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*Forms of Talk in Roman Comedy. Reading Plautus and Terence
with Goffman and Conversation Analysts**

Abstract

The paper aims at examining different types of talk represented in the plays by Plautus and Terence. To this end, it combines Goffman's participation framework with tools of Conversation Analysis, which serve to offer a more nuanced definition of speaking turns and the conversational floor. After discussing several types of footing within comedy dialogues, turns are differentiated from other strands of communicating: side comments (including theatrical asides), self-directed cries and backchannel talk. Moreover, verbal interactions in Plautus and Terence are analysed in relation to their floor structure and the kind of participation they entail for the interlocutors. Finally, the concepts here presented, as argued throughout the paper, help to revisit some of the existing accounts of verbal interaction in Roman comedy.

L'articolo si propone di esaminare i diversi modi di parlare rappresentati nelle opere di Plauto e Terenzio. A tal scopo, la teoria del quadro di partecipazione di Goffman viene combinata con strumenti di analisi conversazionale che servono a offrire una definizione un po' più elaborata dei turni e del piano (ing. *floor*) di conversazione. Dopo aver discusso i vari tipi di ancoraggio dialogico nelle commedie, i turni vengono differenziati dagli altri livelli di comunicazione: commenti secondari (compresi gli "a parte" teatrali), esclamazioni autoreferenziali ed espressioni di feedback. Inoltre, le interazioni verbali in Plauto e Terenzio vengono analizzate in relazione alla loro struttura del piano di conversazione e al tipo di partecipazione che instaurano con gli interlocutori. Infine, i fenomeni presentati, come sostenuto in tutto il lavoro, aiutano a chiarire alcune concezioni dell'interazione verbale nella commedia romana.

1. *Introduction*

Talk represented in the plays by Plautus and Terence takes several forms, which are partially determined by the ever-changing footing of the (performed) social situation: the characters are talking to themselves, emit emotional reactions, interrupt each other, construct long speeches or actively listen to the talk by others¹. Most of these issues have been addressed by the scholars interested in the verbal interaction in Roman comedy, who provide invaluable insights for our understanding either of general speech

* The paper is part of the international research project *Conversation in Antiquity. Analysis of Verbal Interaction in Ancient Greek and Latin* (SI1/PJI/2019-00283), financed by the Community of Madrid. I want to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions and corrections.

¹ Verbal interaction in Roman comedy has attracted attention of the scholars as part of the playwrights' dramatic craft (e.g. KARAKASIS 2005, UNCETA 2019) or as a valid source of data for Linguistic Pragmatics of Latin (e.g. RISSELADA 1993, DICKEY 2002, UNCETA 2018).

patterns or of particular conversations². My intention in this paper is to propose a more fine-grained theoretical framework of studying conversation-related phenomena, which might help to revisit some of the findings of the existing accounts.

Firstly, the dramatic dialogue (between characters) will be tentatively analysed from a broader perspective by integrating it with the performance level (between the play and the audience). To this end, I will propose to reinterpret the stage presentation of the comedies – in a form it is designed within the text – as a simulation of social interactions. To some extent, the original non-illusionistic theatre by Plautus and Terence already invites scholars to delete the rigid line between the characters and the audience (see the brief discussion in Section 3). Here, it will be a purely methodological procedure serving to calibrate a more nuanced description of talk – in its various forms and strands – represented in the comedy texts, as they came down to us from antiquity³.

By drawing on the theoretical writings by Goffman (1981), the on-stage interaction and the off-stage spectators will be treated on the same level of analysis: as parties to a social situation, namely «a full physical arena in which persons present are in sight and sound of one another» (Goffman 1981, 136). Consequently, characters become ratified participants of the conversation (the comedy dialogue), performed in public and perceivable to the by-standing members of the audience. Within this broader view of social situation, Goffman (1981, 133f.) draws a distinction between the dominating (main-stream) conversation and other (non-official) states of talk. He divides the latter into three different types of subordinate communication: of one interlocutor with a subgroup of ratified participants (*byplay*), among some participants and bystanders (*crossplay*), or entirely between bystanders (*sideplay*).

Goffman's participation framework – summarised above – will be further supplied with methods of Conversation Analysis in order to explain how talk-in-interaction is constructed and managed by the interlocutors⁴. In particular, my combined methodological approach aims at defining the most basic – and hence the most crucial – concepts of *speaking turns* and the *conversational floor*. Both terms – along with the phenomena derived from their distinction – are much debated in the conversation-

² See MÜLLER'S (1997) pioneering account of turn taking and backchannel talk in Terence. BARRIOS-LECH (2016) offers solid chapters on conversational structure (with a special interest on the im/politeness phenomena). See also contributions by HOFFMANN (1983), ROESCH (2002; 2008) and, more recently, by BERGER (2019).

³ I based my investigations on the recent editions by Loeb Classical Library, using BARSBY (2001) for Terence and DE MELO (2011-2013) for Plautus. If not stated otherwise, these are also the sources of the Latin text and its English translation. Having in mind the main argument of the paper, I will not reproduce the translators' stage directions, while modifying some of the punctuation marks.

⁴ A concise introduction to Conversation Analysis as a study of naturally occurring conversation – with a specific interest for investigating dramatic discourse – is offered by HERMAN (2002). See also HELM (1982), who shows briefly how this methodology might benefit Goffman's framework of analysing forms of talk.

oriented studies⁵. Edelsky (1981, 401f.) points out that most scholars tend to use *turn* indistinctly with *floor*, while – from the inferred interlocutors' perspective – taking turns not always means to hold the floor. These nuances, on the other hand, seem to be indispensable for a methodologically plausible analysis of such socially charged phenomena as interruptions and backchannel.

Having in mind the particularity of dramatic dialogues, Herman (2002, 19) chooses to gloss *turn* as «the enactment of a speaker's right to speak by taking an opportunity to speak in a speech event or situation». In this simplistic view, any change of speaking character in an on-stage dialogue would mark a new turn. This also seems to be the approach adopted in the available analysis of talk in Roman comedy. In the following pages, I will apply two additional criteria by Edelsky (1981, 403): turns are (i) examples of on-record speaking and (ii) serve «to convey a message that is both referential and functional». Accordingly, this narrower definition excludes from the scope of turns side comments (Section 3), which are pronounced – normally in a lowered voice – only to one or few selected participants, as well as instances of self-directed talk (Section 4) and tokens of feedback (Section 5) with no referential meaning.

Floor, on the other hand, is defined as «the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space» and – more precisely – can be related to the topic or the type of communicative action being jointly developed and accounted by the participants (Edelsky 1981, 405). Much in a similar vein, Goffman (1981, 140) states that «[i]n canonical talk, the participants seem to share a focus of cognitive concern – a common subject matter». In summary, the speakers can produce propositional and functional utterances (turns), which either belong to the current flow of events (floor) or that should be analysed as off-floor contributions. Possible applications of this distinction in analysing the talk in Plautus and Terence will be discussed in the following sections.

2. *Speaking turns*

A multi-party conversation given in (1) is an example of on-record communicating with a single conversational floor. The analysis of the speakership transition will show that the social practice of taking turns is ordered and organised by normative rules, which allows avoiding chaos and problems with reception⁶. Daemones meets on stage his ill-disciplined servant Gripus talking to another slave, Trachalio. Note that here and throughout I will reproduce the text of the comedies focalising the change of speaker (and not the metrical division in lines), which seems to serve better the main argument of the paper.

⁵ Interestingly enough, *turn* is not defined explicitly in the Conversation Analysis' seminal paper on turn-taking systematics by SACK – SCHEGLOFF – JEFFERSON (1974). See EDELSKY (1981, 397-400) and O'CONNELL – KOWAL – KALTENBACHER (1990, 351f.) for a critical overview.

