THE FAMILY SEMANTICS GRID (FSG)
THE NARRATED POLARITIES
A MANUAL FOR THE SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THERAPEUTIC CONVERSATIONS AND SELF-NARRATIVES

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The paper introduces the family semantics grid (FSG), a unitizing and coding system for the semantic analysis of dyadic therapeutic conversations and self-narratives. Inspired by systemic and cognitivist therapeutic approaches centered on meaning and psychopathology, the manual focuses on Ugazio's (1998) constructionist concept of *family semantic polarities* and operationalizes the *narrated semantic polarities*, namely the explicit semantic oppositions inferred from what is said in dyadic conversations. The FSG provides a system for coding the narrated semantic polarities extracted from the transcripts. The grid consists of four semantics — *freedom*, *goodness*, *power*, and *belonging* — which, according to Ugazio, prevail in conversations with clients diagnosed with phobic, obsessive-compulsive, eating, and mood disorders, respectively. Suitable also for biographical interviews, political speeches and literary texts, the FSG is consistent and reliable.

Key words: Coding system; Psychopathology; Family semantic polarities; Positioning; Systemic therapy.

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MEANING AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

In the last 25 years, some cognitivist and systemic therapists (Bara, 1996; Guidano, 1987, 1991; Guidano & Liotti, 1983; Lorenzini & Sassaroli, 1987; Ugazio, 1998/in press; Villegas, 1995, 1997) have developed clinical models centered on psychopathology and meaning. According to these therapists, psychopathology is "a science of meaning" (Guidano, 1991, p. 56) and the main psychopathologies are characterized by ways of functioning with specific meanings at their core.

Guidano and Liotti, as well as the other cognitivist therapists inspired by their model (Bara, 1996, 2005; Lorenzini & Sassaroli, 1987, 1992; Mahoney, 1991; Mannino, 2005; Picardi & Mannino, 2001; Reda, 1986), focused their attention on the individual processes which characterize and construct personal meaning. Ugazio (1998), following a systemic-constructionist approach, shifted her attention to conversational processes within the family and the other social groups through which individuals construct events in their specific ways. Ugazio maintained that in all families conversation is organized within antagonistic meanings — called *family semantic polarities* — such as fair/unfair, closed/open, attractive/disgusting — which form a sort of shared plot within which each family member has to take a position in the conversation. And, in families with

members featuring some of the most recurrent psychopathologic disorders, conversation is organized around a specific and coherent group of family semantic polarities, that we call *family semantics*.

In phobic disorders, the prevailing family semantics is that of *freedom*, in obsessive-compulsive of *goodness*, in eating disorders of *power* and in severe depressions of *belonging*. For Ugazio, the prevalence in the family conversation of one specific group of semantic polarities represents a necessary but insufficient condition for the onset of the disorder connected to it. For instance, a family conversation may be dominated by the semantics of freedom without any member developing a phobic disorder. The development of any of the four psychopathologies depends on the reciprocal positioning that client and significant others take up in the conversation in relation to the critical family semantics. Through these positionings, one may experience a conflictual situation defined as a dilemma or "strange loop" (Cronen, Johnson, & Lannamann, 1982), which is assumed to be at the origin of a disorder. When this happens, the client is no longer able to construct any stable positioning along the polarities of the critical family semantics and he/she oscillates between mutually exclusive positionings. Moreover, because conversation in all families — as in every other context with a history — consists of a number of semantic polarities, different semantics may dominate at different times during the family history, or even at the same time but without any of them prevailing over the others.

This psychopathological model, just like those developed by the cognitivist authors, built on the author's clinical experience and illustrated through examples taken from clinical cases, has not yet been validated through systematic empirical research, even though some efforts in this direction have been made (Castiglioni, Contino, & Golzio, 2003; Castiglioni & Veronese, 2008; Mannino, 2005; Picardi & Mannino, 2001; Picardi et al., 2003; Ugazio, Negri, Zanaboni, & Fellin, 2007).

The *family semantics grid* (FSG) was indeed created in order to test one central hypothesis of Ugazio's (1998) model according to which phobic, obsessive-compulsive, eating, and chronic depressive disorders are connected to the semantics of freedom, goodness, power, and belonging, respectively; and, consequently, these semantics dominate therapeutic as well as family conversation. To this end we operationalized the concept of family semantic polarities (FSP) and the four family semantics (FS) mentioned above.

The operationalization of the FSP concept highlighted the co-presence of three different types of polarity, corresponding to as many levels of meaning. The manual we present here refers to only one level: *the narrated semantic polarities*.

FAMILY SEMANTIC POLARITIES: THE CONCEPT AND ITS OPERATIONALIZATION

FSP are polar meanings around which every family — just like every group with a history — organizes its conversation. "The concept picks up the old idea that meaning is constructed through antagonistic polarities, and frames it within a constructionist perspective" (Ugazio, in press). Therefore, FSP are not mental representations akin to Kelly's (1955) personal constructs but, rather, discursive phenomena which Ugazio (1998/in press) likened to the properties of conversation. First of all, these dimensions of antithetical meanings define what is relevant for each group and indicate what will be constructed, through joint action, as an episode, that is,

the speech smallest constituent unit (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). A family stands out from the others and, consequently, acquires its own identity and specificity, as its members construct conversation and episodes in a way that is different from that of other families. Only certain semantic polarities present in the broader cultural context turn out to be salient for a given family and form a shared plot that defines the repertoire of narratives and storylines within which the episodes will be constructed. Furthermore, "all the members of a family must necessarily take a position into the semantic polarities that are relevant within their own group" (Ugazio, 1998, p. 46). In agreement with the Positioning Theory (Bamberg, 1997, 1999; Harrè & Van Langenhove, 1999; Hermans, 2001; Hollway, 1994; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000; Ugazio, 1998; Wortham, 2000), we inevitably find ourselves taking co-positions in the conversation with others. "This discursive practice is not semantically empty: individuals always position themselves inside certain meanings present in the conversation" (Ugazio, 1998, p. 47).

The polar structure of meanings makes the identities of family members interdependent. This is Ugazio's (1998/in press) main thesis: "By co-positioning themselves with other partners in the plot of semantic polarities relevant in their own contexts, conversational partners anchor their own identities to those of the other group members. The shared nature of subjectivity is consequently ensured by the polar structure of the meanings. Moreover, because in all families (as in all other conversational contexts) more than one polarity is salient, the selves are multiple, just as the positions generated by the polarities" (in press). If, for example, the "intelligent-obtuse" polarity is relevant in a family, the members of that family will position themselves with intelligent or even very intelligent people, but will also be surrounded by limited, or even obtuse, individuals. They will marry people who are intelligent, brilliant, stupid, or distressingly limited. They will endeavor and suffer to be intellectually brilliant themselves, or to render intellectually brilliant those who unfortunately are not. Some members of the family will be intellectually brilliant, or considered so, while others will have to be considered cognitively deficient. One thing is certain: all members of this family will have to co-position themselves within the polar dimension in question and, in order to maintain their own identity, each one will need those placed at other points within this semantic dimension. In other families, different polarities are relevant, and *in all families more than one polarity is salient.*

We summarized the FSP concept[1] also to emphasize that the operationalization proposed in the FSG can only capture some of its distinctive features. FSP are operationalized as semantic opposites through which client and therapist position themselves with reference to the following semantic areas: a) values; b) definition of self/others/relationships; c) ways of relating; d) emotions and feelings.[2] These areas identify the main social realities created in conversation (Cronen et al., 1982; Harrè, 1986; Harrè & Van Langenhove, 1999; Pearce & Cronen, 1980) and, according to Ugazio (1998), emotions are the founding one.

