

**SELF-DISCLOSURE IN TROUBLES TALK SEQUENCES.
ITALIAN YOUNG ADULTS TALK ABOUT ROMANTIC PROBLEMS**

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how self-disclosure (i.e., the activity to deliberately reveal something personal or private - feelings, thought, beliefs, personal experiences, etc.- to somebody else) emerges in troubles talk conversational sequences.

Trouble talk is quite a common activity in informal everyday talk (especially in a close relationship), during which the party who talks about her/his trouble often produces self-narratives. Our attempt is to integrate different domains of research, since as far as we know, on the one hand, only a few conversation analysts who have dealt with troubles talk explicitly emphasized the topic of self-disclosure within these kinds of sequences and, on the other, studies about self-disclosure did not explicitly consider the conversational script of troubles talk.

We particularly analyse the pragma-linguistic features of such sequences, considered as social and dialogic constructions.

Keywords: troubles talk, self-disclosure, romantic problems, dialogical co-construction, and mitigation.

1. Introduction

The present study aims to investigate *self-disclosure* as a conversational event within the dialogic script of *troubles talk*. Self-disclosure is usually defined as a set of verbal and non-verbal messages during an interaction through which someone deliberately reveals something personal or private (feelings, thought, beliefs, personal experiences etc.) to somebody else – often significant – with whom s/he intends to establish or strengthen a close, intimate relationship (Jones & Archer, 1976; Derlega et al., 1976; Archer, 1980; Archer & Cook, 1986; Derlega et al., 1993; Hendrick, 1981; Hendrick et al., 1988; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004; Greene et al., 2006). The results of quantitative and qualitative studies on this topic suggest that this phenomenon is strictly related to the:

(1) *Situational and communicative context*. In particular, a set of studies focused on how this activity is structured in different contexts, such as: *psychotherapeutic* (Pizer, 1997; Stricker, 2003), *political* (for example Collins & Miller, 1994) and *ordinary*, specifically in intimate relationships (Altman et al., 1981; Dindia, 1997; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004);

(2) *Speaker's individual characteristics*, e.g. personality traits (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004) and speakers' perception of self-images (Gilbert & Cambon, 2003). For this reason, the concept of self-disclosure is often presented as closely related to that of *self-presentation*;

(3) *Specific relationship between interlocutors*. Self-disclosure emerges more frequently in intimate relations (Schmidt & Cornelius, 1987). Therefore, self-disclosure and intimate relationships seem to feed off of each other. If, on the one hand, intimate relations favour self-disclosure, on the other, only the reciprocal sharing of thoughts, feelings, dreams, passions, convictions, histories etc. allow to achieve a real intimacy between people (Berne, 1970; Derlega et al., 1976; Derlega et al., 1993; Derlega et al., 2008). Speakers often use self-disclosure to receive social support, as well as to clarify some aspects of their ego (Derlega et al., 2008).

The term “troubles talk”, first introduced within the context of Conversation Analysis by Gail Jefferson (Jefferson & Lee, 1981/1992; Jefferson, 1984, 1988), refers to a “package” (i.e., a relatively long sequence of talk) in which the parties negotiate a peculiar conversational activity: *telling someone about a personal trouble*. That trouble is understood as an event, a situation or a state of affairs which represents a source of concern, worry, discomfort, embarrassment, distress or anxiety; that is to say, the emotional component plays a primary role. Such conversational activity is identifiable by typical structural features (internal organization, dialogic roles, linguistic actions etc.) and is quite common in informal everyday

talk (especially in a close relationship). In analysing such sequences, it is possible to notice that the party who talks about her/his trouble often produces self-narratives, where prominence is given to self-disclosure.

Several scholars have approached this conversational phenomenon from different perspectives. Boxer (1993a, 1993b, 1996) analysed the role of indirect complaint as a speech act, used to open a troubles talk, seek agreement, and forge a common bond between speaker and addressee. Traverso (1996), referring to the same conversational events, talked about *confidences*, as a typical model of “familiar” interactions, highlighting that the dialogues can show different structural features according to the speaker’s aims: self-narrative and self-disclosure (*confidence-révélation*) on the one hand, or rather simply an emotional outlet (*confidence-épanchement*), on the other. Differently, Buttny (2004) dealt with the analysis of conversations mainly concerning social problems (e.g., racial discrimination, teenage parenthood, or interpersonal and family relationships during therapy).

Other studies analysed troubles talk, from different theoretical and methodological perspectives (including the analysis of spontaneous interactions, but also surveys and interviews), highlighting, for example, the potential role played in the choice of attitudes and linguistic actions performed by cultural differences (Geyer, 1988; Samter et al., 1997; Barbee & Cunningham, 2000; Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Mortenson, 2009) and gender differences (Tannen, 1990; Michaud & Warner, 1997; Basow & Rubinfeld, 2003; MacGeorge et al., 2004), but also the fact that these kinds of sequences are a preferential ‘place’ for the emerging of social support (Goldsmith, 1999, 2004; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; MacGeorge et al., 2004; Verhofstadt et al., 2007; Burleson et al., 2009; Virtanen & Isotalus, 2011).

Finally, we mention Korobov & Thorne (2007, 2009) and Morgan & Korobov (2012), who investigated conversational exchanges about problems among young adults, with the main aim of studying the construction of personal and interpersonal identities. The authors analysed datasets of videotaped conversations, focussing on the production of *troubles talk narratives*, in order to explore how young adults share with same sex friends stories about their romantic experiences. Also these studies did not explicitly analyse self-disclosure as a conversational collaborative activity.

As far as we know however, on the one hand, only a few conversation analysts who have dealt with troubles talk explicitly emphasized the topic of self-disclosure within these kinds of sequences – we can mention Grainger et al. (1990), Coupland et al. (1991) and Traverso (1996), the former studying this topic in geriatric contexts from the Accommodation Theory perspective, the latter in “familiar” conversations. On the other hand, studies about self-

disclosure did not explicitly consider the conversational script of troubles talk. In self-disclosure literature, there are many studies devoted to specific aspects such as gender differences in self-disclosure (Hill & Stull, 1987); cultural features of the phenomenon (Kito, 2005; Schug et al., 2010); factors affecting the decision to narrate some aspects of themselves to others (Derlega et al., 2008).