⁶ SACK – SCHEGLOFF – JEFFERSON (1974).

(1)
 GRI. *o ere, salve.*
 DAE. *salve, Gripe. quid fit?*
 TRA. *tuosne hic servos est? /*
 GRI. *haud pudet.*
 TRA. *nil ago tecum.*
 GRI. *ergo abi hinc sis. /*
 TRA. *quaeso responde, senex: tuos hic servost?*
 DAE. *meus est.*

GRI. My greetings, master. DAE. And mine to you, Gripus. How are things? TRA. Is this your slave? GRI. I'm not ashamed of it. TRA. I'm not dealing with you. GRI. Then go away from here, will you? TRA. Please answer, old man: is this your slave? DAE. Yes. (Plaut. *Rud.* 1052-1054)

The turns, which alternate between the interlocutors, are spoken by one character to another (by Gripus to Daemones, by Trachalio to Daemones, etc.) and constitute different types of action. They are organised in pairs of conventionally related turns, such as question-answer or greeting-greeting. In Conversation Analysis, this two-part format is called an *adjacency pair* and is considered the basic structural unit of conversation⁷. Adjacency pairs are responsible for a smooth and orderly alternation of speakers: by opening an adjacency pair and addressing it – explicitly or otherwise – to a specific person, the interlocutor who currently holds the turn automatically selects the next speaker. The turn-taking order is also visible whenever it gets disturbed. The recipient of Trachalio's question (*tuosne hic servos est?*), for instance, is clearly the free-born citizen Daemones and yet the following turn is grabbed unexpectedly by Gripus, whose self-selection gets rebuked and rejected (*nil ago tecum*). After this short distraction, Trachalio reissues the first part of an adjacency pair – with more explicit addressing (*quaeso responde, senex*) – and the format is finally completed by the intended addressee (*meus est*).

When holding their turn-at-talk, speakers construct utterances out of recognisable and structured units, whose completion points can be predicted by other participants. These turn-constructive units may range from a complex clause to a single word, whenever – in a given context – these linguistic tokens may count as meaningful, coherent and independent utterances⁸. Within the sequence given in (2), one finds turn-constructive units based on complex clauses (*si*-clause, *quando*-clause), phrases (*me ipso praesente...*) or single lexical items (e.g. *quid?*).

⁷ Early treatments of the concept can be found in SCHEGLOFF (1968) and SCHEGLOFF – SACKS (1973). See SCHEGLOFF (2007, 13-27) for a comprehensive account of a sequence based on this minimal, two-turn format. Some recent applications in Latin are offered by RISSELADA (2020).

⁸ Accordingly, from a linguistic-theoretic perspective, turn-constructive units would correspond with *sentences*, defined by some linguists as «complete units of communication» (PINKSTER 2015, 15).

(2)

THER. *quando vir bonus es, responde quod rogo.*CAP. *roga quod lubet. /*THER. *promistin, si liberali quisquam hanc assereret manu, / te omne argentum redditurum?*CAP. *non commemini dicere. /*THER. *quid? negas?*CAP. *nego hercle vero. quo praesente? quo in loco? /*THER. *me ipso praesente et Lycone tarpezita.*

THER. Since you're a good man, reply to what I ask you. CAP. Ask what you like.

THER. Didn't you promise that if anyone claimed this woman as free, you would return the entire money? CAP. I don't remember saying it. THER. What? You deny it? CAP. I do indeed deny it. In whose presence? In what place? THER. In

my very own presence and that of the banker Lyco. (Plaut. *Curc.* 708-14)

The end of every such unit is potentially the end of the turn and a possible place for the change of speaker. Although turn size is not fixed, longer speech normally requires additional interpersonal work and negotiations. In lengthy interventions by the same participant, the turn space is normally filled with more than one unit, which might launch different actions⁹. Within his last utterance, Cappadox manages to construct a two-unit turn with different actions: first, he reacts to the prior question (*nego hercle vero*) and then, instead of passing over the turn, he withholds it in order to open up a new adjacency pair (question-answer).

Moreover, if participants want to speak for a significantly longer time, they tend to signal beforehand that they are about to produce an extended unit of talk¹⁰. The maid Bromia (3), while talking to her master, starts her multi-unit turn with an elaborate preface. Thus she attempts at securing reciprocity and a temporal suspension of the turn-taking rules, which prevents her interlocutor from intervening before completing the whole story. She already has the turn-at-talk, but currently she requires also the floor and the role of a prominent speaker.

(3)

BRO. *at ego faciam, tu idem ut aliter praedices, / Amphitruo, piam et pudicam esse tuam uxorem ut scias. / de ea re signa atque argumenta paucis verbis eloquar. / omnium primum: Alcumena geminos peperit filios— /*AMPH. *ain tu, geminos?*BRO. *geminos.*AMPH. *di me servant.*BRO. *sine me dicere, / ut scias tibi tuaeque uxori deos esse omnis propitios. /*AMPH. *loquere.*BRO. *postquam parturire hodie ocepit uxor tua ...*

⁹ On turn construction in the context of speaker change, see CLAYMAN (2013), with further references.

¹⁰ Cf. STIVERS (2013, 200-203).

BRO. But I'll make you speak differently, Amphitruo, and I'll make you realise that your wife is pious and chaste. I'll tell you the signs and evidence for this in a few words. First of all: Alcumena has given birth to twin sons. AMPH. Do you say so, twins? BRO. Yes, twins. AMPH. The gods are saving me. BRO. Let me speak, so that you know that all the gods are well-disposed toward you and your wife. AMPH. Yes, speak. BRO. After your wife began to be in labour today [...] (Plaut. *Amph.* 1085-1091)

Through her turn-initial preface, Bromia stresses that the upcoming talk is relevant, newsworthy and – paradoxically – short (*paucis verbis eloquar*). However, once the actual story-telling begins (with a discourse-organising marker *omnium primum*), the addressee interrupts with astonishment. After a short confirmatory digression, the maid has to retake the floor (*sine me dicere*) and reissue the story¹¹.

As we can see, the size of turns – strictly connected with the dynamics of speaker change – leads to different conversational styles and types of interaction. While the exchange of short one-unit turns (see (1) above) might be a useful dramatic resource of representing quarrels, interrogation scenes, and a farcical “tit-for-tat”, multi-unit utterances normally appear in personal story-telling, relating some past events, and action-planning scenes. Herman (2002, 21) explains that longer turns

block access to the floor for other potential speakers and can function as a ploy for dominance, exclusion or coercion, depending on whether resistance or challenge or counter-measures are undertaken in response.

On the other hand, the orderly progression of turns based on adjacency leads to a situation where the utterances do not stand by themselves in the dialogue: the turn-at-hand in this way or another orients itself to the preceding talk and brings some implications for the upcoming turns. As stated by conversation analysts, this feature of talk is governed by the *principle of contiguity* or *nextness*, according to which «speakers design their turns to be connected to prior turns, and to display to the other speaker(s) that coherence or connectedness with the ongoing talk»¹².

Still, some discontinuities in turn progression are possible. When Thais is beginning her story-telling sequence (4), the slave Parmeno warns her that he will react to every falsehood in her talk. Then, he interrupts at the first possible turn-completion point announcing that regarding this part of the story... he does not have to intervene¹³. (In the rest of the paper, I will mark the continuation of a turn by one speaker with “=”, whereas the talk bypassed by the addressee will be displaced to the right.)

¹¹ I am grateful to Rodie Risselada for her insights during a discussion about this particular scene.

¹² DREW (2013, 134). The concept of contiguity goes back to SACKS (1987).

