

CLOSING CONFLICTS

Conversational strategies across Greek and Roman tragedies

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Abstract – Pre-closing and closing sequences are a standard feature of conversations, permitting a harmonious end to an exchange. As Schegloff and Sacks (1973, p. 289) put it, a conversation “does not simply end, but is brought to a close”. The absence of closing sequences, in turn, is a strong indicator of some irregularity, potentially a conflict between the interlocutors. This paper deals with closing sequences in ancient tragedy. According to the rules of the genre, tragedies deal with conflicts that do not find a peaceful resolution, barring a few exceptions. There is thus a significant number of conversations in which no agreement is reached. Often, the close of the dialogues does not follow the regular patterns. Instead, the non-negotiated and unmediated end affirms the non-cooperative nature of the dialogue. This paper looks specifically at how the close of the conversation is managed where disagreement persists, in an approach that considers both the specificity of the individual situation and broad diachronic developments. It thus offers a contribution to the systematization of termination of dialogue, complementing in particular the wide field of studies on closing procedures with a survey of texts in which these procedures are not observed.

Keywords: closings; conflicts; Greek tragedy; Roman tragedy; conversational strategies.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with conversational closing sequences and their absence in Greek and Roman tragedies. As such, it is situated in the realm of historical pragmatics, in that it applies an approach borrowed from Conversational Analysis – Emanuel Schegloff’s and Harvey Sacks’s groundbreaking work on closings (Schegloff, Sacks 1973) – to ancient theatrical texts dating back to the time span between the fifth century BCE and the first century CE. It aims to offer a diachronic perspective on the issue of closings. More specifically, we shall concentrate on closings in a specific type of conversation, namely conflict dialogues, in which a strong disagreement between the parties is expressed and not dissolved by the time the dialogue ends. It is a particularly striking example

of how tragedy builds on and partly exploits the structures of daily conversation, creating its own forms, to serve its specific purposes of literary, emotional, or characterizing effects.

As Conversational Analysis has shown, regular, real-life conversations do not just end; they are gradually brought to a close by a series of steps (Schegloff, Sacks 1973; Button 1987; Sidnell 2010, pp. 214-221): we as interlocutors signal that we expect the conversation to come to an end by turning to a “closing-implicative topic”. This is followed by one or more rounds of pre-closing items, that is, by adjacency pairs that do not offer much content but rather test the ground to see if there is agreement on ending the dialogue. Finally, we have a farewell formula such as “good-bye”:

Johnson: ... and uh, uh we're gonna see if we can't uh tie in our plans a little better.	<i>Closing-implicative topic</i>
Baldwin: Okay // fine.	
Johnson: ALRIGHT?	<i>Pre-Closings</i>
Baldwin: RIGHT.	
Johnson: Okay boy,	
Baldwin: Okay	
Johnson: Bye//bye	<i>Closing (farewell formulas)</i>
Baldwin: G'night.	

(Example borrowed from Schegloff, Sacks 1973, p. 307)

This structure is not only widespread in modern cultures (Laver 1975, 1981; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990),¹ but it goes back all the way to antiquity, as we can see from closings in Roman comedies, which offer relatively naturalistic scenes of dialogue in comparison with other scripted dramatic dialogues (Roesch 2002; Roesch 2005; Iurescia 2019). Dialogues in Roman comedies stereotypically end with the question *numquid vis?* ‘Do you want anything?’ (or an equivalent implication of closing), followed by a mutual “farewell”,² as (1) and (2) show:

(1) PARASITUS *numquid uis?* PISTOCLERUS *abeas. celeriter facto est opus.*
 PARASITUS *uale, dentifrangibule.* PISTOCLERUS *Et tu, integumentum, uale.*
 (Plautus *Bacchides* 604-605)³
 HANGER-ON Do you want anything? PISTOCLERUS Yes, go away. You need to do so quickly. HANGER-ON Goodbye, tooth-cracker. PISTOCLERUS And goodbye to you, shield.

¹ L'organisation interne de ces séquences [sc. d'ouverture et de clôture, nda] [...] varie aussi d'une culture à l'autre, mais dans toutes les sociétés, on note l'existence de rituels particuliers pour l'ouverture et la clôture des interactions, qui tient au fait qu'il s'agit là d'opérations importantes, et délicates: il n'est pas si facile de passer du silence à la parole, et de la parole au silence. (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990, p. 221).

² On greetings and farewell in Latin see Poccetti (2010).

³ All Latin and Greek texts and their translations are borrowed from Loeb editions as listed in the references; departures from these editions are indicated in footnotes.

(2) PARMENO *habes omnem rem. pergam quo coepi hoc iter.*
 PHILOTIS *et quidem ego. nam constitui cum quodam hospite*
me esse illum conventurum. PARMENO *di vortant bene*
quod agas! PHILOTIS *vale.* PARMENO *et tu bene vale, Philotium.* (Terence
The Mother-in-law 194-197)

PARMENO There you have the whole story. I'll go on my way. PHILOTIS So will I. I've an appointment to meet a client from overseas. PARMENO Heaven bless your enterprise! PHILOTIS Goodbye. PARMENO Goodbye to you, Philotis dear.

Such pre-closing and closing sequences that negotiate the termination of the conversation permit a harmonious end to an exchange, so as to continue the relationship between the interlocutors even despite their persistent disagreement. Their absence, in turn, is a strong indicator of some irregularity, potentially a conflict between the interlocutors, as each denies the other the orderly close and the collaboration concerning floor management (Frank 1982; Wardhaugh 1985, pp. 156-160; Vuchinich 1990). It is such kinds of conversation, namely conflicts, or rather, conflicts typically resolved by violence, that lie at the heart of the genre of tragedy. There is thus a significant number of conversations in which no agreement is reached; in such cases the closing process of dialogues does not follow the regular patterns, made up of negotiation and a mutually approved close of the interaction. Rather, as we shall see, conflicts in tragic dialogues tend to show a different kind of closing.

