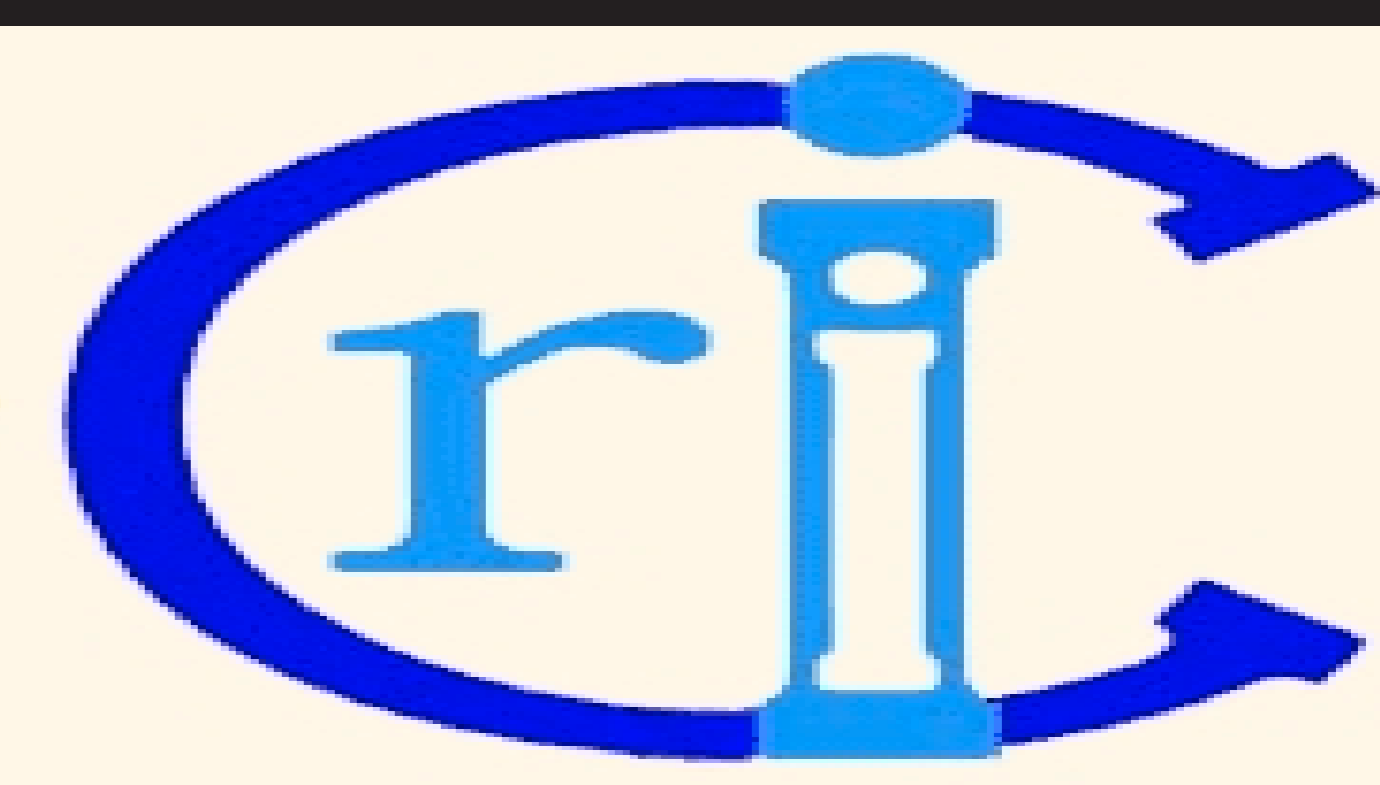


# Constructive Conversation Analysis in psychotherapy: cognitive relevance of actants in terms of linguistic constructions

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## Introduction

- ▶ Psychotherapists produce pseudo-structured discourse with their clients that can be analysed with linguistics and pragmatics.
- ▶ Often:
  - ▷ Conversation Analysis (Peäkylä 2008) is qualitative, non-systematic;
  - ▷ detailed analysis of transcripts is still not widely used.
- ▶ Our research question:
  - ▷ how client's representations of key relations change during the interactions with the psychotherapist through the way of health recovery?