The FSG takes into account three types of positioning similar to the ones that Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2004) considered relevant in biographical interviews. The first positioning refers to the narrated story explicitly told by the client, in which the therapist takes position as well, even though playing a secondary role. This story may be quite far from the lived experience that the client enacts by telling and interacting with the therapist. For instance, the client may describe him/herself as being incapable of reacting to abuse of power by his/her own family and colleagues, yet expressing his/her narration in an assertive and accusatory register to win over the therapist as an ally against his/her spouse. The *narrated semantic polarities* are

precisely the semantic oppositions along which both client and therapist position themselves. So these polarities refer to what is said, rather than actually done.

The other two positionings, which generally remain implicit, are discursive phenomena of a performative order. The second positioning refers to the act of narrating through which the client positions him/herself with respect to the persons he/she is talking about. Often, these positionings can diverge dramatically from those of the narrated story. For example, a client may burst into tears while providing a self-description as a person indifferent to and detached from his/her father. The *narrating semantic polarities* are the semantic contents along which these implicit positionings take place. The third type of positioning is purely interactive and concerns how client and therapist position themselves in the ongoing interaction; during sessions the client — very often through extra-narrative and meta-narrative remarks — positions the therapist as a supporter, as an accomplice to rely on, as an ally for winning a battle, as a confessor who condemns or absolves, and so on. The *interactive semantic polarities* are the semantic contents along which these positionings occur.

In summary, the FSG operationalizes semantic polarities as a) narrated: explicit semantic oppositions inferred from the positionings narrated by the two interlocutors; b) narrating: implicit semantic oppositions inferred from the act of narrating; c) interactive: semantic oppositions inferred through the ways in which the client positions him/herself with respect to the therapist and vice-versa.

Only the narrating and interactive are real semantic polarities in constructionist terms, but they are expressed mainly in an implicit way. Therefore, their identification is more inferential than for narrated semantic polarities, which is the focus of this paper. The other two will be covered in another paper.

FAMILY SEMANTICS: THE CONCEPT AND ITS OPERATIONALIZATION

By FS we mean a coherent group of polarities predominant in a specific conversational context with a shared history. We call them FS because they primarily come out of family conversation, which, for the majority of people, is the strongest and emotionally most involving conversational context. These semantics tend to be common and everyday for people, as they also affect other conversations a person takes part in, such as psychotherapeutic conversation.

As mentioned above, we operationalized the semantics — freedom, goodness, power, and belonging — which are characteristic of phobic, obsessive-compulsive, eating, and depressive disorders, respectively (Ugazio, 1998/in press). Each FS was identified as a group comprising two principal polarities based on an emotional opposition, and a series of connected polar opposites.

For each of these four FS we devised a grid with 36 semantic polarities, which convey the peculiar meanings of each of the semantics regarding the four areas mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Values: four polar opposites defining the distinctive values of the specific FS.

Definitions of self/others/relationship: 18 polar opposites grouped into five cells with polar opposites in the same cell having similar meanings. The principal polar opposites of each cell are in capital letters. The third cell contains polarities used preferably to define others, whereas the first two have to do mainly with the definition of self. The fourth cell includes polarities di-

rectly stemming from emotions. The last cell consists of only two opposites concerning physical polarities.

Ways of relating: 12 polar opposites equally split into four cells. The last cell concerns the more explicitly emotional ways of relating to others.

Emotions: two polar opposites. The more characteristic of the two is in bold print to highlight that it is the most important source for the entire semantics.

The polar opposites of each semantics were located using a top-down method. Each grid was initially drawn up on the basis of the meanings identified by Ugazio (1998) as distinctive of the four disorders, and integrated with others highlighted in the wider literature. Then, each grid was amended on the basis of a pilot application on a number of prototypical-case protocols for each of the four psychopathologies considered.

Due to their specific features, all the semantics may present an articulation of meanings richer in one semantic area than in the others. However, a staggered grid would have entailed the risk of biased coding.

Because of the limited number of consensual meanings available for defining the median position, the grids simply indicate the two extremes of each polarity, although the concept of FSP is actually triadic in nature. Multiple opposites for each cell help coders to identify people's peculiar way of speaking about the median position.

Semantics of Freedom

Central Meanings

The semantics of freedom (Table 1) features two distinctive and mutually integrating polarities: *freedom-dependency, exploration-attachment.*[3]

This FS entails a certain degree of intransitivity between being free and maintaining emotionally important relationships with others. Being free means emancipating oneself *from* a relationship and *from* its bonds.

"Freedom-dependency" and "exploration-attachment" express a moral order in which freedom and exploration are seen as values, whereas attachment relationships and the company of the other are felt as expressions of a need for protection from a world which is perceived as dangerous. As a consequence, people living in contexts in which this FS is critical may feel friendship, love, and other bonds in partially negative terms, as forms of dependency. On the contrary, facing circumstances single-handedly is constructed as an expression of freedom which boosts self-esteem.

When this FS prevails, some members feel and are defined as fearful, cautious or, on the contrary, brave or even daring; they encounter people willing to protect them, or dependent and unable to fend for themselves. They marry fragile, dependent people, or free partners who may not tolerate bonds. Admiration, contempt, conflicts, suffering, alliances, and love will be tied into dependence-independence themes. In these contexts some are so clinging that they need the help and presence of others to face even daily life, whereas others show an outstanding degree of autonomy.

TABLE 1
Semantics of freedom grid

VALUES	
FREEDOM	DEPENDENCY
EXPLORATION	ATTACHMENT
RISK	SAFETY
CHANGE	STABILITY
DEFINITIONS OF SELF/OTHERS/RELATIONSHIPS	
FREE Self-sufficient Explorative Unattached	DEPENDENT Conditioned by others Trapped Bound
UP AGAINST THE ODDS Nomadic Precarious Disoriented	PROTECTED Sedentary Stable Safeguarded
UNPREDICTABLE Distant Stranger Dangerous	RELIABLE Close Familiar Reassuring
COURAGEOUS Rash Careless Bold	FEARFUL Cautious Careful Cowardly
STRONG Invulnerable	WEAK Fragile
WAYS OF RELATING	
KEEPING DISTANT Counting on oneself Opening to others	GETTING CLOSE Counting on others Closing others out
GETTING FREE FROM OTHERS Breaking free Keeping self-sufficient	DEPENDING ON OTHERS Clinging to others Relying on others
EXPLORING Opening to novelty Taking risks	STAYING PUT Digging in Protecting oneself
SCARING Disorienting Alarming	REASSURING Guiding Calming
EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS	
COURAGE	**FEAR**
DISORIENTATION	CONSTRAINT

Emotions

The core emotions of this FS are fear and courage. The world — often due to dramatic events in the history of conversational contexts — is seen as a hotbed of peril to the individual's health, his/her relational world, and even his/her survival. Even emotions — owing to their impetus — may be perceived as threatening. From the positions of both those who are free and those

who are dependent, there is always a perceived risk in exploring the external world and even one's own feelings and moods. Because reality instills fear, those who position themselves at the extreme of freedom feel (and are considered) courageous; however, exploration can cause disorientation and induce them also to seek out closeness to others. Relationships are perceived as sources of protection and reassurance but also causes of limitation: being close could generate feelings of constriction, while breaking away from protective bonds could generate bewilderment. In short, when this FS prevails, people feel scared of distance from others, yet constricted when protected.

