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Practices of relationship management in organized helping

Introduction

1. Setting the stage: Managing relationships in organized helping

"Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich" (Buber 2008)

Helping represents a basic practice of human interaction and is mutually co-constructed by social actors in and through their interaction. Helping exists both across mundane, everyday contexts and across institutional as well as organizational contexts. Unlike the spontaneous, unplanned, often reciprocal, instances of everyday helping, organized forms of helping are characterized by a certain permanency and unilateral structure that imply a stronger commitment, but also higher expectations on the side of the social actors. According to Böhringer, Hitzler and Richter (2022: 16), organized helping is both influenced, pre-structured and delineated by the specific interactive and/or institutional context and concurrently follows – as concrete, locally emerging practice of helping – specific interactional logics that account for its structured organization. I.e., organized helping transpires in the interplay between (pre-)structuring context and locally situated practice; as such it represents a structured situated social action that can be described along its relational, interactive, contextual / situational, and processual dimensions (Böhringer, Hitzler, and Richter 2022: 22ff).

Helping in its everyday as well as institutionalized form is understood here – following the pragmalinguistic conceptualization of Pick and Scarvaglieri (2019; 2022) – as verbal (and non-verbal) helping actions performed by a helper, who takes over these actions instead of and for another person, who is temporarily or permanently unable to perform such actions themselves. Helping thereby relieves these help-receiving persons of the need to decide on the correct action plan and/or to

act themselves. Particularly in institutional interactions, helping is often preceded by a detailed discussion of the goals of the helping. Moreover, varying degrees of helping can be differentiated, with the helping person performing all actions necessary to achieve the respective goals, performing only parts of them or just making suggestions about how the person in need for help might act themselves (for more details see Pick and Scarvaglieri 2019; 2022).

At the core of helping in both its everyday and (institutionally and professionally) organized forms are the helping person, the person receiving help and the relationship they mutually engage in. A relationship is conceptualized here as the connection between individuals premised on communicative acts (resting on e.g., language, gesture, body posture, facial expression, or gaze), which are performed and concomitantly perceived by the interacting individuals. Interactors construct a mental model of their relationship based on these communicative acts and on social patterns of understanding and interpreting these acts, monitor each subsequent communicative act as regards its possible impact on the relationship and adapt their respective models accordingly (cf. Linke and Schröter 2017: 15). Relationships thus have a historical and developmental dimension; they change over time and are not only locally constructed but also build on previous interaction (cf. Trasmundi and Philipsen 2020: 8). While any relationship then is a psychological phenomenon in its intra-individual interpretation of communication regarding the connection with an interlocutor, relationships - on the other hand - are constructed, maintained and molded by verbal and nonverbal interactive actions and practices: "(...) relationships are dynamically constructed in interaction by the participants" (Locher 2012: 46). These actions and practices of relating can be observed, documented and analyzed in their emergence and situatedness (cf. Arundale 2021: 23) with established methods from the social sciences. The systematic exploration of such overt verbal and non-verbal practices of relationship management across different contexts within the (institutional) helper – helped domain is at the heart of this book.

While building and managing relationships are part and parcel of social interactions in general – Enfield (2009: 65) talks about human societies being relationship-grounded societies – its specific forms and qualities are of particular relevance in social interactions dedicated to helping. The relationship between help giver and help receiver, i.e., the helping relationship, forms the bedrock of helping (Miller and Considine 2009; Graf and Spranz-Fogasy 2018). Helping relations have been defined by Rogers (1951) as relationships in which one of the parties, i.e., the helper, intends and is willing to promote the growth, development, maturity, or improved functioning of the other party, the help seeker. While this definition still holds relevance today, (organized) helping relations have undergone and are still undergoing massive change: As part of the overall societal transformation from a production-oriented to a service-oriented society with its growing emphasis on person-oriented services

(Miller and Considine 2009; Habscheid 2011), helping interactions have become differentiated as well as formalized, regulated and institutionalized (Luhmann 1973; Giddens 1991; Fietze 2011; Graf and Spranz-Fogasy 2018). Various organized forms and formats of person-oriented helping services have emerged and helping services by experts as such represent a prominent characteristic of modern Western societies (cf. Goffman 1983: 310; Miller and Considine 2009).

Such expert-based helping services are offered by professionals, i.e., helpers, who have acquired their profession-specific helping expertise, practices and qualification via specialized and institutionalized education and training, which in turn are built on profession-specific, regulated, and normed standards (Fietze 2015). A helping profession is thereby defined as a professional (and institutional) interaction between a helping expert and a help-seeking client, which is initiated to nurture the growth and learning of a person or to address their physical, psychological, intellectual and/or emotional constitution and problems related with it (cf. Graf et al. 2014: 1). According to the APA, helping professions include "occupations in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, counseling, medicine, nursing, social work, physical and occupational therapy, teaching, and education" (American Psychological Association (APA) 2020) (see also Combs and Gonzalez 1994). Of relevance from a social science and linguistic perspective is how the social actors co-construct their respective roles of 'expert' (e.g., doctor, therapist or counselor) and 'layperson' (client or patient) (Hall, Sarangi, and Slembrouck 1999; Juhila et al. 2003; Graf 2012), what types of knowledge are required to solve the latter's problem(s) and how a shared knowledge-base is co-constructed (Sarangi 2002; Gülich 2003; Brünner 2005; Scarvaglieri 2013): Professional helpers apply their professional vision (Goodwin 1994) based on their professional, clearly delineated objective knowledge, their professional experience as well as institutional perspective, while clients bring their life-world perspective and frame their experience as something subjective, individual and unique. This divergence of perspectives is a vital prerequisite and constitutive characteristic of any kind of therapeutic, consulting, coaching, counseling or medical interaction (cf. Graf 2019: 58).

