# SOME CASES OF COMPLAINING IN ROMANIAN. REMARKS ON THEIR INCREMENTAL STRUCTURE AND STRATEGIC USE

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**Abstract**. The complaint sequence is often characterised by the fact that the hearer (dis/)affiliates to the complaint. In this study we look at the close connection between (dis/)preference and (dis/)affiliation of the participants towards the format of the complaint. We analyze the degree of preference at the level of the participation framework, and the degree of affiliation at the level of the thematic structure of the complaint. We present two cases: the case in which the hearer responds at the complaint with minimal verbal affiliation and a high degree of preference (example 1), and the case in which the complaint is used as a strategy of saving the speaker's face (examples 2–3). In the latter case, the affiliation and the participation of the interlocutor at the complaint format are not easily obtained by the complainer. The claim that the rhetoric complaint is signalized by the way preference and affiliation are conversationally constructed is launched in this study.

**Keywords**: complaint, preference, affiliation, participation framework, thematic structure, strategy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the present study, which is still a work in progress, complaint sequences are analysed in the framework of ethnomethodology and of discourse functional analysis. We are looking at the way in which the complaint is constructed by the co-participants, seeking recursive and non-accidental features that are specific to the complaint sequence. We start from the theoretical premise that the linguistic and communicative resources that occur in complaints (such as exclamatives, interjections and other discourse markers, strategies, conversational moves, etc.) have a certain recurrence, a limited variation in spite of the myriad of communicative situations and in spite of the innumerable fluctuations of the

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RRL, **LXIII**, *1–2*, p. 99–113, Bucureşti, 2018

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speakers' interlocutory behaviour. This study does not come up with a new theoretical approach; it rather aims to point out that many salient and recurrent features of the complaint that were previously discussed in the literature (see References) can equally be traced in the Romanian corpus. Furthermore, the original contribution of the present study consists in applying the concepts of preference/dispreference and of affiliation (of the hearer to the complaint) in a congruent manner, taking into account the discourse levels where these concepts become active characteristics. All the examples have been extracted from the IVLRA corpus of spoken Romanian.

A complaint can be a local speech act[2], which is considerably less frequent in verbal interactions as compared to the complaints within conversational sequences or to the "cascading" complaints, i.e. series of complaints issued by one speaker or by several enunciators involved in the communication act. Hence, our focus in this study is on complaining as a *big package* of conversation or as a *speech act set*, a synergic unit of variable extent which is not exclusively dependent upon a single verbal intervention, an adjacency pair, a triplet (Sacks 1992: 561–569; Laforest 2009) etc., but upon the entire sequence. Thus, the local analysis of every utterance[3] needs to be correlated with the sequence (Traverso 2009).

Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) put forward a definition of this verbal action that is apparently too restrictive regarding not only the intuitive manner of construing the act of complaining, at least in Romanian culture and perhaps in other cultures as well, but also the theoretical observations made in the subsequent research on complaints. Their definition, which envisages complaining as a speech act whose prototypical accomplishment is made by means of an adjacency pair, is the following: "In the speech act of complaining, the speaker (S) expresses displeasure or annoyance – censure – as a reaction to a past or ongoing action, the consequences of which are perceived by S as affecting her unfavourably. This complaint is usually addressed to the hearer (H) whom S holds, at least partially, responsible for offensive action" (Olshtain and Weinbach 1993). The authors then identify the necessary „preconditions"[4] for the occurrence of the speech act of complaint, their centrepiece being *the socially unacceptable act* (SUA).

When viewing a complaint as a sequence which is accomplished through the collaborative participation of the interlocutors, the presentation of this verbal act, which is equally a social act, is broadened as regards responsibility, considering that the SUA could

[2] When a complaint has the minimal realization of a speech act, it consists of an adjacency pair in which speaker A's complaint is followed by an affiliative response (Drew and Curl 2009).

[3] Sometimes an even more thorough analysis of utterances is needed, specifically at the level of turn constructional units.

[4] These are: 1. H performs a socially unacceptable act (SUA) that is contrary to a social code of behavioral norms shared by S and H. 2. S perceives the SUA as having unfavorable consequences on herself, and/or for the general public. 3. The verbal expression of S relates post facto directly or indirectly to the SUA, thus having the illocutionary force of censure. 4. S perceives the SUA as: (a) freeing S (at least partially) from the implicit understanding of a social cooperative relationship with H; S therefore chooses to express her frustration or annoyance, although the result will be a "conflictive" type of illocution in Leech's terms (Leech, 1983, 104); and (b) giving S the legitimate right to ask for repair in order to undo the SUA, either for her benefit or for the public benefit. It is the latter perception that leads to instrumental complaints aimed at "changing things" that do not meet with our standards or expectations. The main goal of such instrumental complaints is to ensure that H performs some action of repair as a result of the complaint (Olshtain and Weinbach 1993: 108).

