CONSTRUCTION OF AFFILIATION THROUGH TROUBLES-TALK IN ONLINE TEXT CHAT

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ABSTRACT

Users of text-based synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) face the issue of how to construct stance and social relations within the affordances and constraints of the medium (Chun, 1994; Simpson, 2005; Smith, 2003; Warner, 2004; Werry, 1996). Previous studies have examined how participants construct affective stance and affiliation/disaffiliation with lexical and syntactic resources, abbreviations, symbols, and emoticons, and such actions as affiliative/disaffiliative assessments (Golato & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; González-Lloret, 2011, 2016; Smith, 2003).

In everyday talk, intimate participants in particular also engage in troubles-talk as an (dis)affiliation-generating practice. As described by Jefferson (1988) and Jefferson and Lee (1981) from a conversation-analytic perspective, troubles-telling commonly advances through a sequence of ordered actions that involve, minimally, a description or display of the trouble by the teller and a (dis)affiliative response by the recipient (Lindström & Sorjonen, 2013). As yet, there are only a limited number of studies of troubles talk in text-based SCMC.

To fill the gap, this study adopts conversation analysis (CA) to examine troubles-telling practices in online text chat (Tudini, 2010) between close friends. The participants' shared personal histories and academic discipline serve as resources that enable recognitional reference (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979) and an orientation to minimization more generally. These interactional preferences have a good fit with the structural constraints of the medium. The talks will show how the participants accomplish troubles-talk through recurrent interactional practices and in this way "do friendship" in an online text chat environment.

INTRODUCTION

Online text chat has been pervasively used by Internet users around the world for the last two decades. It has been primarily utilized by spatially distant participants in order to interact with each other effectively and efficiently. However, unlike co-present oral interaction, online text chat has its medium-specific constraints such as the lack of prosody. Thus, the participants of online text chat deploy a variety of alternative resources including acronyms, abbreviations, symbols and emoticons to compensate for that lack (González-Lloret, 2011, 2016).

This paper aims to explore how two intimate friends jointly construct affiliation within an online text chat environment while engaging in a specific interactional practice called "troubles-talk" (Jefferson, 1988; Heritage, 2011). Specifically, the analysis particularly concentrates on the semiotic resources that participants deploy to achieve interpersonal affiliation through troubles-talk within affordances and constraints of the medium. To do so, the study adopts Conversation Analysis (CA) to explicate in detail how the participants accomplish troubles-talk within the interaction. Based on a turn-by-turn analysis that attends to the details of sequence organization and turn construction, the study seeks to demonstrate how troubles-talk contingently emerges and how participants affiliate with each other while engaging in troubles-talk. A number of studies revealing the construction of emotion through troubles-talk in co-present interaction have been conducted (e.g. Ekström, Lindström, & Karlsson, 2013; Jefferson, 1988; Jefferson & Lee, 1981; Pritchard, 1993), but only a handful of investigations have been done for the context of online text chat (González-Lloret, 2011, 2016).

Thus, this paper intends to contribute to the larger body of SCMC literature by adding a study of a specific interactional practice occurring within an SCMC environment.

BACKGROUND

Interactional Organization of Online Text Chat

Online text chat (Tudini, 2010) has a distinctive turn-taking system from co-present interaction (Garcia & Jacobs, 1999; González-Lloret, 2009, 2011; Herring, 1999; Schönfeldt & Golato, 2003, Tudini, 2010).

First, while the floor is generally assigned to one speaker at a time in co-present interaction,

all participants can compose and post their messages simultaneously in the medium of online text chat. As Thorne (2008) noted, there is no competition for the right to provide a message among the participants in online text chat. Next, participants do not need to post their messages right after the previous one. That is, time elapses are allowed between messages in online text chat. Also, Tudini (2010) pointed out that the participants in online text chat are not able to see each other's utterances-in-progress unless appropriate software allows to do so. For this reason, written messages appear as complete on the screen, and it is hard for participants to predict transition-relevant places (TRP) (Garcia & Jacobs, 1999). As a result, overlaps between the turns can occur by the participants and cause the appearance of split adjacency pairs (Tudini, 2010). Furthermore, in online text chat environment, typographical resources such as emoticons and punctuations are considered as turn-constructional units (TCUs), which compensate for the lack of prosody of the medium. Lastly, online text chat does not allow recycled turn beginnings, interruptions and continuers.