Ways of Relating

Within the semantics of freedom, "keeping distant-getting close" is the typical way of constructing interpersonal relationships, as defining distance becomes a central theme. Staying close to another is indispensable because one often feels on the edge of an abyss; this type of situation, however, can also generate feelings of constriction and drive the person to move away from the attachment figures in order to maintain a psychological distance. When people perceive danger or their own fragility, they draw closer to the attachment figures in search of support; when, instead, they feel strong, they keep their distance and even break away from the other person.

Definition of Self/Others/Relationships

The polar oppositions in the first two cells are re-expressions of the two most important polarities in this semantic area. Just like the other semantic contrasts of the same cell, "up against the odds-protected" are direct outgrowths of "exploration-attachment"; it is in fact exploration that puts one up against the odds and induces a condition of nomadism and precariousness; whereas attachment, by ensuring the presence of another person, also ensures protection and stability. The third cell refers to a world populated by unpredictable and therefore dangerous people or, on the contrary, people who are reliable whenever the circumstances call for it. These people are perceived as familiar, belonging to a known area, and thus predictable and reassuring (even if this makes them less interesting) or, on the contrary, they may be perceived as foreign, outside one's circle, intriguing, but also alarming. The fourth cell is centered on definitions directly derived from emotions, whereas the fifth cell focuses on the "strong-weak" polarity: in a FS used to construct the world as a threat to one's own physical wellbeing, this polarity is central to the definition of self/others.

Values

Of the four polar opposites identifying this FS values, the first two are the basic meanings, whereas "risk-safety" and "change-stability" are derivations: freedom and exploration produce risk and encourage change, whereas dependency and attachment produce safety and stability. In West-

ern culture, only the extremes of "dependency" and "risk" are negatively connoted. Given the moral order expressed by this FS, attachment, safety, and stability are associated with a certain degree of negativity, whereas freedom, exploration, change, and even risk have a positive connotation. For instance, a person who expresses him/herself through this FS may state that he/she appreciates safety because he/she is not a "lion," but may then go on to say that his/her favorite sibling is the embodiment of risk. Only if this moral order is respected should the polarities be included in this FS. A reversal of order would make the person alien to it.

Cultural Premises

This FS expresses a conception of freedom as independence from relationships. It is a concept unknown in Greek antiquity and linked to a vision embedded in modern Western society: the single person as a small, self-standing world that exists independently of the greater world which is "external," "out there." It is definitely an idea extraneous to Japanese tradition, for example, in which "emotional dependency" — the *amae* — not only had no negative connotation but, as pointed out by Doi (1971), was central to Japanese psychology. The term *jiyu* — the Japanese word for *freedom* — traditionally indicates the freedom to behave as one wishes, even in an overbearing manner, but always within a relationship; in no case does it imply the possibility of cutting loose and transcending the *amae*.

Semantics of Goodness

Central Meanings

The semantics of goodness (Table 2) features two distinctive polarities: *good (abstemious)-bad, dead-alive.*[4]

The latter polarity lends a dramatic pathos to this semantics, because life is on the evil side. Within this FS, goodness is constructed on the basis of *abstinence*: a good person is somebody who relinquishes his/her desires, goals, and success, is self-sacrificing, rather than a person who is primarily generous and welcoming. A bad person, instead, is somebody who pursues pleasure and self-satisfaction. The moral order of this semantics identifies sexuality and personal fulfillment with evil, as they are expressed in violent or perverse ways. Because of this *reductive* conception of goodness, the "chastity-depravity" polarity may better express the central meaning, but it could establish a link with sexuality that is not always present.

When this FS prevails, conversation concerns episodes of malice, deliberate harm, greed, guilty indulging of the senses, but also purity, innocence, as well as sacrifice and abnegation. Thanks to these conversational processes, family members feel and are considered good, pure or, conversely, bad and merciless; they meet people willing to save or uphold them or, instead, who introduce them to vice. Some suffer because of their own or others' wickedness, whereas others are proud of their moral superiority. In these families' history some have proven great abnegation, even mortifying their own needs to come across as ascetics; others have expressed their impulses so violently as to earn an evil reputation.

TABLE 2
Semantics of goodness grid

VALUES	
ABSTEMIOUS GOODNESS	EVIL
CHASTITY	DEPRAVITY
SELF-DENIAL	SELF-ASSERTION
HOLINESS	WICKEDNESS
DEFINITIONS OF SELF/OTHERS/RELATIONSHIPS	
GOOD (ABSTEMIOUS) Self-sacrificing Sparing Responsible	BAD Selfish Greedy Careless
UPRIGHT Abstemious Spiritual Chaste	IMMORAL Pleasure-seeking Carnal Depraved
STRICT Repressed Controlled/-ing Stingy	PERMISSIVE Instinctive Spontaneous Spendthrift
INNOCENT Mortified Disgusted Victim	GUILTY Thirsty for life Sated Torturer
DEAD Clean	ALIVE Dirty
WAYS OF RELATING	
ABSTAINING Renouncing (sex) Cleaning	CORRUPTING Enjoying (sex) Dirtying
SELF-SACRIFICING Feeling responsible Depriving oneself	TAKING ADVANTAGE Not giving a damn Exploiting others
REDEEMING Repressing Forbidding	DEPRAVING Letting it all out Transgressing
CONDEMNING Blaming Amending	ABSOLVING Scandalizing Sinning
EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS	
INNOCENCE	**GUILT**
DISGUST	PLEASURE

Emotions

"Innocence-guilt" and "disgust-pleasure" are the core emotions. Because sexuality and self-assertion are tied in with domination and violence, their expression generates guilt and disgust, whereas abnegation and renouncement are associated to purity and innocence.

Ways of Relating

"Abstaining-corrupting" and "self-sacrificing/taking advantage" are the principal ways of relating that come from the central meanings. The former is related to sexual dynamics, whereas the latter transcends sex. In either case — and in the other ways of relating shown in Table 2 as well — the negative pole represents a position of exchange with others. On the contrary, individuals in the opposite pole take a step back from relationships.

Definition of Self/Others/Relationships

The polar opposites in the first two cells are based on the principal semantic polarities: the second cell defines the self and others in relation to a perverse or somehow negative sexuality, either experienced or denied (chaste/pleasure-seeking), whereas the first cell contains non-sexual re-expressions of the "good (abstemious)-bad" polarity. The third contains opposites used mainly to define others. The fourth concerns the polarities directly connected to the emotions. The fifth features two central physical polarities for this FS: "dead-alive", "clean-dirty." Both qualify the semantics of goodness and should be highlighted in the grids in capital letters; however, in order to avoid coding bias we decided to follow the homogeneity criterion. Consequently, "dead-alive" is highlighted as it works with the "good-bad" polarity to define the main meaning of this FS.

Values

The second polar opposition centers exclusively on sexuality, whereas the third is related to the peremptory act of taking centre stage with oneself and one's own needs. In this FS, goodness and evil are meant as *noluntas* and *voluntas* (Schopenhauer, 1819/1969); the adjective "abstemious" thus plays a central role: good and evil without further specifications are not a part of this FS. In many Western cultures, the "self-denial/self-assertion" polarity does not express a predefined moral order. Here, however, self-denial expresses the positive extreme, as goodness (abstemious) does, both representing a step back from life. On the contrary, depravity, self-assertion, and wickedness qualify negative but on-the-side-of-life positionings.