¹³ In ancient Greece, a woman, who lived away from the city where she was born, was usually a prostitute (Don. ad *Eun.* 107), hence *peregrina* in comedy sometimes substitutes *meretrix* (Don. ad *Ter. An.* 469). Here, by refraining from a comment, Parmeno seems to be implying that the fact that Thais mother was a foreigner sounds credible.

(4)

PAR. ... *proin tu, taceri si vis, vera dicito.*THA. *Samia mihi mater fuit. ea habitabat Rhodi-* /PAR. *potest taceri hoc.*= THA. *-ibi tum matri parvolam / puellam dono quidam mercator dedit ...*

PAR. [...] Therefore, if you want me to be quiet, speak the truth. THA. My mother was a Samian; she lived at Rhodes. PAR. Here one can be quiet. THA. There, at that period, a certain merchant made present to my mother of a little girl [...] (Ter. *Eun.* 106-109)¹⁴.

Just like Bromia in (3), Thais is concerned about her role as the floor holder, so she ignores Parmeno's interruption and continues the story unhindered (see the rest of the scene in (22) below). Accordingly, the slave takes the opportunity to speak but his utterance is not *heard* as an authorised turn by being left out of the current sequence of turns and, hence, out of the conversational floor.

3. Side-talk

In real-life conversations, some participants can decide to contribute off-record by talking – intentionally – without holding the floor. They use this – sometimes playful – way of communicating in order to evaluate, comment on or challenge what is being said by the principal speaker (Goffman, 1976, 275). As for the on-stage interactions, the evaluative comments either with no clear second-person reference or ostensibly ignored by the rest of the ratified interlocutors, are difficult to distinguish from the dramaturgical aside which Bain (1977, 17) defines – in its purest form – as follows:

when X and Y are on stage together, an aside is any utterance by either speaker not intended to be heard by the other and not in fact heard or properly heard by him.

Through asides, the characters of Roman comedies – much like in other theatrical traditions – comment on the on-going action, reveal their true motivations and remind the spectators of the details of the intrigue. This mode of communicating, therefore, tends to be related to role-playing and metatheatricality¹⁵. According to the dramatic conventions, the aside is only audible to the audience, who – it is worth reminding – in the original outdoor and daylight performance was not separated from the actors with a symbolical “fourth wall”. Thus the spectators technically existed in the performance space as bystanders or, if addressed explicitly, the ever-silent recipients. Given this

¹⁴ For this scene I reproduce a more fitting translation by RILEY (1896) – with slight modifications. Cf. n. 43.

¹⁵ On this technique in Roman comedy, see DUCKWORTH (1952, 111-13), BAIN (1977, 154-84) and – in the context of metatheatricality – SLATER (2000², 131f.). BEXLEY (2014, 473f.) explains the special treatment of asides in Terence.

constant awareness of the on-looking and eavesdropping audience¹⁶, Marshall (1999, 113) argues that the aside, in its (modern) dramaturgical sense, does not readily apply to *fabula palliata*, which is neither naturalistic nor illusionistic¹⁷. Instead, as suggested by the scholar, the characters are communicating – off-record – with the spectators, who they have within a “spitting distance” (cf. Plaut. *Asin.* 38-44) and who – admittedly – they are facing directly whenever making an aside (Marshall 1999, 123). Occasionally, the members of the audience are even requested to participate in the action of the play (e.g. Plaut. *Aul.* 713-21, *Men.* 879-81, *Mil.* 862).

One can argue, therefore, that the particular conditions of comedy performances – included also in the script – make the concept of the dramaturgical aside conflate with its conversational counterparts¹⁸. A good example of this ambiguity is what some translators label as the *half aside*, namely a type of talk not directed expressly to the other character and still ratified as a speaking turn. Let Amphitruo’s evaluative third-person remark concerning – but not addressed to – his interlocutor Bromia be one example here. This non-directional talk immediately gets reintegrated with the main sequence of speaking turns¹⁹.

(5)

AMPH. *agedum expedi: / scin me tuom esse erum Amphitruonem?*

BRO. *scio.*

AMPH. *vide etiam nunc.*

BRO. *scio. /*

AMPH. *haec sola sanam mentem gestat meorum familiarium. /*

BRO. *immo omnes sani sunt profecto.*

AMPH. *at me uxor insanum facit / suis foedis factis.*

AMPH. Go on, tell me: do you know that I’m your master Amphitruo? BRO. I do.

AMPH. Have another look now. BRO. I do know it. AMPH. Of my household members only this one is sane. BRO. No, all are sane indeed. AMPH. But my wife is driving me insane with her shameful actions (Plaut. *Amph.* 1081-1085)

¹⁶ According to GOFFMAN (1981, 132) bystanders are not ratified as participants of the interaction, but the interlocutors can perceive their access to the encounter. Even though they might hear or even follow the ongoing conversation (as eavesdroppers), the bystanders «should act so as to maximally encourage the fiction that they aren’t present [...]».

¹⁷ Cf. MARSHALL (2006, 166). DUCKWORTH (1952, 132-136), SLATER (2000², 6-8), CILLIERS (1996), and KOCUR (2018, 221-26) provide discussion on the non-illusionistic aspects of Roman comedy.

¹⁸ By contrast, if the theatrical tradition is abiding by the rule of the “fourth wall”, according to GOFFMAN (1981, 139), «the words addressed by one character in a play to another [...] are eternally sealed off from the audience, belonging entirely to a self-enclosed, make-believe realm». However, the scholar admits a possibility that «the actors who are performing these characters (and who in a way are also cut off from the dramatic action) might well appreciate signs of audience attentiveness».

¹⁹ See also Plaut. *Truc.* 190-93. In the context of ancient dramaturgical tradition, BAIN (1977) separates the “proper” dramaturgical asides from the “aside-related conventions”, whereas I would rather agree with one of his critics, who prefers «the idea of a slow slide between pure asides and normal conversation» (SIDER 1978, 400).

In order to stress that both ways of talking – off-floor and to the audience – are functionally overlapping, I will refer to them jointly as *side comments*. Accordingly, one could argue against Slater (2000², 132), who states that the aside «is a reminder of the special nature of communication in drama that allows us to receive two or more messages simultaneously». In fact, the dramatic communication, at least in this aspect, is not so different from naturally occurring conversation, where the main conversational floor(s) can easily coexist with side comments and background contributions, all of which might convey multiple messages and perspectives²⁰.

As reminded before, the talk directed explicitly to the audience-as-bystanders – except the staged eavesdropping scenes – normally is ignored by the rest of the present characters. This is so even if the off-record comments are entwined with conversational turns, in the midst of a close face-to-face interaction with the other party²¹. On occasions, off-speaking might accidentally get through to the main floor. In this case, it is normally perceived as indistinct self-talk (*secum loqui*), which – nonetheless – might attract the other party's attention. In (6), for instance, the off-record speaker is asked to repeat his last words, but he steers the interlocutor's interest away by quickly changing the topic.

(6)

TRA. *numquid dixisti de illo quod dixi tibi?* /

THEO. *dixi hercle vero omnia.*

TRA. *ei misero mihi! / metuo ne techinae meae perpetuo perierint.* /

THEO. *quid tute tecum?*

TRA. *nihil enim. / sed dic mihi ...*

TRA. Did you tell him what I told you? THEO. Yes, I told him everything. TRA. Poor me! I'm afraid that my tricks have perished utterly. THEO. What are you saying to yourself? TRA. Nothing, I assure you. But tell me [...] (Plaut. *Most.* 548-51)²².