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have been committed by the interlocutor (the most typical case considered by Olshtain and Weinbach) or by someone else: „To complain means to express feelings of discontent about some state of affairs, for which responsibility can be attributed *to «someone» (to some person, organization or the like*)" (Heinemann, Traverso 2009; our emphasis). The notion of responsibility is a conceptual constant of considerable socio-pragmatic importance for this verbal action, whose function is to analytically determine the target of the complaint.

Véronique Traverso (2009) also pointed out that there is not a perfect correspondence between French and English or, we might add, between French and Romanian at the level of denomination and, furthermore, we believe that this is equally valid for the conceptual model of verbal complaining in different languages. In both French and Romanian the corresponding term for *complaint* is a common verb derived from Latin: Fr. *se plaindre* / Rom. *a se plânge* < lat. *plangere*, with the etymological sense of „beating one's chest as a sign of grief or exaltation". Apart from the synonyms of *se plaindre,* Traverso (2009) noted that French also uses other verbs for various instances of complaining: (Fr.) *reprocher / faire des reproches*, and so does Romanian (*a reproşa / a face reproşuri*), we might add[5]. In speech, the reference to this verbal sequence can often be made through misnaming, by using – in an overdetermined or underdetermined manner with reference to the denoted state of affairs – a series of lexemes such as *a regreta, a critica, a se autocritica, a acuza, a învinui* (Engl. *to regret, to criticise, to criticise oneself, to accuse, to blame*) that the complaining sequence actually borders on from an illocutionary standpoint. When the complaining sequence is included in or unfolds into a narrative or argumentation, the reference to the complaining sequence can be made by using at will such nouns and verbs as: *a povesti* / n. *povestire* (*to tell, to narrate / n. narration*)*, a i se întâmpla, a păți / pățanie* (*to go through, to happen to/ happening*)*, a argumenta* / n. *argumentație* (*to argue / argument*), and so forth.[6] In the present study we acknowledge the idea that there is an illocutionary versatility of the complaining sequence and that it also bears upon the spontaneous manner in which one can assign more or less precise denominations to this conversational act. This illocutionary versatility that can occur with complaining does not go beyond the realm of verbal acts with a face threatening potential. It can be the outcome of several factors: of the degrees of illocutionary force, of indirectness, of the speakers' penchant for a specific type of politeness, of the influence exerted by the sequential environment or of the fact that the complaint sequence can often be embedded in superordinate conversational structures such as verbal conflict, argumentation, etc. Heinemann (2009) reported the findings of some researchers according to whom complaining and gossiping, in some situational contexts, can be comparable verbal activities or that reproach and complaining, or criticism and complaining have a similar ranking on the scale of illocutionary force, sometimes being very difficult to differentiate.

The ethnomethodological approach to complaints, according to which a complaint is construed as a „social activity in talk-in-interaction" (Heinemann, Traverso 2009), underscores the fact that the themes which emerge in conversation and which have a complaint potential, namely *complainables*, as termed by Schegloff (2005), may or may not

[5] These are what we consider to be the perfect synonyms for *a se plânge* (to complain): (Rom. scholarly) *a se lamenta* (to complain), (Rom. familiar) *a se văicări* (to whine).

[6] All these contextual verbal synonyms used for the act of complaining are linguistic approximations which emerge in spontaneously underteremined or overdetermined use of language.

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evolve and develop into a complaining sequence depending on: the attitude of the participants, their orientation, the degree of preferentiality (Schegloff 2007), their affiliation / disaffiliation with the complainer and with what he wants to accomplish through his verbal interventions. Consequently, there can often be seen that there is a progression from a "potential complaint" stage to a "proper complaint" stage, which is permanently negotiated between participants (Heinemann and Traverso 2009; Drew and Curl 2009; Laforest 2009). Heinemann and Traverso (2009) pointed out that this actually occurs in most cases and that there are scarcely any unforeseen manifestations of discontent verbally constructed by only one speaker. Drew and Curl (2009) called attention to Mandelbaum's[7] argument that, within the action of complaining, the co-participant ought to be given the opportunity to join in the complaint.

In this study, after making some theoretical remarks concerning the method of analysis to be used, we shall provide three examples of complaining sequences with a focus on the important role of the design of the complaining module, on the array of linguistic devices used in building up this sequence, and on the interrelation between the participants at the complaint. Finally, we will outline several possible directions for further research on this subject.

## 2. THE METHOD OF ANALYSIS

For every example subjected to analysis, we are going to examine: (i) the communicative situation, (ii) the structure of the sequence, (iii) the linguistic and sociopragmatic features identified in the language of complaining; (iv) the stance of the participants in the act of complaining.