In helping professions, the relationship between professionals and their patients and clients has proven to be pivotal for the interactive construction of the helping process and for obtaining the respective institutional tasks and goals, i.e., patients' or clients' change, development, or learning (see e.g., Graf et al. (eds.) 2019; Pawelczyk and Graf (eds.) (2019); Scarvaglieri 2020). Originating in (research on) psychodynamics, the 'therapeutic alliance' and its related – at times synonymously used (cf. Horvath and Luborsky 1993: 561) – term the 'working alliance' (first introduced by Greenson in 1965 as the reality-based part of the relationship in contrast to the transference dimension of the relationship) nowadays finds a pantheoretical application to helping professions in general (Bordin 1979; Horvath and Luborsky

1993; Ackerman and Hilsenroth 2003). In addition to broadening its scope, several further developments and adaptations since its origin in the works of Freud (1913) have influenced its current readings. In this vein, e.g., Zetzel (1956) was the first to differentiate aspects of transference from aspects of the 'real relationship' (later termed 'working alliance' by Greenson 1965), and Bordin, in a series of publications (e.g., 1979) elaborated on the concept of the working alliance in its distinction from the unconscious projections of the patients/clients and thereby identified three essential components of the working alliance: *tasks*, *bonds*, and *goals* (cf. Horvath and Luborsky 1993: 563–564). Another adaption was suggested by Luborsky (1976), who introduced the alliance as a dynamic rather than a static entity responsive to the changing demands of different phases of therapy: "Two types of helping alliances [used synonymously with therapeutic and working alliance; EG et al.] were identified: Type 1, more evident in the beginning of therapy, and Type 2, more typical of later phases of treatment" (Horvath and Luborsky 1993: 563).

The therapeutic/working alliance by now represents an established and verified common success factor in therapeutic interactions as well as other helping formats such as coaching and counseling and has inspired much theoretical and empirical work on helping professions from various disciplines within the social sciences (e.g., Horvath 2006; Ardito and Rabellino 2011; Spencer et al. 2019): "The strength of the alliance is arguably the best and most reliable predictor of outcomes [...] and is generally considered one of the most important common factors in therapy" (Ribeiro et al. 2013: 295; see also Horvath and Greenberg 1994; Lambert 2013; Norcross and Lambert 2018; for coaching see Baron et al. 2011; Behrendt 2012; de Haan et al. 2016; Graßmann et al. 2019; for counseling see Thurnherr 2019, in 2022). However, as already claimed by Horvath and Luborsky in 1993, "most studies of the alliance deal with the impact of the quality of the alliance on therapy outcome; we have much less research data on the specific therapist techniques that improve the relationship" (Horvath and Luborsky 1993: 568; cf. Muntigl and Horvath 2014: 328). In a similar vein, Thurnherr argues about 30 years later that "(d)espite its recognized importance for psychotherapy and counseling, how the therapeutic alliance is exactly negotiated has not been extensively researched by psychologists who use qualitative research methods" (2019: 3). And linguistic insights into how the alliance is really 'done' on the interactional micro-level across therapeutic, counseling and coaching interactions are still rare, too (but see Horvath and Muntigl 2018; Scarvaglieri 2020 for psychotherapy or Thurnherr 2019, 2022 for email counseling).

While the ongoing differentiation, specialization, and utilization of helping professions continues as one of the dominant socio-cultural trends in the 21st century (due to the therapeutization of modern society as already outlined by MacIntyre 1987; Giddens 1991; Furedi 2004; Hausendorf 2011, or the related commodification

of emotions as outlined in Hochschild 1983 or Illouz 2008), another notable and far-reaching trend is the growing implementation and proliferation of online (professional) help. Computer-mediated or, more generally, electronically mediated professional helping in the realm of e-health, bears far-reaching consequences for the interaction between helper and helped and concurrently, for the verbal and non-verbal practices of establishing and maintaining a helping relationship and the helping itself (see e.g., Locher 2006; Locher and Thurnherr 2017; Stommel 2012; Stommel and te Molder 2015; Stommel and Van der Houwen 2015; Thurnherr 2022). Another, even more radical socio-cultural change in the context of organized helping is the democratization of helping expertise and the growing relevance and presence of online peer support. Such digital self-help formats do not require accredited professional expertise from their participants and are premised on a more variable participation-framework both as regards the roles of help-giver and help-seeker and as regards the timing of the helping itself. This is especially the case in asynchronous formats such as e-mail or Twitter. Although (often) not institutionalized or professionalized in the traditional sense, they nevertheless represent rule-based, situated social helping interactions based on language and other semiotic devices that spill out along their relational, interactive, contextual/situational, and processual dimensions and as such are of core interest for linguistic and pragmatic analysis.