Similar tensions between mainstream and side communication are reported also for the naturally occurring dialogues. Goffman (1981, 275) notes that real-life asides can also «cause their maker embarrassment if ratified as something to be given the floor and accorded an answer». In comedy, this is so, especially if – by such overhearing – the success of the whole deceit might be at stake. Duckworth (1952, 112) recalls a scene from *Miles gloriosus* (7), where the interlocutor has captured not only the voice but also

²⁰ Cf. GOFFMAN (1981, 154f.): «As dramatists can put any world on their stage, so we can enact any participation framework and production format in our conversation». The convergence of onstage performance and everyday communication is best exploited in GOFFMAN (1959).

²¹ E.g. Plaut. *Truc.* 186f.; Ter. *An.* 495ff.

²² The side comments are perceived as indistinct muttering also in Plaut. *Aul.* 190, *Most.* 512; Ter. *Hau.* 199f. etc.

the exact words of the off-record speaker, the slave Palaestrio. This incident could result in compromising the servant's deceitful plan.

(7)

PYR. *quid istuc est negoti?*

PAL. *animus hanc modo hic reliquerat. /*

PAL. *metuoque ut timeo, ne hoc tandem propalam fiat, nimis. /*

PYR. *quid id est?*

PAL. *nos secundum ferri nunc per urbem haec omnia, / ne quis tibi hoc vitio vortat.*

PYR. *mea, non illorum dedi: / parvi ego illos facio.*

PYR. What business is that? PAL. She's just lost conscience here. I'm terribly scared and afraid that this might come out at last. PYR. What do you mean? PAL. All this stuff now being carried behind us throughout the city, I'm afraid that someone might find fault with you for it. PYR. I gave what's mine, not what's theirs; I care little about them. (Plaut. *Mil.* 1347-51)

Palaestrio, however, manages to react quickly by converting the original side comment into talk meant for public hearing. By adding a syntactically dependent unit (*ne hoc propalam fiat :: quid id est? :: ferri...*), he generates an entirely "innocent" meaning for the whole utterance. Moreover, one can argue that this is also achieved due to a syntactical redesigning *ex post* of the whole turn: now *nimis* belongs to the phrase *propalam fiat* instead of modifying the main clause *timeo metuoque*. Thus Palaestrio is not "terribly" scared that the intrigue might come out, but he is afraid that carrying soldier's belongings through the city may seem "too" ostentatious.

4. Self-talk

By a prescriptive rule, talking to oneself in public – excepting some special circumstances – is considered a deviant behaviour and is avoided in an ordinary conversation (Goffman 1981, 84-88). Indistinct side comments in Roman comedy – discussed above – whenever perceived by other characters might be taken as a sign of keeping secrets and plotting²³ or of emotional distress²⁴. In addition, the self-addressed remarks pronounced on-record while talking to others serve the playwrights to stage mental insanity, either playfully performed or pretended by the characters²⁵. Accordingly, if the speakers do not want to appear insane, every moment of thinking out loud should be duly acknowledged and thus integrated somehow with the on-going

²³ E.g. Plaut. *Amph.* 954; *Aul.* 52.

²⁴ E.g. Plaut. *Merc.* 364f., *frg. inc.* 42 De Melo = 32 Leo.

²⁵ More specifically, in order to pretend insanity, Plautine characters resort to admitting they hear voices, they address absent interlocutors (e.g. gods) and talk to themselves (e.g. Plaut. *Capt.* 593ff., *Men.* 831ff.). Thus they simulate divine possession or Bacchic frenzy. For a detailed study, see FANTHAM (2011, 15-31).

speech event. When Geta in (8) asks Phormio to come up with a plan, the latter starts mumbling as if he was consulting himself about a possible solution²⁶.

(8)
 GET. *obsecro te.*
 PHO. *si rogabit...*
 = GET. *in te spes est.*
 = PHO. *eccere, / quid si reddet...?*
 = GET. *tu impulisti.*
 = PHO. *sic opinor.*
 = GET. *subveni. /*
 PHO. *cedo senem: iam instructa sunt mi in corde consilia omnia.* (Ter. *Ph.* 319-21)

GET. I implore you. PHO. If he asks... GET. Our hopes lie in you. PHO. Look, what if he replies...? GET. It was you who pushed him into it. PHO. That's it, I think. GET. Help us. PHO. Bring on the old man. All my plans are drawn up in my mind.

Once the self-talker finishes, he returns to the conversation by acknowledging that his off-turn and – from his interlocutor's perspective – incoherent sentences were only externalised symptoms of his inner (*in corde*) intellectual work²⁷.

More excusable cases of self-talk are emotional reactions triggered by specific circumstances or by an uncontrolled turn of events. Even being alone in public, whenever one happens to trip or to experience a sudden wave of cold air, s/he tends to respond with an apparently self-directed comment or interjection. Goffman (1981, 89) analyses these (para)linguistic cries as indexes which make available the self-talker's inner state to others present in the situation:

In brief, our subject externalizes a presumed inward state and acts so as to make discernible the special circumstances which presumably produced it. He tells a little story to the situation. He renders himself easy to assess by all those in the gathering, even as he guides what is to be their assessment. He presents an act specialized in a conventional way for providing information – a *display* – a communication in the ethological, not the linguistic, sense.

Commenting on Goffman's essay, Helm (1982, 151) concludes that this type of staged response cries «can work as impression-management strategies». The readers of Roman comedy are familiar with similar instances of self-talking – frequently expanded into long soliloquies²⁸ – which are used by characters to express their emotional state and thus clarify the ever-changing circumstances. The following excerpt contains

²⁶ Cf. Don. *ad Ph.* 319f.: *ECCE REM QUID SI REDDET totum hoc quasi alia agens loquitur parasitus ... SIC OPINOR non ad tu impulisti hoc pertinet sed ad id quod secum tacitus voluit Phormio.*

²⁷ For a similar planning *in corde* with hints on self-talk, see Plaut. *Mil.* 195-99.

²⁸ DUCKWORTH (1952, 103) distinguishes a soliloquy from a monologue, explaining that the former takes place when «a character, believing himself [sic!] to be alone, talks aloud under the stress of strong emotion».

Nicobulus' exclamation of joy informing the audience (as bystanders) that he has spotted another character on stage.

(9)

PHIL. *certo hic prope me mihi nescio quis loqui visust; sed quem video? / hic quidemst pater Mnesilochi.*

NIC. *euge, socium aerumnae et mei mali video. /*

NIC. *Philoxene, salve.*

PHIL. *et tu. unde agis?*

PHIL. Definitely someone seemed to be talking here near me; but who do I see? This is Mnesilochus' father. NIC. Hurray, I can see a companion in my suffering and my trouble. My greetings to you, Philoxenus. PHIL. And mine to you. Where are you coming from? (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1105-1107)

Accordingly, the self-expression of joy (*euge*), glossed by the following side comment, points towards an imminent dialogue opening, which leads also to a reconfiguration of the proxemics in the scene²⁹.

The response cries (interjections, imprecations, exclamations, etc.) do not classify as turns-at-talk, although they do have interactional potential and they need cooperation from other parties to the social situation³⁰. According to Goffman (1981, 109f.), the self-talker requires of the listeners «that they hear and understand the cry but act as though it has not been uttered in their hearing». Consider the case of Amphitruo (10) struck by a peal of thunder and lying confused in front of his house. His servant Bromia is calling out for him, but all he can do is to give cries of pain and startle.

(10)

BRO. *Amphitruo.*

AMPH. *perii.*

= BRO. *surge.*

AMPH. *interii.*

= BRO. *cedo manum.*

AMPH. *quis me tenet? /*

BRO. *tua Bromia ancilla.*

BRO. Amphitruo! AMPH. I'm dead. BRO. Get up. AMPH. I'm gone. BRO. Give me your hand. AMPH. Who is holding me? BRO. Your maid Bromia. (Plaut. *Amph.* 1076f.)