The applicability of the concepts and methods of Conversational Analysis to literary (i.e. scripted), highly formalized texts has been studied extensively and with growing intensity in recent years (for a general overview, see, e.g., Jacobs, Jucker 1995; Jucker, Taavitsainen 2013; Locher, Jucker 2017; for a recent review on previous studies applying a pragmatic approach to Latin literary texts, see Ricottilli 2009; among the most recent monographs see, e.g., Schuren 2015; Barrios-Lech 2016; and Emde Boas 2017). This study aims to contribute to this line of research by applying a conversation analytic approach to classical (ancient) texts.

In order better to appreciate the specificities of ancient tragic dialogue, we take as a corpus all the ancient tragedies that have survived in their entirety:⁴ from the fifth century BCE six Greek plays by Aeschylus and one transmitted under his name (though probably spurious), seven by Sophocles, sixteen by Euripides and (probably from the fourth century BCE) one tragedy wrongly ascribed to him; for Roman tragedy the dramatic works of Seneca (eight tragedies from the first century CE) and two tragedies whose authors are unknown from roughly the same period.

⁴ Single lines or sections of text may have been lost in the course of transmission, but in none of these cases is there a sign that such problems of transmission concern the passages under discussion here. On problematic cases related to the uncertainty of the original text cf. Section 3.1.

A first general observation can be made with regard to the entire set of data under consideration, i.e. the full body of texts: the stylized dialogue in tragedy generally dispenses with the conventions of ordinary life with regard to closings, irrespective of the particular kind of conversation under way and of the existence of conflicts. This may have different explanations: it may partly be due to plot constraints. The specific ongoing events may, for instance, be characterized by urgency, so that the conventions of daily conversation tend to be overlooked. A further motive may be the characterization of the dramatic figures – the abrupt termination of a dialogue, for example, may depict a character as rude or a villain – or, as we would like to show, the emphasis given to the particular kind of conversation being closed. Further observations can be made when one considers the specific kind of dialogue, as outlined above: conflict dialogues without resolution, which we define as two-way dialogues which end in disagreement about the issue under debate, and their closing. We thereby exclude dialogues that continue after the affirmation of disagreement and a change of topic.

We aim to determine patterns in which conflicts fall short of elaborate closings, and why these closings exhibit brevity, or even abruptness, against a standard conversational pattern, especially in relation to techniques of dramatizing conflicts. The analysis will be based on a qualitative approach due to the unfeasibility of defining lexical (or other electronically retrievable) markers (see e.g. Jucker, Taavitsainen 2008), the size of the available sample, and the issue considered, namely closings in conflict scenes. A qualitative approach, which, on a micro-level, uses a fine-grained analysis of linguistic features following the methods elaborated by CA, and, on a macro-level, takes into account the wider context of the plot and narrative settings, allows to appreciate the specificities of that tricky section of the conversation, which closings is.

2. Closing conflict dialogues in ancient tragedies

2.1. Classification of closings in conflict dialogues

As stated above, Greek and Roman tragedies present closings in an abbreviated manner: we never get a terminal element of the “farewell”-kind, and quite frequently there is not even a pre-closing item or a closing-implicative topic. Instead, it often happens that the most blatant reaffirmation of the antagonistic positions is at the same time the end of the dialogue.

We distinguish three types of closings (see Table 1): type A, those in which both parties indicate in some way that the dialogue is coming to a close, that is, as we choose to call it, “fully closed” (or negotiated) dialogues; type B, which we call “semi-closed”, refers to cases in which only one party indicates the imminent close; finally, there is type C, or “unclosed” dialogue, in which the dialogue ends without any previous indication.

Type A	Type B	Type C
Fully closed (negotiated) dialogues: Both parties indicate the imminent close	Semi-closed dialogues: Only one party indicates the imminent close	Unclosed dialogues: Neither party indicates the imminent close

Table 1
Types of closings in conflicts.

This categorization may be further refined by reference to the way in which the dialogue ends: under categories B and C we find three ways in which the irregular termination is brought about (see Table 2). Sub-type a) refers to cases in which one character (or sometimes both) exit(s), often after a last affirmation of their position; then we find sub-type b), where one speaker changes addressees, either turning to someone present or in the form of an apostrophe (Lausberg 1990 [1949] s. v.), e. g. to a deity or absent person. Finally, there is sub-type c), where an external termination is brought about through the intervention or arrival of a person other than the interlocutors.

Type A	Type B			Type C		
	Sub-type a) Character(s)' exit	Sub-type b) Change of addressee	Sub-type c) External termination	Sub-type a) Character(s)' exit	Sub-type b) Change of addressee	Sub-type c) External termination

Table 2
Sub-types of closings.

In order to illustrate how this plays out, type A may be exemplified in (3):

(3) ΜΕΝΕΛΑΟΣ ἄπειμι· καὶ γὰρ αἰσχρόν, εἰ πύθοιτό τις
 λόγους κολάζειν ὧι βιάζεσθαι πάρα.
 ΤΕΥΚΡΟΣ ἄφερπέ νυν· κάμοι γὰρ αἴσχιστον κλύειν
 ἀνδρὸς ματαίου φλαῦρ' ἔπη μυθουμένου. (Sophocles *Ajax* 1159-1162)
 MENELAUS I shall depart; it would be disgraceful if anyone learned that I was
 chastising with words when I could use force. TEUCER Be off, then, for me too
 it is utterly disgraceful to listen to a futile fellow speaking foolish words.

In the above exchange most elements of the closing procedure are suppressed. What remains is an explicit acknowledgment by both parties that they are not willing to continue the conversation. The announcement of imminent departure – here the formulations “I shall depart.” and “Be off then.” – replaces the “goodbye”.