Analyzing relationship management: An overview of current linguistic approaches

Documenting and analyzing – from a linguistic perspective – the verbal and non-verbal management of relationships in their respective contextual, processual and temporal embedding across a variety of organized helping contexts is at the core of this edited volume. The volume thereby sheds light on a phenomenon that is ubiquitous and elementary for all forms of social interaction (Goffman 1967; Holly 1979, 2001; Enfield 2009; Linke and Schröter (eds.) 2017) by carving out its specific characteristics across various forms of organized helping with the help of Conversation Analysis, *linguistische Gesprächsanalyse*¹, Discourse Analysis, Pragmalinguistics as well as Interpersonal Pragmatics.² Linguistic research on

^{1.} Linguistische Gesprächsanalyse is a German research paradigm based on Conversation Analysis, which also draws on pragmatics, discourse analysis and linguistic text analysis (see Deppermann 2008).

^{2.} Following the definition by Locher and Graham (2010: 2), interpersonal pragmatics is concerned with the "relational aspect of interactions between people" since "people adjust their language to their addressees and the situation in order to achieve interpersonal effects".

practices of relationship management in organized helping is still predominantly restricted to the particularities of specific helping formats. A contrasting – and concurrently integrative – view on verbal (and non-verbal) practices of building and managing relationships across different contexts of organized helping is so far missing. In its supra-contextual perspective, the presented research thereby builds on but goes beyond and extends existing research across a variety of related research areas. The individual chapters thereby elucidate how helping relationships are verbally (and non-verbally) initiated and established (Graf and Jautz), managed (Muntigl; Buchholz; Kabatnik et al.; Winkler; Günthner; Thurnherr; Kabatnik), adapted (Graf and Jautz; Kuna and Scarvaglieri), but also challenged (Guxholli et al.; Pawelczyk and Faccio) or repaired (Džanko) along the unfolding interactions by focusing on the respective communicative and discursive practices on the interactional micro- as well as meso-level.

While a theoretical and empirical foundation of relational management in organized helping is still scarce in the wider field of linguistics, relational management in social interaction as such has attracted substantial attention in a variety of related concepts and approaches from Interpersonal Pragmatics and neighboring research areas. In what follows we will give a brief, yet not exhaustive, overview of the most prominent concepts and aspects of this research focusing in particular on their relevance and influence on the present work.

A prominent approach in linguistic pragmatics that tackles the (verbal) management of relationships in interaction is 'rapport management' as introduced in the works of Spencer-Oatey and colleagues. Rapport is understood by Spencer-Oatey most generally as harmony amongst people and as such can be considered part and parcel of any social interaction. Rooted in linguistic politeness theory and face theory (Goffman 1967; Brown and Levinson 1987), rapport management considers (im-)politeness as (dis)harmony in social relations and aims to explore the bases on which people make their social judgements in authentic interaction. While it does aim to examine "the use of language to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious social relations" (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 3), it is more generally interested in the interrelation between language use and the management of interpersonal relations. In this sense, rapport management focuses in particular on intercultural social interactions (see most recently Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2021). According to Spencer-Oatey (2002: 540) "rapport management involves two main components: the management of face and the management of sociality rights". In contrast to Brown and Levinson (1987), Spencer-Oatey emphasizes the social aspect of face, since she conceives not only of a "quality face" (Brown and Levinson's positive face), but also of a "social identity face" (in place of Brown and Levinson's negative face) that is defined "in terms of social or group roles and is closely associated with our sense of public worth" (Spencer-Oatey 2002: 540). Sociality rights refer to the rights

to be "treated fairly" (Spencer-Oatey 2002) regarding costs/benefits as well as personal autonomy and to be able to freely associate or dissociate with or from others. Unlike earlier politeness theories, rapport management thus stresses the way people are treated by others as indicative of their social position in general as well as within the specific group in which they are currently interacting. As such, interactants do not only want to portray their own personal qualities per se (positive face/quality face), they also want to be recognized within their social roles and, vice versa, need to recognize their counterparts in this regard (social identity face, sociality rights).

Explicating the dimensions of polite vs. impolite behavior as facets of harmonious or disharmonious social relations, rapport management delineates the basic and underlying conditions for successful relationship building. In this vein, politeness must also be understood as basis for successfully building and managing relationships dedicated to helping, i.e., polite behavior represents a necessary, but (as the contributions to this volume illustrate) not sufficient condition. While impolite behavior by (professional) helpers and patients/clients would render social interactions as those described in this volume impossible, professional helpers, particularly in the therapeutic contexts at times strategically challenge patients and threaten their "quality face", for instance by infringing on the principles of epistemic authority (Heritage 2013) (see e.g., the contributions by Muntigl or Pawelczyk and Faccio in this volume). As detailed in these contributions, in such moments help-seeker and help-provider employ specific relationship management techniques such as retreating from their initial position or rephrasing their intervention to save face and to repair rapport (cf. Scarvaglieri 2020). (Im)politeness thus forms an essential part of generic relationship management and applying strategies and competencies of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009) provides a necessary condition for interaction in helping contexts. Yet, politeness and face-saving strategies do not suffice to build and manage helping relationships in ways that enable and guarantee the clients' development, learning and change.