Véronique Traverso (2009) argued that the act of complaining consists of several stages: *the initiation*, *the core part* of complaining (in which „the complaint is approved by the recipient(s) *via* an expressed agreement on the complaint topic and an affiliation with the complainer"), *the complaint development* and *the closing*. In the analysis that we are going to conduct on the complaint sequence, we will consider, on the one hand, **the participation framework** i.e. the sequencing of the turns and the degree of preference/dispreference at the level of each conversational turn and, on the other hand, we will investigate whether **the incremental and thematic structure** of the complaint, that Traverso delineated, can be completely restored. Hence, our focus is on two structures: namely the one that deals with the organizational mechanism of turn by turn succession (i.e. the participation framework) and the thematic structure of the complaint. The two structures coexist in a synergic manner due to the incremental and hierarchical nature of the conversation.

At the level of the participation framework a specific feature is preferentiality or, in other words, the adjacency of the turns, the manner in which the speakers situate themselves in relation to the prior turn. At the level of the thematic structure, the specific feature is the **affiliation / disaffiliation** of the speakers to the ongoing conversational process. More recent studies on complaints published in the thematic issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics* (2009) put an emphasis on the fact that the speakers' participation and their

[7] Mandelbaum, Jenny, 1991 / 1992, "Conversational non-co-operation: an exploration of disattended complaints", *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 25, 97–138, *ap.* Drew and Curl (2009).

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affiliation / disaffiliation are two core issues related to complaining. It is also in these studies that a distinction is made between the two notions. Drew and Curl (2009) as well as Heinemann and Traverso (2009) speak of the structural character of preferentiality because the latter is analysed in terms of succession timing, of the local properties of turn concatenation[8], of contextual properties like "who is complaining to whom about whom or about what". Affiliation has an evaluative character which consists in the fact that the interlocutor is (or is not) in agreement with the complainer, that the former does (or does not) support the latter's conversational undertaking, that the interlocutor builds (or does not) a stance that is consonant with the complainer's stance. Affiliation is dependent upon the participation framework, hence on preferentiality, but it is a superior form with a non-local character and it indicates the manner in which the recipient of the complaint „joins the complaining activity"[9] (Heinemann, Traverso 2009). To conclude, participation framework and thematic structure are two different discourse levels, with different degrees of complexity and different characteristics. Preferentiality is an attribute of the participation framework; affiliation is the emergent characteristic of the thematic structure. One last remark to be made in this respect is that preferentiality and affiliation contribute to the attainment of the speakers' *stance*.

The research conducted on this macro-speech act from an interlanguage studies perspective underscores the on-record and off-record strategies performed by the speaker as complainer (Olshtain and Weinbach 1993; Geluykens and Kroft 2002). In our view, the pattern of the sequence (both the participation framework, and especially the thematic structure of the complaint) includes these strategies which can likewise be subclassified according to the degree of affiliation or disaffiliation.

## 3. "SUFFICIENT" AFFILIATION

In example (1), which is a discussion between friends who are also colleagues and which unfolds in A's home, the complaining sequence occurs after a problem-solving sequence regarding some issues that involved putting a potential seller of an affordable second-hand car in touch with a prospective buyer, namely A; thus, A shifts from the interactional pattern of personal problem solving to the one of complaining. From a typological point of view, the complaint is indirect or, in other words, it is a third party complaint. The interlocutor constantly maintains her role of receptor of the complaint; the target of the complaint is A's old car or rather the circumstance of being the possessor of an object that does not function properly and not a person who is also involved in the communicative situation. Mention should be made of the fact that in this case we are dealing with a multi-target complaint: the damaged car, the lack of money to buy a new one (that A alludes to in turn 5) as well as the general state of affairs. The responsibility is not

[8] The linking types of turns are also described by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1990: 206–210), where the author mentions linking that occurs at the level of propositional content or at the level of inferred meaning.

[9] The literature on the subject presents many forms of joining the activity of complaining, such as the situation in which the recipient participates, or he/she exaggerates in his participation and "goes too far" (Drew and Curl 2009), the situation in which the recipient which is also the target of the complaint denies his responsibility, or shifts the blame, acting innocent (Manzoni 2009), etc.

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distinctly marked by either one of the speakers. Between the two conversationalists there is a great amount of shared knowledge due to their being friends and co-workers.

(1)

| | |
|---|---|
| 1A: | ((vine înapoi în cameră)) |
| | este TErminată de MULtă vreme maşina noastră↓## |
| | iar eu N-AM destui bani ca să cumpăr o maşină adevărată ((zgomot de veselă)) |
| 2B: | mh↓ |
| 3A: | asta-i↓ adevărată! vreau să zic nouă |
| | şi:: [ce să-ţi spun |
| 4B: | [nouă↓ da |
| 5+A: | sîntem aşa: o încroPEAlă am adus↓ am adus cît s-o repare pe-aia↓ |
| | da' mă-ntreb dacă:: = |
| 6B: | = dacă face |
| 7A: | dacă face↑ |
| | că se strică-n altă parte. caroseria e toată terminată↑ |
| 8B: | ((formează un număr de telefon)) |
| 9A: | ar fi: extraordinar să iasă chestia asta atunci chiar [că |
| 10B: | [mh |
| 11+A: | ne-mbătăm. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1A: | ((returning to the room)) |
| | our car has been RUined for a LOng time now↓## |
| | and I DON'T have enough money to buy a real car ((clatter of dishes)) |
| 2B: | mhm↓ |
| 3A: | this is↓ real! I mean new |
| | a::nd [what is there to say |
| 4B: | [new↓ yes |
| 5+A: | it's just tha:t it's an improviSAtion I brought↓ I brought just enough to repair that one↓ |
| | but I wonder i::f = |
| 6B: | = if it's worth it |
| 7A: | if it's worth it↑ |
| | 'cause something else crashes. the body is all busted up↑ |
| 8B: | ((dialling a phone number)) |
| 9A: | it would be: great to pull this off then we'll [really |
| 10B: | [mhm |
| 11+A: | we'll drink to it. |

