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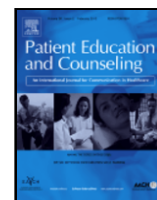
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Proposing surgery at the prosthetic clinic: managing patient resistance

Piera Margutti^{a,*}, Renata Galatolo^b, Monica Simone^b, Paul Drew^c

^a Department of Studies on Language and Culture, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Modena, Italy

^b Department of the Arts, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy

^c Department of Language & Linguistic Science, University of York, York, UK

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Investigating doctors' communicative practices for recommending surgery to amputees when the proposal counters patients' expectation.

Method: Conversation Analysis of 77 videorecorded medical consultations at an Italian prosthesis clinic.

Results: Compared to the direct format doctors used to prescribe prosthesis, when suggesting surgery doctors adopted a more circuitous, indirect approach. They used a range of communication strategies, orientating to patients' likely resistance – indeed, patients were frequently observed to reject surgical options.

Conclusions: Considering patients' expectations is part of a patient centred approach, hence the cautious ways in which doctors introduce the option of surgery. Moreover, doctors do not pursue recommending surgery when patients display their reluctance or resistance.

Practice implications: Doctors in prosthetics clinics might adopt a more balanced communicative strategy that takes into account patients' perspectives, concerns and expectations, whilst but also providing patients with the necessary information to collaborate meaningfully to decision making.

1. Introduction

Amputees are routinely prescribed the application of an artificial limb and a rehabilitation process [1,2]. However, surgery may also be recommended as an elective treatment in addition or as alternative to prosthesis. Therefore, a decision-making process may be in play. This study draws on a corpus of 'first visits' at a clinic linked to a public social insurance institution that provides prosthesis and rehabilitation for patients who suffered amputations, mostly as a consequence of work-related accidents. These patients are referred to the clinic to be evaluated by a multidisciplinary panel of specialists regarding the application of a prosthesis. In our corpus, a prosthesis is prescribed in most of the cases, while surgery is in only 14 cases. This article investigates this latter group, excluding those cases (3) in which the surgical alternative is raised by patients.

According to the principles of patient-centred communication, patients' involvement in decision-making is vital for providing solutions tailored to the patients' psychosocial and physical needs [3–5]. Nevertheless, little is known about how treatment decisions are actually made in prosthetics clinics, and about how doctors introduce and explore post-amputation solutions in order to foster shared decision-

making [6]. Few studies have investigated prosthesis users' perspectives, values and preferences, or their satisfaction with their communication with their prosthetists [7]; and [8]. Results show that the quality of communication, including patients' understanding of the key factors influencing the decision-making process, stand out as fundamental. Prior studies reporting patients' perceptions of their communication with prosthetists and other physicians are mainly based on post hoc accounts and reports. Therefore, there is a gap in knowledge of how decision-making is accomplished in prosthetic clinical practice. The present study uses conversation analysis to investigate this process. Previous literature adopting a conversation-analytic perspective on decision-making in healthcare [9–12] highlights the importance of doctors' communication practices in enhancing shared decision-making with patients [4,13].

This article focuses on the way in which surgical options are presented to patients, and on their reception. Results show that, in this setting, doctors use direct, straightforward practices to prescribe prosthesis. By contrast, they use circuitous and less direct communicative strategies when they are introducing possible surgery, thereby displaying their orientation to the patients' likely resistance. These strategies include enquiring whether patients have experienced discomfort in the

* Correspondence to: Department of Studies on Language and Culture, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Largo Sant'Eufemia, 19, 41121 Modena, Italy.

E-mail addresses: piera.margutti@unimore.it (P. Margutti), renata.galatolo@unibo.it (R. Galatolo), monica.simone2@unibo.it (M. Simone), paul.drew@york.ac.uk (P. Drew).

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amputated limb, sometimes avoiding explicit reference to surgery, and enquiring whether patients 'have heard about surgery' in order to explore their stance towards it. Doctors' cautiousness displays their anticipation that patients may be unwilling to undertake surgery. Indeed, in most cases, patients display resistance to the proposal and reject it. The delicacy involved in presenting the proposal is also evidenced by the doctors' orientation to promptly aligning with any early signs of patients' resistance and by their deferral of or withdrawal from the decision about surgery.