Relational aspects of communication have also been discussed in (interpersonal) pragmatic and interactional research via the neighboring concept of 'relational work' (see the work of Locher and colleagues and for a summary most recently Thurnherr 2022), which draws on (im)politeness, facework and rapport management in general, but also moves beyond that (cf. Locher and Schnurr 2017: 690). Relational work is defined by Locher and Watts (2008: 96) as "the work invested by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice". As further argued by Locher and Watts (2005: 10), "[...] human beings rely crucially on others to be able to realize their life goals and aspirations"; concrete aims and goals such as receiving help with a health or emotional issue thereby serves as a prime motivation for humans to seek relationship and cooperation with others.

The concept 'relational work' foregrounds a perspective that perceives interpersonal interaction, face work and rapport not as something that emerges naturally and unintentionally in conversation; instead, relational work is understood by Locher as something that interactants engage in strategically and into which social actors invest time and communicative effort. Pragmatic research on relational work has documented and analyzed practices such as apologizing, criticizing, praising, mitigating, using humor etc. on the basic assumption that interpersonal work is created through discursive practices and that language is always salient in the negotiation of relationships; moreover, research has looked into the impact such strategies have on the ongoing interactions as well as the construction of the participants' identities³ (cf. Thurnherr 2019: 4). This perspective is relevant in the institutional contexts investigated in this volume because, as evidenced by the contributions, patients/clients and particularly institutional helping agents consciously construct, monitor and manage their relationships and apply various communicative, verbal and non-verbal, techniques to do so. Concurrently, the participants' verbal and non-verbal engagement in relational work is molded by and adapted to the existing social norms in specific contexts (cf. Locher and Watts 2005: 11), i.e., relational work is adapted to what is considered appropriate in a specific therapeutic or medical context, in certain cultural contexts or in certain (social) media (cf. Locher 2012: 47). More recent research applying the concept of relational work in helping contexts has focused e.g., on genetic counseling (Zayts and Schnurr 2011, 2014), email counseling (Thurnherr 2019, 2022 and this volume) as well as (e-)health contexts (Locher and Thurnherr 2017; Locher and Schnurr 2017).

Finally, as regards concrete linguistic and communicative means that bear on relationship management in interactions dedicated to helping and beyond, research in Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis has evinced the following findings: Scarvaglieri (2013) claims for psychotherapy that the relationship between therapist and patient is managed on various levels of interaction via different verbal and non-verbal mechanisms on the interactive meso- and micro-level such as e.g., turn-taking, sequentiality, initiation and processing of topics, pauses and intonation as well as the spatial positioning of the participants. These relational

^{3.} While identity construction – as elaborated in the context of Positioning Theory as put forth by Davies and Harré (1990) as well as in socio-constructivist approaches to identity as put forth originally by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) – plays an important role in relationship management due to, among other things, the relational and discursive nature of identity (cf. Thurnherr 2019: 22ff), these concepts are not further detailed here as the focus of this edited volume is on relationship management of the helping dyads themselves, not so much on the individual partners' positioning and identities.

means are used in ways that thoroughly engages and activates the patient. Such "recipient-centeredness" (Scarvaglieri 2017) contributes to building and managing the therapeutic relationship and concurrently prepares the grounds for change (Scarvaglieri 2020) (see Graf and Jautz in this volume and their concept of 'client-centeredness' and its contribution to managing the relationship between coach and client). Also located on the interactive meso-level, Graf (2019) defines "Building a Relationship" as one of the four basic activities of coaching (Graf 2019: 69ff and 127ff). The activity builds on various communicative tasks such as 'Establishing the roles and identities 'coach' and 'client' (Graf 2019: 130ff) or 'Negotiating hierarchy in an asymmetrical relationship' (Graf 2019: 146ff) and serves as the matrix against which all other activities of coaching transpire. In this sense, building and managing the relationship represents a "permanent task" in helping professional interaction (Spranz-Fogasy 1992) that underlies all other communicative tasks that the participants engage in when doing helping. On the interactional micro-level, research by Muntigl, Horvath and others (e.g., Muntigl et al. 2012; Muntigl and Horvath 2014) addresses practices of dis-/affiliation and dis-/ alignment in various forms of therapy as sequential achievements. Such practices of micro-managing the interpersonal relationship are vital for successful therapy, as therapists often carry out actions that violate the principle of epistemic authority (Heritage 2013) and strain the therapeutic relationship (Muntigl et al. 2013; Weiste et al. 2016). Therefore, therapists employ specific conversational mechanisms to uphold an otherwise endangered working relationship such as downgrading, re-framing or explaining their interventions (Scarvaglieri 2020: 11f). In addition, linguistic research has at least in passing documented and analyzed relational management from a temporal and developmental perspective alongside (therapy) sessions and processes (Graf and Jautz 2019; Trasmundi and Philipsen 2020; Scarvaglieri 2020).

In 2010 Arundale claimed that despite prolific discussions of the linguistic and discursive management of relationships in the context of '(im)politeness', 'facework', 'relational work', 'relating' or 'rapport management' and the fact that "human language use is inextricably linked to phenomena that involve human beings in relationship to one another, however, matters of language use within the relationships that humans create and enact with one another have received comparatively little attention" (2010: 137). In 2022, the gamut and scope of linguistic findings as regards discursive practices of relationship management tells a different story. Yet, a systematic linguistic exploration of how relationships are locally and discursively managed in social interactions both in traditional and innovative formats of organized helping is still missing. This is where the current volume is located.