The indirect complaint in (1) is realized by a series of turns grouped as a single "batch" of turn-takings. The "seeds" of the complaint had been previously "planted". In the conversational interaction, this complaint sequence is preceded by a troubles telling one (Jefferson 1988), and at this point, in 1A, the speaker turns this critical potential into a complaint[10].

The participation framework is characterized by the fact that the complainer, namely speaker A, is considerably more vocal than speaker B as she builds longer conversational moves, some of them taking the form of extended turns prompted by B's supportive backchanneling, which is an indication that A is not inhibited by B, on the contrary, she feels discursively supported by B (3A and 5+A; 9A and 11+A). Speaker B, the recipient of

[10] There are references made by speaker A to the wear and tear of the car that she owns, to the idea of the opportunity to buy a better second-hand car, all due to "chance".

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the complaint, has a constantly supportive attitude, her turns are much more illocutionary monotonous than A's who resorts to a wider range of speech acts. Apart from the responsive turns that indicate B's preference for the conversational pattern initiated by A, speaker B links up her intervention by means of overlapping and "backchanneling" (4B), performs a hetero-completion of the complainer's turn (6B), therefore she co-participates in the complaining sequence[11], and this action is promptly validated by A in turn 7. In turn 8, speaker B refrains from a possible verbal intervention and opts for a non-verbal action, hence her attempt to reach the seller of the car by phone. Speaker B's silence at this point indicates her attempt to reduce the negative impact of the SUA, an instance that Laforest (2009) and Traverso (2009) discussed, the latter author describing it as an „easing out from the complaint". If we were to ignore speaker B's minimal supportive moves, which were virtually devoid of semantic content, we could safely claim that speaker A's verbal behaviour is mostly monological.

At the superior level of analysis of the thematic structure of the complaint, all the supportive moves performed by speaker B, accomplished without hesitation, represent affiliative resources that are conveyed through minimal linguistic expressions. Actually, Drew and Curl (2009) showed that, generally, in the case of complaints, "positive affiliative response is preferred over negative and disaffiliated responses". Another preliminary observation that ought to be made with a view to the presentation of the thematic structure of this complaint and of the linguistic devices used in it, is that the entire sequence is oriented towards positive politeness, that we are dealing with an on-record complaint and that speaker A initiates all the structural thematic stages of the complaint while speaker B offers her support through a tactful minimal participation in this conversational pattern.

The thematic structure of this complaint starts with the stage of initiation of the complaint, in which two contrasting observations are issued, both pertaining to the semantic category of negative features (1A: the car is „ruined", the money is not enough). What follows next is the stage of development of the complaint (3A-7A), in which this macro-speech act is documented with negative details in connection with the objective target of the blame (the old car) and some personal details about the speaker herself (5A). Next there is the closing stage of the complaint which is accomplished here by the expression of wish, of hope and of reward (*it would be great to pull this off; we'll drink to it*). This interlocutory closing of the complaint which stretches from 9A to 11A is a strategy whereby a civility-induced withdrawal from the complaint verbal sequence is accomplished. The prefiguration of a potential felicitous repair of the unsatisfactory *status quo* can be interpreted as a strategy of mitigation of the threatening force of the complaint. As it can be noticed, the second stage of the structure put forward by Traverso (2009), namely the core part of the complaint, a stage in which the complaint is approved by the recipient, is tacitly performed. There aren't any formulations of agreement, approval or explicit affiliation. Thus, a more "economical" variant of the incremental thematic structure is being restored, due to the speakers' considerable amount of shared knowledge and to their close relationship.

One of the most important pragma-linguistic resources in the realization of this sequence is the ratio between the explicitness of evaluation and the implicitness of emotion. The discourse of the complainer oscillates between negative evaluations which involve a

[11] The pre-emptive completion corresponds to a psycholinguistic mechanism of extending the personal deictic center, a mechanism which was initially explained through conversational strategies by P. Brown and St. Levinson in their book on politeness.

