



IRIT KUPFERBERG
DAVID GREEN

Troubled Talk

Metaphorical Negotiation
in Problem Discourse

MOUTON



DE GRUYTER

Troubled Talk

Metaphorical Negotiation
in Problem Discourse

by

Irit Kupferberg
David Green

Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York

Mouton de Gruyter (formerly Mouton, The Hague)
is a Division of Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kupferberg, Irit.

Troubled talk : metaphorical negotiation in problem discourse /
by Irit Kupferberg, David Green.

p. cm. — (Language, power, and social process ; 15)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 3-11-018415-X (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 3-11-
018416-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Discourse analysis — Psychological aspects. 2. Discourse
analysis, Narrative. 3. Narration (Rhetoric) 4. Psycholinguis-
tics. 5. Interpersonal communication. I. Green, David, 1935—
II. Title. III. Series.

P302.8.K868 2005

401'.41—dc22

2005010443

⊗ Printed on acid-free paper which falls within the guidelines
of the ANSI to ensure permanence and durability.

ISBN 3-11-018415-X hb

ISBN 3-11-018416-8 pb

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the
Internet at <<http://dnb.ddb.de>>.

© Copyright 2005 by Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, D-10785 Berlin.

All rights reserved, including those of translation into foreign languages. No part of this book
may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photo-
copy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing
from the publisher.

Cover design: Christopher Schneider.

Printed in Germany.

To Batia and Arie

W

The Best of Pulitzer Prize News Writing

**Wm. David Sloan, Valarie McCrary
and Johanna Cleary**

**Publishing Horizons, Inc.
Columbus, Ohio**

©Copyright 1986, PUBLISHING HORIZONS, INC.
2950 North High Street
P.O. Box 02190
Columbus, Ohio 43202

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright holder.

Printed in the United States.

2 3 4 7 6 5 4

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Main entry under title:

The Best of Pulitzer Prize news writing.

1. Journalism—United States. 2. Pulitzer prizes.
I. Sloan, W. David (William David), 1947- . II. McCrary, Valarie, 1960- . III. Cleary, Johanna, 1961- .
PN4726.B383 1986 071'.3 85-19410
ISBN 0-942280-14-8

Preface

About nine years ago, we decided to collaborate by combining our discourse analytic and psychological perspectives in a study of radio, hotline and cyber talk about problems. We were curious to find out how sufferers who are in an acute emotional state negotiate the meaning of their troubled experiences with anonymous others. Guided by theoretical and practical goals, we set out on a challenging journey of exploration in the course of which we discovered a treasure comprising intriguing figurative forms we named “organizing tropes”. A close examination of these salient gems showed that they often encapsulate the essence of the detailed and painful personal stories unfolded by troubled selves visiting various sites where mental help is provided. We also found out that these figurative constructions enhance the interactive discussion of solutions and prevail over the limitations characteristic of problem talk. In this book, we would like to share the insights we gained with our readers, hoping that they will be able to apply them in research and in practice in other domains of life.

Deeply felt thanks are due to Monica Heller and Richard Watts, the editors of the series and Rebecca Walter at Mouton who have supported our project from its inception until it became a full-fledged book. We have been blessed with the help of Richard Watts, who has provided us with wise and supportive observations and comments that guided us at meaningful junctions of the book production. We are grateful to the anonymous readers for their insightful comments. We know that any remaining errors are entirely our own. We express our gratitude to ERAN (The Israeli Hotline) and Izhak Gilat, its professional coordinator who collaborated with us in the writing of Chapter 5. We also thank Israel Broadcasting Authority, the Israel Defense Forces Radio and the hosts Yovav Katz and Gideon Reicher for their support. We are grateful to Tami Ronen for her ongoing support and advice. We acknowledge with gratitude the students at Levinsky College of Education and Tel Aviv University for their participation in the collection of the radio corpus and those students who participated in some of the analyses of problem talk. We are appreciative of the

anonymous callers and digital writers we hosted in the book. Without them, we would have never discovered the precious organizing figurative language of problem discourse. And last but certainly not least, to Batia, David's wife and Arie, Irit's husband for their immense love and patience.