2. Methods

2.1. Data

This study draws on a corpus of video recorded medical visits by 77 patients (38 with upper limb amputation; 39 with lower limb amputation) and 24 healthcare professionals, including surgeons, physiatrists,¹ prosthesis engineers and technicians, and nurses. The recordings using multiple cameras were collected between 2010–2012 at a prosthetics clinic in northern Italy; they totalled approximately 24 h. Ethical approval was obtained by the Ethics Committee of the University of (omitted) (approval n. 135371). All participants provided written informed consent. The visits were scheduled 'first visits' as part of the post-amputation rehabilitation pathway normally leading to the application of a prosthesis. During these visits, physicians assess the status of the patients' residual limb(s) through physical examination, in order to determine whether patients can receive a prosthesis, if so of what type (e.g., functional or aesthetic), or whether instead surgery was advisable.

2.2. Analytic procedure

Conversation analysis (CA) provides the framework for data transcription and analysis [14,15] which developed as depicted in Table 1 (see Appendix 1 for transcript conventions). Due to its detailed and strictly empirical approach to explaining social actions, CA is recognized to be a suitable tool to identify the communication practices used by professionals and patients [4]. The analysis focuses on details of the design and sequential positioning of participants' (doctors and patients) talk and visible conduct that are observably consequential for producing, delivering, and responding to treatment recommendation.

Treatment recommendation sequences were distinguished according to the type of treatment (prosthesis vs surgery). According to CA's inductive, data-driven approach [16], such distinction reflects the way the participants themselves ostensibly treated recommending either of the two treatments as configuring a distinct interactional business with specific practical implications. The validity of the proposed analysis thus lies primarily in the adherence to the participants' emic perspective as manifested in their sequential actions.

Patterns underlying each type of treatment recommendation were identified particularly with regard to the sequential unfolding and design (syntactic formatting, lexical choices) of doctors' actions, and to the positioning and type of patient's responses (acceptance/rejection and forms of resistance). Relevant details pertaining to the participants' embodied conduct were also considered. To enhance the validity of the analysis, instances of the identified patterns were compared to check their association with observable interactional goals [17].

The transcripts accompanying the analysis in the following section enable the reader to independently check the validity and transparency of the claims being advanced.

3. Results

In our corpus, prosthesis prescription was adopted in 84 % of all visits, while surgery was offered in the remaining 16 %. As shown in the following analysis, the interactions developed in different ways, depending on the type of treatment that was prescribed. In what follows we illustrate one case of prosthesis prescription and then the less direct practices employed to suggest surgery.

Before that, a note about our use of 'prescription' is in order. 'Prescription' may be commonly understood to be a written instruction by the doctor about medication the patient should take. It might therefore be supposed therefore that 'treatment recommendation' [18] would be more appropriate. However, two factors inform our use here of 'prescription'. First, there is nothing equivalent in Italian to 'treatment recommendation'; there is a single word (*prescrivere*) covering instructing patients about treatment, including medication, and patients' records in the prosthetics clinic specifies 'prescription'. Second, when surgery might be an option, doctors do not straightforwardly 'recommend' that treatment.

3.1. The prosthesis prescription - a direct format

In Extract 1 the clinician (technician) prescribed prosthesis in a direct, straightforward format. The extract exemplifies common aspects of all the occurrences of this prescription type.

Ex.1 [Prost:300708/P1] [T: Technician; P: Patient] (P lost part of her second finger during a work accident.

This follows the physical examination).

01 T: *adesso va in reparto, dove facciamo.*

now you'll go to the ward where we make.

02 *le pro:tesi? <le ve::de così capisce.*

prostheses you'll see them so you understand.

03 *bene di cosa si tratta, poi partiamo con questo.*

well what this is about then we'll start with this.

04 *coprimonco:ne, [e dopo un po' di tempo.*

stump cover, and after a little while.

05 P: [*s* ì .

yes.

06 T: *si passa alla protesì.*

we'll move on to the prosthesis.

07 P: *va bene.*

alright.

While the doctor who performed the examination is filling in the medical record, the technician (T) gave the patient (P) instructions and information concerning a visit to the lab where prostheses are produced. First, T instructs P on what to do next (ll.1–2: "*now you'll go to the ward*", "*you'll see them*"); then he announces what they (the doctors) will do (ll.3–4: "*then we'll start with this stump cover*", "*we'll move on to the prosthesis*").

By moving straight to the illustration of the next steps leading to the prosthesis application, clinicians did not thematise the prescription phase but actually skipped it. In this way, the decision was presented as the doctor's unilateral decision [19,20], taken for granted and independent from any negotiation with the patient. Furthermore, with this concise, straightforward practice, doctors displayed their orientation to the prosthesis prescription as the default solution from both their own and the patient's perspectives [25].