## Therapeutic Cycles Model

- ▶ The Therapeutic Cycles Model (TCM) uses ad-hoc software to perform textual analysis of psychotherapeutic transcripts, in order to elicit significant elements in the therapeutic interaction (Lepper & Mergenthaler 2008).
- ▶ Advantages:
  - ▷ it highlights semantic patterns on the dichotomy Emotion / Abstraction;
  - ▷ it highlights Client's insights during therapy.
- ▶ Limits:
  - ▷ it does not consider linguistic constructions as units of analysis;
  - ▷ it does not focus on the roles of actants within therapy.

## Constructive Adpositional Grammars

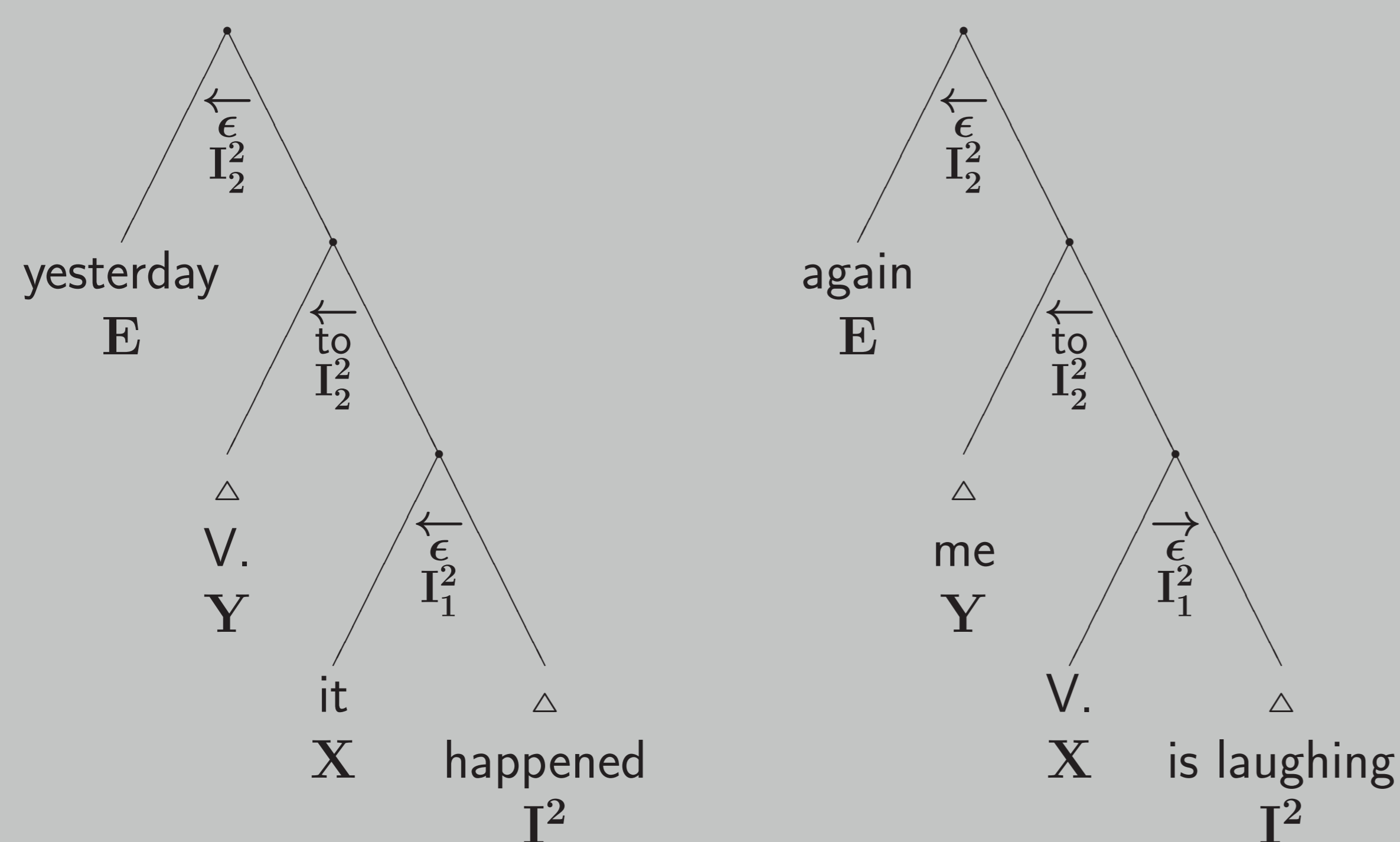


Figure: Trees of *it happened to V. yesterday* and *V. is laughing to me again*

- ▶ Constructive Adpositional Grammars (CxADGrams) are the ground for the Conversation Analysis so to fill the gap left by the TCM.
- ▶ CxADGrams are a fine-grained morphosyntactic formalism of linguistic constructions as the main unit of analysis (Gobbo & Benini 2011).
- ▶ Constructions are based on verbants filled by actants within constructions, respecting the information prominence ( $\leftrightarrow$ ), based on the dichotomy TR/LM (Langacker 1987).
- ▶ Some main features:
  - ▷ it's based on the Tesnerian notion of valency ( $I^2$  is bivalent);
  - ▷  $\overrightarrow{X}$  is a more prominent first actant;
  - ▷  $\overleftarrow{Y}$  is a less prominent second actant;
  - ▷  $E$  is a circumstantial (indicates even extra-valent actants).
- ▶ The collocation of relevant actants within the used constructions shows:
  - ▷ how the Client tells about herself and the relevant actants;
  - ▷ how narratives change through therapy;
  - ▷ how much narrative change fits the cycles found by the TCM.

## Methodology

- ▶ individuation of the constructions involving Client's relevant actants;