The present study aims to integrate these two domains of research on the basis of a qualitative analysis carried out on a corpus of naturally occurring conversations, identifiable as examples of troubles talk, in which the phenomenon of self-disclosure is present in a relevant way. We particularly analyse the pragma-linguistic features of such sequences, considered as social and dialogic constructions.

2. Our previous studies

Our interest in troubles telling sequences began when, since 2000, with the contribution of undergraduate students in Communication Sciences, we started to collect a corpus of spoken Italian. The audio was recorded in ecological contexts. Participants in the conversation were, mainly, people linked by a close bond of affection (friends, partners, siblings, parents and children etc.). It was surprising to notice, from the beginning of the collection, the significant recurrence of that peculiar dialogical situation identifiable as ‘talking to a friend about a personal problem’. It was even more interesting to observe how the recursivity is not limited to the conversational event in itself, but it manifests itself also through *well-defined structural features*, beyond the specific contextual situations.

Our data show that the problems which people talk about are almost always accompanied from the, more or less explicit, expression of related feelings and moods, so much that the *Troubles Teller's* (hereinafter TT) main aim seems to be not ‘to solve the problem in actual fact’ but rather ‘to unburden her/himself’, that is to talk about her/his own emotional experience (Jefferson, Lee 1981/1992); in some cases, but not necessarily in every case, the TT may ask the *Troubles Recipient* (hereinafter TR) for opinions and/or advice.

One of the main results of our previous studies (Riccioni, 2008; Zuczkowski & Riccioni, 2010, 2013) regards the interlocutors’ taking on and negotiation of reciprocal conversational roles, that often give rise to peculiar interactional outcomes. With the term ‘roles’, we refer both to those generic, “global” and complementary ones that we named *confider* (the party who talks about her/his trouble) and *confidant/e* (the addressee of the confidence) and to the “local”

ones, strictly dependent on the specific dialogic actions they perform. For example, the interlocutor designed as a confidant/e, within such a global role, seems to have a certain freedom of action: s/he can be a *container* (listening to the confider, accepting her/his emotional outlet and expressing a tactful, non-intrusive support), an *ally* (taking the side of the interlocutor, often against a third person or a situation identified as the ‘source’ of the trouble), an *advice-giver* (offering – more or less explicitly – suggestions, even if not requested by the other), a *confider* in her/his turn (taking the opportunity for talking about her/his problems) or even as an *enemy* (appearing in different ways critical and devaluing toward the confider) .

3. Present study

We analysed a set of self-narrative sequences, found in a corpus of conversations, classifiable as troubles talk exchanges in which self-disclosure emerges

3.1 Data

The dataset is made up of a corpus of 20 conversations (total length 2hrs 39’ 14’’) in which the parties are talking about the TT’s troubles regarding her/his sentimental (heterosexual) relationships. This choice has been motivated by two main factors: 1) *sentimental problems* is one of the most recurring topics in our wider corpus of troubles talk conversations; 2) this topic allows us to connect our results to those of Korobov & Thorne (2007, 2009) and Morgan & Korobov (2012), related to similar, though not identical¹, corpora.

The partner, “source” of the trouble, and who is not present at the moment of the interaction, is sometimes a stable boyfriend or girlfriend, is sometimes an ex-partner, or is sometimes a person the TT is flirting with. Speakers involved are young adults (all university students, Italian native speakers), tied by friendship (only in one conversation are the parties siblings). 16 conversations are between two girls; 4 are between a girl and a boy (in 2 of these the girl has the role of TT, in the other 2 that of TR).

Each conversation, audiotaped in ecological contexts and transcribed by using a simplified version of Jefferson system (1985), has been assigned a code (*TT-11/01* and subsequent) in

¹ Their data were collected from spontaneous (Korobov & Thorne 2007, 2009) or solicited – by a semi-structured group interview - conversations (Korobov 2011), among voluntary University students and videotaped in a room on campus.

order to facilitate going back from the presented excerpts to the whole transcript. All the names of people or places have been replaced.

3.2 Procedures

The qualitative analysis was conducted by the four authors who periodically met in order to compare and discuss the results of their previous individual analyses. They integrated a qualitative thematic analysis with a pragma-linguistic one, using tools coming from Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis.

3.3 Aims

The main aims of the study were to identify:

- *how the TT's self-images emerge during revelation*, i.e., how the TT speaks about how s/he describes her/himself, what s/he reveals (emotions, states of mind, thoughts, convictions etc.), how s/he manages his/her own face (in relation both to the interlocutor and to the third absent);
- *how dialogic co-construction of self-disclosure occurs*: i.e., how and through which linguistic actions and strategies the self-revelation is performed, “in” and “across” the conversation, thanks to/through the negotiation process and to the co-contribution of the TT and the TR.

4. Results

4.1. The Ego that reveals

Our analysis shows that the emotional topic allows the TT the possibility to share explicitly his/her thoughts, state of mind and behaviour related to the problematic situation. In other terms, the TT's self-disclosure focuses on his/her emotional, cognitive and behavioural experiences.

As one can easily imagine, these three dimensions are strictly related (for example, the TT can convey his/her “mental confusion” connected to the understanding of his/her own feelings, to the interpretation of the events, as well as to the more appropriate behaviour to be adopted). As for the expression of feelings and mental states/climates, we frequently found:

- *experiences of suffering* related to a relation/story that is finished or perceived “at the terminus”, such as in the following example:

(1) *TT-11/12* (Elisa)

- 1 Dedicarmi più a me stessa (.) e:: lasciare che le cose vengano da sole (.) però nel frattempo ci sto male
To dedicate myself more to myself (.) and:: let things happen on their own (.) but meanwhile I feel bad
- 2 >cioè non è che è 'na cosa facile!< (.) Perché c'hai paura che comunque è come penso io che la storia
>*well it's not an easy thing!*< (.) *Because you're afraid that anyway it's like I think that the relationship*
- 3 sia finita pertanto che non:: (..) non lo vogliamo ammettere' e comunque per passare il tempo ci
is over but we don't (..) want to admit it so to make time pass we
- 4 allontaneremo ancora di più (...) perché se no (...) saremmo tornati insieme.
move even further apart (...) because otherwise we would have got back together.