Cultural Premises

The idea of abstinent goodness is not foreign to some religions: sexuality, the body, and organic life have often been associated with evil. However, here the dialectics between good and evil is anti-Augustinian. Augustine's (and Thomas') concept of the dialectics between good and evil is optimistic: just of shadow is merely the absence of light, so is evil the absence of good, and therefore without substantial reality. The concept of good and evil that characterizes this FS is, instead, to be found in psychological culture, with Freudian psychoanalysis — inspired by Schopenhauer (1819/1969) — being a prime example. Schopenhauer radically expressed the

idea that life is evil: the world is *voluntas*, that is the insatiable will to live, the cruel, selfish drive that pervades the entire universe. To *voluntas* he opposed *noluntas*, namely, the intentional annihilation of oneself, sacrifice, mortification of all forms of will, which took on a positive connotation in his thinking.

Semantics of Power

Central Meanings

The semantics of power (Table 3) features two distinctive polarities: *winner-loser, strong-willed/yielding.*[5]

The latter polarity is subordinated to the former on the basis of a means-end relation: people are winners in the sense that they are determined and strong-willed, whereas losers are incapable of self-assertion.

"Winner-loser" is peculiar compared to the other polarities in that "it cannot be perceived — not even during immediate experience — as an individual trait. It is the outcome of a match" (Ugazio, 1998, p. 236) and because it is purely relational, other people and their appraisal are perceived, *at every moment and in every circumstance*, as central to the definition of one's self. In this semantics there is a particular sensitivity to the others' judgment and to social success. As a rule, this constant attention toward the other makes conversational partners *hetero-attributors*, in that their behavior is seen as an answer to others'.

Because meaning is defined through comparison, competitive conflicts are the norm. Within the family context as well as in the relationships with the outside world (including the therapist), the battle to define the relationship becomes the central topic of conversation. The conflict content is generally irrelevant; what counts is who gains the upper hand. Because this FS determines and highlights who succeeds and who succumbs, nobody can rest on their laurels. Those who are in a losing position cannot accept their own surrender if not momentarily; likewise, those who are in a winning position must work on in order to preserve their superiority. This FS makes the exteriorization of individual characteristics problematic: differences never encourage cooperation but, rather, are exploited to assert one's superiority. All the definitions in the grid are therefore expressions of superiority or inferiority and imply some form of comparison.

Emotions

Each conversational partner's positioning in the competitive conflict is at the origin of the range of emotional states that feeds this FS. Winners experience feelings of self-efficacy and competence and thus self-trust, whereas feelings of inadequacy, ineptitude, and impotence prevail in people in the losing position. Boasting prevails when one's superiority is recognized by conversational partners, whereas shame and embarrassment prevail when one is in a losing position. The two emotional polarities in the grid of this semantics are hence such only when connected to the mentioned positions.

TABLE 3
Semantics of power grid

VALUES	
SUCCESS	FAILURE
POWER	SUBMISSION
DETERMINATION	COMPLIANCE
DISPLAY	AUTHENTICITY
DEFINITIONS OF SELF/OTHERS/RELATIONSHIPS	
WINNER Successful Excellent Superior	LOSER Defeated Mediocre Inferior
STRONG-WILLED Efficient Gritty Competitive	YIELDING Inept Weak-willed Spine-less
OVERBEARING Assertive Challenging Imposing	SUBMISSIVE Meek Retiring Complying
BOASTFUL Arrogant Self-confident Double-faced	HUMBLE Laid back Ill at ease Authentic
GOOD-LOOKING Slim	UGLY Fat
WAYS OF RELATING	
ADAPTING Gaining consent Prevaricating	⇄ RESISTING Stepping off Putting up with
WINNING Succeeding Excelling	LOSING Failing Accepting ordinariness
FIGHTING Buckling down Competing	SURRENDERING Giving in Withdrawing
MAKING AN IMPRESSION Boasting Patronizing others	MAKING A POOR IMPRESSION Self-abasing Cutting others down to size
EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS	
BOAST	**SHAME**
SELF-EFFICACY	INADEQUACY

Ways of Relating

The most typical way of relating is "adapting-resisting." Winners adapt to those in a higher position to preserve their own status. Losers believe they cannot improve their position; consequently, they oppose winners in an attempt to delegitimize their superiority. This first cell includes the ways of relating that construct the winning or losing position: making allies and

earning consensus versus withdrawing from a confrontation that would surely be lost. The extremes can be inverted: winners may oppose losers who attempt to dethrone them, and losers may settle into their lower position. The second cell shows the ways of relating that define one's position in a competitive comparison; the third derives from the "determination-compliance" polarity and concerns the challenge to reach one's goals or, conversely, yielding to difficulties. The fourth cell indicates the ways of relating most closely connected to emotions: making an impression is closely associated to boasting and exhibiting the qualities that make one superior; which implies patronizing losers or help them to behave as if they were in a more elevated positioning, which is a very similar relational move, as well as trying to lower themselves to put others at their ease. On the other hand, making a bad impression and cutting others down to size derive from shame and inadequacy.

Definition of Self/Others/Relationships

All the polar opposites in the first cell have in common a total lack of content. The second cell contains a number of polarities deriving from the "determination-compliance" one. The third includes polar oppositions often used in reference to others. The fourth features definitions related to emotions, all referring to one's status: people are defined arrogant in relation to their hierarchical placement, or humble because they do not give themselves airs despite their status; people are humiliated because they are placed at a lower level. Finally, "ugly-good looking" and "slim-fat" are the physical polarities peculiar to this FS.

Values

Of the four polar opposites in this area, the first two are redefinitions of the "winner-loser" polarity in terms of values which are void of content, anchored exclusively to confrontation. The third, "determination-compliance," is built around a moral order in which determination is a value opposed to compliance, assimilated, in its turn, to the ineptitude to face challenges. Thus, it is not the outcome of a confrontation; it is, however, instrumental in attaining supremacy. The "display-authenticity" polarity, generally introduced into conversation by losers, is related to a moral order different from that of the other three polarities and is such that it can cause a reversal. In fact, this polarity — which is interchangeable with "conformism-unconventionality" — also lacks content: the negative pole contextualizes "success" and "power" as display, whereas the positive pole is usually left undefined.

Cultural Premises

Underlying the semantics of power is an idea of *equality as the demolition of differences*. In the last forty years, egalitarian ideology has become commonplace in Western societies, that have often been rejecting differences and negating any hierarchy of value. When people consider themselves equal, with no differences or deficiencies inducing them to compensate for each other, relationships are inevitably perceived through the metaphor of power. Nothing is left but

the battle for supremacy leading to "everybody against everybody else." Another peculiar feature of this FS is the absence of reference to values that could organize behaviors in a moral universe. Here the idea of equality transcends values and delegitimizes differences: a *superiority free of any contents* is pursued.

Semantics of Belonging

Central Meanings

The semantics of belonging (Table 4) features two principal polarities: *inclusion-exclusion*, *honor-disgrace.*

The former polarity is at the basis of the entire FS, the latter is its indispensable integration. The salient feature of this FS is the individuals' inclusion in their family, their blood ties, their lineage, in the broader community or, on the contrary, their exclusion from the group, their marginalization. The persons occupying the excluded position in the conversation feel their expulsion as an ignominy, as irreparable damage to their dignity, as a disruption of a natural order that undermines their sense of amiability. Inclusion, instead, is experienced as an honor of which the members taking part in the conversation may or may not be worthy, but which some members may refuse in the name of dignity: they might find themselves in a morally unacceptable position, where inclusion would bring even more disgrace than rejection. Therefore, when this FS prevails, people are chosen, honored, worthy of being remembered or, on the contrary, marginalized, defrauded, forgotten. And surely some people achieve glory or important recognition from the community, while others are rejected, abandoned, or locked up in a madhouse, prison, or some other institution for those who, rightly or wrongly, are unworthy of belonging to the community they should be a part of.