The following extract demonstrates how turn-takings work in online text chat.

```
(1) Break-up

   1  F1        Matt (8:01pm)   Yo!
   2  S1        Evan (8:03pm)   Yang
   3  F2                        what up bro
   4  S2        Matt (8:03pm)   just being in honolulu
   5  F3   →                    you?
   6  SCT2 →    Evan (8:03pm)   hate u
   7  S3a                       just being in Roanoke
   8  S3b                       Studying
   9  F4                        how are your rotations going
  10  S4        Matt (8:04pm)   really chill… it's 2pm here
  11  SCT4+F5   Evan (8:04pm)   nice nice how long u there
  12  S5a       Matt (8:04pm)   am out already
  13  S5b                       i will be back wv on Saturday
  14  F6                        did u schedule your boards yet
  15  S6a       Evan (8:09pm)   sheeet
  16  S6b                       naw
  17  S6c                       next month
  18  SCT6      Matt (8:12pm)   ok ok
  19  F7   →                    did ashley graduate from law school?
  20  S6d →     Evan (8:12pm)   just trying to get by
  21  S7a →                     Naw
  22  F8   →    Matt (8:12pm)   heard ppl passing the bar exam and such
  23  S7b →     Evan (8:12pm)   she has 2.5 more years
  24  S8   →                    yeah
```

```
25                              btw
26                              ashley and i broke up on Monday
```

Extract 1 shows there are several overlaps occurring between the turns in l. 5-6, and l. 19-24. Because of the overlaps, these turns are split and not contiguously paired. That is, l. 5 is paired with l. 7 as a question-answer sequence, whereas l. 6 is the last turn of the question-answer sequence initiated from l. 3.

From l. 19-24, l. 19 is paired with l. 21 and l. 23 as a question-answer sequence, and l. 20 is the last turn of the question-answer sequence initiated from l. 14. Lastly, l. 22 is paired with l. 24 for a statement-acknowledgment sequence.

Despite the occurrences of split adjacency pairs within the medium, the sequential organization of online text chat is quite similar with co-present interaction. As discussed in González-Lloret (2011), the participants of online text chat consistently orient to the particular previous messages, which is called "virtual adjacency" (Schönfeldt & Golato, 2003). In other words, although the 'nextness' does not always constitute an adjacency pair in online text chat, the participants adhere to social orders within the affordances and constraints of the medium. Likewise, Extract 1 demonstrates the participants contingently manage turn-taking, while consistently orienting to social orders within the medium-specific environment.

Troubles-Talk

Kuroshima and Iwata (2016) defined troubles-talk as "a project that speakers are engaged in by talking about their troubles, concerns, and the like" (2016, p. 92). According to Miller and Silverman (1995), troubles are inherently socially-constructed realities, consisting of "portrayals of (and interactions about) aspects of people's lives as undesired and, perhaps, warranting change in behavior or perspectives" (Miller & Silverman, 1995, p. 725).

Troubles-talk is distinguished from advice-seeking in that the focal object of troubles-telling is "teller and his experiences", whereas the focal object of advice-seeking is "problem and its properties" (Jefferson & Lee, 1981, p. 411).

Troubles-talk has been an analytical interest among CA researchers (Heritage, 2011; Jefferson, 1988; Jefferson & Lee, 1981) and examined in a variety of settings from ordinary conversation to professional counseling (Ekström, Lindström & Karlsson, 2013; Heritage, 2011; Jefferson, 1988; Jefferson & Lee, 1981; Miller & Silverman, 1995).

Jefferson (1988) explicated the candidate sequential organization of the activity. In this seminal paper, she examined how troubles-talk emerges during ordinary conversation and how it is ordered within the interaction. By doing so, she proposed that troubles-talk generally progresses from "talking business as usual" to "focusing on troubles" and "returning to business as usual." She also argued that the troubles-teller and recipient contingently manage the tension between "business as usual" and "talking about troubles" throughout the process of troubles-talk.

Although she warned that the sequence of troubles-talk is "vaguely ordered" (1988, p. 419) and often distorted by general and local contingencies of interaction, Jefferson argued that troubles-talk evolves in overall sequential patterns. That is, it usually progresses through a sequence of ordered actions that involve, minimally, a description or display of the trouble by the teller and a (dis)affiliative response by the recipient (Lindström & Sorjonen, 2013). Participants in troubles-talk usually start from routine conversation, move toward the trouble and its properties, and return to routine conversation. At the interpersonal level, participants start out at a distance, become closer toward the trouble, arrive at a moment of intense intimacy during troubles-talk, and return to their routine conversation.