- *positive feelings that are interwoven with the negative ones.* In the excerpt (2), the TT speaks about her feelings, conflicting but simultaneously present inside her (the TT, almost reluctantly, realizes that she cares for her ex-boyfriend and gets excited when she meets him or when other people talk about him). In the example (3), the TT asserts that she feels happy - also if she doesn't want to show it – when her boyfriend looks for her and she feels sad when he goes away

(2) *TT-11/10* (Daniela)

- 1 Un po' sì. Perché fondamentalmente ci tengo ancora a lui. Perché se no è impossì- cioè, una persona
A little, yes. Because basically I still care for him. Because if not it's impossì- that's to say, a person
- 2 che non ci tiene più a te, entra in casa tua e si emoziona,
who doesn't care for you anymore, comes into your house and gets all worked up,
- 3 ti vede per strada e si emoziona, te ne parlano e si emoziona, io non ce la faccio più.
sees you in the street and gets all worked up, talks to you about him and gets all worked up.
- 4 Cioè io sono stremata! Non ce la faccio più. Voglio andare via da Xxxxxx! Basta!
- 5 *I'm worn out! I can't take it anymore! I want to leave Xxxxxx! I've had enough!*

(3) *TT-11/02 (Ambra)*

- 1 Anche se faccio la tosta quando viene capito e e:: però dentro so' contenta poi alla fine che
Even if I fake being tough, you know and and:: but I'm happy inside at the end of the day that
- 2 lui mi cerca ancora e tutto, solo che la sensazione del dopo quando se ne va,
he is still interested in me and everything, the only thing is the feeling of when he goes away afterwards,
- 3 è un po' triste.
it's a little sad.

- *experiences of disenchantment towards the other person, such as in the example (4), or of generalized frustration, subsequent to the closure of a relationship, such as in the example (5):*

(4) *TT-11/03 (Federica)*

- 1 (...) Una delusione dietro l'altra, (.) un- una conferma dietro l'altra del fatto che
(...) One disappointment after another, (.) on- one confirmation after another of the fact that
- 2 lui non c'abbia interesse verso de me (..) che non sia interessato!
he has no interest in me (..) that he's not interested!

(5) *TT-11/14 (Serena)*

- 1 Va be' ventun anni, ventun anni, ogni volta, (.) voglio qualcosa e
Ok twenty one years old, twenty one years old, every time, (.) I want something and
- 2 >non riesco mai a ottenella.< Cioè so' arrivata a un punto che::,
>I can never get it.< That's to say I've got to the point that::,
- 3 cioè veramente (.) n::on glie la faccio più!
well really (.) I can't take it anymore!

- *experiences of worry that, in the following example (6), materialize themselves in the fear of having to give up to his/her freedom and autonomy in favour of the relationship:*

(6) TT-11/17 (Alessia)

- 1 Cioè una delle cose che temo di più del rapporto, ma in genere anche nella vita,
Well, one of the things that I'm most afraid about in a relationship, but also generally in life
- 2 è:: perdere:: >l'indipendenza, l'autonomia, la libertà< (.) cioè libertà di scelta su
is:: losing >independence, autonomy, freedom< (.) That's to say freedom to choose on
- 3 m:: tutti i fronti (..) >cioè intesa proprio in senso assoluto<(..) anche:: cioè la libertà
m:: on every side >that is to say really meaning in an widest sense< (...) also:: well the freedom
- 4 di fare le le p- piccolissime cose(..) non lo so, è come se:: tante volte nell'altro
to do the the s- smallest things (..) I don't know, it's like if:: many times in the other person
- 5 vedo una:: una limitazio- cioè magari so' io che mi autolimito in in tutte le:: le circostanze (..)
I see a:: limitat-- that's to say maybe I know that I limit myself in in every circumstance (..)
- 6 e che comunque lo lo faccio (..) con la consapevolezza
and I know (...) I'm doing it.

- *confusion, uncertainty, difficulty in making clear his/her feelings for the other, such as in the following example (in which TT talks about her ex boyfriend):*

(7) TT-11/10 (Daniela)

Non so se mi sta a cuore come persona. Mi ci sono talmente affezionata!
I don't know if I have feelings for him. I've got really attached to him!

4.1.1 Conflict (uncertainty, doubt)

The topic of emotive-cognitive conflict (often a source of confusion and difficulties in decision making) is highly recurrent in the dialogues of our corpus. Sometimes, conflict concerns the emotions of the TT towards the other person, such as in the example (7); some others, conflict concerns how to read the partner's emotions, such as in the example (8), in which the TT, in order to explain to her interlocutor what she intends to tell to her boyfriend, with whom she is flirting, puts up a *fictional dialogue*:

(8) TT-11/18 (Rachele)

- 1 ((inspira)) Perché io inizialmente volevo inizia' il discorso dicendo:: (..) 'na roba del tipo,
 ((Deep sigh)) *Because at the beginning I wanted to start the conversation saying (..) something like,*
- 2 “Te devo lascia' perde' oppure no?” Nel senso >e lui m'avrebbe detto< “In che senso
do I have to leave you alone or not? And that > he would have answered< “What do you mean
- 3 me devi lascia perde?” >io je dicevo< “Nel senso che, tu mi piaci, è:: da un po' de tempo tanto ormai
leave me alone?” >I would have answered him< “I mean I like you, it's:: quite some time now
- 4 che, l'avrai capito tanto, te invito a usci', vedo d'usci' con te:, però eh io, non ho ancora capito
that, you have understood, that I would have like to ask you out: but I still don't understand
- 5 te cosa c'hai in testa. E, è ora per me di capirlo perché::,
what's going on inside your head. And now it's time for me to understand it because,
- 6 non me va de continua' così.” (..) Quindi,
I don't feel like going on like this.” (..) So,

In some cases the TT clearly recognizes this conflict and his/her “incoherence” (9), that often leads to an impasse that involves not only the emotive and cognitive levels but also the behavioural levels. This results in a “decision block” (frequently in our corpus, the TT asserts to be aware of having to make a decision and, at the same time, of not being able to make one, at least in this moment), such as in the example (10):

(9) TT-11/10 (Daniela)

- 1 Non lo so::, mi rendo conto che sono incoerente però sinceramente non so.
I don't know, I realise I'm not a very consistent person but I really don't know.
- 2 Non so perché capito?
I don't know why you know what I mean?