Emotions

Joy for having been accepted in the desired group, or anger and desperation at having been excluded or ostracized, characterize this FS. When one is excluded or abandoned or feels defrauded, he/she is torn between anger and desperation. Anger makes him/her more active and reactive, whereas desperation leaves him/her helpless. Included people generally experience gratitude, but can feel resentment if accepted in such a way that they feel their dignity at stake.

Ways of Relating

"Including-ostracizing" oneself is the most characteristic and central way of relating. The order of the second way of relating (honoring-dishonoring) may be inverted: the positioning of the excluded person can be honorable (though not acknowledged). The third way of relating features dynamics in which some strip others of their belonging and advantages, whereas others (who are not necessarily deserving) receive many moral or material benefits. The last cell includes the ways of relating which most directly express the typical emotions at a relational level.

TABLE 4
Semantics of belonging grid

VALUES		
INCLUSION		EXCLUSION
HONOR	⇆	DISGRACE
BEING CHOSEN		BEING REJECTED
GLORY	⇆	DOWNFALL
DEFINITIONS OF SELF/OTHERS/RELATIONSHIPS		
IN THE GROUP Belonging Being welcomed Accepted		OUT OF THE GROUP Excluded Being discarded Kept out
WORTHY Respectable Honorable Deserving	⇆	UNWORTHY Contemptible Despicable Reprehensible
ELECTED Rewarded Respected Revered		OUTCAST Deprived Refused Defrauded
GRATEFUL Enthusiastic Joyful Merry		ANGRY Miserable Inconsolable Hopeless
ENERGETIC Together (with)	→	RUN DOWN Alone
WAYS OF RELATING		
INCLUDING Sharing Welcoming		OSTRACIZING Cutting off Abandoning
HONORING Deserving Ennobling	⇆	DISHONORING Usurping Discrediting
OVERWHELMING WITH GOODS Remembering Celebrating		DEFRAUDING Forgetting Ignoring
VENERATING Enthusing Jubilating		DESTROYING Getting down Regretting
EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS		
JOY		**DESPERATION/ANGER**
GRATEFULNESS		RESENTMENT

Definition of Self/Others/Relationships

The opposites in the first two cells redefine the principal meanings of this FS. The "worthy-unworthy" cell may reverse the order: "unworthy" may refer to a person who is included and "worthy" to a person who is excluded. The third cell refers to the processes that make some *included* and others *excluded* — some are elected and others are outcast, and so on.

The individual's behavior plays a secondary role in relation to these processes, because this FS opposes the "revered" position (typical of those who belong) to the "defrauded" one: a person's belonging may be fraudulent and another's exclusion may be unfair. The fourth cell contains the definitions most directly connected to emotions. The order of the first physical polarity may be reversed: even those who position themselves at the pole of exclusion may feel vigor through anger.

Values

The first pair of polar opposites expresses the FS founding values. The third pair detracts this value from personal merit. Election is based on chance and whim. On the contrary, "glory-downfall" and "honor-disgrace" are linked to personal merit, but glory — as well as honor and dignity — may not be directly linked to belonging. The moral order of this FS allows the excluded and rejected individual to preserve honor and dignity and to achieve glory. The second and fourth pair of opposites may thus reverse the order of the extremes.

Cultural Premises

In this FS, being cut off from the group maintains the dramatic pathos with which this condition was experienced in antiquity and in most pre-modern societies where individuals identified themselves and were identified by others on the basis of their belonging to their family, lineage, or community. This means inclusion by birth: belonging to a group was not conceived as a social fact constructed or deconstructed through conversation. For Plato, Aristotle, the sophists, and the tragic poets, the individual existed only within the context of the *polis*. Only those who were denied the status of human beings, such as foreigners, pariahs, and slaves, were conceived as being excluded from the group. It is in these terms that inclusion or exclusion are experienced in this FS.

THE FSG CODING METHOD

The FSG coding method is divided into two phases. In the first phase, the text is segmented into conversational turns and narrative units; in the second phase, the speech explicit FSP are located and coded.

First Phase: Unitising the Text into Conversational Turns and Narrative Units

The first step is to assign a progressive number to each conversational turn. As customary in conversational analysis, we define a conversational turn as a textual unit limited by grammatical, syntactic, and/or intonational indicators which tell us that the conversational turn is complete (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). When the other interlocutor talks, a new conversational turn begins.[6]

The turns must be numbered progressively on the left side of the text.

Example 1. Conversational turns[7]

829) T.: Why does everybody like him?

830) Cl.: He acts. I'm always telling him "You know why you get tired?"

831) T.: Because he acts.

The second step is to segment the text into narrative units, namely topic-specific passages (topic segments), based on the criteria illustrated in the narrative process coding system (NPCS) (Angus, Hardtke, & Levitt, 1996, 1999), which was also devised for psychotherapeutic sessions. The NPCS defines a narrative unit as a sequence of verbal exchanges between client and therapist that is typically a "narration or description of a specific area of content or a detailed formulation of the different aspects of a same area of content" (p. 2).

Once the text has been unitized, the narrative units must be numbered progressively on the right side of the transcript.

Example 2. The client explicitly introduces a new topic

This is the second session with a 58-year-old woman (with a 40-year-long history of anorexia) who has requested therapy following a life-threatening symptomatic deterioration. (15)

574) T.: What, in your opinion, are the causes of your deterioration? Before you mentioned Luigi [the son].

575) Cl.: Yes. I think… the first blow came from Luigi [her son]: by kicking me out of his life he made me suffer dreadfully…. My husband says I don't love myself because I tend to be very strict in my self-judgment… (T.: Mmh)… so I asked myself "Where did I go wrong?" But you see, I didn't feel like telling him he [the son] was right! For my ethic principles I had to tell him what I eventually did. I'm strict because I'm just like my father, there!

(16) I haven't told you much about him yet. My dad was strict, he was outspoken, just like me.

576) T.: Even more than your mother?

577) Cl.: Mum was better at… finding some expedient to justify herself; my dad wasn't…

As we can see from this example, a new narrative unit can occur even within a same conversational turn. In turn 575, the client comments what she has said so far and introduces a new topic without making a pause.

Second Phase: Identifying and Classifying the Narrated Semantic Polarities

Step 1: Read the Text Multiple Times

In order to correctly identify in a conversation the narrated semantic polarities, it is mandatory that every single word and sentence be thoroughly understood. As we know, the meaning of something that is said can be fully captured only by placing every single word and sentence within its discourse context. For this reason, the coder must first read the text to be coded (in our case the transcript of the entire therapeutic session) multiple times in order to understand the conversation overall narrative sequence.

Step 2: Highlight the Semantic Areas and Identify the Semantic Contents

The coder must then highlight (here we use *italics*) the sentences of each narrative unit that refer to any of the aforementioned four specific semantic areas (emotions, ways of relating, definitions of self/others/relationships, values).

Next, the coder must identify (by underlining) — within each italicized semantic area — the specific and explicit terms — the *semantic contents* — used by the speaker to define his/her narrated positioning. As we can see from the following examples, some passages may contain even two or more different types of content.[8]

By *emotions* and *feelings* we refer to any noun, adjective, verb, or phrasing describing an emotional experience and/or a physical perception or sensation that implies a psychological state of mind.

Example 3

When the therapist asks the client to describe his mother, the client tells of a recurrent childhood situation in which his mother was very anxious and afraid for her children's safety.

109) T.: And what kind of person was your mum?