3. The current volume: Aims and scope, research questions and methodology

Late modern society has witnessed a marked socio-cultural appreciation of the importance of helping professional interactions and more generally, of organized helping, as well as the entailed relationship building as part of its overall therapeutic culture that builds on expert-systems and a commodified emotionality. Against this background, the present volume is both relevant and timely. It brings together research that investigates "the entire gamut of interpersonal effects" (Locher 2012: 45) that linguistic and communicative means have on relationships and thereby contributes to a better understanding of how social agents create relational effects by means of language in organized contexts of helping. According to Enfield (2009: 60), human beings are continually designing and interpreting utterances in view of their relationships with the persons with whom they are engaged and therefore, the forming and maintaining of relationships is "a primary locus of social organization" to be addressed in research on how persons use language in everyday and organized settings.

While health issues in medical and therapeutic interactions build the volume's primary thematic scope (see the contributions by Muntigl, Buchholz, Guxholli et al., Pawelczyk and Faccio, Kabatnik et al., Günthner, Kuna and Scarvaglieri as well as by Džanko), the book also offers a discussion of relationship management in business/executive coaching as a non-health form of organized helping (see the contributions by Winkler and by Graf and Jautz). Beyond detailing "helper patient/client relationships" in offline helping formats, the discussed organized helping interactions also include professional online help in e-mail counseling (the contribution by Thurnherr) as well as self-help or peer-to-peer help via Twitter (the contribution by Kabatnik). Including such research builds a bridge between the presence and the future of relational practices in formal and informal helping contexts. The volume's overall goal is to deepen our linguistic understanding of the (sequential) co-construction of helping relationships in traditional as well as more recent formats. It focuses in particular on the entailed micro- and meso-level communicative and discursive practices and their unfolding interactive and linguistic morphology within and across the sessions or communicative events. It also aims to carve out commonalities and differences in how psychotherapy, doctor-patient interaction, coaching and counseling "do" helping relationships as emerging situated practice. To this aim, in addition to the individual contributions that focus on the management of particular helping relationships, a synthesizing chapter summarizes and juxtaposes the findings and allows for a more macro-pragmatic perspective on how helpers and helped interactively and communicatively relate with each other (Scarvaglieri and Graf this volume). Such a supra-format

understanding of the pragmatics of helping relationships also allows to dovetail these insights into current interdisciplinary research on the more general phenomenon of helping as a social practice as outlined in Böhringer, Hitzler and Richter (2022).

Given the underlying assumption that organized forms of helping in general and helping relations in particular are interactively co-constructed in and through language, a key research question across all contributions in this volume addresses the specific communicative practices that participants apply to manage their relationships. Each contribution identifies particular discursive practices that initiate and build up a new relationship, regulate or maintain an existing relationship or are designed to repair a relationship that has been negatively affected by any specific preceding action. In so doing, all contributions implicitly or explicitly address the progressive dimension of relationship building. Since most of the explored organized helping interactions span the continuum of multiple sessions or contacts, the relationship between helping practitioners and clients/persons receiving help needs to be developed and managed not only within one isolated encounter, but across multiple sessions during the entire organized process. While some contributions focus on first sessions as the onset of the helping relationship and address the particular affordances of these first encounters (e.g., Graf and Jautz), others such as the chapter by Kuna and Scarvaglieri address processes of relationship building across the continuum of the entire treatment. While longitudinal studies on communicative phenomena and how these develop along several sessions in the sense of "supra-session courses of action" (Bercelli et al. 2013; see also Bercelli et al. 2008; Voutilainen et al. 2011, 2018 and Peräkylä 2019) represent a relatively recent and incipient research field, many research gaps still exist. The current volume contributes to closing some of them.

Given the influence of specific media affordances on the type of relation that can be built and on the relational practices that can and must be employed by the participants (Muntigl et al. 2013; Stommel and Te Molder 2015; Linke and Schröter 2017), another empirical focus addresses the medium in and through which the helping relationship materializes (cf. Ekberg et al. 2016; Berger 2017; Van Daele et al. 2020; Kysely et al. 2022). While most contributions draw on face-to-face interaction in the context of verbal communication, embodied practices of relationship building and their combination with verbal practices are at the center of the contribution by Muntigl. In addition to face-to-face settings, the volume also includes studies on the affordances of building and managing relationships in digital discourse (Thurnherr, Kabatnik). There, the lack of a physical co-presence of the interactors and a possible asynchronicity of the interaction necessitate a diverging, often quite sophisticated, handling of the delicate matter of relationships via a variety of semiotic resources (cf. Marx 2019). Forms of digital help and non-professional, peer-to-peer helping

(cf. Schmitt 1997; Pick and Scarvaglieri 2019; Wakke and Heller 2022) and helping relationships have recently emerged as a major trend: People thereby receive digital help and support on the internet or through messenger services (Bliesener 2015; Czech et al. 2018) in the forms of e-psychotherapy (Dirkse 2015; Poltrum et al. 2020; Giesler 2019; Thurnherr this volume), e-coaching (Ribbers and Waringa 2015; Weinzinger 2016), or self-help forums (Lindholm 2017; Hünniger 2019) as well as through illness-related networking on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram (de Choudhury et al. 2014; Andalibi et al. 2017; Scherr and Schmitt 2018; Kabatnik this volume). Research on digital helping not only allows for a comparative view on the influence of the communicative medium on practices of relationship building and management, but also pays theoretical and empirical tribute to processes which will shape helping (professional) interactions to a much greater extent in the (near) future.