(10) TT-11/02 (Ambra)

- 1 Devo fare devo prendere una decisione che non lo so, non so
I have to make I have to take a decision that I don't know, I don't know

- 2 che devo fa' Manue', non lo so!
what I have to do. Manue', I don't know.

Specifically, the analysis of our corpus showed a certain recursion of the locution *non so/non lo so* [I don't know] (Weatherall, 2011), often related with other interjections that in Italian convey doubt and uncertainty, such as *boh, mah* etc. According to Korobov & Thorne (2007), such markers could be considered (as well as the approximation, humour and shift of focus) *mitigation devices* used in order to save the speaker's and interlocutor's faces and to facilitate the negotiation process.

4.1.2 Past behaviours

When the TT speaks about him/herself, often s/he refers to the behavioural dimensions, both to those already performed (in relation to which s/he can express satisfaction or remorse) and to those that s/he proposes to do, as well as, to those that seem to be experienced as peculiar of him/her self or that appear to be functional to save the own positive and negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In particular, in the following example (11), the TT, trying to put herself in her boyfriend's shoes (using a fictional monologue), expresses her regret for how she treated him:

(11) TT-11/11 (Lisa)

- 1 ma vedi, infatti io ho sbagliato in una cosa a un certo punto, a un certo punto ho sbagliato
But look, I really did make a mistake in one thing at a certain point, at a certain point I made a mistake
- 2 nel cominciare a dirgli "Ti ho eliminato da facebook!", "Ho levato le foto
starting out by telling him "I have unfriended you from Facebook!", "I have taken down the photos
- 3 dalla stanza!", "Non ti voglio più vedere!", "Non ti voglio più sentire!",
from my room!", "I don't want to see you anymore!", "I don't want to hear from you anymore!",
- 4 perché lui a un certo punto si è sentito preso in sopra "Ma che è cretina?
because at a certain point he felt I was taking the mickey out of him "But is she a cretin?
- 5 Cioè non solo praticamente mi metti i piedi in faccia, per giunta mi telefoni per dirmi
That's to say not only do you treat me so badly what's more you called me to tell me
- 6 'non ti fare più vedere né sentire!', 'ti ho eliminato da facebook',

'I don't want to see you or hear from you anymore!', *'I unfriended you from Facebook!'*

- 7 'non ho più foto di te nella stanza', giustamente fa "Eh io che
'I don't have any photos of you in my room anymore!', he answers rightly *"What the*
- 8 *cazzo ti dovrei dire?"* [...] Perché ovviamente lui avrà detto "Ma questa è pazza?
fuck should I tell you? [...] Because obviously he would have said *"But is she crazy?*
- 9 Cioè che cazzo vuole da me? Cioè non solo ha sbagliato
That is to say what the fuck does she want from me? That's to say not did she make a mistake
- 10 e per giunta mi dice 'non ti fare vedere, non ti fare sentire'" e infatti lui al messaggio
what's more she told me 'don't come round, don't get in touch'" and sure enough to the message
- 11 "Non ti fare vedere, non ti fare sentire" non ha più risposto "Tu sei- tu sei fusa!"
"Don't come round, don't get in touch" he didn't answer anymore "You're- you're out of your mind!"

Sometimes, the TT, speaking about his/her own attitudes and behaviours, highlights the attempt to save his/her positive face also if s/he recognizes – such as in the example (12) – the conflict between the external self-image ("the strong", i.e. that s/he wants to present to the other) and the interior self-image (i.e. what the person knows to be, in other words, how s/he perceive him/herself):

(12) *TT-11/02* (Ambra)

- 1 Ci sono momenti in cui lo vedo e so' contentissima anche se, credimi eh,
There are moments when I see him and I'm really happy even if, believe me,
- 2 sto facendo la dura perché non glielo do a vedere!
I'm putting on a brave face because I don't want him to see it!

According to Korobov & Thorne (2007), in these types of dialogues also, humour and laughter can be considered as devices useful to save the own positive face, since they are used to mitigate the intensity of the TT's emotional involvement in the problem (see also the Jefferson's concept of "troubles resistance", 1984).

At the same time, for the authors, the same devices would act as mitigation devices (Caffi, 1999, 2007) able to save the negative face of the interlocutor (TR): in fact they would be a way to share with the friend a problem (and its related experiences), but without encumbering

him/her with an excessive emotional burden. In this way, on the one hand, the TT presents him/herself able to “manage” the problem (if I can make a joke about it, it means that I can manage it); on the other, s/he shows that s/he doesn’t want to pour out an emotional outburst - that could result in an unpleasant and/or embarrassing effect - on the TR.

(13) *TT-11/18* (Rachele)

- 1 [...] allora io l’ho chiamato, >perché me so’ rotta le palle non ne posso più je lo devo di’<,

[...] so I called him >because I busted my balls I can’t take it anymore I have to tell him that<,
- 2 l’ho chiamato al telefono j’ho detto: “Sente, io:: ho bisogno di parlarti:: a quattrocchi,

I called on the phone and I told him:: “Listen, I need to talk to you:: face to face,
- 3 e::hm bisogna che me dedichi un po’ d’attenzione, se te stasera non puoi,

h’m you need to give me some of your attention, if you can’t make it this evening,
- 4 io pensavo de- >coje’ l’occasione stasera per parlarti ma siccome

I thought of- >taking advantage of the situation this evening to talk to you, but seeing as
- 5 stasera non puoi<, o io te raggiungo giù al maneggio se te c’hai tempo stasera

you can’t make it this evening<, either I’ll come and see you at the stables if you’ve got time this evening
- 6 oppure dimme te, quando possiamo, però a breve, entro mercoledì” j’ho detto. E lui m’ha detto

otherwise you tell me, when we can, but soon, before Wednesday” I told him. And he told me
- 7 “Mercoledì che festa c’è?” [((ride))] e io ho detto “Nessuna fe(h)sta! E’ che io te vojo

“Where’s the party on Wednesday ((laughs)) and I told him “No party! It’s because I want
- 8 parla’ entro mercoledì! [...]

to talk to you before Wednesday. [...]