Type B is illustrated in (4):⁵

(4) ΚΗΡΥΞ ἔλθ', ὡς σε λόγῃ σπαρτὸς ἐν κόνει βάλῃ.
 ΘΗΣΕΥΣ τίς δ' ἐκ δράκοντος θοῦρος ἂν γένοιτ' Ἄρης;
 ΚΗΡΥΞ γνώσῃ σὺ πάσῃων· νῦν δ' ἔτ' εἶ νεανίας.
 ΘΗΣΕΥΣ οὔτοι μ' ἐπαρεῖς ὥστε θυμοῦσθαι φρένας
 τοῖς σοῖσι κόμποις· ἀλλ' ἀποστέλλου χθονὸς
 λόγους ματαίους οὔσπερ ἠνέγκω λαβών. (Euripides *Suppliant Women* 578-583)
 HERALD Come and let the Sown Men's spear hurl you into the dust!
 THESEUS What sort of martial fury can come from a dragon? HERALD You'll
 learn by painful experience. You are still young. THESEUS You will not stir
 me up to anger with your boastful talk. Leave the country, and take with you the
 foolish words you brought here! We are accomplishing nothing.

Exit herald by Eisodos B.

As we can see, the herald does not respond to King Theseus' “Leave the country”, a formulation through which the king indicates his will to bring the conversation to an end. He leaves without a word; the closing is implemented solely by the physical departure (i.e. without being verbalised), in silent execution of Theseus' order.⁶

Finally, in (5) we find an instance of type C:

⁵ This is sub-type a). For sub-type b) cf. the examples listed under (7); for sub-type c) cf. the examples under (8).

⁶ No stage directions are preserved in Latin or ancient Greek dramatic texts; adding them for the reader's comprehension is part of the interpreters' task, as in this case the translator does by means of “*Exit herald by Eisodos B*”.

(5) ΧΟΡΟΣ μη ἄθης ὁδοὺς σὺ τάσδ' ἐφ' Ἑβδόμαις πύλαις.
 ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ τεθηγμένον τοί μ' οὐκ ἀπαμβλυνεῖς λόγῳι.
 ΧΟΡΟΣ νίκην γε μέντοι καὶ κακὴν τιμᾷ θεός.
 ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ οὐκ ἄνδρ' ὀπλίτην τοῦτο χρή στέργειν ἔπος.
 ΧΟΡΟΣ ἀλλ' αὐτάδελφον αἷμα δρέψασθαι θέλεις;
 ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ θεῶν διδόντων οὐκ ἂν ἐκφύγοις κακά. (Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 714-719)
 CHORUS Don't make this journey to the Seventh Gate. ETEOCLES I am whetted, and your words will not blunt me. CHORUS Yet god respects even an inglorious victory. ETEOCLES That's not an expression that a man-at-arms should tolerate. CHORUS You want to shed the blood of your own brother? ETEOCLES When the gods send evil, one cannot escape.

As we see, there is no unequivocal hint at the end of the discussion. A very intense question implying that the chorus entreats Eteocles not to go and fight his brother is answered by a gnomic statement.⁷ Each party makes their position clear, and that is how the dialogue ends: abruptly and unexpectedly.

Such abruptness is represented in different degrees through the three kinds of sub-types identified, as in (6), (7a) and (7b), and (8a) and (8b), as the following discussion will illustrate.

(6) OCTAVIA *Gravi deorum nostra iam pridem domus
 urgetur ira, prima quam pressit Venus
 furore miserae dura genetricis meae,
 quae nupta demens nupsit incesta face,
 oblita nostri,⁸ coniugis, legum immemor.*

...
 NUTRIX *Renovare luctus parce cum fletu pios,
 Manes parentis neve sollicita tuae,
 graves furoris quae sui poenas dedit.*

CHORUS *Quae fama modo venit ad aures!* (Octavia 257-273)

OCTAVIA Our house has long been burdened with the gods' heavy anger. The first to afflict it was cruel Venus, using the madness of my poor mother, who made an insane, unholy marriage while already married, oblivious to us, her husband and heedless of the law. ... NURSE Forbear from renewing your laments, your tears of devotion – and do not disturb the spirit of your mother, who has paid a heavy penalty for her madness. CHORUS What a rumour has just now reached our ears!

(6) exemplifies sub-type a) (as did (4) and (5)), which ends with the exit of one or both interlocutors. We learn that the dialogue between Octavia and the Nurse

⁷ Proverbial (gnomic) statements “which can be heard as the ‘moral’ or ‘lesson’ of the topic” are viewed by Schegloff, Sacks (1973, p. 306) as possible topic-closing and as such closing-implicative markers. In the example above, however, there is no such concluding notion to be detected (in a logical sense); instead, the *gnomê* gives a one-sided emphasis to Eteocles's position.

⁸ *Nostris* here departs from the Loeb edition, and follows Zwierlein's text; the translation has been accordingly slightly modified by the paper's authors.

is over just because the Chorus' ode starts suddenly, without any transition. As Ferri (2003, p. 205) notes, "There is no exit to signal the end of the scene. Octavia and the Nurse disappear with no reason, however conventional, being given for their departure." It is a very abrupt termination, and it marks a strong break, a sharp divide between the dialogue and what follows.

In (7a) and (7b) we find illustrated sub-type b), which occurs when one character ends the dialogue by addressing someone other than his or her previous interlocutor. The change of addressee may be realised by means of an order to third parties, as in (7a), or by an apostrophe, either to an absent person or to a divinity, as in (7b).

(7a) AGAMEMNON *Nullum est periculum tibimet.* CASSANDRA *At magnum tibi.*

AGAMEMNON *Victor timere quid potest?* CASSANDRA *Quod non timet.*

AGAMEMNON *Hanc fida famuli turba, dum excutiat deum, retinete ne quid impotens peccet furor.* (Seneca *Agamemnon* 798-801)

AGAMEMNON There is no danger for you. CASSANDRA But great danger for you. AGAMEMNON What can a conqueror fear? CASSANDRA What he does not fear. AGAMEMNON My loyal band of servants, restrain her until she throws off the god's influence, lest her wayward madness should commit some offence.