²⁹ During the performance, the verbal displays of one's inner states, accompanied by gestures and body movements, must have been crucial for performances with masks. See PANAYOTAKIS (2005) on actors' body language and RICOTTILLI (2018) on crying and tears in Terence.

³⁰ I omit here the traditional classification of these linguistic tokens, since I am more interested in their use within or outside the conversational environment. For a comprehensive definition of interjections in Latin, see UNCETA (2012, 2017). Exclamatory sentences are treated in SHALEV (2002) and PINKSTER (2015, 361-68). From a pragmatic perspective, RISSELADA (1993, 40f.) sets some grounds for the classification of the speaker-oriented speech acts about emotions. DUTSCH (2008, 96-104) offers insights into gendered cries of pain in Roman comedy.

These self-expressions must be noted by the other party but they are not treated as Amphitruo's turns-at-talk: they are the dramatisation of his state of shock that permeates Bromia's opening turn (*Amphitruo, surge, cedo manum*). I would argue, then, that this verse design can be Plautus' representation of background noise, simultaneous to the talk by the other character.

The response cries discussed so far appeared on the margins of the dialogue, just before the ratification of talk with others. In the following examples, self-expression concerning emotions is inserted into the ongoing conversation either as a non-turn – seemingly unnoticed – contribution (11) or as a fully-fledged turn-at-talk (12), with an assigned position in the sequence.

(11)

SEN. *pro eunuchon?*

PAR. *sic est. hunc pro moeicho postea / comprehendere intus et constrinxere.*

SEN. *occidi!* /

= PAR. *audaciam meretricum specta.*

SEN. *num quid est / aliud mali damnive quod non dixeris / relicuom?*

PAR. *tantumst.*

SEN. In place of the eunuch? PAR. That's right. Then they arrested him as an adulterer and tied him up. SEN. Damnation! PAR. Observe the impudence of the women. SEN. Is there any other disgrace or damage that you've left unmentioned? PAR. That's all. (Ter. *Eun.* 992-96)

(12)

EUN. *volo te uxorem / domum ducere.*

MEG. *ei occidi!*

EUN. *quid ita?* /

MEG. *quia mihi misero cerebrum excutiunt / tua dicta, soror: lapides loqueris.*

EUN. I want you to take home a wife. MEG. Oh no! That is the end of me! EUN. How so? MEG. Because, dear sister, your words are knocking out my brains, poor chap that I am. Your words are stones. (Plaut. *Aul.* 149-52)

In such cases, it depends entirely on the participants if they give salience to other's (verbalised) emotional displays by providing them with turn space³¹. An intermediate situation is presented in (13), where a short reactive exclamation serves – from a perspective informed by Conversation Analysis – as a turn-initial device. By this self-

³¹ HELM (1982, 152-152) stresses the interactional potential of response cries in his critical review of Goffman's framework. Interestingly enough, the same linguistic tokens that are analysed here as non-conversational self-talk can appear also in utterances with explicit addressing (e.g. Plaut. *Bacch.* 671: MNE. *Chrysale, occidi.* CHRY. *fortassis tu auri dempsisti parum?* «MNE. Chrysalus, I'm dead. CHRY. Perhaps you took too little of the gold?»), which can suggest that – by their very design – they were intended to be authorised as turn-at-talk.

directed expression of surprise, Astaphium reacts to the prior talk, while offering cues about the stance she is about to take in her upcoming turn³².

(13)

TRUC. *tene hoc tibi: / rabonem habeto, uti mecum hanc noctem sies. /*

AST. **Perii!** “*rabonem*”? *quam esse dicam hanc beluam? / quin tu “arrabonem” dicis?*

TRUC. “*a*” *facio lucri ...*

TRUC. Take this: have it as posit, so that you’ll spend the night with me. AST. I’m dead! “Posit”? What beast should I say this is? Why don’t you say “deposit”?

TRUC. I’m saving “de” [...] (Plaut. *Truc.* 687-90)

In this sort of turn design, Goffman (1981, 111) identifies a playful shift of footing: the initial cry presented in the guise of self-talk – as argued by the scholar – functions as a side comment, which the addressee will be understood to be overhearing³³.

Furthermore, the liberty of the treatment of response cries in a conversational environment contributes to their comical exploitation by Plautus in (14). When the slave Pseudolus asks his young master how he should help him, the latter emits a painful sigh *eheu!*, which – being an expression of self-pity – apparently serves as an emotionally charged preface to a trouble-telling sequence (*eheu! miser sum...*). Thus the self-concerned cry becomes complementary to the upcoming recipient-oriented talk.

(14)

CALI. *nilne adiuuare me audes?*

PSEU. *quid faciam tibi? /*

CALI. **eheu!**

PSEU. “*eheu*”? *id quidem hercle ne parsis: dabo. /*

= CALI. *miser sum, argentum nusquam inuenio mutuom. /*

PSEU. **eheu!**

= CALI. *neque intus nummus ullus est.*

PSEU. **eheu!** /

= CALI. *ille abducturus est mulierem cras.*

PSEU. **eheu!** /

CALI. *istocin pacto me adiuvas?*

PSEU. *do id quod mihi est ...*

CALI. Don’t you want to support me at all? PSEU. What should I do for you?

CALI. Dear me! PSEU. “Dear me”? Don’t spare that: I’ll give it to you. CALI. I’m

wretched, I can’t find money on loan anywhere. PSEU. Dear me! CALI. And

inside I don’t have a single coin. PSEU. Dear me! CALI. He’s going to take her

away tomorrow. PSEU. Dear me! CALI. Is that how you’re supporting me? PSEU.

I’m giving you what I have [...] (Plaut. *Pseud.* 78-83).

³² On the type of actions related to the turn-initial position, see HERITAGE (2013).

³³ In this context, see GOFFMAN (1981, 122): «[...] even though these interjections come to be employed in conversational environments, they cannot be adequately analysed there without reference to their original functioning outside of states of talk».

Pseudolus, however, takes the interjection as turn-at-talk with a referential meaning, a literal response to his question (*quid faciam tibi?*). Accordingly, the slave readily “helps” with a series of the same cries of pain, which accompany Calidorus’ progressing turn. As a self-talker not holding the turn nor contributing to the conversational floor, Pseudolus withdraws to the background of the conversation: all the assistance he is now willing to offer is his insincere and comically staged empathy³⁴.

5. Backchannel talk

Following Edelsky’s (1981, 404) definition, another class of interventions that should be excluded from the turn-taking system are the feedback messages, such as English *mhm* and *yeah*³⁵. Similar phenomena of listener’s responses have been studied under several terms, but the most widespread is perhaps *backchannel*, given that it is produced – so to speak – in the background of the interaction, as supplementary to the “main” channel of the speaker³⁶.

As tokens of engaged listenership, backchannels do not contribute to the substance of the talk, and serve, instead, to show that the addressee is an active participant in the ongoing conversation even without currently holding a turn. In this context, see the slave Parmeno, who – apparently lacking sufficient feedback – checks, if his interlocutor inside the house is paying attention to his instructions.

PAR. *senex si quaeret me, modo isse dicito / ad portum percontatum adventum Pamphili. / audin quid dicam, Scirte? si quaeret me, uti / tum dicas; si non quaeret, nullus dixeris, / alias ut uti possim causa hac integra.*

PAR. If the old man asks for me, say I’ve just gone to the harbour to find out when Pamphilus is arriving. Do you hear what I’m saying, Scirtus? If he asks for me, then say that; if he doesn’t, don’t say a word, so that I can keep the excuse to use another time. (Ter. *Hec.* 76-80).