Jefferson's analysis reveals troubles-telling sequence consists of six components of actions in order: (a) Approach, (b) Arrival. (c) Delivery, (d) Work-up, (e) Close implicature, (f) Exit (1988, p. 420). I will briefly describe the overall sequence organization of the activity proposed by Jefferson (1988), using the following extract from the data.

```
(2) Break-up

 1 →     Matt (8:01pm)   Yo!
 2       Evan (8:03pm)   Yang
 3                       what up bro
 4       Matt (8:03pm)   just being in Honolulu
 5                       you?
 6       Evan (8:03pm)   hate u
 7                       just being in Roanoke
 8                       Studying
 9                       how are your rotations going
10       Matt (8:04pm)   really chill… it's 2pm here
11       Evan (8:04pm)   nice nice how long u there
12       Matt (8:04pm)   am out already
13                       i will be back wv on Saturday
14                       did u schedule your boards yet
15       Evan (8:09pm)   Sheet
16                       Naw
17                       next month
```

```
18      Matt (8:12pm)    ok ok
19                       did ashley graduate from law school?
20      Evan (8:12pm)    just trying to get by
21                       Naw
22      Matt (8:12pm)    heard ppl passing the bar exam and such
23      Evan (8:12pm)    she has 2.5 more years
24                       Yeah
25→                      Btw
26                       ashley and i broke up on Monday
27      Matt (8:12pm)    i'm so sorry to hear that…
28                       and sorry for asking
29      Evan (8:14pm)    haha i mean
30                       it's fine
31                       Yeah
32                       it sux
33                       But
34                       it was for the best
35      Matt (8:15pm)    yeah i understand
36      Evan (8:16pm)    thanks man
37→                      so what did u do in hawaii?
```

In l. 1-18, the participants orient to talking about each other's current life affairs. The participants' updating each other's events using their co-membership knowledge as medical students is a category-bound activity with which their personal relationship category of friends are made relevant (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2004). In other words, as Pomerantz and Mandelbaum (2004) argued, Matt and Evan's locally relevant actions invoke their personal relationship by themselves and enact "incumbency in a relationship category" (2004, p. 153). Before the troubles-talk sequence begins, Matt's bringing up a mutually known person (Ashely) inadvertently makes the trouble talk relevant in l. 19. In l. 25, Evan uses the acronym "btw" (by the way) as a mark of departure from the current line of talk and preface to the delivery of troubles-talk, consisting of exposition, affiliation, and affiliation response.

The delivery sequence progresses from l. 26. Evan announces his troubles regarding his girlfriend in 26. In the subsequent turns, Matt orients to Evan's trouble and affiliates with it through empathic responses. Responding to Matt's empathic responses, Evan downgrades the trouble by employing a lexicalized laughter (haha) and assessment in l. 29-30. Then in the subsequent turns, he upgrades his trouble using the acknowledgment token (yeah) and an assessment. However, in the immediately following turns in l. 33-34, he shifts his stance again and orients to closing implicature using idiomatic expressions (Drew & Holt, 1988). In l. 35, Matt affiliates with Evan's stance-taking and joins the closing sequence of the troubles talk,

followed by Evan's appreciation. By doing so, the participants exit from the troubles talk sequence and resume their routine conversation in l. 37.

Affiliation in Troubles-Talk

As discussed in Heritage (2005), affiliation (Heritage, 2011; Lindström & Sorjonen, 2013; Sorjonen, 2001; Steensig & Drew, 2008; Stivers, 2008) is a responsive action that is supportive of social solidarity to a variety of first actions. It describes a recipient's stance that is congruent with the affective stance expressed by the speaker. (Lindström & Sorjonen, 2013). Stivers (2008) defined affiliation as "the affective level of cooperation" (2008, p. 20), whereas alignment as "the structural level of cooperation" (2008, p. 20). She noted that by displaying affiliation, the recipient shows support and endorsement for an affective stance conveyed by the teller. Couper-Kuhlen (2012) also noted that affiliation is an interpersonal dimension of reception.

The concept of affiliation is also discussed in relation to preference organization (Pomerantz, 1984; Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013). In the troubles-talk environment, affiliation is regarded as a preferred response that displays emotional support for the teller's troubles. The most common affiliative responses in troubles talk are doing empathy and sympathy (Burch & Kasper, 2016; Kupetz, 2014; Kuroshima & Iwata, 2016; Pudlinski, 2005).