The dialogue between Agamemnon and Cassandra is deadlocked; Agamemnon orders his servants to restrain Cassandra, as he thinks she is in divine frenzy.

(7b) NUTRIX *Defende saltem dexteram, infelix, tuam, fraudisque facinus esse, non nuptae, sciat.*

DEIANIRA *Defendar illic: inferi absolvent ream.*

a me ipsa damnor, purget has Pluton manus.

stabo ante ripas, immemor Lethe, tuas

et umbra tristis coniugem excipiam meum. (*Hercules on Oeta* 932-937)

NURSE At least vindicate your action, ill-fated woman: let him know the deed arose from treachery, not his wife. DEIANIRA I shall be vindicated there: those below will absolve me at my trial. I condemn myself; let Pluto absolve these hands. O Lethe of oblivion, I shall stand before your banks and wait as a sad shade to greet my husband.

Deianira picks up on the Nurse's words, replying to her "vindicate your action", by "I shall be vindicated there"; then slips into apostrophe, addressing a river in the underworld: "O Lethe ... I shall stand before your banks". The contact between Deianira and the nurse is not re-established; the scene ends.

The way the contact is interrupted here is through an apostrophe to an absent (or sometimes abstract) entity. This is a special form of the change of addressee, which is used particularly frequently in high poetry. Orlandini and Poccetti (2010) subsume the phenomena of address to an absent entity and to a present third party under the concept of 'non-interpellation'. This device may

serve to express different, even opposite intentions on the part of the speaker, and the context is crucial to identify the one in use in the ongoing interaction.⁹ As a special realization of a more general illocutionary intention, even a rhetorical device as apostrophe may then be seen as rooted in the conventions of daily conversation, and contribute to shaping scripted, literary dialogues under the conversational structure shared by all kind of dialogues. (See Section 3 for more details on this.)

In (8a) and (8b) we find instances of sub-type (c), where the dialogue is ended through an event external to the dialogue proper, viz. the arrival of a person other than the speaker, as in (8a), or the interruption of the dialogue by a third person already present, as in (8b):

(8a) NUTRIX *Compesce verba, parce iam, demens, minis animosque minue; tempori aptari decet.*
 MEDEA *Fortuna opes auferre, non animum potest. Sed cuius ictu regius cardo strepit? ipse est Pelasgo tumidus imperio Creon.* (Seneca *Medea* 174-178)

NURSE Control your words, give up your threats now, crazy woman, subdue your proud spirit; it is right to adapt to circumstances. MEDEA Fortune can take away my wealth, but not my spirit. But who pounds the palace doors, creaking on their hinges? It is himself, swollen with Pelasgian power: Creon.

In this example the speakers are arguing as one of them hears a noise (the pounding of the doors). The distraction seems merely to interrupt the dialogue, but the subsequent approach of Creon, who then starts to speak, ends the conversation for good.

(8b) ΙΟΚΑΣΤΗ καὶ μὴν μέγας <γ> ὀφθαλμὸς οἱ πατρὸς τάφοι.
 ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ μέγας, ξυνήμ'· ἀλλὰ τῆς ζώσης φόβος.
 ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ ποίας δὲ καὶ γυναικὸς ἐκφοβεῖσθ' ὕπερ; (Sophocles *OT* 987-989)
 IOCASTE Well, your father's funeral is a great source of light. OEDIPUS Yes, I understand; but I am afraid while she still lives. MESSENGER But who is the woman who makes you afraid?

Here the messenger, already present on stage, interrupts the dialogue between Oedipus and Iocaste, and takes over and speaks with Oedipus for a while (989-1050).

The preceding examples have illustrated the scope of ways in which conflict dialogues can end. For a more detailed view, we shall look at the evidence from a quantitative angle to see whether not only the types, but also the distribution bear similarity to real life.

⁹ “Comme la plupart des actes illocutoires de “macro-pragmatique”, la non-interpellation est une stratégie exploitée dans deux sens: pour s’opposer en rejetant l’autre ou pour mitiger notre agressivité envers lui. Seul le contexte peut enlever l’ambiguïté concernant l’attitude de celui qui choisit la non-interpellation comme de celui qui la rejette.” (Orlandini, Poccetti 2010, § 15).

2.2. Distribution of closing types in conflicts across Greek and Roman tragedies

The tables 3, 4, 5, 6 (see annexes) show the distribution of types and sub-types throughout the corpus. Where the chronology of plays can be ascertained (i.e. in the cases of Aeschylus and Euripides) the arrangement follows this principle; for Sophocles and Seneca we present the plays in the traditional order of transmission. The distribution of (sub-)types permits the following observations and conclusions, which indicate the divergence of the tragic corpus from the patterns of regular everyday conversation, for reasons that may range from personal preference to a special dramatic effect and even to circumstances of performance (see Section 3):

Firstly, the pattern closest to the standard of ordinary conversation – the fully closed type (Type A) – is far less frequent (15 unambiguous¹⁰ instances out of 69 or 21.7%) than the semi-closed (Type B: 23 instances or 33.3%) and unclosed (Type C: 31 instances or 44.9%) types, which are apparently the regular ways to end a scene if the conflict persists. The sub-types are more evenly distributed: sub-type a) has 19 instances (12 with type B, 7 with type C), b) 20 (8 with B, 12 with C) and c) 15 (3 with B, 12 with C).

Secondly, when we go into details, a difference between Greek and Roman tragedy emerges. While they both show a general preponderance to end conflict dialogues without both parties indicating the closing, the patterns in the specific techniques of ending such dialogues differ.