110) Cl.: Mum was a meek sort but she was very fond of us, *in the sense that if we weren't home by a certain hour she would start to panic… She got all frightened, I mean at some point she'd start worrying, she'd always be at the window. Until I arrived she stayed there, all anxious, always this anxiety that she passed on to me as well because I knew that I had to be home by that certain time.*

When we talk about *ways of relating*, we refer to any verb or phrasing that indicates a behavior, an action, or an attitude explicitly showing a positioning or a definition of oneself in relation to others.

Example 4

The client is talking about a recent meeting with his wife's family, during which his mother-in-law was particularly inquisitive and critical toward him and his wife.

317) Cl.: *Even my wife has had plenty of clashes with her mother and they've only made up recently and they're still on the look-out. Now, I can't really say what gives me this feeling, I don't know… she butts in and talks nonsense.* Anyway, even with our son… *she always has to have her say… tell us what we do wrong...*

When we talk about *definition of self/others/relationships* we refer to any noun, adjective, or phrasing that somehow describes or characterizes people (including the client and the therapist) and their relationship.

Example 5

The client illustrates his symptomatology: it is always present, although it reaches its highest point only during periods of work-induced pressure. The client then moves on to define himself in an abstract manner as an anxious person — a definition the therapist tries to make explicit and to contextualise in the client's relationships.

226) Cl.: *I mean, I'm anxious by nature.*

227) T.: *When do you feel especially anxious, for instance?*

228) Cl.: For instance, when it's time to leave for the lake; I get so worked up, doctor, that… If my wife, when I come home at night, says, "Look, we're out to dinner" — an unexpected dinner out, I mean — I get nervous because maybe I don't feel like going out… getting in the car, looking for a place to park… I find it much more comfortable to stay at home.

[…]

234) T.: So you like staying at home with your wife?

235) Cl.: Yes.

236) T.: You get along.

237) Cl.: Yes … she's got her temper and all, but basically they're all things that are… manageable. *I would say that we have a serene and overall peaceful relationship, my wife and I.*

When we talk about *values* we refer to any noun that indicates, in an abstract manner, a positive or negative moral quality from the client's point of view.

Example 6

The therapist is asking the client, a 21-year-old girl suffering from anorexia, how her parents react to her refusal to eat.

121) Cl.: Now, for example, when my dad tickles me and says, "my little bag of bones." So I just, like... Maybe I poke his fat belly. So now I think he's definitely less worried about my eating.

122) T.: So he now accepts it. What about your mum?

123) Cl.: Well, before she was the one who insisted more on the eating… but now it's different, we now agree also on the way I dress… she understands that *beauty is important, beauty is everything for me!*

Emotions, ways of relating, definitions of self/others and relationships, values, all form a privileged, but not exclusive, field for narrated semantic polarities that occur during conversation. The rest of the text should not be highlighted. In particular, passages with reference to facts or tales that do not concern people but objects or animals (other than pets) should not be considered. When the coder is uncertain whether or not a passage should fall into any of the four indicated areas, the passage should be left unmarked.

Step 3: Re-Express the Semantic Contents

The third step makes it possible to put together semantic contents that are equivalent in meaning but different in form. In this step each underlined content is re-expressed with an adjective or a noun. If this is not possible, then a verb may be used, keeping re-phrasing as a last resort. If a verb is used, it must be put into the infinitive or the third-person singular form. It is important to stay as close as possible to the words in the text, using the speaker's actual words whenever possible (e.g., "*My sister is a calm person*" should be re-expressed as "calm" and not "calmness"). If the semantic content is expressed with a negation, the negation must be included in the re-expression.

Repetitions must not be coded. If, for instance, the subject repeats identical (or almost identical) words, only one semantic content must be coded (e.g., in "*My father is a happy person — very happy*," only "happy" must be coded). If a person simply repeats the semantic contents

introduced by the interlocutor, without modifying its meaning, it must be considered as redundant (e.g., "*Oh, so you're saying that your father is happy*").

Finally, any *identity* must be singled out. By *identities* we mean semantic contents expressed using synonyms (e.g., "*Giulio has that attitude of his — he's always showing off, he thinks he's so big… I mean, he thinks he's at the top at everything — he's 'the best'*": in this case we have four different phrases expressing the same semantic content). We have chosen to code the synonyms as well in order to gather as many words as possible used to express the various semantic contents, but we will assign them a code that enables us, during the analysis, to count them as a single occurrence.

Repetitions and identities are quite common in the type of text for which the FSG is designed. Clients are encouraged to make themselves understood but fear they may have trouble doing so as the therapist is not yet familiar with them; thus, they tend to make frequent use of repetitions and/or synonyms in order to try and better convey what they want to express.

This step also requires that coders indicate the *attributor* and the *target person* for each semantic content. The attributor is the person who introduces it, whereas the target person is whom it refers to. Because the FSG is designed for dyadic interactions, there can only be two possible attributors — in our case, the client and the therapist. The type and the number of target persons depend on the specific aims of each study.

Step 4: Identify the Polarities

Each semantic content is a pole within a polarity which, by definition, features a triadic structure, with two extremes and a median position. In order to identify which polarity each semantic content belongs to, the opposite pole must be identified in the text. If the semantic contents express the median position, then both extreme poles must be identified. The complementary pole of each semantic content can be searched for within a single narrative unit or in the whole text, depending on research purposes. If one limits the scope of the search to a single narrative unit — as we did in our study — there are three cases in which a polarity may be marked as *closed*: the poles are explicitly juxtaposed in the same conversational turn (example 7); the poles are explicitly juxtaposed in separate conversational turns but within the same narrative unit (example 8); the poles are implicitly juxtaposed within the same narrative unit (example 9).

And there are two cases in which the polarity must be marked as *open*: no clear juxtapositions are identified within the same narrative unit; there is uncertainty regarding the various closure options; this occurs when several types of semantic content are juxtaposed but no clear indications emerge concerning which one pertains to the semantic content in question.

Example 7

As is common in the first sessions, the therapist is investigating what changes the client expects from therapy.

318) T.: What things remain unsatisfying even when you feel good?

319) Cl.: *Well let's see, being intolerant with others, sometimes, I mean let's see, maybe my inability to get along well with others in just about any given situation. Let's see, for instance, there's this colleague at work … [T.: mmh...]… he has the ability to get along well with everyone.*

Example 8

Following a systemic technique, the therapist is asking the client to rank himself and his siblings in relation to a certain aspect, in this case intelligence.

216) T.: *So both you children are very intelligent; that is, you're bright, intelligent... and your brother also has a degree.*
217) Cl.: Yes, my brother has a degree, yes, in engineering.
218) T.: *Is he intelligent as well?*
219) Cl.: *Oh yes… not as much as me, but he's intelligent too, I think [laughs].*
220) T.: Your sister too, the…
221) Cl.: …Sonia.
222) T.: *Sonia, is she bright as well?*
223) Cl.: *Mmh... to tell the truth… no, she has always been considered, let's say, "slower," she has always had problems, even at school since her childhood.*

In his narration, the client positions both himself and his brother on the "intelligent" pole, although he positions himself more towards the extreme. His sister, as we can explicitly see in 223, is positioned at the opposite extreme.

Example 9

The client and the therapist are defining the client's parents' way of dealing with sexuality and, by comparison, the client's way.