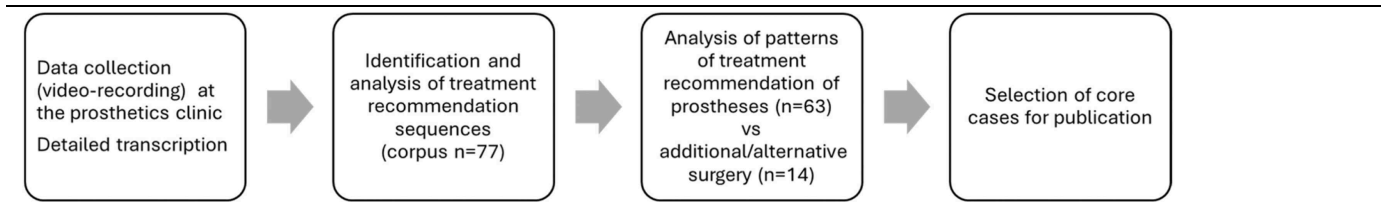
3.2. The option of surgery

In contrast to the direct and unilateral ways in which surgeons directly prescribed prosthesis, as illustrated in Ex.1 ("*now you'll go to the ward where we make prostheses*", lines 1–2), they were less direct, more cautious and gradual in suggesting surgery. **In what follows, we highlight some of the ways in which surgeons approached the option of**

¹ The physiatrist is a specialist in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases and injuries that may affect the locomotor system and/or peripheral nerves.

Table 1

Diagram of the data collection and analytical flow.



surgery more cautiously, through i) a gradual or stepwise approach, ii) enquiries that can lead to something like ‘online commentaries’ of what the surgeon can see, and iii) elusive or implicit references to surgery.

i) Gradual or stepwise approach to suggesting surgery.

When surgeons were inclined to suggest surgery, either as a preliminary to or instead of prosthesis, they prepared the ground, leading up to the possibility of surgery by asking patients about their experience of the relevant, compromised limb. For instance, in this next example, the surgeon did not immediately refer to ‘surgery’ upfront but rather led indirectly into the possibility of surgery.

Ex.2 [Sur:120912/P22] [S: Surgeon; P: Patient] (P had a work accident three months earlier in which the third and fourth fingers of his left hand were damaged).

01 S: *faccia il pugno? ((makes a fist himself)).
make a fist.*

02 P: *((makes a fist)).*

03 S: *il fatto che non si piega completamente, le dà un po’.*

the fact that it doesn’t bend completely does that.

((S manipulates and examines P’s hand)).

04 *fastidio s’è?*

bother you yes?

~((S raises his gaze to P, who is standing in front of the doctors)).

05 (2.0)/((P shakes head slowly side by side, smiles with protruded lips, and opens right arm))/((S keeps gaze on P)).

06 P: *s’è. però::;*

yes but.

07 S: *[però riesce? eh.*

but you manage eh.

08 P: *[(va bene così) no va bene così ((smiling)).*

it’s ok this way no it’s ok this way.

09 S: *non vorrebbe fare un intervento per migliorare la tensione?*

wouldn’t you like a surgery to improve the tension.

((gazing at P)).

10 (0.6)/((S maintains his gaze on P)).

11 P: *ma s’è, se si può fare s’è.*

well yes if it is possible yes.

((S lowers gaze on P’s hand)).

Before asking the patient about surgery (in line 9), the surgeon first asked the patient to move the limb (“*make a fist*”, line 1). In response to the patient’s attempt to follow that instruction (line 2), the surgeon formulated a trouble the patient encountered (“*it doesn’t bend completely*”, line 3), then asked the patient whether the stump of the limb bothered him, i.e., troubled him. The preference associated with the surgeon’s enquiry is highlighted by his having added the tag *yes* to the enquiry (“*does that bother you, yes?*”, lines 3–4). Sure enough, the patient answered according to that preference, although seeming about to add a possible caveat or qualification (“*yes but*”, line 6). The surgeon intercepted whatever had been going to be that caveat, offering on the patient’s behalf something like a stoical response to adversity, i.e. he still *manage(d)* (the problem, by bending his hand) (line 7), thereby leaving intact the likelihood that the limb was ‘bothering’ the patient; in this way the surgeon aligned with the patient’s anticipated resistance to admit fully that there was a problem.