In Greek tragedy on the whole there is great variety. There are no clear trends in Aeschylus' or Sophocles' handling of closings. To some degree Euripides may provide a more interesting set of data: his tragedies seem to show a shift from a proportionally higher rate of fully closed (Type A) and semi-closed dialogues ending with one character's exit (Type B, sub-type a) in his earlier plays to a more even distribution without clear preferences in his later tragedies (see table 3 for the details). The figures may, however, be too small and the patterns too heterogeneous to allow the shift to be considered significant.

In Roman tragedy, by contrast, we find a striking distribution of the most abrupt sub-type a), the termination by an exit, with a conspicuous divergence from one author to another: Seneca makes use of this sub-type in only 3 out of 17 relevant conflict scenes; in all three instances he uses the same technique to mitigate the abrupt exit: the simultaneous entrance by a soliloquizing new character (Sen. *Phoen.* 363, *Med.* 431, *Ag.* 226). For the anonymous author of *Octavia*, who presumably wrote the tragedy not very long after Seneca's death

¹⁰ In this count the two passages Aeschylus *Eumenides* 228–231/234 and Euripides *Hercules* 236–251/274 have been omitted, as the type cannot be determined. Other cases where the tables indicate a second possibility in brackets, only the main option has been taken into account.

(Ferri 2003, pp. 17 and 27; Boyle 2008, pp. xiv-xv), we find the opposite predilection, as this sub-type is the only form of closing he employs. He thus clearly favors such an abrupt break, as he makes the dialogues in all three conflicts end with the unexpected exit of both speakers (and without mitigation as in Seneca's genuine plays). What is more, he increases the strong effect of such a closing by letting it coincide with the end of the act and the emptying of the stage, and in one instance even with a significant shift of time ahead of the next scene. This means that the abruptness of the closing contributes to a neat pause, together with the change of characters on stage. We already saw in (6) the dialogue between Octavia and the Nurse, and how it was followed by the choral song. Passage (9a) follows the same pattern: Seneca tries to persuade Nero to offer mercy to his enemies and to his wife Octavia. He does not succeed, however, as Nero does not change his mind, but rather decides to set the date for his wedding with Poppaea. After that, we suddenly find a monologue by (the ghost of) Agrippina (who had hitherto not been present on stage): again, we have no other indications that Seneca's and Nero's dialogue had been concluded and that they left the stage. Furthermore, this monologue takes place on the following day: a strong shift in time increases the break produced by the unexpected closing and the change of characters on stage.

(9a) SENECA *Excelsa metuit. NERO Non minus carpit tamen.*
 SENECA *Facile opprimetur. merita te divi patris*
aetasque frangat coniugis, probitas pudor.
 NERO *Desiste tandem, iam gravis nimium mihi,*
instare! liceat facere quod Seneca improbat.
et ipse populi vota iam pridem moror
 *****¹¹

cum portet utero pignus et partem mei.

quin destinamus proximum thalamis diem.

AGRIPPINA *Tellure rupta Tartaro gressum extuli ... (Octavia 585-593)*

SENECA It fears the great. NERO But carps nonetheless. SENECA It will easily be crushed. You should be swayed by your obligations to your deified father, by your wife's youth, her probity and modesty. NERO Enough, stop pressing the point! You are trying my patience now. Let me act in a way that Seneca disapproves. Indeed I have been delaying the people's wishes for some time ... since she is carrying in her womb a token and a portion of myself. Come, let us set tomorrow as the day for the wedding.

(exeunt)

(time: toward dawn of the next day)

GHOST OF AGRIPPINA Bursting through the earth I have made my way from Tartarus ...

The third example is at the end of the dialogue between Nero and the Prefect (9b). Here we find, again, a character pleading in vain for mercy, whereas Nero

¹¹ Lacuna in the text.

tells him to execute the orders. Then follows the choral ode: as a matter of fact, we have no explicit closing of the dialogue, instead the features that we have already seen – abrupt closing, change of characters on stage – mark a strong break between the dialogue and what is next to come. To make it even stronger, we may, at this point, also have a change of scenery, as some scholars think that the Chorus' ode is set on the dock in Campania, from where Octavia was historically deported. To be sure, critics do not agree on this question, as this would be the only hint throughout the play at the actual historical conditions of Octavia's deportation (Ferri 2003, p. 383; cf. Boyle 2008, p. 271).

(9b) PRAEFECTVS *Haud quemquam, reor,
mulier*¹² NERO *Dedit natura cui pronum malo
animum, ad nocendum pectus instruxit dolis.*
PRAEFECTVS *Sed uim negavit.* NERO *Vt ne inexpugnabilis
esset, sed aegras frangeret uires timor
uel poena; quae iam sera damnatam premet
diu nocentem. tolle consilium ac preces
et imperata perage: deuectam rate
procul in remotum litus interimi iube,
tandem ut residat pectoris nostri tumor.*
CHORUS *O funestus multis populi
dirusque fauor ... (Octavia 867-878)*

PREFECT I do not think anyone could (incite) a woman – NERO To whom Nature has given a spirit prone to evil, and furnished her heart with trickery for use in wrongdoing. PREFECT But denied her strength. NERO Yes, so she should not be invincible, since her feeble strength would be broken by fear or punishment. And punishment, now overdue, shall crush this condemned criminal of long standing. No more advice or appeals! Carry out your orders. Have her transported by ship to some distant remote shore, and killed, so that the ferment of anger in my heart can finally subside. CHORUS How dire and deadly the people's backing proves to many!

In any case, what we do have in all three cases is a neat break, realized through different means.

3. Interpretation

The evidence presented above gives rise to different conclusions.