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dysphoric mood and positive values, the former being more predominant than the latter. From this perspective, speaker A's language is bipolar as it builds antagonism between two referents (the old car and the one for sale) and two emotional states (frustration, discontent vs. hope, positive expectations). Moreover, the complainer resorts to rephrasing whereby she explains and accentuates the intended meaning (3A; 5A), she switches from a metaphorical expression to a denotative type of expression (cf. the metaphorically used adjective *adevărată* (*real*) which is correlated with the denotative adjective *nouă* (*new*); the metaphoric depreciative noun *încropeală* (*improvisation*) is set in a relationship of semantic equivalence to the predication *am adus [bani] atât cât să o repare* (*I brought just enough [money] to repair it*). The complainer prefers exclamative sentences, some of them with a superlative value, and focuses the discourse on herself by using the subject *I*[12]. She also underscores and polarizes prominent referents by means of symbolically used deictics (***asta**-i adevărată* / ***this** is real; s-o repare **pe aia*** / *to repair **that one***)[13]. When documenting the complaint, the pragma-linguistic strategies used by the complainer diversify as she resorts to such conversational strategies as the confession (*o încropeală am adus...* / *I brought an improvisation*) that she signals by means of the clichéd phrase *ce să-ți spun* (*what is there to say*), which is a hesitation discourse marker in Romanian, as well as to the display of disbelief or doubt by using the technique of externalizing inner speech (*da' mă-ntreb dacă:: face* / *but I wonder i::f it's worth it*) (Bălăşoiu 2017: 17-54).

The main conceptual coordinates on which this complaining sequence is grounded are: the unfavourable situation, the opportunity that could remedy the situation and the final reward.

The two speakers build a convergent positioning, they share common values and speaker B, who is cooperative, efficient and breviloquent, displays empathy towards A rather than affiliation to the complaint pattern that speaker A initiated and developed, as proven by the strategy of withholding replies (8B) and by her attitude of "not going too far" with the verbal support for the conversational pattern initiated by A. The brief conversational reactions of the speaker B to A's complaint does not represent a full-fledged conversational affiliation to the complaint format.

## 4. THE COMPLAINT AS A CONVERSATIONAL REMEDY

The following sequence unfolds in the house of one of the two friends who are also co-workers and who share a great deal of common knowledge: reference to previous conversations between the two (*our agreement*, see 1A) is made at a certain point, A has detailed knowledge about B's intellectual needs and that is precisely why she mentions a bibliography that she could provide, she also knows, albeit indirectly, of some of the other social relationships that B is involved in[14]. The conversation between the two women starts with a reproach which is formulated by A and is addressed to B, who is a few years younger than A.

[12] Expressing the first person and second person subject in Romanian is emphatic.

[13] The demonstratives are symbolically used because the referent is not an entity *in praesentia*, but a salient notion in the common background knowledge of the speakers.

[14] The sequence belongs to the same conversation from which the example (1) was extracted, but this time the role of the speakers has changed.

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(2)
1A: iar TU N-AI respectat î:: înțelegerea noastră că dacă [AI nevoie de ceVA
2B: [<P nu >
3+A: [de bibliografie să-mi spui↓
4B: păi măi↑ n-am prea avut pentru că n-am prea: lucrat↓
adică am fost atît de:: sîcîită ştii. cu: cursuri↓ o grămadă de cursuri am avut cum NU ştiu aşa::
eu-s cam zăpăcită şi cam ineficientă↑ şi mie-mi # trebuie: spațiu: mental şi psihic [ca să mă concentrez
5A: [ să te poți concentra.
tu dacă nu profiți de vacanța asta [într-adevăr
6B: [păi tocmai de-asta [eram
7+A: [eşti pierdută
8B: TErifiată de ideea că vor veni şi vor sta la noi↓mai ales neştiind nimic cît timp au↓că dacă au timp puțin şi nu ştiu ce↑ măcar amenințarea era mai limitată↓ da' aşa mă gîndeam că poate vin şi stau toată vara toată toamna ştii↑
9A: mă↓ nu ştiu dacă ți-e de folos ce ți-am spus eu din experiența mea↓
STAI într-o zi cu picioarele-n apă şi fă-ți prog- planu↑ da' la <MARC milimetru↓> mărunt↓

1A: and YOU DID NOT respect our a:: agreement that if [you ever NEED ANYthing
2B: [<W no >
3+A: [any bibliography you should ask me↓
4B: well now↑ I didn't actually because I didn't realy work↓
I mean I've been so:: pestered you know. wi:th classes↓ a lot of classes I've been having like I DOn't know it's like
I'm a bit airheaded and rather inefficient↑ and I # need mental and physical space [to be able to focus
5A: [to be able to focus.
If you don't make the most of this vacation [really
6B: [you see that's why [I was
7+A: [you are lost
8B: TErrified by the idea that they are coming and they are staying with us↓ especially since I don't know how much time they can spend↓cos' if they don't have much time and so on↑ at least the threat is more contained↓ but I thought that they might be coming and they might be staying through the summer through the autumn you know↑
9A: now↓ I don't know if my shared experience is of any use to you↓
PUT your shoulder to the wheel one day and make the plan↑ but to <MARK the last detail↓> minute↓