List of the troubled selves

1. "Amputating the cancerous leg": Chapter 3.
2. "I was really like a mother to him": Chapter 3.
3. "Life is like a jail": Chapter 3.
4. "This puzzle – I have to find the missing part": Chapter 3.
5. "One can talk about all kinds of subjects": Chapter 3.
6. "Like you're the world's only sucker": Chapter 3.
7. "In a big bang": Chapter 4.
8. "I don't know how to get close to my middle son": Chapter 4.
9. "Am I their floor rag?": Chapter 5.
10. "The lion and the snake": Chapter 5.
11. "My life is a story in a book": Chapter 5.
12. "Why not be ahead of my time?": Chapter 6.
13. "I was the best source of light on the market": Chapter 6.
14. "I produce a new mechanism that controls the addictive behavior": Chapter 7.
15. "That person didn't have horns and didn't have a beard": Chapter 7.
16. "Everything simply started snowballing": Chapter 8.
17. "I'm like a blender": Chapter 8.
18. "But sex was always something strong inside": Chapter 8.
19. "I'm not there today": Chapter 8.
20. "He becomes a nervous wreck that drags you along": Chapter 8.
21. "She is condemned to slow and painful extinction and we live in a daily hell": Chapter 8.

Contents

Preface	vii
List of the troubled selves	ix
 Part 1 Defining the boundaries for problem discourse	
Chapter 1 Situating problem discourse in a postmodern landscape	3
1. The troubled self visits actual and virtual sites	3
2. Institutional discourse: Between the panopticon and the workshop room	5
Chapter 2 Theoretical and methodological frameworks	15
1. Theoretical framework	15
1.1. Functional approaches to discourse	15
1.2. Global coherence	21
1.3. Narrative evaluation	22
1.4. Worlds of discourse	25
1.5. Discourse-oriented perspective on figurative language	28
2. Methodological framework	33
2.1. Corpora	33
2.1.1. "The two of us together and each of us alone" corpus	35
2.1.2. "Night birds talk" corpus	36
2.1.3. Hotline corpus	37
2.1.4. Cyberspace corpus	38
2.2. Data collection and analysis	38
3. Overview of the book	41
 Part 2 Figurative bridges in radio, hotline and cyber discourse	
Chapter 3 Organizing tropes	47
1. The troubled caller makes a phone call	47
1.1. Effective interactions	47
1.2. Ineffective interactions	56
2. Summary	64
Chapter 4 Open your call with a title	69
1. Topic-focused program: "I advise you to hate your mother"	69

2. General program: “I don’t know how to get close to my middle son”	82
3. Summary	90
Chapter 5 Figurative conspiracies	93
1. Hotline sufferers	93
1.1. “Am I their floor rag?”	93
1.2. “The lion and the snake”	99
1.3. “My life is a story in a book”	102
2. Summary	104
Chapter 6 Cyber multilogues	107
1. Cyberspace sufferers	107
1.1. “Why not be ahead of my time?”	107
1.2. “I was the best source of light on the market”	120
2. Summary	126
Part 3 The discursive construction of control	
Chapter 7 Negotiating the right to advertise the self	131
1. The healer: “I produce a new mechanism that controls the addictive behavior”	131
2. The lesbian: “That person didn’t have horns and didn’t have a beard”	136
3. Summary	139
Chapter 8 The construction of addictive disorders in discourse	141
1. Addictive behaviors and codependency	142
2. Addicted and codependent selves	144
2.1. The love addict: “Everything simply started snowballing”	144
2.2. The obese eater: “I’m a blender”	148
2.3. The sex addict: “But sex was always something strong inside”	151
2.4. The abstinent gambler: “I’m not there today”	152
2.5. An ex-alcoholic’s wife: “He becomes a nervous wreck that drags you along”	154
2.6. The anorexic’s mother: “We live in daily hell”	158
3. Summary	160

Part 4	Redefining the boundaries of problem discourse	
Chapter 9	Theoretical conclusions and action-oriented implications	167
1.	Theoretical conclusions: Global figurative coherence in a multilogue	168
1.1.	Professional and lay voices reshape the boundaries of problem discourse	168
1.2.	Figurative trans-world journeys	172
2.	Action-oriented implications	176
Epilogue		179
Notes		181
References		193
Author index		215
Subject index		219

Part 1

Defining the boundaries for problem discourse

Chapter 1

Situating problem discourse in a postmodern landscape

1. The troubled self visits actual and virtual sites

At the outset of the twenty-first century, troubled selves¹ wander about a contemporary² landscape full of actual and virtual institutional sites³ that entice them to pay a visit in order to make sense of their experience. These sites comprise various therapeutic and counseling settings such as long-term and short-term therapy, hotlines, support groups, as well as the more public radio problem discussions and cyberspace forums.