304) Cl.: *And he spoke of sex in a way… his eyes twinkled, when he talked about sex…*
305) T.: *Oh, his eyes twinkled!*
306) Cl.: *Yes, you could tell that he was, he wanted to have sex with other women in general and not only with my mother, he used to cheat on her.*
307) T.: And your mother?
308) Cl.: *Nothing. Quite the opposite.*
309) T:. *You mean that she didn't care for it?*
310) Cl.: *Yes, yes, mum was the opposite. Mum was devoted, a family woman, completely different.*
311) T: I see.
312) Cl.: … but now I feel better than when I had those urinary tract problems I told you of last time. *I've rediscovered the pleasure and satisfaction. I think I'm enthralled too, now. I'm a bit like my father.*

As we can see, the narrative unit shows a clear opposition between the parents concerning sexual dynamics: the father was "enthralled by sex" (sinful sex, outside the marriage), whereas the opposite was true for the mother: "a family woman, completely different." The client then states he is also "enthralled [by sex]," like his father. In this way, he implicitly positions himself at the opposite pole compared to his mother.

Step 5: Re-Express the Semantic Contents on the Basis of the Polarity They Belong to

In this step, the meaning of each semantic content is re-framed on the basis of the polarity it belongs to. The purpose of this step is to translate into conventional terms the speaker's often idiosyncratic and/or slangy expressions.

Example 10

As it is custom in the first sessions, the client is describing the most important figures in his relational milieu.

240) Cl.: *I think my cousin has always been a bit slow, even at school.*

241) T.: Your cousin Luigi or Davide?

242) Cl.: *Davide! Not Luigi, Luigi's a bright boy.*

In this case "slow" is the opposite of "bright" and we can thus redefine it as "stupid." Thus, the two types of semantic content fall into the "intelligent-stupid" polarity.

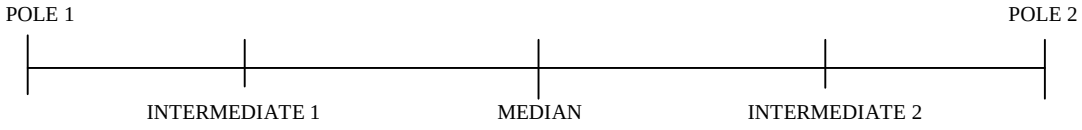
Step 6: Identify the Value-Connotations of the Polarities

The purpose of this step is to identify the value-connotation assigned by the attributor to the polarity, not only on the basis of the poles semantic contents but also in relation to the entire text. The connotation may not be prevalent in the culture of the coders, the interlocutor, and the social context. It may also be explicit or implicit. If clear (though implicit) indications by the speaker are missing, or in the presence of doubts or alternative interpretations concerning the value-connotation of a given polarity, no connotation should be given. Value-connotation is marked by giving each pole a positive, negative, or neutral value and by indicating its explicit or implicit nature. Thus, the following combinations are possible where the pole is characterized: explicitly as positive or negative; implicitly as positive or negative; as neutral or not connoted.

Step 7: Identify the Positions of the Targets

Clearly, the number of potential positions along the semantic continuum is manifold. For the sake of simplicity, we identify only five positions (Figure 1): the two extremes, the median, and the two in between the median and either extreme.

FIGURE 1
Positions chart.



When a target is positioned within a polarity with no other specifications, the target position must be coded as intermediate 1 or 2 (between one polar extreme and the median position).

Example 11. Target positions

The therapist explores how the client positions each family member within different polarities.

196) Cl.: *My mother is very womanly, I don't know if you see what I mean (T.: Mhm...). She's very… feminine, very intellective, very... she travels a lot with her mind, so to speak... on her affections, on these emotions of hers… she's a very emotional type.*

197) T.: *When you say she's very womanly, do you mean that she is very emotional?*

198) Cl.: *Yes, yes, she's very emotional, whereas my father is very manly, he's the exact opposite, he's very matter-of-fact.*

199) T.: He's got his feet on the ground... and you wanted to become a mechanic, you liked to "do" what daddy did.

200) Cl.: Oh yes, yes, let's say that in those things you could already tell that I wasn't… yes, I did things, but without the dedication and consistency that my father had.

201) T.: *So, you were less good than daddy with concrete stuff?*

202) Cl.: *Let's say that I travelled more... I travelled more with my mind, right, in the sense that if I saw a broken moped part, I tried to figure out what might've, what could've happened, to make it break so what could be done, because… but when it came down to removing nuts and bolts by hand…*

203) T.: *You were a moped theoretician, I suppose.*

204) Cl.: *Yes, I was a moped theoretician (laughs). I even tried but I wasn't the one who dismantled the parts, put them back together, changed the mufflers; I was more of a different type, I was a moped theoretician.*

The client's father is positioned at one extreme of the polarity ("matter-of-fact") and the mother at the opposite extreme ("emotional"), whereas the client positions himself in the median ("moped theoretician").

Step 8: Code the Semantics

This is the core coding step, in which the identified narrated semantic polarities are classified using the FSG. For each narrative unit, reread the text and decide which of the polarities from the four grids presented is the closest to the identified polarities. If a polarity does not fall into any of the four grids, it should be considered as belonging to the "other semantics" category. A polarity should be included in this category also when the coder is uncertain about its classification.

Once the polarities have been classified, the coder must discern whether each polarity is a *first expression* in the narrative unit, a *re-expression*, or a *semantic shift*. These three categories are mutually exclusive.

Re-expressions apply to all the polarities belonging to the same narrative unit marked with the same code, even if referring to different persons or situations.

Example 12. A re-expression

The client is talking about his brother and their differences. The therapist asks what they have in common.

179) T.: In what ways are you brothers alike?

180) Cl.: Well… I don't know… *I'm arrogant [laughs] but my brother is the most arrogant around the house, he drives my father mad, he's a different sort.*

181) T.: What sort is your father?

182) Cl.: *He's a simple man, who can't stand assuming people.*

In these four conversational turns, the client uses the "arrogant-simple" semantic polarity, first referring to himself, then to his brother, and finally to their father. The polarity is marked in reference to all three people, whose positionings are all coded (the father and the brother are positioned at opposite extremes,

while the client is in the intermediate position between his brother and the median position). "I'm arrogant," closed by "He's a simple man," is considered as a single occurrence of the polarity in the text, whereas "My brother's the most arrogant," closed by "can't stand demanding people" is considered as a re-expression.

Semantic shifts are polarities introduced to re-express or specify how a polarity is understood and which change the polarity interpretation and the FS it belongs to.

Example 13. A semantic shift

The client and the therapist are about to decide if and how to plan the therapy.

1) Cl.: *Well, I was thinking about… of my actual will to do something about my situation, or about the fact of yielding.*
2) T.: *Yielding?*
3) Cl.: *I mean, of just carrying on as usual, uh... I'm not… I mean, it's as if I felt torn between the two… between the two things, so… you asked me if I had any goals and such, anything I wanted to solve myself. (T.: Yes) And maybe, I mean, something I've been thinking about is that, basically, I can never set any deadlines for myself, in the sense that...*
4) T.: What do you mean by deadlines?...
5) Cl.: *I mean, I can't plan things, like, my holidays or stuff like that. I live day by day and it's really a huge effort for me to say to a friend, like, "Let's meet next Monday at midday for a coffee," so to say.*

At conversational turn number 1 the client introduces the "get something done-yielding" polarity. Four turns later, he specifies that by "yielding" he means his "living day by day," his "not managing to set deadlines" and to take on commitments. Both the ways of relating identified by "to yield" and "to live day by day" must be coded, but only the latter is to be considered as an actual occurrence of the polarity in the text. The semantic polarity expressed by the client is closer to the semantics of freedom than to that of power, to which the first way of relating could seem connected: for the client, "to yield" means not to keep bonds with anything or anyone, in order to remain free.

Steps 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 require the attribution of a numeric code to each categorical distinction. Consequently, a specific code is required for all the elements described in the previous steps. The codes we have chosen are available online[9] together with an example of the FSG Manual applied to a long passage of therapeutic conversation.