- ▶ constructive analysis of the constructions focusing on:
  - ▷ position in valency (e.g.,  $X$ ,  $Y$ ,  $E$ );
  - ▷ the information prominence ( $\leftrightarrow$ ).
- ▶ comparison of the analysis to the results by TCM to Emotion / Abstraction patterns and Shift Events;
- ▶ depicting the evolution of Client's mental space.

## The Lisa Case

- ▶ About Lisa: young, married woman in her late 20s with two young children.
  - ▷ Complaints: husband's compulsive gambling habits (e.g., leave the house without warning, spending the little money, so putting them into debt).
- ▶ Past events:
  - ▷ Lisa had tried to leave him once and briefly moved back to her parents.
  - ▷ Her mother convinced her to go back, suggesting to remain supportive to her husband ("stand by your man" choice).
  - ▷ Lisa's father was also a compulsive gambler, and her mother's choice was exactly "stand by your man".
- ▶ The therapy lasted 15 sessions in total. Details:
  - ▷ Hybrid approach; focus on emotions; client-centered relational framework;
  - ▷ Techniques from Gestalt, esp. the empty chair (i.e., talk to the chair as if the person were really there). 15 sessions in total.
- ▶ Goals of the therapy:
  - ▷ to access maladaptive emotional states seen as the source of the depression (Greenberg, Watson & Goldman, 1998);
  - ▷ to restructure Lisa's maladaptive habits into adaptive responses.

## An excerpt of the Constructive Conversation Analysis of Lisa's case

Session	WB	Verb	X	Y	Z	E	Pattern	in cycle?
2	33	split up	I / V.				Reflecting	yes
2	43	do	they	it	in front of V.		Reflecting	no
7	33	had	M.	strength			Reflecting	no

Notes: V. stands for Husband, M. for Mother. The complete table is available by the authors on request, if privacy can be guaranteed.