First of all, from our typology of dialogue ends it can be seen that the literary dialogues of tragedy in general, and those in the non-negotiated conflict dialogues, which we considered in this paper, in particular, imitate practices of everyday conversations: they offer a range of different techniques to end such

¹² This distribution of the characters' turns departs from the Loeb edition, and follows Zwierlein's text; the Loeb edition has been accordingly slightly modified by the paper's authors, without effect on the categorization of the type of closing.

dialogues. The use of apostrophe shows that even the strict structure of face-to-face addresses can be dissolved, as this rhetorical device finds (one of) its *raison(s) d'être* in the macropragmatics of the conversational structure. The playwrights do, however, dispense with the extended form discovered by Schegloff and Sacks in 1973, which gradually leads to a mutual agreement on closing. Tragedy thus represents closings in a very condensed, often even abrupt, manner. In some way this is in line with the entire practice of writing in ancient drama, which is quite succinct, dispensing with conversational slack. But the case of breaking off conflict dialogues without a sense of closure, at the climax of escalation, goes beyond that general characteristic. Even in the cases of fully closed dialogues, that is, type A, the negotiation is always very brief. We would argue that one major factor for this preference lies exactly in the dramatic effect typical for the literary genre: as tragedy deals mostly with unresolved – and often unresolvable – conflicts, representing even the closings as not negotiated is another way to deal with the problematic interpersonal constellation, which amounts to depicting the topic ‘conflict’ both on the plot level and on the level of conversational structure.

Furthermore, while several individual types are extant in the corpus, their distribution differs from what one might expect, viz. the predominance of type A, the one closest to everyday conversations, in favor of types B and C. We would like to suggest that it is tragedy as a literary genre which gives rise to this preference. We base this interpretation on the double distinctness we have seen in the genre: not only does tragedy show relative overall coherence in choosing abbreviated forms of closings of conflict scenes without resolution, but it thereby also departs from other genres in the radical reduction of the closing procedure in any type of conversation. For, lighter genres differ in both aspects. As regards dialogue closings in ancient comedy, we rely on Roesch's (2002) research on dialogues' ends in Plautus' comedies. She lists only examples of negotiated closings and demonstrates how pre-closing sequences may be realized, thus evidencing the existence in Rome of closing patterns not found in tragedies from the same culture.

Moreover, from a recent study on quarrels in Roman comedy and the Roman novel, we know that this kind of interaction often ends in fully negotiated closings, even though this type of conversation shows a tendency to emphasize the underlying conflict (Iurescia 2019, pp. 179-181). While a thorough investigation on closing sequences is still outstanding, this data may hint at a particular correlation between the closing procedure, on the one hand, and comic and laughter, on the other: in the lower genres of Comedy and Novel, in which the latter are prevalent, we find a propensity towards negotiated closings – or, in turn, the high genre of tragedy with its focus on lasting and devastating conflicts tends to omit mitigating conversational techniques.

Thus there appears to be a specifically tragic way of handling closings, and this – we argue – has to do with the distinct nature of tragedy: the main reason why tragedy regularly shortens the routine closing sequence, avoiding the negotiation of the end of the dialogue, may lie in the ‘dramatic’ effect, intended to intensify the depiction of conflict: a conflict ending without any agreement, neither on issues being discussed, nor on the termination of conversation, is a very strong realization of a contrast, and it surely had a powerful impact on the audience.

Finally, Roman tragedy apparently exhibits far stronger individual patterns in types of closing, in particular with regard to sub-type a). Seneca apparently avoids the brusque end of a dialogue that is brought about if one or both interlocutors leave without a comment or indication of their departure. When he employs this type, he softens it by a smooth transition to the next scene. By contrast, the poet of the *Octavia* enhances the effect by further dramatic means such as a change of scenery. We would like to suggest that the abrupt closing with both speakers’ exit (Type C, sub-type a) hints at the saliency of non-verbal elements in performance on stage, aimed, in this case, to achieve the effect of a strong dramatic caesura.

3.1. *Special cases: mise-en-scène*

The categorization we have discussed so far describes all cases of dialogue closing in the corpus. However, sometimes the analysis is complicated by the absence in ancient drama of stage directions. In our review of the corpus we found a small number of cases in which there is room for uncertainty about exactly which type or sub-type is best suited to appreciate the nuances of the ongoing interaction.¹³ More specifically, we noted that the interaction may be staged in different ways equally reconcilable with the transmitted text. The ambiguity results in different descriptions along the proposed categories. In what follows we discuss one of these cases in order to elucidate the phenomenon.

A paramount example is in (10), where the realization is open to different options:

(10) ΧΟΡΟΣ ἄρ' οὐκ ἀφορμὰς τοῖς λόγοισιν ἀγαθοὶ
 θνητῶν ἔχουσι, κἂν βραδύς τις ἢ λέγειν;
 ΛΥΚΟΣ σὺ μὲν λέγ' ἡμᾶς οἷς πεπύργωσαι λόγοις.
 ἐγὼ δὲ δρᾶσω σ' ἀντὶ τῶν λόγων κακῶς.
 ἄγ', οἱ μὲν Ἑλικῶν', οἱ δὲ Παρνασοῦπτυχᾶς
 τέμνειν ἄνωχθ' ἐλθόντες ὑλουργοὺς δρυὸς
 κορμούς· ἐπειδὰν δ' ἐσκομισθῶσιν πόλει,
 βωμὸν πέριξ νήσαντες ἀμφήρη ξύλα

¹³ In the tables the different possibilities of staging are indicated by means of round parentheses.

ἐπίμπρατ' αὐτῶν κάκφυροῦτε σώματα
 πάντων, ἴν' εἰδῶσ' οὐνεκ' οὐχ ὁ καθανῶν
 κρατεῖ χθονὸς τῆσδ' ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τὰ νῦν τάδε.
 ὑμεῖς δέ, πρέσβεις, ταῖς ἐμαῖς ἐναντίοι
 γνῶμαισιν ὄντες, οὐ μόνον στενάξετε
 τοὺς Ἡρακλείους παῖδας ἀλλὰ καὶ δόμου
 τύχας, ὅταν πάσχη τι, μεμνήσεσθε δὲ
 δοῦλοι γεγῶτες τῆς ἐμῆς τυραννίδος. (Euripides *Heracles* 236-251)

CHORUS LEADER Do not brave men, even when they lack a ready tongue, find good things to say? LYCUS Go on reviling me with the words you are so proud of! I shall pay you back for words with deeds! Come, some of you go to Helicon, others to the glens of Parnassus, and order the woodsmen to cut logs of oak! When these have been brought into the city, pile the wood close about the altar and set alight and burn the bodies of them all! Then they will know that it is not the dead man but I who now rule this land! And you, old men, who oppose my decisions, you will weep not only for the sons of Heracles but for the misfortunes of your own houses when they suffer disaster: you will remember that you are slaves subject to my rule!