A further focus of the volume is on how practitioners and clients and more generally helping dyads link process and practices of relationship building to the pursuit of their respective (institutional) goals. As argued above, the working alliance is regarded as an essential cornerstone for success and effectiveness in helping professions. The contributions in this volume illustrate how relationships are locally managed in the specific interactive format in a way that allows to achieve the respective institutional goals – i.e., the healing of psychic or somatic illnesses, the development of managerial skills, the solving of specific problems or the overcoming of physical restrictions. As such, the volume links current linguistic insights into relationship building in organized forms of helping to research on how change and development, conceptualized as the achievement of goals of helping interactions, are discursively co-constructed by a helping agent and a help-receiving client (Graf and Spranz-Fogasy 2018; Graf et al. 2019; Pawelczyk and Graf 2019). By tackling these key factors in professional forms of organized helping that contribute and secure the attainment of institutional goals, the chapters in this volume are of immense practical value, too. The contributions draw a detailed picture of how specific communicative and interactive practices affect the relationship with a client, which practices are helpful to establish or mold a relationship or how a strained relationship can be repaired on the linguistic micro. or meso-level. Practitioners can thereby find evidence-based and empirically supported stimuli for their own helping work. This practical merit is strengthened by the double competence of several contributors, who not only work as discourse researchers, but also as practitioners across various helping professions (incl. Michael Buchholz, Eva-Maria Graf, and Anssi Peräkylä). Another equally important practical value of such research is its application in the training and supervision context of (future) professionals: discourse-analytic findings as regards the interactive specificities of their professional doing could and should be integrated in trainings and feedback and

the respective manuals for doctors, therapists, coaches, counselors etc. (see e.g., Brünner and Pick 2020).

As regards the methods applied, the volume is characterized by a high methodological homogeneity - all contributions work with authentic conversational data and apply established methods from the realms of Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis and Interpersonal Pragmatics; in addition, Corpus Linguistics and Interactional Linguistics are drawn upon. The empirical base of (video and audio) recordings of helping interactions used in all contributions documents interactive practices of in-situ construction, managing, and adapting relationships, which allows for a detailed sequential and processual analysis of those practices. The volume thereby addresses a vital methodological desideratum, as most established research on relationships in helping professions is based on "questionnaires or checklist-type measures" (Muntigl and Horvath 2014: 328) about the perceived quality of the relationship, yet not on authentic data that documents the actual performance of relationships (cf. Elvins and Green 2008; Norcross and Lambert 2018; Graßmann et al. 2019). In addition, the volume offers insights into the rewarding combination of both conversational and interview data (Thurnherr) or conversational, discourse and ethnographic data (Kuna and Scarvaglieri) as well as of different (quantitative and qualitative) methods as found in the contribution by Kabatnik (Corpus Linguistics and Interactional Linguistics). And finally, the volume goes beyond documenting and analyzing the pragmatics of relationship building in organized contexts of helping: The contribution by Winkler illustrates how qualitative linguistic insights gained with the help of Conversation Analysis can be turned into a coding material with the practical aim to offer video-based feedback for coaches. Such practice-oriented Conversation Analysis was already promoted by Antaki (2011) and Stivers (2015) and practiced e.g., in Stokoe's Conversation Analytic Role Play Method (CARM) (2014); it represents one of the desiderata where Conversation Analysis and other qualitative linguistic research of (professional) interaction should move into the future.

4. The contributions

The first five contributions of the edited volume by Muntigl, Buchholz, Guxholli et al., Pawelczyk and Faccio as well as by Kabatnik et al. focus on relationship building in different therapeutic settings.

In Forging relationships in psychotherapeutic interaction, Muntigl illustrates the central role that talk and conduct play in therapist-client relationship-building; while he presents this relationship as an ongoing interactional achievement, he shows how it is either constituted as part of a focused activity, or as incidental to

the main business of the conversation. Analyzing a diverse corpus of video-taped psychotherapy sessions with the help of Conversation Analysis, Muntigl thereby focuses on how therapist-client relationship might be conceptualized in the context of general sociological categories such as 'intimate', 'close' or 'friend', which interactional practices may be 'typically' used to forge such relationships and how shifts in the quality of relationships can be mapped by examining talk.

Buchholz in *Doing We – Working alliance in psychotherapeutic relationships.* A recursive model targets the problem of "larger chunks", i.e., the question how details of narratives and conversation can be brought together not only in, but also between sessions, within the context of the working alliance. Buchholz proposes two approaches to "larger chunks". Following Ginzburg and Poesio (2016), he first analyses hesitation markers as conversational equivalents to embodied pointing gestures. Using the concept of "tacit comparisons", he demonstrates how patients use this to indicate a connection between different stories told. Secondly, Buchholz proposes a recursive model of common ground with four *steps* of (1) pointing to a –perceptual or interactive– object, (2) addressing it, (3) linking it with other conversational objects and, in case of an interactive object, (4) creating a metaphor. Recursion starts when the metaphor is treated *as if* it were a perceptual object; then, the cycle starts with step (1) ("pointing") again. According to Buchholz, the new metaphor thus indicates an important change.

