated ways (other-corrections, bald imperatives), modulated forms (other-initiations) were employed in the context of teasing and humor. According to Gumperz (1977), playfaces, provocative tones, deep sighs, and exaggerated or singsong intonation act as "contextualization cues" which signal the playful nature of the act. This is illustrated in the following segment.

In this example five children are sitting with their father in the living room talking about school. One of the children makes a phonological error. The father does not other-correct the child but responds to the child by imitating his mistake. The father uses exaggerated rising intonation to call attention to the error, which exemplifies as other-initiation by Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977).

- (5)
- | | | | |
|---|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Luis: | ((addressing his brother))
¿No sabes escribir?
<i>You don't know how to write</i> | Trouble Source |
| 2 | Father: | ¿Escribir?
<i>Write?</i> | Other-Initiation |
| 3 | | ¿No sabes escribir?
<i>You don't know how to write</i> | |
| 4 | Luis: | Escribir.
<i>Write</i> | Repetition of
Trouble Source |
| 5 | Father: | ¿Escribi-bir?
<i>Write?</i> | Other-Initiation-
Phonological
Variation |
| 6 | Luis: | Éscribir.
<i>Write,</i>
<i>heh-heh-heh</i> | Repetition of
Trouble Source |
| 7 | Father: | ¿Escribi-bi-bi-rir?
<i>Write?</i> | Other-Initiation-
Phonological
Variation |
| 8 | Luis: | heh-heh | |

The standard pronunciation of the word "write" in Spanish is "escribir." The child pronounces it as "escribir." The father calls attention to the child's error by repeating the child's error using rising intonation. This is done over a

number of turns. He then switches the frame to wordplay: teasing and mocking the child as he does so, which in turn causes the child to laugh. However, the child does not repair his pronunciation and continues to repeat the error. Note again the persistency of both the child and the father in attempts to assert their positions.

Correction of Non-Verbal Behavior through Teasing

The next example illustrates how again a parent attempts to correct the child's non-verbal behavior through teasing. The father employs bald imperatives but is very much softened through teasing.

The children are sitting and talking with their parents in the living room in this example. The father is asking the child about her teacher. However, the child rocks back and forth, clinging on to the pillow as she talks. The father attempts to remedy this behavior in a variety of ways.

(6)

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1 | Mother: <i>¿Cuál maestra te enseña más?</i>
<i>Which teacher teaches you more?</i> | |
| 2 | Viri: Miss Bhimji. | |
| 3 | <i>(rocking back and forth with pillow as she does so)</i> | Trouble Source |
| 4 | Father: <i>Mueve la almohada,</i>
<i>remove the pillow</i> | Verbal Directive |
| 5 | <i>Levante la cara,</i>
<i>Lift up your face</i>
<i>(much rhythm)</i> | Verbal Directive |
| 6 | <i>((rocks back and forth, imitating Viri))</i> | |
| 7 | Mother: <i>Mira-mira sentada un modo Viri.</i>
<i>Look-look sit properly Viri.</i> | |
| 8 | Viri: <i>(folds her arm around the pillow)</i>
<i>heh-heh-heh</i> | Repetition of
Trouble Source |
| 9 | Um. | |
| 10 | Father: <i>(folds his arm imitating)</i> | |
| 11 | Um-Um. | |
| 12 | <i>(rocks back and forth)</i> | |

- 13 (*smiles teasingly*)
- 14 Pero baja la almohada
 (*but put down the pillow*)

In this segment the parent teases and plays with the child to a great extent. The father directs the child to put the cushion away using sing-song exaggerated intonation: *levante la cara*, (lift up your face) *mueve la almohada* (put down the pillow). The non-verbal behavior of the father in this sequence consists of teasing his child. He imitates her behavior, rocking back and forth. The child does not correct her behavior, continuing to hold on to the pillow, laughing as she does so. He then mocks her speech: *um-um*. He then imitates her behavior by folding his arms around his chest which causes her to laugh. In lines 4 and 5 he employs the *politer* “Vi” form to direct the child’s behavior: *mueve la almohada* (move the pillow), *levante la cara* (lift up your face), which again serves as a mitigated way of giving instructions. When this strategy fails he takes the pillow away from her in segment 7.

(7)

Viri: Miss Bhimji
 (*To the fieldworker*)

Father: Pero baja la almohada.
 But put down the pillow

Parece que traes pulgas.
You look like you have fleas

(*tickles her and takes the pillow away*).

Note that as the father takes the pillow away from her he says that she looks as if she has fleas. Hence, he continues to tease her behavior even when he intervenes to correct her behavior. The child then continues to speak without the pillow.

CONCLUSIONS

Other- corrections (#1, #2, and #3), use of bald imperatives, gestural modeling (#4), and teasing (#5, #6, and #7) were some of the means used by working class Latino parents to socialize their children. Latino parents prefer to correct their children’s behavior in unmodulated and explicit ways. When parents did employ modulated forms of corrections they did so in the context of teasing and playfulness, that is by using singsong intonation over their bald imperatives and imitating their children’s behavior.

These findings differ from studies which suggest that adults (teachers) tend to other-initiate corrections in classroom settings (Mchoul, 1990). I suggest that these differences may be accounted by the nature of the activity. Literacy activities differ from mundane conversational and non-verbal behaviors as literacy activities are relatively formal means of educating children. Children are also given greater waiting time to correct their errors during literacy activities. In addition, Latino parents may assume a relatively greater authority over their children than their teachers may. Hence, there is a greater likelihood for parents to correct their children in unmodulated ways.

It was also noted that parents maintain strong positions and are persistent in the correction process when children refused to make corrections. Valdes (1996) suggests, in her ethnography of Mexican descent families, that the majority of the teaching to the children was carried out by means of "*consejos*" (spontaneous homilies designed to influence behaviors and attitudes) (p.125). According to my observations, parents in this study employ overt forms of directives and corrections to guide their children's behavior. Children are not lectured or told moral tales but are rather explicitly told how to behave and act.

Parents and children both display an epistemological stance in the correction process of both non-verbal as well as verbal behavior. Parents employ bald imperatives, model correct behavior in correction of non-verbal behavior, and make unmodulated corrections to correct verbal behavior the majority of the time. Children do not necessarily make the corrections in their subsequent turns and in certain instances do not make the corrections at all. They continue to repeat their errors or modify them to a certain extent but do not always include the modeled corrections in their utterances.

It remains to be investigated as to why the children in this study do not necessarily acquiesce to their parents. However, it is essential to remember that the children are being socialized in multiple settings. There is the children's school where they encounter teachers from middle class educated backgrounds. Then there are their parents who are immigrants from the rural areas of Mexico. Finally, I suggest there is the culture of urban neighborhoods which requires the child to be "tough" to combat many of the challenges it may pose. In order to gain a better understanding of all these complexities and how it impacts Latino children's language acquisition process, I recommend language acquisition of children in the rural areas of Mexico be compared to the language acquisition process of Latino children in the urban settings of the United States.

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