As shown in many studies, backchannel behaviour might concern a wide range of tokens and expressive means: small lexical items, minimal vocal signals, as well as a non-linguistic activity such as head nods, blinks, grimaces etc.³⁷. In Roman comedy

³⁴ On this scene, see also SLATER (2000², 98f.) and DUTSCH (2008, 100-101). UNCETA (2012, 367-68) provides further examples of *eheu!* used in Roman comedy.

³⁵ Backchannel talk is considered non-turn also by ORESTRÖM (1983, 23). SCHEGLOFF (2000, 5) states that continuers are «alternative to an independent and competitive spate of talking» and as such are non-problematic instances of overlapping.

³⁶ The term *backchannel* was coined by YNGVE (1970), who defined it as short messages which do not interfere with turn-holding by the principal speaker. Admittedly, the examples given by the scholar suggest he did not distinguish between taking turn and holding the floor (CUTRONE 2005, 241f.).

³⁷ There is no consensus as to what items or functions should be included under the concept of backchannels, which leads to consider this category «a hodgepodge» (DRUMMOND – HOPPER 1993, 162). Accordingly, the phenomenon is referred to by different terms, which sometimes capture its particular

dialogues, the phenomenon is usually scripted as short responses – normally of one or two words – injected into others' talk, especially salient in story-telling or action-planning discourse. For the dialogues by Terence, there is a thorough and detailed study offered by Müller (1997, 39-50), who discusses backchannel jointly with other (floor-supporting) displays of interest and emotional involvement. Drawing on his investigation, one can conclude that – even as products of a literary representation – backchannels have several different functions which sometimes overlap or appear simultaneously. I summarise them by adapting Cutrone's (2005, 243-45) classification while providing some of its most prototypical linguistic tokens from Plautus and Terence:

- i. allowing the speaker to continue: *audio* (Plaut. *Capt.* 240; Ter. *An.* 552; *Ph.* 160).
- ii. display of understating of content: *scio* (Plaut. *Mil.* 236), *teneo* (Plaut. *Epid.* 357)
- iii. agreement: *licet* (Plaut. *Cas.* 482, *Most.* 402), *ita (e)st* (Ter. *An.* 54)
- iv. support and empathy towards the speaker's judgement: *docte* (Plaut. *Epid.* 289), *placet* (Plaut. *Asin.* 773)
- v. aligning emotional response: *hahahae!* (Ter. *Hec.* 862) *eugae!* (Plaut. *Epid.* 356)

As for the general positioning, CA-informed studies suggest that most backchannel items appear regularly at the end of turn units, where the speaker potentially could change and yet the listening party – by emitting only backchannel talk – signals an understanding that a longer unit of speech is underway. This is how Schegloff (1981, 81) defines the class of *continuers*, which promote further talk of the current turn holder. In the following excerpt, Parmeno is explaining step-by-step his daring plan to Chaerea, who reacts with different encouraging responses. Neither of them seems to claim the turn nor contributes to the substance of the conversation.

- (16)
 PAR. *quid si nunc tute fortunatus fias?*
 CHAE. *qua re, Parmeno? / responde.*
 PAR. *capias tuu illius vestem.*
 CHAE. *vestem? quid tum postea? /*
 = PAR. *pro illo te ducam.*
 CHAE. *audio.*
 = PAR. *te eesse illum dicam.*
 CHAE. *intellego. /*
 =PAR. *tu illis fruire commodis quibus tu illum dicebas modo ...*

aspects: e.g. «continuers» (SCHEGLOFF 1981), «acknowledgment tokens» (DRUMMOND – HOPPER 1993), «engaged listenership» (LAMBERTZ 2011). See FUJIMOTO (2007, 38f.) for a full list of terms and a comprehensive survey of available literature. For the sake of clarity I will use backchannels (or backchannel behaviour/item) as a general term, while referring to their types by names of specific functions (cf. PETERS – WONG 2015, 408).

PAR. What if you now become the lucky one? CHAE. In what way? Answer me.
 PAR. You could put on his clothes. CHAE. Clothes? And then what? PAR. I could
 take you instead of him. CHAE. I'm listening. PAR. I could say you were him.
 CHAE. I begin to see. PAR. You could enjoy the benefits which you were just
 saying would be his [...] (Ter. *Eun.* 369-72)

Within this interpretation, Parmeno's action-planning constitutes one single turn-at-talk interwoven with a string of three background responses by the listener. Note that beside short one-word tokens of engaged listening (*audio*) and understanding (*intellego*), there is also one longer backchannel item (*vestem? quid tum postea?*). Scholars, like Tottie (1991, 260f.), propose to include similar complex messages into the class of backchannels, whenever they do not provoke an overt response in the main speaker's turn.³⁸ Compare Chaerea's non-turn *quid tum postea?* with its equivalent linguistic token used by Libanus in (17).

(17)

LEO. *animum advorte, ut aequae mecum haec scias.*

LIB. *taceo.*

LEO. *beas. / meministine asinos Arcadicos mercatori Pelleo / nostrum vendere atriensem?*

LIB. *memini. quid tum postea? /*

LEO. *em ergo is argentum huc remisit, quod daretur Saureae / pro asinis. ...*

LEO. Pay attention so that you know about it as well as I do. LIB. I'm silent. LEO. You're making me happy. Do you remember that our steward sold donkeys from Arcadia to a merchant from Pella? LIB. I do. What next? LEO. Well then, he sent money back here to be given to Saurea for the donkeys. [...] (Plaut. *Asin.* 332-37)

Here the token of confirmation (*memini*) and an invitation to further talk (*quid tum postea?*) are understood by Leonida as a full speaking turn and – as such – they are responded to in the following talk (*em ergo...*)³⁹. This broad criteria, by drawing on an ostensive participant's perspective, seems to be particularly useful for analysing Latin dramatic diction, which occasionally translates feedback functions into wordy paraphrases (18); a practice that might be related to the genre-specific style of comedy diction or the metrical design of a given line.

(18)

ANT. *deinde senex ille illi dixit, cuius erat tibicina, / quasi ego nunc tibi dico.*

EPIG. *ausculto atque animum advorto sedulo. /*

= ANT. 'ego tibi meam filiam, bene quicum cubitares, dedi ...'

³⁸ NORRICK (2012) analyses the effect that backchannel may have on the primary speaker's turn.

³⁹ MÜLLER (1997, 42) identifies *quid tum postea?* used also by speakers in order to organise their long story-telling turns (Ter. *Hec.* 551, *Eun.* 637).

ANT. Then the old man said to the one the flute girl belonged to, the same as I'm now saying to you. EPIG. I'm listening and paying attention carefully. ANT. "I've given you my daughter so that you could sleep pleasantly with her..." (Plaut. *Stich.* 545-47)

Note that, if one deletes Chaerea's (16) and Epignomus' (18) backchannels, neither the structure nor the meaning of the talk produced by their interlocutors seems to be affected.

Furthermore, some instances of self-talk (see Section 4) in reaction to one's utterance might also be analysed as a type of backchannels expressing the hearer's emotional involvement: see the category given in (v) above. In this context, it seems relevant to reproduce Planesia's exclamation in the midst of the soldier's story-telling, which triggers *anagnoresis*.