In co-present interaction, there are a variety of verbal and non-verbal resources such as lexical, grammatical, phonetic and prosodic and gestural resources to display affiliation (Burch & Kasper, 2016; Lindström & Sorjonen, 2013). In terms of non-verbal resources in displaying affiliation, Burch and Kasper (2016) noted that in co-present interaction the recipient employs various non-verbal tokens such as facial expressions, gestures and postures in order to affiliate with the speaker's stance. However, these non-verbal resources are unavailable in online text chat, so participants deploy alternative resources such as punctuations, spellings, emoticons, abbreviations and acronyms in order to display affiliation in online text chat of troubles talk. (González-Lloret, 2011, 2016)

Doing Empathy

Empathy has been described as one type of affiliative responses in the previous literature (Kuroshima & Iwata, 2016; Heritage, 2011; Heritage & Lindström, 2012). As Heritage (2011) noted, empathic response is "an affective response that stems from the apprehension or

comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, and that is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel" (2011, p. 160). Kupetz (2014) pointed out empathy is showing understanding of the speaker's emotional stance. She also states, "empathic responses are made relevant in more specific interactional contexts when one participant's personal experiences and related affects are being dealt with." (2014, p. 7).

In the context of troubles talk, empathic responses display a matching stance with the troubles-teller's and by doing so affiliates with the teller's troubles talk.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The focal participant of the study is Matt (pseudonym). He is a Korean-American who has been living in America for more than 20 years. He once lived in Korea during his teens, and came back to the US for college and medical school. He is currently in his third year of residency at a hospital in the Eastern United States.

The co-participants are Matt's close friends from either high school or college. They are Evan, Bela, Alan and Dave (all pseudonyms). Evan is a Korean-American, and he graduated from the same college with Matt. He is in his first year of residency. Bela is one of his female friends from college. She majored in English literature and is currently pursuing her PhD in literature. Alan is Matt's the oldest friend. Matt and Alan have known with each other since elementary school. They went to the same international school in Korea, but ended up going to different colleges. Alan graduated from law school in the Eastern United States. Dave went to the same college with Matt and was Matt's roommate. He is pursuing his MD/PhD degree in infectious disease.

Data

The data were collected from participants' dyadic online conversation in Google Chat. Google chat, also called Gchat, is an online communication tool that is widely used by internet users all over the world. It is considered as one of the text-based SCMC tools, which allows spatially distant participants to engage in an instantly delivered conversation. It may include more than two participants, and multiple users can participate in the multiple conversations

simultaneously. In the present study, however, I only used dyadic conversation threads. Matt, the focal participant, had conversations with five different co-participants, respectively. All of their conversations took place from 2007 to 2014, but chats took place periodically with long intervals. The total amount of the corpus is 35 hours. From this corpus, I first assembled a collection of troubles-talk episodes (13 hours). Then I divide it into two further subcorpora of troubles-talks, one with affiliative responses (11 hours) and one with non-affiliative responses (2 hours). The great majority of troubles- talks had affiliative responses, showing that the preference for affiliative uptake of troubles talk in co-present conversation is also seen in online text chat.

Using the selected data, I examined how two participants jointly construct affiliation in a contingent manner through troubles-telling practices and how they use various semiotic resources to display affiliation within the affordances and constraints of the medium. The data revealed that displays of affiliation were salient when participants were talking about sensitive personal experiences.

ANAYSIS

I. Affiliative Responses

I.1. Empathy. As reported in the literature on troubles-talk in co-present interaction, in response to the teller's troubles-talk, the troubles-recipient reciprocates the teller's emotional stance (Jefferson, 1988; Lindstrm & Sorjonen, 2013; Pudlinski, 2005). Since matching stances (Burch & Kasper, 2016; Couper-Kuhlen, 2012) support the teller's project, affiliative responses are the preferred response option. This is also the case in the online text chat data. One common practice is for the recipient to design their response turns with linguistic and typographical resources that formulate or index empathy with the teller.

I.1.1. Formulating empathy. The following extract shows how the troubles-recipient (Matt) affiliates with the teller's (Evan) bad personal news with explicit formulation of empathy (Goldsmith, 2010; Haugh & Chang, 2015; Jefferson, 1988, 2015; Kupetz, 2014; Pudlinski, 2005).