The last words of Lycus are addressed to the Chorus, and he closes the dialogue by threatening them ‘you will remember that you are slaves subject to my rule’.¹⁴ Then the Chorus leader replies (Eur. *Herc.* 252-274) by alternating apostrophe to the citizen of Thebes – where the story is set – address to Lycus and apostrophe to his (the chorus leader’s) own right hand. As in what follows another character speaks with the Chorus (275-315), we can legitimately conclude that Lycus has left by 275. The issue is: when exactly does he leave earshot, and does he hear what the Chorus replies?¹⁵ If he does, it is the Chorus who closes the interaction with Lycus, being the last to address the other. Both interlocutors have made clear that they intend to end their interaction,¹⁶ that is, they produce a closing of Type A.

¹⁴ “You will remember” is the English translation for μεμνήσεσθε δὲ; if this is to be conceived of as an indication of closings, then this passage falls under Ba in the proposed categorization; if not, it would fall under Ca.

¹⁵ “Offspring of earth that Ares once sowed when he had despoiled the fierce jaw of the dragon, will you not take up the staves that prop your right hands and bloody this man’s godless head? He is no true Theban, and rules most wrongfully over the citizens since he is an immigrant. But you will never get away with lording it over me, nor take from me what I have worked so hard to get. Go back to where you came from and be high-handed there! While I live you will never kill the children of Heracles: not so deep as that is he buried in the ground, leaving his children behind! O right arm of mine, how you long to take up the spear! Yet because of your weakness your longing has come to naught. Otherwise I would have put a stop to your calling me “slave” and would have done a glorious service to Thebes, in which you are now reveling. Thebes is not in its right mind, it suffers from civil strife and bad counsel. Otherwise it would never have taken you for a master. You have destroyed this country and you now rule it, but Heracles, who did it great service, does not get his due reward. Am I a meddler, then, if I do good to my friends when they are dead, the time when friends are most needed?” (Eur. *Herc.* 252-274)

¹⁶ We take Lycus’s words “You will weep ...” as closing-implicative, as it gives a prospect to the events after their conversation has ended without a resolution of their disagreement.

If, on the other hand, Lycus leaves right after his own words, the Chorus replies *in absentia*: it is only one speaker, namely Lycus, who decides to end the dialogue, which means resorting to Type B, sub-type a. The difference results then in different possible realisations on stage.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, a pragmatic analysis of closings in conflict dialogues has brought about a systematic description of their different kinds, and of their distribution across the corpus of texts. At the same time it has also uncovered a particular technique that exploits the expectations from (both ancient and modern) everyday conversations. That technique, viz. the departure from the familiar pattern, serves to highlight the abruptness of the scripted conversations and thus intensifies the emotional impact of the staged conflicts.

The results have thus led to possible explanations for their patterns, which we hope can advance our understanding of both linguistic and literary aspects of these texts. On the other hand, they have shown that the methodology in the use of literary texts needs to be strongly aware of the specific conventions of literary genres and the limitations in inferring historical practices of conversations from their imitations in literature.

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Annexes

Tragedies	Closing without Agreement						
	Type A	Type B			Type C		
		Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)	Sub-type c)	Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)	Sub-type c)
Aeschylus							
Sept. 718-719					✓		
Suppl. 928-953	✓						
Ag. 1652-1653							✓
Cho. 928-930		✓					
Eum. 228-231/4 ¹⁷	(228-234) ✓	(228-231) ✓					
Eum. 652-673				✓			
Eum. 729-733				✓			
PV 392-396	✓						
PV 1001-1035		✓					
Sophocles							
Ai. 594-595 ¹⁸			✓				
Ai. 1159-1162	✓						
El. 1049-1057					✓		
OT 444-446	✓						
OT 629-635							✓
OT 987-989							✓
OT 1069-1070			✓				
Ant. 523-525 ¹⁹				✓			(✓)
Ant. 558-561							✓
Ant. 576-578	✓						
Ant. 758-765		✓					
Ant. 1063-1090						✓	
Phil. 1001-1003						✓	
OC 821-823						✓	
OC 1348-1400			✓				
Euripides							
Alc. 63-71		✓					
Alc. 729-740	✓						
Med. 1402-1405						✓	
Hcl. 67-72			✓				
Hcl. 274-287	✓						
Hipp. 105-108	✓						
Hipp. 520-524		✓					
Hipp. 615-668		✓					
Hipp. 1086-1101	✓						
Andr. 261-272	✓						
Andr. 693-746		✓					
Hec. 400-401							✓
Suppl. 580-590		✓					
Herc. 236-251/274 ²⁰	(236-274) (✓)	(236-251) ✓					
Ion. 1311-1319							✓
Ion. 1539-1548		✓					
Hel. 1639-1641							✓

¹⁷ Two different options of staging are brought about by μέτεμι “I shall pursue” (Aesch. *Eum.* 231); if it indicates closings, then the passage falls under Ba; if not, the closings is to be put at 234, resulting in negotiated closings, Type A in the categorization proposed.

¹⁸ This is a case in which one speaker seems to reject the closing implication by the other: Ajax tells his concubine Tecmessa that she has already been talking too much (closing-implicative) and then orders his attendants to shut the door (and thus cut off the conversation). But Tecmessa resists (595 “I beg you to relent!”). Ajax replies one more time, but apparently the door is then shut; the conversation is over.