(19)

THER. ... *pater meus habuit Periplanes, Planesium, / is prius quam moritur mihi dedit tamquam suo, / ut aequom fuerat, filio.*

PLA. *pro Iuppiter! /*

= THER. *et isti me heredem fecit.*

PLA. *pietas mea, serva me, quando ego te servavi sedulo. /*

PLA. *frater mi, salve.*

THER. *qui credam ego istuc, cedo ...*

THER. [...] My father Periplanes had [the ring], Planesium. Before he died, he gave it to me, since I was his son, as was appropriate. PLA. O Jupiter! THER. And with it he made me his heir. PLA. O my dear goddess of filial love, preserve me, since I've preserved you eagerly. My dear brother, greetings. THER. Why should I believe this, tell me [...] (Plaut. *Curc.* 636-41)

The response cry, conveying surprise and joy, leads to a short – off-floor – prayer, followed (after a turn-final pause) to a full conversational turn directed to the interlocutor. Therefore, the emotional feedback in this recognition scene was seemingly oriented to take the floor, that is – unlike continuers – it exhibited not so much active listening but rather an orientation to changing the role from the listener to the speaker. Hence the so-called incipient speakership might serve as another distinctive feature of some backchannel items⁴⁰. Consequently, strong emotional response cries should be considered a different – possibly less prototypical – group of backchannels given that they project an imminent shift of speaker-recipient configuration. Thus the self-talk given in (11), (12), (13), and (14) above can be analysed in a similar way.

Another way of explaining differences in the sequencing of response tokens is by comparing the conveyed stance with the one projected by the storyteller. It seems very likely that disaligning reactions to the talk in progress will be eventually ratified as

⁴⁰ For dynamic shifts in speakerships, see JEFFERSON (1993) and DRUMMOND – HOPPER (1993).

speaking turns. See the response tokens emitted by Aeschinus (20) while listening to his father's story about some (supposedly) random girl. At first, the backchannel behaviour displays the recipient's low commitment and does not interfere with Micio's multi-unit turn.

(20)

MIC. ... *habitant hic quaedam mulieres pauperulae. / ut opinor eas non nosse te, et certo scio: / neque enim diu huc migrarunt.*

AES. *quid tum postea?* /

= MIC. *virgost cum matre.*

AES. *perge.*

= MIC. *haec virgo orbast patre. / hic meus amicus illi genere est proximus. / huic leges cogunt nubere hanc.*

AES. *perii!*

MIC. *quid est?* /

AES. *nil, recte: perge.*

MIC. *is venit ut secum avehat: / nam habitat Mileti.*

MIC. [...] In this house live some not very well-off women. I don't think you know them. In fact I'm sure you don't. They've only just come to live here. AES. So? MIC. There's a girl there with her mother. AES. Go on. MIC. The girl has lost her father. This friend of mine is her closest relative and the law requires her to marry him. AES. I'm lost! MIC. What's the matter? AES. Nothing, it's all right. Go on. MIC. He's come to take her away with him. He lives at Miletus. (Ter. *Ad.* 647-54)

The narration (at least ostensibly) is not designed to provoke a negative emotional reaction, so the son's exclamation *perii!* is bound to attract the teller's attention (*quid est?*). Aeschinus, however, quickly contains himself, corrects his disaligning stance (*recte*), and encourages his father to continue (*perge*) talking.

Lastly, it should be noted that the same tokens which appear among the backchannel sub-groups are also used in conversational turns to convey actual agreement and understanding within certain types of adjacency pairs. Let the sequence given in (21) be an example, where the interlocutor gives non-phatic and emotionally engaged responses in second-pair-part positions.

(21)

PSEU. ... *iam ego te differam dictis meis. / impudice.*

BAL. *ita est.*

CALI. *sceleste.*

BAL. *dicis vera.*

PSEU. I'll tear him to pieces with my words right now. You shameless creature!
BAL. Indeed. CALI. You criminal! BAL. You speak the truth. (Plaut. *Pseud.* 359f.)

In this dynamic three-party interaction, Ballio perversely agrees with every insult proffered his way. If one analyses these items as mere continuers, the scene – a Plautine farcical staging of *flagitatio*⁴¹ – loses a great deal of its comicality. By contrast, the main function of back-channelling talk is to (merely) display involvement in the interaction by agreeing to the other party's role of turn holder. In naturally occurring conversation, the difference would be also marked by intonation or loudness.

6. Floor management

After discussing different types of talk – conversational turns, side comments, self-talk and back-ground talk – it is time to return to the concept of the floor, which was partially advanced in the previous sections. The conversational floor, defined at the beginning of this paper as «the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space» (Edelsky 1981, 405), might take various forms and participation frameworks. Hayashi (1991, 2) argues that «discovering (and also reconstructing) floor structure contributes to a proper analysis of discourse events and helps in understanding the participants' intentions». In the context of Roman comedy, floor-managing strategies, along with turn-taking mechanisms, and the use of other forms of talk, might provide a more nuanced interpretation of a given scene or means of characterisation through dialogue⁴².

Some of the floor-taking techniques will be better illustrated with the following example, which is part of the scene discussed before under (4). The courtesan Thais launches a story-telling sequence, which substitutes for an expository prologue of the play. Before she begins, however, the woman expresses her concerns regarding possible interruptions by the slave Parmeno (Ter. *Eun.* 101: THA. ... *potin est hic tacere?*), who – driven by prejudices – shows a lot of hostility towards her. As mentioned before, the servant promises to abstain from speaking, only if Thais tells the truth (103: PAR. ... *quae vera audivi taceo et contineo optume*). Finally, once the *meretrix* is given the floor, she becomes the principal speaker with control over the general flow of talking, whereas the other interlocutors assume the role of (active) recipients. Both take turns at turn-unit junctures, but with different intentions. Thais' lover, Phaedria, acts as a floor-supporter by asking for clarification concerning one aspect of the story: he takes a turn at speaking (as confirmed by the teller's response) and yet does not claim the floor. In such contexts, a more prototypical floor-supporting mechanism is backchannel talk, although – as a non-turn contribution – it is proper to less dynamic participation frameworks: see (16), (18), and (20) above.

⁴¹ The Republican institution of *flagitatio* consisted in verbally humiliating someone in order to force him to return a debt. See USENER (1901) and, in the context of Roman comedy, SCAFURO (1997, 185f.).

⁴² The types of floor and their definitions follow the classification offered by HAYASHI (1991, 7-12), who draws on EDELSKY (1981) and SHULTZ – FLORIO – ERICKSON (1982).

(22)

TH. *Samia mihi mater fuit: ea habitabat Rhodi.* /PAR. *potest taceri hoc.*= THA. *ibi tum matri parvolam / puellam dono quidam mercator dedit / ex Attica hinc abreptam.*PHAE. *civemne?*THA. *arbitror; / certum non scimus. matris nomen et patris / dicebat ipsa.*... *ego cum illo quocum tum uno rem habebam hospite / abii huc, qui mihi reliquit haec quae habeo omnia.* /PAR. *utrumque hoc falsumst: effluet.*THA. *qui istuc?*PAR. *quia / neque tu uno eras contenta neque solus dedit. / nam hic quoque bonam magnamque partem ad te attulit.* /THA. *itast.*THA *sed sine me pervenire quo volo. / interea miles qui me amare occeperat / in Cariamst profectus; te interea loci / cognovi. tute scis postilla quam intumum / habeam te et mea consilia ut tibi credam omnia.* /PAR. *ne hoc quidem tacebit Parmeno.*PHAE. *oh dubiumne id est? /*THA. *hoc agite, amabo. mater mea illic mortuast / nuper ...*

THA. My mother was a Samian; she lived at Rhodes. PAR. Here one can be quiet
 THA. There, at that period, a certain merchant made a present to my mother of a little girl, who had been stolen away from Attica here. PHAE. What, a citizen?
 THA. I think so; we do not know for certain: she herself used to mention her mother's and her father's name. [...] Thence I came hither with that stranger, with whom alone at that period I was connected; he left me all which I now possess.
 PAR. Both these things are false; out it goes. THA. How so? PAR. Because you were neither content with one, nor was he the only one to make you presents; for he likewise brought a pretty considerable share to you. THA. Such is the fact; but do allow me to arrive at the point I wish. In the meantime, the Captain, who had begun to take a fancy to me, set out to Caria; since when, in the interval, I became acquainted with you. You yourself are aware how very dear I have held you; and how I confess to you all my nearest counsels. PAR. Nor will Parmeno be silent about that. PAR. O, is that a matter of doubt? THA. Attend; I entreat you. My mother died there recently [...] (Ter. *Eun.* 107-31)⁴³.