## Main results

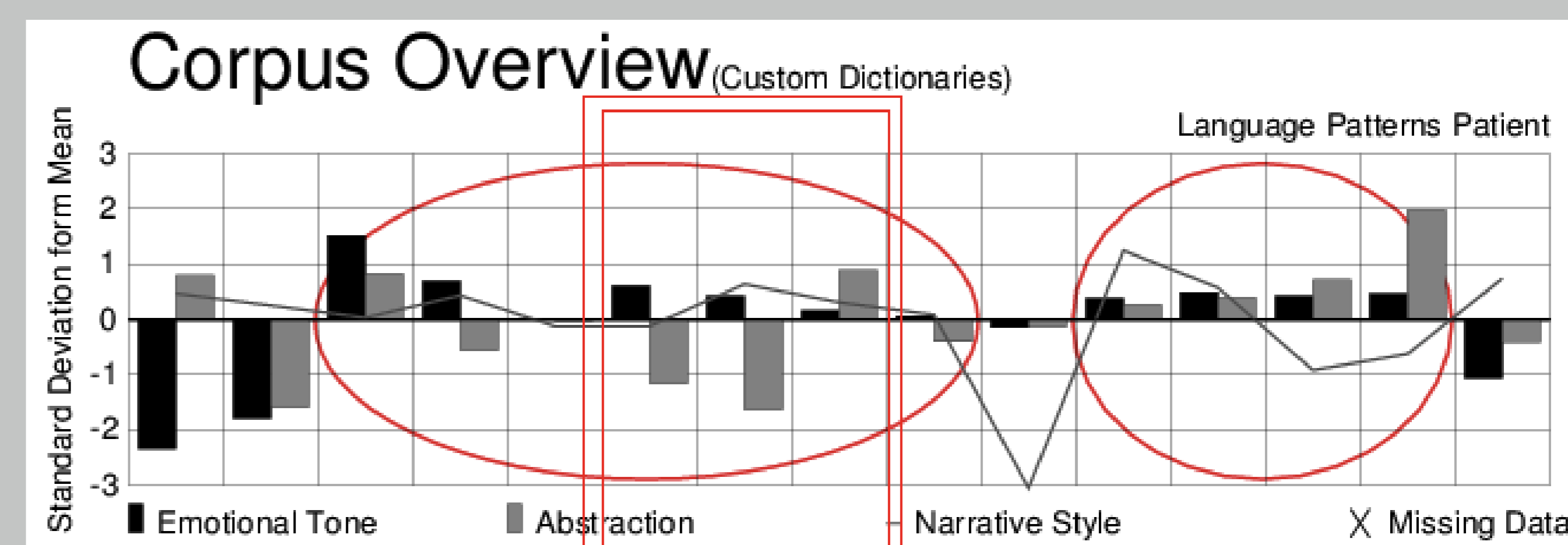


Figure: TCM analysis (black) and CoCAL (red)

- ▶ Cognitively and linguistically:
  - ▷ actants Husband and Mother shift from an inner-valency position (i.e.,  $X$ ,  $Y$  and  $Z$ , e.g. *me and my Mother, my Husband did Y to me*) to the periphery ( $E$ , e.g. *with my Husband*) during therapy;
  - ▷ Lisa ceases quickly (from session 4) to use 'shoes-based' metaphors – e.g. *to step / put / feel into Mother's / Husband's shoes*.
- ▶ Comparison with TCM:
  - ▷ key sessions are 6 and 7, which are emotionally dense and in the middle of a therapeutic cycle (Figure 2);
  - ▷ the empty chair is not relevant here (being used in 2, 3, 5, 8 and 10).

## Conclusions and further directions

The analysis of actants gives interesting insights of the cycles in the therapeutic process and can clarify the linguistic basis of TCM. More robust data are now needed to confirm this result.

## Acknowledgements

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## Main references

- ▶ Gobbo, Federico & Benini, Marco (2011). *Constructive Adpositional Grammars*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- ▶ Lepper, Georgia & Mergenthaler (2008). Observing therapeutic interaction in the "Lisa" case. *Psychotherapy Research*. 18(6): 634–644.