4.1.3 Criticism of the other

In some cases, the self-presentation – in particular, that related to the own personal characteristics and/or to the own behaviours, experienced as positive or negative - goes/ through the contraposition to the other (and sometimes the criticism). The example (14) calls in to question the “maturity” of the partner (and by reflex, also his/her own).

(14) *TT-11/03* (Federica)

- 1 Sì domenica! Io c'avevo l'esame:: mercoledì (.) no giovedì e io domenica sera dopo
Yes Sunday! I had an exam Wednesday (.) no Thursday and I Sunday evening after
- 2 >m'ha ospitato Lara perché io non c'ho neanche più casa a Xxxxxxx< e:: domenica vado
>Lara had put me up because I don't have a house in Xxxxxxx anymore< and Sunday I go
- 3 da lui gli dico:: che sono a Xxxxxxx, lui me viene a prende' con la macchina
to him and say I'm in Xxxxxxx and he comes and picks me up in the car
- 4 >e ce mettemo a fa' una passeggiatina!< e lui me racconta com'è and- com'è stato bello stare::
>and we start walking< and he's telling me how it wen- how great it was to stay
- 5 all'Mtv day che però:: ehm:: diversamente da Bologna Roma non era tutto 'sto granché mm::
at MTVday but erm unlike Bologna Rome wasn't that much hmm
- 6 che:: tutto il tempo del concerto c'era (.) faceva vedere anche l'Mtv day di Milano eccetera (.)
all the way through the concert there was (.) they also showed Milan's MTVday etc. (.)
- 7 Sinceramente poco m'interessa >perché quando vedi che c'è qualcosa d'importante
Sincerely I don't care that much >because when you see that there is something important
- 8 che ti devo di' metti da parte il resto< è possibile che non non non c'è
I have to say to you you have to put aside the other things< is it possible there isn't isn't
- 9 un minimo de maturità (..) no?
the least bit of maturity (..) right?

Also in the following examples the presentation of the own position/point of view and of the own right reasons passes through the criticism of the partner. In particular, the expressed concepts are: in (15) “I was clear, I am in the right position; he makes a mistake, he is wrong”; in (17) “I am valid and I am not worth a boyfriend (as him) who betrays me”.

(15) *TT-11/01* (Chiara)

- 1 No, CHE VUOL DI' PIU' CHIARA OH! (.) LUI LO SAPEVA
No, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT YOU HAVE TO BE CLEARER! (.) HE KNEW

- 2 BENISSIMO CHE I- ER- ERO IN UNA FASE DI DI TRANSIZIONE IN CUI
ALL TOO WELL THAT I- WA- WAS IN A TRANSITION PERIOD IN WHICH
- 3 STAVO ASPETTANDO UNA RISPOSTA, MI E' ARRIVATA QUELLA RISPOSTA,
I WAS WAITING FOR AN ANSWER, THAT ANSWER ARRIVED,
- 4 MI E'ARRIVATA QUELLA CONFERMA NEL MOMENTO IN CUI MI E' ARRIVATA,
THAT CONFIRMATION ARRIVED IN THE MOMENT IN WHICH IT ARRIVED,
- 5 L'HO PRESA E L'HO COMUNICATA! QUINDI PIU' CHIARA DI C::HE?! (...)
I TOOK IT AND I COMMUNICATED IT! SO CLEARER THAN WHAT?! (...)
- 6 PIU' CHIARA DI CHE?! SE UNO NON VUOLE CAPIRE,
SO CLEARER THAN WHAT?! IF SOMEONE DOESN'T WANT TO UNDERSTAND,
- 7 non capisce. Se uno si vuole nascondere dietro ai pretesti e o a fare il sant'uomo non capisce!
they don't understand. If someone wants to hide behind excuses or be a saint they don't understand!
- 8 Che a me ti metti a fare Silvio Pellico e scrivi le le le tue sofferenze me ne sbatto,
I don't care that you start being Silvio Pellico and write about your suffering,
- 9 perché so io quanti pianti mi sono fatta dietro a lui!
because I know how much I cried over him!

(16) *TT-11/07* (Rebecca)

- 1 Glie faccio una bastardata del genere poi se loro due se lascia o non se lascia
I do something really bad to them then if those two split up or don't split up
- 2 so' cavoli loro, però io intanto me vendico dicemo tra virgolette, poi se
it's their own business, but meanwhile let's say I'll get my own back in inverted commas, then if
- 3 veramente lo perdo per sempre allora a 'sto punto è meglio perché io preferisco perderlo
I really do lose him forever then at this moment it's better that way because I'd prefer losing him
- 4 per sempre che ave'(.) un ragazzo del genere al mio fianco, perché sinceramente non ho fatto niente de
forever than having (.) a guy like that at my side, because sincerely I have done nothing
- 5 male per avecce uno come Lorenzo vicino a me!

wrong to have someone like Lorenzo by my side!

4.2. Self-disclosure as a co-construction

Conversation Analysis considers everyday talk the outcome of a process of co-production, at both a global (the whole conversation) and a local (macro- and micro-sequences) level. In other words, dialogic activities and roles are phenomena that arise from a joint participation, collaboration and constant negotiation between conversational partners. Adopting this perspective, we can point out that self-disclosure within a troubles talk sequence is the outcome of an implicit and collaborative interpersonal communicative project. In other words, we observe that self-disclosure and self-presentation often emerge from the interaction with the conversational partner that, not only is involved in the dialogue by the TT (who, for example, explicitly and/or implicitly, requests her/his attention and participation), but often contributes, actively and autonomously (with questions and comments), to bring out contents of personal, intimate nature.