As for Parmeno, he cannot contain himself for a long time and, whenever he disagrees with the floor holder, streams of disruptive talk «leak out of him» (105: PAR. ... *plenus rimarum sum, hac atque illac perfluo*). His first floor-claiming intention comes through launching a strong disaligning assessment of Thais' words. The girl immediately reacts by asking for explanations, which functions as a floor-yielding device and – for a moment – it creates a new focus of attention. After a short sequence of turns, however,

⁴³ For this scene I reproduce a more fitting translation by RILEY (1896) – with slight modifications. Arguably, by *taceri* Parmeno means not to “keep a secret” (BARSBY 1999, 105f.) but to be a non-active participant of the floor. He presents himself as “overflowing” with speech (Ter. *Eun.* 105, 121), especially if he detects a lie in Thais' words. Accordingly, what “is out at once” (104: *continuo palamst*) is not the badly kept secrets, but his comments challenging the courtesan's words.

the courtesan reclaims her role as the principal speaker (*sed sine me pervenire quo volo*), but soon her story-telling is interrupted once more. This time the slave's side comment – with no specified addressee – is captured and responded to by Phaedria. Again Thais is forced to call for her male interlocutors' attention, while she retakes the floor to carry on with the story and she prevents the subordinate state of talk (byplay) from developing further⁴⁴.

Accordingly, this Terentian excerpt starts as a single-person floor, with a prominent figure of one story-teller (Thais) and two secondary speakers: one collaborative (Phaedria) and one markedly disruptive (Parmeno). Interestingly enough, the latter assumes an effective floor-grabbing technique. Instead of overtly challenging the content of the main-stream talk, he only signals his disaligning stance in order to encourage Thais and Phaedria to start a byplay. As a consequence, small side floors emerge, which are reportedly interrupting the floor held by the girl. The above analysis of floor (and turn) management in a conversation between a prostitute, her lover and a slave, arguably, might offer a new tool for interpretation of the scene, given that its floor structure reflects, among others, relations of power and competition, as well as solidarity and collaboration (Hayashi 1991, 7).

Apart from the single-person floor, the comedy corpus provides examples of collaborative floors, namely conversations where the role of the principal speaker is not clearly assigned, whereas the (ratified) turn holders jointly contribute to the on-going topical and action agenda. Such is the case in the casual talk by two slaves in (23), where friendly banter mixes with floor-supporting questions and smooth changes of topics.

(23)

EPI. *quid tu agis? ut vales?* /

THES. *exemplum adesse intellego.* /

EPI. *eugae!* / *corpulentior videre atque habitior.*

THES. *huic gratia.* /

EPI. *quam quidem te iam diu / perdidisse oportuit.* /

THES. *minus iam furtificus sum quam antehac.*

EPI. *quid ita?*

THES. *rapio propalam.* /

EPI. *di immortales te infelicient, ut tu es gradibus grandibus!* / *nam ut apud portum te conspexi, curriculo occepi sequi: / vix adipiscendi potestas modo fuit.* /

THES. *scurra es.*

EPI. *scio / te esse equidem hominem militarem.*

THES. *audacter quam vis dicito.*

EPI. How are you? Are you well? THES. I realise that my model is here. EPI. Excellent! You seem stouter and heavier. THES. Thanks to this one (*lifts up his left*

⁴⁴ Different techniques of promoting or disattending byplay in story telling are discussed in GOODWIN (1990).

hand). EPI. You ought to have lost it long ago. THES. I'm less of a sneakerthief than I was. EPI. How so? THES. I rob people openly. EPI. May the immortal gods make you unhappy! How big your steps are! When I spotted you at the harbour, I began to follow you at a run. I barely managed to get hold of you. THES. You are a real townie. EPI. Well, I know that *you* are a military man. EPI. You can say that however boldly you wish. (Plaut. *Epid.* 9-16)

If the exchange of turns is done rhythmically and with no topic disruptions nor interrupting speech, Hayashi (1991, 9f.) speaks about an *ensemble floor*. This collaborative – and so to speak democratic – participation framework will be rather rare among the dynamic and antagonist interactions of *fabula palliata*.

The extant plays of Roman comedy contain also scenes (apparently) with multiple floors. In the following excerpt (24), the turns alternate between three interlocutors but, at one point, there is a schism and two parallel floors emerge: the advice-giving sequence (between Clinia and Clitipho) and another, in which Clitipho tries to convince Syrus to reveal his plan before leaving the stage. First, I reproduce this conversation excerpt in its original line-by-line form:

(24)

CLIT. *quid ago nunc?* CLIN. *tune? quod boni—* CLIN. *Syre, dic modo verum.* SYR. *age modo. hodie sero ac nequiquam voles.*
 CLIN. —*datur, fruare dum licet. nam nescias—*
 CLIT. *Syre, inquam.* SYR. *perge porro, tamen istuc ago.*
 CLIN. —*eius sit potestas posthac an numquam tibi.*
 CLIT. *verum hercle istuc est. ...*

CLIT. What do I do? CLIN. You? When something good— CLIT. Syrus, just be frank with me. SYR. Come on now. You'll wish I'd done it later, and it'll be too late. CLIN. —is an offer, enjoy it while you can. You never know— CLIT. Syrus, I say! SYR. You carry on. I'm going to do it anyway. CLIN. —whether you will ever have the opportunity again. CLIT. That's true, for heaven's sake. [...] (Ter. *Heaut.* 343-48)

What seems important here is that Clitipho is participating in both floors simultaneously and thus he is assuming a role of a *sui generis* pivot interlocutor: after he finishes up the parallel exchange with the slave, he moves back to the other floor just in time to give an evaluative reaction to the turn by Clinia⁴⁵. When commenting on the scene, Müller (1997, 63f.) duly concludes that, through this linear metrical design, Terence is representing not only multiple conversational floors but also simultaneous speech. Perhaps the situation will be best illustrated in the following form, which tries to capture the possible timing of both turn sequences:

⁴⁵ The function of a pivot in moving back and forth between two different conversational floors is mentioned briefly in GOFFMAN (1981, 135). See also Ter. *Eun.* 754-56.

Ultimately, this work has aimed at offering fine-grained definitions of speaking turns and the conversational floor, which – later on – served to distinguish other modes of talking: side comments, emotional self-talk, and backchannel contributions. I suggest that all of these forms of talk represented by Plautus and Terence appear – subject to various dramatic functions – with a participation framework specific to them:

- i. two (and more) collaborating or competing turn holders
- ii. turn holder and side- or self-talker
- iii. principal speaker (teller) and floor supporters or backchannel producers
- iv. speakers struggling over the floor and/or over the turn
- v. interlocutors collaborating in an ensemble floor.
- vi. characters participating in a single or in multiple floors.
- vii. ...

The identification of the type of conversational footing – and its constant fluctuations – might benefit our understanding of what is going on in a particular interaction, as it is designed by the available script. Arguably, a well-grounded analysis of talk in Roman comedy could provide editors, translators, and contemporary theatre practitioners with additional textual cues, new interpretations, as well as nuanced stage directions.

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