The illocutionary space of this sequence has a high degree of threatening potential and it consists of reproach (1–3+A), complaint (2–4–8B), between which warning (5–7+A) and advice (9A) are intercalated. The complaint occurs as a disaffiliation reaction of speaker B to the reproach format. B has a twofold conversational role, namely of complainer and of complainee, on account of the fact that she is also part of the complicated target of the complaint, she is the person who expresses criticism as well as self-criticism because she didn't do any work, yet she still cannot ask A for the bibliography (4B). Furthermore, speaker A, the one who formulates the reproach, is also a complainer because of her having developed a certain feeling of frustration: her friend had not asked for the bibliography that she would have been able to provide. Consequently, the two participants in the communication have double roles: A, the one who formulates the reproach, is somewhat an indirect complainer as well, but she shortly becomes the recipient

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of the complaint, whereas B is both a complainer and a complainee. This double role play, which is far more powerful in speaker B's case, renders the sequence difficult to classify from a typological point of view. In this sequence of turns in which there are various instances of expressing discontent, the target of the complaint is manifold: on the one hand there is speaker B (who did not ask for the bibliography, who did not manage to start working and who has a complicated mental configuration which prevented her from focusing and from getting herself organized), on the other hand the current situation is unfavourable to personal intellectual endeavours (B had to give many lectures, she had visitors). The typological framing of this complaint is twofold as it corresponds to speaker B's roles and to the more complex construction of the object of discontent. On the one hand, there is a direct complaint because the complainee is present, but on the other hand the sequence can be classified as an indirect complaint or a third party complaint, because its object is perceived as a dispreferred situation.

The general pattern obtained through the chaining of conversational moves is dominated by illocutionary versatility. The complaint launched by B at (4B) is locally intermingled with a justification act and with an act of rejection of the reproach performed by speaker A. The complaint is versatile from an illocutionary point of view as it comprises an instance of self-criticism and one of indirect apology.

When examining the turn organisational features, i.e. the participation framework of this conversational sequence, it can be noticed that the turn takings are neither definitely dominated by dispreferred actions nor characterized by the presence of preferred second pair parts. We can therefore enumerate these situations: (i) at (2B) there is a mildly uttered and overlapped *nu (no)*, a discourse marker that brackets the rejection of reproach, hence B very alertly signals her dispreference by a halfway fragmentation of the performance of the reproach and by marking her attitude, although the reproach is however carried out in (3+A); (ii) the overlap in (5A) relies on the same linguistic material as the final part of B's previous turn, which indicates speaker A's local supportive attitude towards the complainer but not necessarily towards the act of complaining; (iii) the complaint is initiated by B through an interjectional marker indicating a rather dispreferred interactional action (*păi măi / well now*; (4B)); (iv) turns (4B–8B), characterized by numerous overlaps, represent a competition between the two speakers: complaining is intertwined with warning and both conversational moves are successfully performed, but the overlaps indicate a conversational attitude "of not paying too much attention to what the other is saying", an attitude that presupposes the acknowledgement of the interlocutor's verbal intervention and, at the same time, not really ensuring their conversational space The overlap between (6B–7+A) is a "buffer" zone where B tries to reduce A's warning as much as possible, presumably intending to determine the speaker A to abandon her verbal intervention with the aim of extending B's own complaining discourse space. B resorts to the strategy of not ensuring her interlocutor's conversational space by an attempt to mitigate the threatening potential of her warning. Both speakers adopt longer turns and have the same speech patterns that include idiomatic expressions, figuratively used words, scholarly terms and interjectional markers.

The thematic structure of the complaint is restored in an incomplete and defective manner[15]. The complaint seems to be lacking the first two stages, namely the initial stage

[15] The term is borrowed from the terminology of speech acts.

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and the core part of complaint. The complainer starts abruptly with the development of the complaining act. The closing of the complaint is also non-existent and in this instance it is replaced by the piece of advice offered by A at (9A). The discourse marker *ştii / you know* (4B), in mid position, fulfils the function of marking speaker involvement. It is only through A's supportive reaction in (5A) that the complainer is certain of the interlocutor's abiding by this conversational pattern. The verbal competition between the two speakers, the fact that none of them is willing to cede, that several times the start of the turn is marked by indicators of the rejection of the conversational pattern (*nu! / no!*) and of a dispreferred action (*păi, măi / well now*), that the affiliation is not very conspicuous, that the thematic structure of the complaint is reduced to a single stage of the original four, that the complaint has an intrinsic illocutionary versatility that renders it similar to self-criticism, all the above prove that we are not dealing with a full-fledged complaint.