APPLICATION AND RELIABILITY

The FSG was applied to verbatim transcripts of 100 video-recorded systemic individual psychotherapeutic sessions, the first two conducted with 50 clients, gender-balanced. Forty of these clients were equally distributed among the four psychopathologies included in Ugazio's clinical hypothesis (1998/in press): phobic (agoraphobia, panic attacks), obsessive-compulsive (personality disorder included), eating (anorexia, bulimia, binge eating), and mood disorders (major depression and bipolar). The remaining 10 — the comparison group —were clients who requested psychotherapy for life problems, without a full diagnosis fulfilling the *DSM-IV-TR* criteria (APA, 2000).

The participants' average age was 34.9 years (*SD* = 12.4; range = 17-59) and their education background was middle/high level. The 40 clients with a psychopathological diagnosis were all very prototypical clinical cases, with no co-morbidity and previously diagnosed in 80% of cases. All the transcripts used come from sessions conducted by the same therapist.[10]

Only the central third of every session was coded, corresponding to 24 minutes on average, the sessions lasting between 60 and 90 minutes (*M* = 73 minutes). In our transcripts, each narrative unit consisted, on average, of 35 complete sentences (range =14-171). The narrated polarities coded were on average 98.8 per session (*SD* = 40.3; range = 31-234).

In order to learn the coding method, the coders practiced on therapeutic conversations of clients not enrolled in the study until they reached an agreement rate higher than 75% on the identification of the parts of text (step 2 of the second phase) and a Cohen's kappa coefficient higher than 0.7 on the coding of the polarities within the five semantics of the FSG (step 8 of the second phase).

In order to test the inter-rater agreement, a second independent coder coded 36 transcripts, 28 of which were equally distributed among the four diagnostic groups, the remaining eight belonging to the comparison group. Of these, 24 were first sessions and 12 second sessions. The inter-rater agreement in the identification of the parts of text featuring codable semantic contents was 82.1% (83.7% for the first sessions and 79.0% for the second sessions).The inter-rater agreement for coding the narrated polarities in each text part identified by both coders is summarized in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Inter-raters agreement of the transcripts' coding

Type of coding	Cohen's *K*	
Semantics [a] (freedom, goodness, power, belonging, and "others")	First sessions	.82
	Second sessions	.73
	Total	.79
Semantic areas [b] (values, definitions, ways of relating, emotions)	First sessions	.78
	Second sessions	.73
	Total	.76
Semantic polarities [c]	First sessions	.75
	Second sessions	.70
	Total	.73

Note. [a] agreement on classifying a polarity within the same semantics; [b] agreement on classifying a polarity within the same grid area; [c] agreement on classifying a polarity within the same grid cell.

Two analyses of internal consistency of the grids were performed: Cronbach's alpha and cluster analysis. Two semantic areas (values and emotions) were excluded from the analyses, because their frequency was very low (in some cells lower than 10 units).

The alpha for the four semantics ranged from .88 for the goodness grid to .93 for the power grid (freedom = .90; belonging = .90). These results show a strong coherence in the use of the main polarities (corresponding to the different cells) of each grid. A cluster analysis conducted on the polarities of each grid confirmed these results. This analysis indicates the presence of four groups of polarities totally overlapping those presented in the four grids.

The application of the grid to these transcripts allowed also a confirmation of the clinical hypothesis that the FSG was constructed to test: the semantics of freedom, goodness, power, and belonging prevail significantly in the conversation with phobic, obsessive-compulsive, eating-disordered, and depressed clients, respectively; in the comparison group (clients with life problems) the category "other semantics" prevails significantly.[11] These results, which are also a measure of the FSG's validity, are presented in other papers (Ugazio, Negri, & Fellin, 2009; Ugazio, Negri, Zanaboni, & Fellin, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The FSG is the first tool that makes it possible to test the hypothesis of a connection between psychopathology and meaning by analyzing therapeutic conversation. The efforts so far made in this direction have in fact been using self-report questionnaires (Picardi et al., 2003) or Kelly's Repertory Grids (Castiglioni et al., 2003; Castiglioni & Veronese, 2008).

This manual, which analyzes the narrated polarities — very similar to Kelly's (1955) personal constructs — allowed for empirical confirmation of the hypotheses formulated by Ugazio as well as Guidano, and other cognitivist authors, where there is strong convergence, as in phobic disorders. Introducing the necessary changes into the meanings constituting the four grids, the FSG could also be used by other researchers who share the hypothesis of a connection between psychopathology and meaning, but presume the presence of different meanings to those proposed by Ugazio.

As shown by the reliability analyses presented and by the validity ones mentioned in the previous paragraph, the FSG is a reliable and valid coding system. Therefore, it could also be used for diagnostic assessment, as it makes it possible to identify the four main psychopathologies *just* by analyzing the semantic contents of the conversation, regardless of symptoms-related information (Ugazio et al., 2009). Consequently, the FSG allows a hermeneutic diagnosis that could integrate the nosographic classifications such as the DSM, particularly for those psychopathological symptoms, such as depression, where traditional nosographic classifications turn out to be insufficiently discriminant (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007). An episode that meets the criteria for major depression in the *DSM-IV-TR* (APA, 2000) can occur in fact in people with a prevalence of the semantics of belonging, but also of the other three. Used together with descriptive diagnosis, this tool offers a more complete and comprehensive diagnosis, particularly useful for psychotherapists. While pharmacotherapy can disregard the client's semantic universe, the psycho-diagnostic assessment definitely cannot.

The current version of the FSG has been applied to the analysis of transcripts of individual psychotherapies, but it could be extended to other dyadic conversations. For example, biographical interviews for research purposes can also be coded with the FSG, because therapeutic sessions have much in common with oral biographies. They are, indeed, asymmetric conversations in which the roles of speaker and listener are predefined: clients talk about themselves and their history, while the therapist mostly listens. Also literary texts and monologues — such as political speeches — can be coded with the FSG.

In order to fully test Ugazio's clinical hypotheses (1998/in press) on meaning and psychopathology, we are developing a manual, designed for identifying and coding the narrating and interactive semantic polarities in family and couple psychotherapeutic sessions as well.

NOTES

1. For an extensive presentation of the concept, see Ugazio (1998/in press).
2. Each of these areas is operatively defined in the second phase, step 2 of the "The FSG Coding Method" paragraph.
3. The extensive presentation of these semantics is in Ugazio (1998/in press, Chapter IV).
4. The extensive presentation of these semantics is in Ugazio (1998/in press, Chapter V).
5. The extensive presentation of these semantics is in Ugazio (1998/in press, Chapter VI).
6. Conversation management discourse markers such as "uhm, mmh, yes, ah," expressed by the listener as signals to the interlocutor to carry on with his/her speech are not considered as a turn. Short repetitions by the interlocutor of what the speaker has just said, inserted into the conversation without altering its content and intonation, are not considered new turns either.
7. All the clinical examples come from our study (Ugazio et al., 2009).
8. For the sake of this paper, the remaining text has not been highlighted, even though it does contain many other types of semantic contents. The same criteria will apply also to the examples in the next coding steps.
9. www.unibg.it/pers/?valeria.ugazio or www.eist.it/attivitascientifica
10. Valeria Ugazio, the first author.
11. For these analyses we counted only the occurrences of the polarities that we called "first expressions" (second phase — 8th step), regardless of how often they occur within the same unit. This choice is in line with the approach adopted by other text-coding methods (Angus et al., 1996; Luborsky & Crist-Christoph, 1990; Semerari et al., 2003) and prevents an artificial increase in the occurrences of the semantic polarities due to the clients' verbal productivity.

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