(3) Break-up

```
19      Matt (8:12pm)    did ashley graduate from law school?
20      Evan (8:12pm)    just trying to get by
21                       Naw
22      Matt (8:12pm)    heard ppl passing the bar exam and such
23      Evan (8:12pm)    she has 2.5 more years
24                       Yeah
25                       Btw
26→                      ashley and i broke up on Monday
27→     Matt (8:12pm)    i'm so sorry to hear that…
28→                      and sorry for asking
29      Evan (8:14pm)    haha i mean
30                       it's fine
31                       Yeah
32                       it sux
33                       But
34                       it was for the best
35      Matt (8:15pm)    yeah i understand
36      Evan (8:16pm)    thanks man
37                       so what did u do in hawaii?
```

Before the start of Extract 3, the participants were engaged in a category-bound activity by updating each other on relevant events in their lives (see Extract 2 above). In l. 26, Evan announces his troubles (a break-up with his girlfriend) after he produces an acronym (btw) for 'by the way' that marks a departure of the current line of talk and preface to the delivery of troubles talk. In response to Evan's troubles announcement, Matt upgrades his empathic displays with two different actions in l. 27-28. First, he uses a formulaic expression (i'm so sorry to hear that) to display empathy. At the end of the same turn, he uses three dots (…) for ellipsis that marks innuendo. In this medium-specific environment, Matt employs them in a tactful way of leaving more on a painful topic unsaid. Also, in l. 28, he apologizes for asking a question related to Evan's girlfriend. Matt's actions in l. 27-28 shows his orientation to the delicacy of the topic as well as how he treats the sensitivity of the trouble in a way as the troubles-recipient. By doing so, Matt strongly affiliates with Evan's emotional stance.

Responding Matt's empathic responses, Evan self-deprecates his troubles with a lexicalized laughter (haha) and assessment in l. 29-30. As discussed in Jefferson (1984, 2015), laughter that is produced by the troubles-teller in troubles talk downgrades their troubles. That is, the troubles-teller attempts to "being stoic, resisting the troubles, even making light of the trouble" (Jefferson, 2015, p. 166).

In l. 31- 32, Evan upgrades his trouble by producing acknowledgment (yeah) and assessment. In the subsequent turn, he shifts his stance again by downgrading his trouble and orients to closing the troubles-telling sequence using an idiomatic expression (it was for the best) (Drew & Holt, 1988).

It is noted that Matt does not laugh along with Evan's laughter. Jefferson (1984, 2015) suggested that in troubles-talk, when the troubles-teller produces laughter, the recipient normally does not laugh along with the teller, positioning themselves as a troubles-recipient. This is because the recipient treats teller's problem as a serious and delicate matter that is something not laughable. So in the context of troubles talk, the troubles-recipient's rejection of the troubles-teller's invitation to laugh together actually shows affiliation with teller's stance displays.

I.1.2. Constructing empathy with typographical resources. As has been well documented in the research literature, the participants of online text chat use a wide variety of typographical resources such as punctuations, acronym, and emoticons to construct actions and stances (González-Lloret, 2011, 2016; Negretti, 1999). These resources are coordinated with each other and with selections from linguistic repertoires within the same turn, or a single typographical resource is used as a complete turn-constructional unit (TCU) or turn (González-Lloret, 2016). According to González-Lloret (2016), emoticons as a single TCU and complete turn can be used as a stance marker in responding actions. In online text chat, such medium-specific resources are deployed to compensate for the unavailability of prosody and facial expressions, two critical semiotic repertoires for the display of emotion in co-present interaction (Peräkylä & Sorjonen, 2012).

The following extract shows how emoticons are used by the recipient as a single TCU and complete turn for an empathic stance marker in response to Matt's troubles-talk.

```
(4) Financial difficulty

    1       Alan (10:53am)   Yo
    2            (10:54am)   you ok?
    3       Matt (10:54am)   financially not really
    4→      Alan (10:54am)   :/
    5                        need help?
    6                        I can probably transfer you a hundred or so
    7       Matt (10:54am)   I'll see what i can do
    8→      Alan (10:54am)   ☺
    9                        it'll be no problem for me ot* lend you some
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10                          you are my buddy after all
11     Matt (10:55am)  my parents are helping out as much as they can
12     Alan (10:55am)  aight, well, if you find yourself low
13                          gimme a call
14     Matt (10:55am)  yea thanks man
15     Alan (10:55am)  Granville says hi
```

After Matt's announcement of trouble regarding financial difficulty in l. 3, Alan affiliates with Matt's troubles talk by deploying a frowny face emoticon : / (González-Lloret, 2011, 2016; Vandergriff, 2014) as a single TCU and complete turn (González-Lloret, 2016). The emoticon graphically represents Alan's facial expression that is unavailable in the medium. In l. 5, Alan performs a prefatory action (pre-offer) (Schegloff, 2007) to the specific financial offer in l. 6. However, Alan's specific financial offer is declined by Matt in l. 7 in a formulaic manner.