The range of pragma-linguistic resources used in this verbal sequence includes, among others, evaluation (Martin and White 2005). The linguistic resources employed for evaluation are the material out of which is generated the perspective in which the speaker presents herself (/himself). The perspective is important in complaints and consist of "the way reference to the complainer and the complainee is expressed when the complainer states his/ her annoyance, moral judgement etc." (Tamanaka 2003)[16]. In our opinion, the complaint perspective is an element out of which the stance is generated. In example (2), the evaluation is twofold because its function is that of providing multiple perspectives for B. She makes a self-evaluation (*sâcâită/ pestered, zăpăcită/ airheaded, ineficientă/ inefficient, fară spațiu mental şi psihic ca să mă concentrez/ in need of mental and physical state to be able to focus*) thus causing herself a loss of face, and she is evaluated by her elder colleague (as the one who *did not respect the agreement/ nu a respectat înțelegerea*), moreover, the elder friend builds such potential representations as *pierdută/ lost* and as the one who should *(să stea cu) picioarele în apă/ put her shoulder to the wheel*[17] in order to build a *minute/ la milimetru* plan. Speaker B sometimes mitigates her evaluations by means of litotes (*cam zăpăcită şi cam ineficientă/a bit airheaded and rather inefficient*), hence she performs the complaint somewhat hesitantly and other times she uses the superlative (*atât de sâcâită/so pestered; terifiată/terrified*). Most of such representations generate an exteriorized affective component, an extroverted and disarmingly honest stance.

The multiple perspectives manifested by speaker B, whose concurrent conversational role of complainer and complainee should not be overlooked, is additionally underscored by the frequent use of pronominal forms (first person and second person singular) which, in Romanian, when they are placed in subject position, can receive a zero-morphemic realization because the subject is non-emphatically indicated by the inflectional endings of the verb. The polyphonic background of this sequence is displayed in the instances of reported speech (1A), as well as in the externalized inner speech, the latter being used in rendering speaker B's thoughts. In conveying her thoughts as a sign of honesty towards speaker A, the interlocutor B evokes an inner speech which is characterized by the discomfort caused by the lack of sufficient information, by the formulation of alarming hypotheses and by powerful emotions (8B). During the complaining sequence, B also uses

[16] With respect to complaint perspective, Tamanaka (2003) is following the analysis of Trosborg, A., 1995, *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints, and apologies*, Berlin, Mouton.

[17] The meaning of the idiomatic expression *a sta cu picioarele în (ligheanul) cu apă (rece)* is that of making great intellectual efforts.

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focus markers (*tocmai/ that's why, mai ales/ especially, măcar/ at least*) which trigger standard implicatures of quantity in order to highlight and control its dysphoric implication.

The question that arises would be: what is *l'image de soi* that speaker B is shaping in this sequence, with A's support. Is it a distressing image through which she irretrievably loses face? From A's firm, direct and, at the same time, empathic and receptive position in relation to B, it is obvious that this does not happen. Speaker A "sufficiently" abides by the complaint pattern in such a way as to avoid conflict and to steadily uphold a more vigilant and advisory position (see 9A). For speaker B, reproach is a *complainable* that she immediately develops conversationally according to a complaint pattern starting from (2B). B applies two strategies: specifically the strategy of enhancing her unfavourable image through self-criticism, one which suits her complainee role, and the strategy of invoking SUA because the latter matches her role of complainer. The contextual implicature signalled by B as complainee would be the following: "Alas, I admit I haven't been working because...!". The contextual implicature indicated by B as complainer would be: „Alas, you have no right to admonish me because, oh!, here is the unfavourable situation I've been going through!"[18]. In conclusion, by the two assumed conversational roles, speaker B is an astute Janus.

In the following sequence (3) – which is part of a telephone conversation between two friends in which once the gossip pattern was initiated by means of a challenging question, it is closed by the other speaker who overtly displays the fact that this locutionary pattern is dispreferred (2B) – one can easily notice that the roles of complainer and of recipient of the complaint are built up incrementally and conjointly. Furthermore, the danger of triggering a verbal conflict is hindered (see the slots 5A–6B) and B's complaint is gradually accepted by speaker A who experienced the frustration of having her gossiping conversational plan rejected. We might claim that in example (3) complaining is being used by B, who assumes the role of complainer, as an interactional strategy of repairing her relationship with A who experienced the discontent of disaffiliation to the pattern that she had initiated. The complaint sequence is initiated and delivered by B as a "conversational remedy" offered to A in order not to undermine their relationship.

(3)
1A: da' TU↑ ce cuceriri mai ai?
2B: m: eu nici una↑ vreau să zic că n-am ieşit deloc pîn-acuma.
3A: vai [da'#
4B:[mie
5A: da' ce-ai păţit TU? eşti STRESATĂ? CE-AI. că TU de_obicei ieşeai mai des. NU aşa.
6B: am foarte mult de-nvăţat↑ # şi-mi #
7A: o:h↑
8B: tu ştii ce medie de toată: JEna↑ am scos anu trecut?
9A: ce MEdie ai scos?
10B: ieh şaptepatrujdoi.
11A: e:h eşti tare. hi hi hi

[18] In the instructive glossing of this implicature, complaining interjections have been intentionally used.