¹⁹ If Soph. *Ant.* 524-525 “Then go below and love those friends, if you must love them! But while I live a woman shall not rule!” indicates closings, then the passage exemplifies Bc; if not, then Cc.

²⁰ See Section 3.1 above.

Phoen. 618-620 ²¹	✓					(✓)
Phoen. 1681-1682	✓					
Or. 491-525					✓	
Or. 1617-1624					✓	
Ba. 509-518	✓					
Ba. 1350-1351		✓				
Rhesus						
Rh. 83-86						✓
Rh. 510-526		✓				
Rh. 874-881					✓	
Seneca						
Her. F. 319-331						✓
Her. F. 438-441						✓
Her. F. 509-515	✓					
Her. F. 1015-1021			✓			
Tro. 349-352			✓			
Phoen. 347-362 ²²		✓			(✓)	
Med. 174-178						✓
Med. 425-430 ²³					✓	(✓)
Med. 1018-1027	✓					
Ph. 574-588						✓
Ph. 710-718			✓			
Oed. 705-708			✓			
Oed. 1032-1039					✓	
Ag. 203-225 ²⁴					✓	(✓)
Ag. 799-801					✓	
Ag. 976-980					✓	
Ag. 996-1000					✓	
Hercules Oetaeus						
Her. O. 884b-935					✓	
Octavia						
Oct. 257-273					✓	
Oct. 588-592					✓	
Oct. 870-876					✓	

Table 3
Closings in conflicts.

²¹ This passage sees several orders to one character to leave and announcements by the same character that he will (593, 613–615), but the conversation continues until it is interrupted by an address to a third party (618–620). Then the original conversation is resumed, but then the conflict is partly resolved as the two parties agree to fight it out by force of arms.

²² If the speaker's words at lines 359-362 "No one shall root me out of these woods. I shall lurk in the cave of a hollowed cliff, or shelter in hiding behind dense brush. From here I shall catch at the words of straying rumors, and hear as best I can of the brothers' savage warfare." indicate closings, the passage falls under Ba; if not, under Ca.

²³ If the arrival of a third party closes the ongoing interaction, this passage exemplifies Cc; if not, and one of the speakers exits before the third party's entry, then it is of the Ca type. Note that the same options in the same conversational situation occur at Sen. *Ag.* 203-225.

²⁴ As in Sen. *Med.* 425-430 (see note 23).

Tragedies	Closing without Agreement						
	Type A	Type B			Type C		
		Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)	Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)	Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)
Aeschylus							
Suppl. 928-953	✓						
Eum. 228-234	✓						
PV 392-396	✓						
Sophocles							
Ai. 1159-1162	✓						
OT 444-446	✓						
Ant. 576-578	✓						
Euripides							
Alc. 729-740	✓						
Held. 274-287	✓						
Hipp. 105-108	✓						
Hipp. 1086-1101	✓						
Andr. 261-272	✓						
Herc. 236-274	(✓)						
Phoen. 618-620	✓						
Phoen. 1681-1682	✓						
Ba. 509-518	✓						
Seneca							
Her. F. 509-515	✓						
Med. 1018-1027	✓						

Table 4
Type A across Greek and Roman Tragedies.

Tragedies	Closing without Agreement						
	Type A	Type B			Type C		
		Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)	Sub-type c)	Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)	Sub-type c)
Aeschylus							
Cho. 928-930		✓					
Eum. 228-231		✓					
Eum. 652-673				✓			
Eum. 729-733				✓			
PV 1001-1035		✓					
Sophocles							
Ai. 594-595			✓				
OT 1069-1070			✓				
Ant. 523-525				✓			
Ant. 758-765		✓					
OC 1348-1400			✓				
Euripides							
Alc. 63-71		✓					
Held. 67-72			✓				
Hipp. 520-524		✓					
Hipp. 615-668		✓					
Andr. 693-746		✓					
Suppl. 580-590		✓					
Herc. 236-251		✓					
Ion. 1539-1548		✓					
Ba. 1350-1351		✓					
Rhesus							
Rh. 510-526		✓					
Seneca							
Her. F. 1015-1021			✓				
Tro. 349-352			✓				
Phoen. 347-362		✓					
Ph. 710-718			✓				
Oed. 705-708			✓				

Table 5
Type B across Greek and Roman Tragedies.

Tragedies	Closing without Agreement						
	Type A	Type B			Type C		
		Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)	Sub-type c)	Sub-type a)	Sub-type b)	Sub-type c)
Aeschylus							
Sept. 718-719					✓		
Ag. 1652-1653							✓
Sophocles							
El. 1049-1057					✓		
OT 629-635							✓
OT 987-989							✓
Ant. 523-525							(✓)
Ant. 558-561							✓
Ant. 1063-1090						✓	
Phil. 1001-1003						✓	
OC 821-823						✓	
Euripides							
Med. 1402-1405						✓	
Hec. 400-401							✓
Herc. 236-251					(✓)		
Ion. 1311-1319							✓
Hel. 1639-1641							✓
Phoen. 618-620							(✓)
Or. 491-525						✓	
Or. 1617-1624						✓	
Rhesus							
Rh. 83-86							✓
Rh. 874-881						✓	
Seneca							
Her. F. 319-331							✓
Her. F. 438-441							✓
Phoen. 347-362					(✓)		
Med. 174-178							✓
Med. 425-430					✓		(✓)
Ph. 574-588							✓
Oed. 1032-1039						✓	
Ag. 203-225					✓		(✓)
Ag. 799-801						✓	
Ag. 976-980						✓	
Ag. 996-1000						✓	
Hercules Oetaeus							
Her. O. 884b-935						✓	
Octavia							
Oct. 257-273					✓		
Oct. 588-592					✓		
Oct. 870-876					✓		

Table 6
Type C across Greek and Roman Tragedies.