Guxholli et al. in their contribution What about you? Responding to a face-threatening question in psychotherapy, discuss patients' efforts to mitigate potential damage to the therapeutic relation. Data comes from 47 video recorded sessions of psychoanalytic, psychodynamic, and cognitive-behavioural psychotherapies conducted in Albanian language. When the therapist questions or challenges the patient's experience of self, this disaffiliating action poses a threat to the patient's face and consequently to the therapeutic relation. Analysis of 24 sequences predominantly occurring in psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psychodynamic psychotherapy reveals that in response to therapists' face-threatening questions, patients resist the transformation of the experience of self by choosing to save their face but not without making considerable efforts to save the therapeutic relation first. The authors conclude that challenging the patient's experience of self is a delicate task in terms of working alliance between the therapist and patient.

The paper by Pawelczyk and Faccio, So let's say men can't understand that much: Gender and relational practices in psychotherapy with women suffering from eating disorders, examines, with the help of Conversation Analysis and Membership Categorization Analysis, how gender is invoked, drawn upon, resisted and interactionally managed in view of the respective session's specific goals. The authors look at three extracts of two psychotherapy sessions, originally in Italian, between a female therapist – working within the interactionist and socio-constructionist

approach – and a woman patient suffering from eating disorders and depression. The analyses reveal how the female patient relies on gender as category-sharing to account for her actions and to seek understanding. The therapist, on the other hand, tends to resist the category-sharing, which may jeopardize the evolving therapeutic relationship, yet allows her to accomplish the goals of the session. Concurrently, she is at times engaging the patient in extensive local work around gender categories to foreground her voice and account for her daily struggle with the illness. It is concluded that female psychotherapists should be particularly attuned to the invoking of category-sharing and critically consider its relevance and application against the background of both maintaining a good working relationship and pursuing the institutional goals.

In the final paper on therapeutic interactions, Relationship management by means of Solution-Oriented Questions in psychodiagnostic interviews, Kabatnik et al. address the eliciting practice Solution Oriented Questions (SOQs) as an interactional tool for relationship building in psychodiagnostic interviews applying Conversation Analysis and German Gesprächsanalyse on 15 videotaped first interviews. Therapeutic alliance results from the concordance of alignment, as willingness to cooperate regarding common goals, and of affiliation, as relationship based upon trust. The authors argue that SOQs particularly allow for both: Solution Oriented Questions are situated at the end of a troublesome thematic unit, which is linked to low agency on the patient's side; yet the formulation of SOQs in a hypothetical, speculative manner serve to relieve the patient of actual responsibilities and to stimulate their self-reflection. SOQs thus lead to an expansion of the patient's agency, to the restructuring of knowledge, and thereby to potential change as a common goal. Concurrently, SOQs reveal understanding of and interest in the patient and their use leads to affiliation via alignment and intersubjectivity, strengthening and securing the therapeutic alliance.

The next two chapters investigate relationship building in the helping format "coaching":

Winkler's contribution, *The role of semi-responsive answers for relationship building in coaching*, is based on the hypothesis that clients' semi-responsive answers are of particular relevance for any coaching process as they reveal ambivalences, (inner) conflicts, uncertainties and/or opposition which ought to be noticed and appropriately addressed by the coach. The chapter first discusses theoretical and methodological aspects in the context of a Conversation Analysis-based manual to study structures of coaching interaction, illustrates a coding-system to identify semi-responsive answers, and, based on transcribed data, analyzes semi-responsive answers with respect to how they are addressed by the coaches. The analysis of 21 face-to-face coaching sessions (64 hours) in Swiss and Standard German reveals that semi-responsive answers are both a valuable source of information and

a challenge as they require the coach to maintain a balance between facilitating the process and maintaining a good relationship with the client.

Graf and Jautz' paper Working alliance and client design as discursive achievements in first sessions of executive coaching explores the coaching alliance as a locally emerging, joint product of coach and clients' negotiation process regarding their relational, procedural, and interactional expectations for their joint coaching engagement. The paper's focus is on the first sessions of two different coach-client dyads, analyzed within an integrative discourse analytic framework. Data stems from a corpus of Emotional Intelligent coaching and is originally in German. Adapting the Basic Activity Model of Coaching (Graf 2019), the authors examine how coach and client use different discursive and relational practices in the context of 'Getting started', 'Voicing expectations regarding coach, coaching and coaching alliance' and 'Negotiating the expectations'. The analyses show how the coach displays a specific 'client design' in the local discursive management of the working alliance: While establishing her own institutional identity as coach by introducing her expertise and managing the coaching agenda, she concurrently attunes her discursive and relational practices to the specificities of the individual clients, their identity constructions and their epistemics of experience and of expertise.

Next, **Günthner**, **Kuna** and **Scarvaglieri** as well as **Džanko's** papers are dedicated to relationship building in doctor-patient interactions.