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12B: ei sînt tare! tare# <$_{MARC}$ PROAstă>.
13A: CE ce să mai zic#
14B: e medie MIcă mă↑ sînt stresată trebuie neapărat să scot şi eu un opt şi ceva ca să: # =
15A: =să se compenseze.
16B: păi↓ # DA.
17A: şi eşti pusă pe FAPTE mari.
18B: o:h# <$_{R}$ trebuie neapărat>#
da' oricum /uichend/-urile mi le rezerv pentru ((bip)) petreceri↓ chefuri↓ şi:# ((zgomot)) eventual un teatru ↓ un film↓
19A: a.

1A: so what romances have YOU↑ got going on?
2B: m: I have none↑ I mean I haven't been going out lately.
3A: oh my [but#
4B:[I've been
5A: but what happened to YOU? are you STRESSED OUT? WHAT'S WRONG. cos YOU_used to go out more often. It's NOT like you.
6B: I have a lot of studying to do↑ # and I #
7A: o:h↑
8B: do you know wha:t a LOusy↑ average mark I scored last year?
9A: what average MArk did you score?
10B: ieh sevenpointfourtwo.
11A: e:h you are incredible. hi hi hi
12B: I'm incredible right! incredibly# <$_{MARK}$ STUpid>.
13A: well WHAT else is there to say#
14B: it's a LOw average mark↑ I am stressed out I really need to score at least eight to: # =
15A: =to make up for it.
16B: well↓ # YEAH.
17A: and you mean BUSINESS.
18B: o:h# <$_{R}$ I really need to>#
but anyway my /weekends/ are for ((beep)) parties↓ binges↓ a:nd# ((noise)) maybe a play↓ a movie↓
19A: oh.

In (3A–5+A), through the avalanche of impulsive questions denoting a dysphoric mood, followed by a reproach or, at least, a non-naive observation (*că tu de obicei ieşeai mai des, nu aşa/ cos' you used to go out more often, it's not like you*), speaker A signals her willingness to „listen to the explanation" of her interlocutor, therefore she signals the fact that she is ready to grant her a larger conversational space, and that she is indirectly soliciting for a conversational remedy from her interlocutor. Up to this point their conversational interchange was dominated by dispreference. The conversational repair starts to happen from slot 6 onwards. All the structural stages of the complaint are covered ((8B) initiaties the complaining sequence and develops it (10B, 12B, 14B), his interlocutor affiliates to this pattern (11A, 15A, 17A), and finally there is the closing complaining

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sequence (18B)). Emerging as an action of conversational remedy for the interlocutor, this complaint offered as substitute for gossip, although structurally complete, does not succeed in granting speaker B a "comfortable" role of complainer. The degree of affiliation to the complaint format is low (13A: *What else is there to say?*). The complainer will soon feel the need to change her status. The turn 18 is a manoeuvre which signals the closing of the complaining sequence and the transition to another format. At this point, speaker B almost forcibly arrogates the image of a girl who knows how to have fun at weekends. The second stance that B hastily builds up paradoxically corresponds to the gossiping pattern that was initially rejected. Speaker A's conversational reaction to B's new stance is a minimal linguistic expression, i.e. no more than an interjection signalling turn reception (19A).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Starting from the assumption that the nature of conversational interaction is synergic and incremental, we proposed an analysis of the complaining sequence which unfolds on two different levels of complexity – the level of participation framework and the level of thematic structure – taking into account the recurrent linguistic resources used. We corroborated the participation framework, in which we evaluated the degrees of preference, with the thematic structure of complaining, where we examined the degrees of affiliation. We have seen that there could be cases in which, due to the complexity of the target of the complaint, this conversational sequence can be typologically included into several categories. We presented a type of conversational situation in which the complaint was genuine (ex. 1) and two other conversational situations, less analysed according to our knowledge, in which the complaint is a face strategy, used by the complainer as a conversational "remedy" offered to the interlocutor in order to relieve the latter's frustration of not having accomplished (his/)her own interactional plan. In all the presented cases affiliation is reached in different degrees, but strenuously in the last two examples.

The present analysis indicates that the complaint registered some disturbances at the level of participation and of affiliation when used as a strategy of face saving. In my opinion, further research on the strategic (i.e. rhetoric) uses of the complaints in talk in interaction is needed also taking into account other discourse genres.

## SOURCE

IVLRA = Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu (ed), *2002, Interacţiunea verbală în limba română actuală. Corpus (selectiv). Schiţă de tipologie*, Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.

**Transcription symbols**:

| | |
|---|---|
| ↓↑ | = intonation rises or falls |
| # | = pause |
| capital letters | = emphasis |
| : | = sound stretch |
| xxx = | |
| =yyy | = latching |
| [...] | = talk omitted from the transcription |

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A [xxx
B [yyy = overlapping passages

<p> = low or soft voice intensity
+A/+B = continuation of the same turn
<MARK > = high voice intensity
<R > = rapid tempo

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