In response to Matt's declination, Alan does two different actions in l. 8-10. First, he supports Matt's stance with a smiley emoticon ☺ (González-Lloret, 2016; Vandergriff, 2014) as a single TCU and complete turn. Next, he reaffirms his offer and provides the second offer of financial help. In the subsequent turn, Alan makes an account for his financial offer by categorizing Matt as 'buddy'. Alan's deployment of vernacular term 'buddy' accentuates the intimacy of their categorical relationship of friends. In l. 11, Alan's second offer is rejected again by Matt in l. 11. At this time, Matt provides a specific account for his declination of Alan's financial help. Orienting to Matt's second declination, Alan accepts Matt's rejection with acknowledgment (aight) in l. 12 and offers an unspecific financial offer. In l. 14, Matt accepts his offer and appreciates his help.

Extract 5 demonstrates how Bela uses a punctuation as a TCU and complete turn as well as coordinates multiple layers of resources, in order to upgrade her empathic responses to Matt's troubles talk about his friend's accident.

```
(5) Coma

1      Matt (10:40am)  umm…guys do suck at times
2      Bela (10:42am)  hah yes they do!
3      Matt (10:42am)  haha how u enthusiastically agree
4      Bela (10:43am)  I'm not positively disposed toward men at
5                          this moment
6           (10:44am)  how are you though?
7→     Matt (10:44am)  terrible, a friend of mine is in a coma
8→     Bela (10:44am)  omg!
```

```
 9→                        that's terrible!
10→                        wow, i'm sorry ☹
11      Matt (10:45am)     yea im gonna go to Charleston medical center
12                         to visit him
13      Bela (10:46am)     is he ill or did he have an accidemt or
14                         something? do you know what the prognosis is?
15      Matt (10:46am)     he received severe head trauma from a car
16                         accident
17→     Bela (10:47am)     !
18→                        oh man
19→                        well i hope he heals well and wakes up soon
20→                        that's just awful
21      Matt (10:48am)     thank you
22                         yea i though about my past crushes the other
23                         day and i could say i'm pissed off at women
24                         in a way thinking "girls suck" lol
```

In l. 6, Bela's deployment of the conventional 'how are you' sequence (Jefferson, 1988) is a prefatory work that makes Matt's troubles-talk relevant. In response to Bela's inquiry, Matt upgrades his assessment with a "highly-valenced response" (terrible) (Jefferson, 2015). It immediately leads Matt to announcing the trouble regarding his friend's accident within the same turn. Responding to his troubles announcement, Bela orients to the gravity of the trouble and intensifies her empathic responses using a variety of semiotic resources. First, Bela expresses a surprise using an acronym (omg) for a formulaic affective expression (oh my god) (Pudlinski, 2005) and exclamation mark (!). In the subsequent turn, she employs an empathic assessment (Kupetz, 2014; Pudlinski, 2005) regarding the incidence. In l. 10, she employs a formulaic affective expression (wow) and displays empathy, along with an emoticon ☹ that represents sadness (González-Lloret, 2016; Vandergriff, 2014).

In l. 13-16, the participants expand the troubles talk sequence by orienting to question-answer sequence. In l. 13, Bela makes a request for further explanation of the trouble by formulating two different types of question. First, she uses an alternative question, categorizing the candidate reasons of coma as 'illness', 'accident', and 'something else'. Then, she formulates a polar question that asks about the future prognosis. However, Matt only orients to the alternative question form and provides the additional accounts for the accident.

In response to Matt's further accounts for the accident, Bela upgrades her empathic responses and affiliates with Matt's accounts in a similar way that she did in l. 8-10. She employs an exclamation mark (!) as a single TCU and complete turn (González-Lloret, 2016), followed by a

formulaic emotional response (oh man), optimistic projection (Jefferson, 1988) and empathic assessment (that's just awful) in subsequent turns.

The next extract further exemplifies how the troubles-recipient upgrades their empathic responses to the teller's troubles talk by employing punctuation marks as a single resource for a complete turn, respectively.

```
(6) Suicide


    1       Matt (2:23pm)   Hey
    2                       Did you happen to know a guy named Mark Mckoy?
    3                       He graduated from Lafayette as well in 07
    4       Bela (2:23pm)   ehy!
    5       Evan (8:12pm)   hey***
    6                       lol
    7                       no i didn't. that is super random lol
    8       Matt (2:24pm)   haha well there's reason why i asked that
    9                       he's a friend of mine in my class
   10→                      and last night he took his life away
   11→     Bela (2:24pm)    !!
   12→                      oh my god
   13→                      oy vey
   14       Matt (2:25pm)   it's been tough
   15                       mentally and emotionally
   16       Bela (2:25pm)   yeah you bet
   17                       i'm so sorry
```