Günthner in Relationship building in oncological doctor-patient interaction: the use of address forms as 'tie signs' focuses on practices of relationship building between oncologists and their patients during oncological consultations when a definitive diagnosis of malignancy must be communicated. In such consultations oncologists have to cope with two tasks: (1) to inform their patients of clinical evidence of the cancer diagnosis and about the details of the disease, and (2) to propose and negotiate treatment therapies. Based on 40 consultations, the article analyzes the sequential construction of the doctor-patient relationship with special focus on physicians' use of terms of address. Drawing on Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics, relationship building is presented as an ongoing task doctors and patients engage in. The data reveal that oncologists frequently address their patients by name in opening and closing sequences as well as during the core part of the interaction. With that doctors document heightened attention to their patients and lend the clinical interaction a more personal and intimate quality. Personalized address forms thus index 'withness' in the sense of Goffman (1971) and serve as a relationship building tool in these clinical contexts.

Kuna and Scarvaglieri contribute *Practices of Relationship Building in Hungarian Primary Care. Communicative Styles and Intergenerational Differences.* In doctor-patient interaction they claim a key role for relationship building which unfolds dynamically in the course of interaction and which is subject to larger

socio-cultural developments. Using data from Hungarian primary care consultations, they focus on the role of address forms and metapragmatic reflections and discuss intergenerational change in doctor-patient communication. Hungarian physicians (interactively) build different types of relationships: Physicians who have recently participated in communication trainings employ a more flexible and egalitarian style of managing relationships involving the patient in therapeutic decisions and explaining their suggestions. Older physicians who have not received communication training build more hierarchical relationships and adapt less to the individual patient, instead relying on a more personalized style of interaction. The authors correlate the different types of relationship building with the respective socio-political era and with shifts in healthcare communication in general.

Džanko's paper on Building (dis-)affiliative medical relationships through interactional practices of knowledge management. A comparative study of German and Bosnian medical encounters sheds light on how building a relationship between doctor and patient is extremely sensitive to possessing and demonstrating epistemic rights. In particular, the paper focuses on (dys-)functional knowledge management indexed by a conflict involving epistemics. Comparing 42 audiotaped conversations of Bosnian and German doctors with their patients with the help of Conversation Analysis reveals that Bosnian patients display an inability to provide the requested information or display reduced access to information they are accountable for. Interactional practices of dysfunctional knowledge management thereby lead to misunderstandings, a break in the progressivity of the interaction, or face threatening actions such as criticism and disciplining of the patient, i.e., bear negatively on the relationship. In contrast, the German data evinces that patients display higher medical knowledge and more personal responsibility. A more patient-centered approach which entails more active patient participation and a higher affiliation of doctors with their patients thereby allows for a functioning knowledge management.

The edited volume ends with two chapters focusing on digital instead of analogical relationship building: In her contribution *How are you getting on with this? Fostering clients' involvement in the therapeutic alliance in email counseling*Thurnherr explores how a counselor uses requests to encourage clients to actively participate in the therapeutic alliance in email counseling. Five naturally occurring email counseling exchanges between one counselor and five clients are examined through content and discourse analysis, adding insight from a practitioner interview. Thurnherr investigates different ways a counselor involves her clients in the therapeutic process taking in consideration the affordances of the medium. Analyses reveal that the counselor carefully considers the clients' face-concerns and that she safeguards the therapeutic alliance through intricate relational work. This relational work also constructs clients as active participants in the therapeutic alliance who

have expertise not only on their troubles, but also on their resources and who can provide solutions. Whereas some medium affordances such as emoticons are used to carry out relational work, the counselor also deals with asynchronicity that is at times a helpful resource and at times a challenge.

Kabatnik analyzes in Twitter as a helping medium: Relationship building through German hashtag #depression the German discourse space #depression on Twitter regarding relationship building. She uses a corpus of #depression tweets as well as follow-up communication as database. In the #depression discourse space, users suffering from depression initiate social exchange surrounding the shared emotional and medical state of being depressed. This is realized interactively via narration, the formulation of wishes, questions or requests, which evoke further reactions of the community. Through (un)commented retweeting, direct addressing and multiple keywording using hashtags, users can express common views and their appreciation, maintain their contacts within the network and be heard in different spaces of discourse. Concurrently, users can reverse the relationship between 'helper' and 'helped' and as such lend or receive support. Twitter thus can act as a helping medium for people in crisis situations through multiple forms of social support from the community in the #depression discourse space.

The final contribution *Relational dimensions of organized helping professions* – Findings and Implications by Scarvaglieri and Graf juxtaposes the contributions of this volume as regards overarching relational dimensions and offers these as a potential meta-language of researching helping relationships. Dimensions identified include the participants engaging in a helping interaction ('personal dimension'), verbal and non-verbal techniques and methods of establishing and managing relationships ('linguistic and discursive dimension'), the theoretical and empirical connection between relationships and the purpose of communication in organized helping ('functional dimension'), the development of relationships over time from abstract socio-historical perspectives as well as within the confines of a particular dyad ('temporal dimension'), the medium of interaction/communication and its effects on the relationship ('medial dimension') as well as the influence of social categories on relationship building ('identity dimension'). Based on the research presented here, Scarvaglieri and Graf also suggest a refined definition of relationships from an interactional perspective and point out methodological challenges and options for future language and discourse-based research on relationships.

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