Some sufferers, like *The lion and the snake*,⁴ the metaphorical name we gave the hotline caller whose problems are unfolded in Chapter 5, avail themselves of the services of several sites at the same time. Once these human beings have entered one of the sites, they publicize their private emotion-laden personal stories⁵ (Macdonald 2003) and negotiate possible solutions to their pressing problems with professional or para-professional representatives of the institution.

In this book,⁶ we set out to explore naturally occurring institutional telephone and cyber problem discourse⁷ in order to attain theoretical and action-oriented goals. In other words, we wish to describe and interpret the meaning-making processes that take place in these sites and then present our findings to our readers. The latter may wish to further explore the domain or apply the insights gained in this book in practice.

Our corpora constitute unique empirical evidence. The participants in goal-oriented telephone and cyber problem discourse are sufferers who are frequently in an acute emotional – if not suicidal – state. As a result, they experience a pressing need to speak or write about their problems. Other participants are professional psychologists, radio hosts and para-professional hotline volunteers whose institutional⁸ goal is to provide mental help.⁹ This complicated discursive undertaking is accomplished in a unique speech situation. While participants are

faced with demanding tasks of problem presentation and negotiation of candidate solutions (Buttny and Jensen 1995), they are often constrained by factors such as the tension between their respective goals and lack of shared knowledge and/or a time limit, which may undermine communication.

How do troubled selves fare in such sites? What do they say about them? What do the professional participants say about these sites that purport to provide mental help, but in fact do not belong to the official psychological establishment? Are the sufferers who seek help in such sites actually given mental help?

Psychology-oriented quantitative studies of telephone and cyber problem discourse in Israel provide partial answers to these questions (Raviv and Abuhav 2003) by showing that both lay and professional participants are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of these services. Raviv and Abuhav (*ibid.*) mention the following advantages: ample distribution of efficient psychological information and popularization and advertisement of psychological services. The disadvantages (*ibid.*) include time limit, which undermines the efficiency and the depth of the telephone interventions, instant solutions, and overgeneralized or erroneous conclusions regarding the caller's problems.

Macdonald (2003) foregrounds the media perspective on the therapist-style talk-shows where private experience is displayed in "its 'raw' state" (*ibid.*: 85). "Everything else – news, sitcoms, soap operas, prime-time drama series – everything else is scripted, orchestrated, excessively edited, performed by good-looking professional actors with great lighting, top-notch photography, background music – it's all canned" (Jerry Springer, as cited in Macdonald 2003: 86). The emotionally charged public confessions made by lay persons often empower the rating-oriented talk-show hosts, who use the dramas unfolded in their programs to advance their aims without solving the lay sufferers' problems (*ibid.*).

In the course of this book, we explore further the voices of suffering individuals seeking help in naturally occurring telephone and cyber sites. Following research that has shown that radio, hotline, cyber and clinical problem discourse are particularly rich in personal stories whose very engine is trouble (Bruner 1997), and using a qualitative method that we developed, we examine the narrative and figurative productions of the troubled selves presented in the book. We show

how these discursive patterns are related to each other and how self-construction is negotiated and accomplished via them.

Before we shift our attention from the sites where problems are verbalized and interpreted by actual or virtual participants to a more theoretical realm where researchers reflect on these selves and the nature of the sites they visit, we would like to show what a very troubled 15-year-old adolescent said about cyber problem discourse – one of the sites we visit in this book. Example (1) is an excerpt from a message sent by this boy. In the message, the teenager describes the contribution of the virtual forum in helping him overcome his problems (see Chapter 6):

Example (1) “The only place where I can speak about it”

1 Hi.
2 I’ve had these feelings for a year and a half, but only now have I
3 found my inner courage¹⁰ and shared my thoughts with other
4 people. And I’m afraid to see the school counselor because she
5 might send me to a psychologist or something like that, and at a
6 time like this I don’t think that’s what I need. That’s why I wrote
7 to this site because it’s probably the only place where I can speak
8 about it without being afraid that some action will be taken
9 against me.

We will never know for sure if this boy opted to live or committed suicide. Our interpretation of the messages he sent and the answers he received suggest that this adolescent was saved by a spur-of-the-moment virtual rescue team whose anonymous members somehow managed to shift the boy’s attention from his tormented past world to a future world where life is worth living.

2. Institutional discourse: Between the panopticon and the workshop room

Where can we locate the troubled minds visiting actual and virtual institutions on a historical axis? What are the characteristics of the post-modern landscape in which these troubled selves wander? What are the characteristics of the language that they use in the actual and virtual sites where problems are unfolded and solutions co-constructed?