Responding to Matt's troubles regarding his friend's suicide in l. 10, Bela upgrades her empathic assessment stepwise employing multiple semiotic resources in l. 11-13. In l, 11, she employs double exclamation marks (!!) that construct a single TCU and complete turn. In the subsequent turn, she employs a formulaic expression (oh my god) that expresses feelings of surprise or shock. In l. 13, she deploys a code-switching (Auer, 1995; Evans, 2009; Androutsopoulos, 2013) for oh my god. (oy vey). *Oy vey* is a Yiddish expression for oh my god in English. In this way, Bela tactfully upgrades her emotional stance toward the trouble using her linguistic repertoire. After Matt's assessment in l.14 and 15, Bela strongly affiliates with Matt's affective stance by agreeing with his assessment and displaying empathy.

As shown in Extract 5 and 6, not only emoticons but also punctuation marks can be used as a stance marker and implement a single TCU and complete turn.

I.2. Impropriety. The participants sometimes use impropriety to construct affiliation with each other in troubles talk environment (Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff, 1987; Jefferson, 1988). In the following extract, the troubles-teller orients to recipient-design (Schegloff et al. 2002) by specifically selecting the informal address term 'dude' and impropriety (fucking) for the troubles-recipient. Also, the teller upgrades his troubles by using impropriety. In response, the troubles-recipient affiliates with the troubles-teller's stance and confirms the teller's deployment of impropriety as appropriate by replicating it in his own turn.

```
(7) Failing exam

    1→      Matt (7:04pm)    dude yo i'm anxious about this whole board
    2                        Thing
    3→      Matt (7:05pm)    fucking failing my exam destroyed my
    4                        Confidence
    5       Phil (7:05pm)    i can see how thta can happen
    6→                       but dude
    7→                       fuck it
    8                        it's over
    9                        wats done is done
    10      Matt (7:05pm)    yea i know
    11      Phil (7:05pm)    cant change much now
    12→          (7:07pm)    so just kick ass from now on
    13      Matt (7:07pm)    i gotta just step it up from now on
```

Matt summons Phil by employing vocatives (dude, yo) (Leech, 1999) and announces his troubles about failing the board exam. Leech (1999) noted that vocatives projects different actions according to their sequential positions. First, when a vocative is deployed in the beginning of the turn, it usually summons attention or address identification. When a vocative is placed in the middle of or at the end of the turn, it plays a role of maintaining social relationship or emotive functions.

In l. 3, orienting to Phil's lack of response to his summoning, Matt upgrades his troubles by employing impropriety (fucking). Then, Phil orients to Matt's troubles-telling in the subsequent turn by displaying an empathic response. It is noted that in l. 6-7, Phil strongly affiliates with Matt's troubles talk and confirms Matt's impropriety as appropriate (Jefferson, 1988; 2015) by replicating it in his own turns. By doing so, Matt's recipient- designed utterances are well taken up by Phil, and in this way, they both strongly pursue and orient to mutual intimacy (Jefferson,

Sacks & Schegloff, 1987). In l. 8-13, Phil upgrades his suggestion using a vernacular expression (kick ass) and orients to closing the troubles talk. In the next turn, Matt rephrases Phil's prior turn. By doing so, Matt affiliates with Phil's stance by acknowledging his suggestion, as well as downgrades it in more socially appropriate way.

The next extract demonstrates how participants contingently co-construct affiliation sequence through on-going management of possibly problematic sources in the course of troubles talk. The example particularly shows how two friends, when encountering disaffiliation, manage moment-to-moment contingencies in order to re-orient to affiliation and maintain their friendship.

```
(8) Tired


    1       Matt (11:24am)  yo
    2→                      I'm damn tired
    3→      Dave (11:24am)  lol nice
    4       Matt (11:24am)  no it's not
    5       Dave (11:25am)  u in class?
    6       Matt (11:25am)  we got 12 mins if classes begin
    7       Dave (11:25am)  go drink a red bull or whatever it is u used
    8                       to pound
    9       Matt (11:26am)  i'm in the histology lab room
    10                      so only water allowed
    11→     Dave (11:26am)  it sucks
    12                      chug a coffee outside
    13      Matt (11:27am)  yea i'll do that afterwards
```

In response to Matt's troubles talk regarding physical tiredness, Dave displays disaffiliative responses, using laughter (lol) and assessment that are mismatching with Matt's stance. In the subsequent turn, Matt resists Dave's dispreferred actions (Pomerantz, 1984; Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013) by expressing direct contradiction. After a one-minute pause, Dave abruptly starts a new sequence in l. 5 by formulating a question and orienting closing the disaffiliation sequence. After Matt provides the second pair part (answer) in l. 6 for Dave's question, Dave re-orients to Matt's troubles-talk and provides remedies (Mewburn, 2011) for his problems. However, Matt declines his remedial suggestions by providing specific accounts for declination. Orienting to Matt's declination, Dave strongly affiliates with Matt's accounts using impropriety (it sucks) and reformulates his suggestions. Subsequently, Matt aligns with his suggestions and uptakes them.