It is possible to identify a set of pragmatic strategies in order to co-construct self-narrative sequences and self-disclosure in troubles talk dialogues, as concerns both the role of TT and TR. In particular, we verified the occurrence of some linguistic devices identified by Norrick (2008), analyzing the phenomenon of collaborative storytelling.

4.2.1 Focus on TT

We noticed, for example that the TT uses:

- discourse markers with both meta-textual (*cioè* [that is], *quindi* [then], *allora* [so], *ma* [but], etc.), in order to extend the narrative sequence, and interactive function, as phatic signals (*capito?* [understood?], *capisci?* [(do you) see/understand?], tag questions, etc.) in order to encourage the interlocutor's involvement and to verify her/his attention and comprehension. It is possible to find both types of pragmatic markers – together with the use of vocatives – in the following excerpt, where the TT is confiding to her friend her own feelings of trouble and confusion toward an, maybe not definitively, ended love story:

(17) *TT-11/08* (Fiamma)

1 [...] Ah >poi me fa< “Sono bloccato da tre giorni da un tendine infiammato al collo”.

Ah >he tells me< “I’ve been laid up for three days with an inflamed tendon in the neck”.

2 →E:h “sto soffrendo come un cane”. Poi me fa “buona notte”. Cioè co- scazzato.

E:hm "I'm suffering like a dog". Then he says "Good night". That is wi- So pissed off.

3 E dopo io glie l'ho rimandato [l'sms] e quello me l'ha rimandato alle tre.

And afterwards I sent it [the sms] him back and he sent me another at three o' clock.

4 →Cioè m'ha risposto dopo tanto. E:: mhm:: e niente quindi lui mi ha detto così però,

That's to say he answered me after some time. And uhm:: so he told me that but,

5 →cioè me dice "Come te posso aiuta" poi me dice "se te vedo:: è una pazzia",

that is he tells me "How can I help you" then he says "If I see you, it's crazy",

6 →cioè quindi capito Rosse'?

that's to say you understand Rosse'?

- response tokens (*mhm* [uhm], *boh* [who knows], *sì* [yes], etc.) which often spread a sense of confusion and/or uncertainty, in order to stimulate the interlocutor to take her/his turn:

(18) *TT-11/16* (Anna, TT – Roberta, TR)

1 R Ma ma state insieme voi due?

But but are you two together?

2 A →Ma non lo so, e non- boh, guarda non me ce fa pensa',

I don't know, and don- who knows, look don't make me think about it,

- further explanations about a situation already presented. In the excerpt (19) the TT, by using Direct Reported Speech (Holt, 1996, 2000; Drew, 1998), reaffirms her position and feelings toward her ex-boyfriend:

(19) *TT-11/01* (Chiara)

1 Oh::! Se Maurizio dice cazzate se Maurizio dice cazzate (.) è un conto, io a MauRIZIO non gli ho detto

Oh! If Maurizio talks bullshit if Maurizio talks bullshit (.) it's one thing, I didn't tell MauRIZIO

2 "In questo momento non voglio stare con te", io gli ho detto a MAURIZIO

"At the moment I didn't want to be with you", I told MAURIZIO

3 "Oh sono giunta alla consapevolezza che non voglio stare più con te PERCHE' NON TI AMO PIU'!

“Oh I’ve become aware that I don’t want to be with you BECAUSE I DON’T LOVE YOU ANYMORE!

- 4 (.) NON TI AMO PIU’! (...) E QUANDO M’HA DETTO “Io perché ti aspetto,
(.) *I DON’T LOVE YOU ANYMORE! (...) AND WHEN HE TOLD ME “I’ll wait for you,*
- 5 se tu torni, cambi idea, me lo dici” “Maurizio, ma non ti preoccupare, non c’è bisogno
if you come back, if you change your mind, tell me”. “Maurizio don’t worry you don’t need
- 6 che mi dici se cambi idea, me lo dici, io se cambio idea, anche se tu stai co’
to tell me if you change your mind, tell me because if I change my mind, even if you’re with
- 7 Claudia Schiffer, vengo per una questione di onestà e te lo dico, ma non aspettarti che accada
Claudia Schiffer, I’ll come and tell you for a question of honesty, but don’t wait for this to happen
- 8 perché non è questo che io sto, su questo che io sto lavorando non su i- sul ritorno indietro
because it’s not this that I’m, this that I’m working on not on th- on going backwards
- 9 ma su un guardare avanti al futuro, >è la stessa cosa che devi fare tu’.<
but I’m looking ahead and >it’s the same thing you have to do<”.
- 10 Ma più chiaro di così, che ti devo dire!
How can I put it any clearer!

4.2.2 Focus on TR

As far as the TR is concerned, we found the use of some linguistic strategies aimed at the collaborative construction of self-disclosure. For example:

- questions for a better understanding of the TT’s feelings and moods, as in the two following excerpts:

(20) *TT-11/08* (Rossella)

- 1 Va be’ lui in realtà è in imbarazzo Fia’. Considera quello che c’è stato prima, (.)
- 2 *Alright in reality he’s embarrassed Fia’. Think about what happened before. (.)*
- 3 perché a te non te creerebbe imbarazzo incontrallo?
because to you, wouldn’t it make you embarrassed to meet him?

(21) *TT-11/02* (Melissa)

((sospiro)) Ma tu stai, cioè ti: ti fa stare bene questa cosa?

((*Deep sigh*)) *But are you, that is to say does this thing make you feel good?*

- proposals about possible interpretations, conclusions and consequences of situations and behaviours, as in the following excerpt:

(22) *TT-11/08* (Rossella)

1 Cioè a lui farebbe tantissimo piacere starti vicino adesso. Perché anche lui come te se la (.)

So it would make him really happy to be close to you now. Because he too like you (.)

2 se immaginava la laurea tua:: in maniera completamente diversa.

imagined your graduation day in a completely different way.

- other back-channels (non-lexical, as *ah*, *mhm* [uhm], etc.; interjections, as *Eh!* [That's right!], *Oddio!* [Oh dear/Oh my God!], etc.; laughing, sighing, etc.) aiming at stimulating an extension of the narration by the TT and/or at communicating agreement and disagreement. In the following example we present a sequence drawn by a conversation in which the TT is telling her friend about the ambivalent feelings that she experiences toward her ex-boyfriend. We can observe, besides other back-channels, a sentence completion, agreed by the TT, who seems stimulated by this kind of intervention, to clarify her position:

(23) *TT-11/10* (Daniela, TT – Eleonora, TR)

1 E Sindrome della crocerossina?

Good samaritan syndrome?

2 D No! No. Assolutamente. Anzi. Se io lo vedessi tutti i giorni distrutto

No! No. Absolutely. Anything but. If I saw him devastated every day

3 penso che::, sarei una delle persone più contente del mondo. Ma non perché si fa male.

I think that I'd be the one of the happiest people in the world. But not because he's hurting.

4 Perché mi::, =

Because I, =

- 5 E → = Ti avvalora la tesi! =
 = *Because he would back up your theory!* =
- 6 D = Brava! Mi avvalorerebbe sempre di più::, cioè mi allontanerebbe voglio di'. Sempre di più capito?
 = *Right! he would back, so he'd keep me at a distance, what I want to say is. Always more, you know?*
- 7 E → Mhm mhm. =
Mmm mmm =
- 8 D = Mi confermerebbe il fatto che è un testa di cavolo. E quindi sarei contenta da quel punto di vista.
 = *He would confirm the fact that he's a moron. And so I'd be happy from that point of view.*
- 9 Vorrei insultarlo senza sentirmi in colpa.
I'd like to insult him without feeling guilty.

4.2.3 Irony

The same conversation offers another interesting matter regarding the use of the irony within this kind of sequence. This irony, in our corpus, seems to be used with both a mitigating (Korobov & Thorne 2007, 2009) and an affiliative function (Jefferson et al., 1987; Edwards, 2005). In the following excerpt the parties co-construct an exchange, matched by laughing, of which the TT's ex-boyfriend becomes the butt of the joke:

(24) *TT-11/10* (Daniela, TT – Eleonora, TR)

- 1 D Eh, te lo dico ancora. Se mi arriva all'orecchio soprattutto una notizia bella, cioè tipo frequenta
I'll tell you again. If a little bird tells me good news especially, like he's going out
- 2 una, sta con una, (.) s'è fatto bello,! =
with a girl, he's with a girl, (.) he's become handsome!
- 3 E = Ma quando mai! ((ridendo)) =
 = *But when did he ever ((laughing))*
- 4 D = S'è fatto intellige[n]te,!
 = *He's become intellige[nt]!*
- 5 E [E::h!] ((ridendo))
 [Huh ((laughing))
- 6 D Non me lo dite!
Don't tell me!

7 E Ma tu credi ancora alle favole eh!
So you still believe in fairy tales right!

8 D Va be' non me lo dite. Non sto scherzando. Non me lo dite veramente.
Alright don't tell me. I'm not kidding. Really don't tell me.

4.2.4 Asking for advice

Other strategies, used by the conversational partners for co-constructing the self-disclosure, emerge from our analysis, probably as peculiar of troubles telling sequences. For example, we can find an explicit seeking for advice by the TT, followed by the TR's suggestion, offered in a more or less directive way. The following sequence shows how this interactive dynamic leads the TT, not only to negotiate with her interlocutor a plan of behaviour, but also, at least in appearance, to clarify inwardly her own feelings. In this conversation the TT addresses to one of her friends in seeking some advice about what to say to a guy she needs to "clear things" up with.

(25) TT-11/18 (Rachele, TT – Sandro, TR)

1 S La parola amore deve essere, deve essere ELIMINATA dal vo- dalla-dalla-
The word love must be, must be ELIMINATED from you- from- from-

2 da ogni tipologia [di dialogo.]
from any type [of dialogue.]

3 R [(ride)) Pe(h)rché?
 [(laughs)) W(h)hy?

4 S (.) Perché te lo dico subito, a meno che non vuoi che fugga a ga-a gambe levate.
 (.) *Now I'll tell you why, at least if you don't want that he runs li- like hell.*

6 R Eh je dico allora che mi piace. Stando più sul:.,
And then I tell him that I like him. Staying very,

7 S (...) Brava je dici "guarda me piaci (.) è un po':: ehm:: in realtà:: sto bene
 (...) *Well done, now go and tell him "Look really (.) I've liked you hem for a while now I feel good*

8 a usci' con te:: ", ehm:: (.) non dire che è un po' che ce pensi,

when I go out with you”, hem (.) you mustn’t tell him that you’ve been thinking about him for a while,

9 R Non je devo di’ che è un po’ che ce penso?

I mustn’t tell him I’ve been thinking about him for a while?

10 S (.) No.

(.) No.

[...]

11 R >Comunque va beh,< io non- non userò la parola amore, userò la parola:.,

>Ok alright,< I won’t use the word love, I’ll use the word,

12 S BRAVA! =

WELL DONE! =

13 R = Piacere.

= Like.

14 S Brava.

Well done

15 R >PERCHE’ va beh< non è che s- che lo amo inf- [infatti], innamorata =

>Because ok< it’s not that I’m I’m in love in eff- [in effect] in love with him =

16 S

[Brava]

[Good]

17 R = è per di’ nel senso che non è che è ‘na semplice cotta,

= it’s just to say that it’s not just infatuation,

18 un pochino de più de una semplice cotta.

it’s a little more than a simple infatuation.

Despite the fact that the conversations that make up our corpus have numerous examples where advice is given by the TR without an explicit (and often also without an implicit) request, in some cases it happens that the TT asks for some advice but the TR does not comply with that request: on the contrary, s/he proposes alternative linguistic actions, above all aiming at stressing that the solution depends only on the TT’s considered and autonomous decision. At

times, as in the following excerpt, the TR, after having remarked that the only one who has “to decide” is the TT, expresses an indirect suggestion, telling how she would act if she were her, but always remarking (lines 3 and 9) that this is her own point of view, linked to the person that she believes to be (*per come sono fatta io* [because of the way I am]):

(26) *TT-11/02* (Ambra, TT – Melissa, TR)

1 M Mhm:: cioè: a me dis-, a me dispiace che tu possa stare così (.) però sei tu che devi decidere.
What I want to say is: I'm sor- I'm sorry that you can feel like this but it's you who has to decide.