II. A Non-Affiliative Response

There was one exception that showed the troubles-recipient displaying a non-affiliative response to the teller's troubles talk. Although in this case the recipient's response was "non-affiliative," it does not mean "disaffiliative." The responses are well aligned, but they are not marked for empathic stance.

```
(9) Depressed

    1        Dave (5:31pm)    Yang
    2                         whats up
    3        Matt (5:31pm)    not good
    4        Dave (5:31pm)    why not
    5        Matt (5:31pm)    i'm sick so i'm going back to Korea
    6        Dave (5:32pm)    like depressed or physically ill
    7        Matt (5:32pm)    depressed so i'm gonna seek help
    8→       Dave (5:32pm)    Ok
    9→                        you take some rest and let the things go
    10       Matt (5:33pm)    yeah i'll thanks
```

After Dave's request for additional accounts of the troubles, Matt announces his sickness in l. 5. In the subsequent turn, Dave reformulates the question form using an alternative question. He divides 'being sick' into two categories (depressed or physically ill) in order for Matt to choose either of them. Matt selects the former answer while orienting to the question form. In l. 8, Dave aligns with Matt's problem with a minimal response (ok) and subsequently gives advice (Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Kouper, 2010; Shaw & Hepburn, 2013; Waring, 2007) in the next turn.

Dave's minimal response and advice-giving (l. 8) in response to Matt's troubles might be considered dispreferred (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013) and disaffiliative (Haugh & Chang, 2015) because the recipient doesn't display emotional support of the teller's conveyed stance. However, a closer look demonstrates that the recipient properly aligns with the teller's troubles-talk and provides remedial suggestions (Haugh & Chang, 2015) for the teller's sake. Although there is only one exception that the troubles-recipient gives advice for the teller's troubles in my data, giving advice is a common response in the context of troubles-talk (Boxer, 1993; Haugh & Chang, 2015). Moreover, in Extract 9, the troubles-teller subsequently accepts recipient's suggestions and displays appreciation. In this regard, rather than saying Dave's response does

not match with the teller's stance so it is disaffiliative, he well aligns with Matt's troubles-talk with non-affiliative responses.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper explored how participants jointly construct affiliation through troubles-telling practices within the affordances and constraints of online text chat. The analysis clearly demonstrated that the participants can profoundly employ a variety of alternative resources as turn-constructional units (TCUs) within the medium-specific environment.

The analysis also showed that the participants can use a single resource or coordinate multiple semiotic resources simultaneously in order to display affiliation with each other in troubles talk. Specifically, such alternative resources as emoticons, punctuations and lexicalized emotional expressions play important roles for the participants' emotional displays in online text chat. Also, it showed these items sometimes implement a single TCU and complete turn, which is not always viable in co-present interaction. Thus, it is evident that online text chat has distinctive features compared to co-present interaction, and it needs to be examined more in-depth in future studies of SCMC.

Nevertheless, this study also revealed that, as Jefferson (1988) proposed, an overall trajectory of troubles talk sequence also takes place in online text chat environment, just like co-present interactions. That is, although the turn-taking system of online text chat works differently from that of co-present interaction within the affordances and constraints of the medium, the participants engaged in troubles talk consistently showed a general tendency to adhere to social orders. That makes "virtual adjacency" available in online text chat. The analysis demonstrated that each participant has their own particular ways of constructing of affiliation employing various resources, and the participants contingently and consistently manage turn-by-turn meanings in order to achieve affiliation in the course of troubles-telling.

This study has several limitations. First, only dyadic interactions were examined. Future research might be done with the online text chats involving multiple co-participants. Also, the study includes only participants whose first language is English. It might be useful for the future studies to include second language learners whose first language is not English or ones who speak more than one language. Also, all participants were friends, and affiliation might be

different between people that are not familiar with each other or that are in different contexts.

Despite such limitations, this paper contributes to the larger body of literature in SCMC studies by adding a microscopic analysis of troubles-telling practices in informal conversation.

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