2 A [[Certo!]
[[Of course]

3 M →[[Io per come] sono fatta io, mi allontanerei anche se lui, cioè ha bisogno di me,
[[Because of the way] I am, I'd keep my distance even if he, that's to say he needed me,

4 mi vuole sentire.
he wants to hear from me

5 A Mhm, mhm
Mmm, mmm

6 M Io sì ti posso ascoltare, ti posso rispondere al telefono, mi posso prendere un caffè
Yes, I can listen to you, I can answer you on the telephone, I can have a coffee

7 con te, però finisce lì.
with you, but that's all

8 A Mhm, mhm
Mmm mmm

9 M → Cioè per come sono fatta io, perché non:: non lo so.
That's to say because of the way I am, because I don't I don't know.

6. Discussion

As far as we know, our study investigated a “territory” still little known, i.e., the conversational organization of self-disclosure within the troubles telling sequences. Furthermore, our study unlike most of the studies on self-disclosure, is based on the analysis of conversational data recorded in an ecological context. The dialogical situation of troubles talk among intimates is a preferred “place” for self-disclosure, since:

- on the one hand, friendship, familiarity and intimacy relationships between interlocutors of these types of conversations seem to make (it) easier and natural to open up to the confidence;
- on the other hand, the distinctive dialogical activity of troubles talk strictly consists of the activity of talking about personal problems and worries and it implies per se the speaker’s revelation.

The qualitative analysis of our corpus of conversations aimed to identify: (1) their specific themes, (2) the linguistic strategies used by the TT, as well as (3) the co-constructive activities performed by both TT and TR. The results of our analysis points out that:

1. when the TT talks about her/himself, s/he mainly focuses on her/his experiences related to emotional, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. Often these domains are in conflict with each other and the problem under discussion is presented as originated and powered by the acknowledgment of an impasse and/or a conflict, for example, between different emotional experiences or between “reason” and “sentiment” etc.;
2. during self-revelation activity, the TT uses *facework* strategies aimed to preserve both her/his own face (positive and negative) and the TR’s;
3. finally, self-disclosure in troubles talk sequences may be considered as the outcome of dialogical co-construction, in which the TR plays a significant role and not simply a passive one. The TR contributes to the construction of the TT’s self-disclosure using not only a range of pragmatic strategies, such as requests for specification and back-channels (with the main aim to stimulate an extension of the TT’s narration), but also suggesting plausible interpretations of the events, hypothesizing possible conclusions and consequences of situations and behaviours.

It is interesting to note that our results are consistent with those of Korobov & Thorne (2007, 2009) in terms of the detection of (a) recurrent emotional topics in troubles talk conversations regarding romantic problems and (b) mitigation devices used by the TT in order to save both her/his and the interlocutor’s face by attenuating the impact of a self-disclosure,.

Specifically, as for the recurrent topics, one of the main links of our study with Korobov & Thorne (2007) concerns the identification of the specific subjects regarding the problems of couples. The authors identified in the dialogues they analysed (and specifically in the narrative sequences) a set of problematic situations: general relational instability, asymmetry of interest, problems of infidelity or trust, problems with others interfering with one's relationship (above all, jealousy and competition). In our corpus, in addition to these categories of problems, we identified the following problematic areas that at times can intertwine within the same conversation:

- relational instability (mainly considered as a continuous “shilly-shallying”, a constant breaking and then resuming the relationship), because of which the TT is doubtful and confused;
- asymmetry of interest (considered as the TT's perception of a different level of intensity in the sentimental involvement between her/himself and her/his partner);
- infidelity and trust betrayal;
- jealousy (considered both as a feeling that the TT experiences and as a partner's feeling, of which the TT is suffering the consequences);
- the definitive end of the relationship;
- “logistic” problems and, in general, reasons beyond one's control, as, for example, the spatial distance that divides the couple, the lack of time for staying with her/his partner.

As for the mitigating rhetorical devices such as displaying uncertainty or ignorance, laughing or being ironic and auto-irony, our results also accord with Korobov & Thorne (2007, 2009). These strategies seem to be useful for saving both one's own and one's conversational partner's face, by attenuating epistemic or emotional positions, avoiding to impose oneself or to upset and burden her/his friend, but establishing affiliation with her/him. Given our limited dataset as regards the corpus size and the demographic homogeneity of the conversational partners involved (Italian native speakers, university students, young adults, largely women, unmarried who are talking about troubles regarding sentimental heterosexual relationships), there are restrictions regarding the generalizability of our findings.

In our future research we would like to enlarge qualitatively and quantitatively our corpus and to integrate the qualitative analysis with a quantitative one.

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APPENDIX A: Transcription Notes

[]	Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech.
[[Double brackets indicate simultaneous speech orientations to prior turn
<u>Underlining</u>	Indicates emphasis.
CAPITALS	Mark speech that is hearably louder than surrounding speech.
°Degree signs°	Enclose hearably quieter speech.
(.)(..) (...)	Indicates a micropause.
(4'')	Indicates a timed pause
((comment))	Additional comments from the transcriber, e.g. about features of context or delivery.
(single parentheses)	Transcriptionist doubt
Co::lons	Show degrees of elongation of the prior sound.

Comma,	Continuation marker; indicates a suspensive tone, irrespective of grammar.
Question mark?	Questioning intonation.
Exclamation mark!	Exclamatory intonation.
Full stop.	Falling, stopping intonation, irrespective of grammar.
' (Apostrophe)	Sounds' omission or contraction.
Hyphen-	Marks a cut-off of the preceding sound.
>he said<	'Greater than' and 'lesser than' signs enclose speeded-up talk. They are used the other way round for slower talk.
=	'Equals' signs mark the immediate 'latching' of successive talk, whether of one or more speakers, with no interval.
“quotation marks”	Indicate Direct Reported Speech.
hhh	Laughter
.hh	Audible inbreaths
te(h)xt	speech with simultaneous laughter

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