This sequential approach to suggesting surgery is akin to ‘stepwise entry into advice giving’ observed in encounters between health visitors and first-time mothers in the UK [21], in which a problem is established through a sequence in which the health visitor enquires after the mother’s/baby’s condition, in preparation for and to set up delivering advice about what might remedy that problem – here, that surgery might relieve the discomfort (“*surgery to improve the tension*”, line 9). Moreover, the patient-oriented negatively constructed enquiry about his preference (“*wouldn’t you like*”, line 9) adds force or pressure to the enquiry [22]. This negatively framed enquiry bordered on offering surgery to the patient – an ‘offer’ which the patient accepts (“*well yes if it is possible yes*”, line 11) – which contrasts further with the surgeon’s unilateral, declarative prescription in Ex.1.

ii) **Surgeons’ enquiries and online commentary:** The indirectness with which the surgeon approached *asking the patient about* rather than outrightly *prescribing* surgery is evident also in this next example, in which the surgeon likewise does not initially refer to surgery but leads into what might be ‘necessary’ by similarly asking the patient whether the limb bothers him (line 4). For convenience, this example is shown in two parts: in the first, Ex.3a, as he held and examined the patient’s hand, the surgeon remarked on ‘noticing’ *some nail residue*” (line 2); this is confirmed by the patient (line 3), in response to which the surgeon asked “*does that bother you a little*” (line 4).

Ex.3a [Sur:120912/P25] [S: Surgeon; P: Patient] (P had a work accident four months earlier in which he lost part of his right little finger).

01 S: *((drops the pen he was using to fill in the form,
reaches for P’s hand and grasps it)).*

02 S: *okei vediamo un po’, qua è rimasto un residuo ungueale.*

okay let’s have a look, here there is some nail residue.

03 P: *s’è. qualcosa è rimasto.*

yes. there is still something.

04 S: *mhm. le dà fastidio un pochi: no.*

mhm. does that bother you a little.

05 P: *((facial expressions that minimize)).*

06 P: *relativamente.*

moderately.

07 (0.6).

08 P: *poco direi.*

a little I would say.

09 S: *ah perché qua, = mhm:: deve:: #uhu:.hh (0.2) se vogliamo (0.2).*

eh because here mhm you should uhu:.hh if we want.

10 *rimuovere tutto > biso’ far un interventino. < .*

remove everything it is necessary to do a little surgery.

11 *togliere::, (.) tutta sta parte qua. ((smiles, gazing at P)).*

to remove all this part here.

12 (1.2).

((a few lines are omitted)).

20 S: *se le dà fastidio ‘sta cosa qua biso’ a.*

if this bothers you this thing here it is necessary.

21 *far un tagliettino rimuovere tutto,*

to make a little cut remove everything.

Here also, as in the previous case (Ex. 2), during the physical examination the surgeon observed something about the patient’s limb (“*some nail residue*”, line 2). The practice of describing what a doctor is seeing during a physical examination (online commentary) has been shown to

be associated with building alignment between doctor and patient [23]. Whilst the surgeon did not formulate the observed condition as an issue to be addressed, as a potential problem (cf. “*it doesn't bend completely*”, Ex. 2 line 3), nonetheless, he asked the patient whether what was observed (the nail residue) bothered him (line 4), to which the patient answered here as the patient did in Ex.2, with a downgraded confirmation that it bothered him (“*moderately*”, line 6), which he further downgraded in “*a little I would say*” (line 8). That was, however, sufficient confirmation of ‘bother’ for the surgeon to raise the possibility of surgery. He did so in a turn (lines 9–11) the complexity of which resulted from several self-corrections implementing changes in direction. But the most salient ways in which the surgeon was circumspect in introducing the suggestion of surgery was that i) the suggestion was made in a conditional form (“*if we want to remove everything*”, lines 9–10), ii) suggesting (“*a little surgery*”, line 10), and iii) repeating the ‘necessity’ not of surgery but of making “*a little cut*” (lines 20–21). Each of these features of the turn design suggesting surgery contributed to this being less direct than the formats used to prescribe prosthesis. The interaction continues:

Ex.3b [Sur:120912/P25] (Some lines omitted in which P told about the nail having grown after the amputation).

33 S: *niente per far una cosa omogenea biso'a fare.*

anyway to get a homogeneous result it is necessary to do a.

34 (1.0)(S clicks on the pen to make it write)).

35 S: *un interventino, si fa un taglietto, (0.4) a bocca di pesce, si rimodella.*

little surgery, one makes a little cut a fish-mouth cut one reshapes.

((while writing on P's finger)).

36 S: *un po' l'osso si toglie la matrice, e questa parte un po'.*

the bone a little removes the matrix and this part to some extent.

37 *in modo tale che diventi (.) tutto omogeneo.*

so as to make it all homogeneous.

38 (0.2).

39 S: *solo che bisogna fare un intervento.*

it's just that it is necessary to do a surgery.

40 P: *e quindi? s'è bisognerà fare l'intervento.*

and so yes it will be necessary to do the surgery.

41 S: *s:ì, no, nel senso se::: le dà fastidio.*

yes no I mean if this bothers you.

42 P: *no non mi dà fastidio però-*

no this doesn't bother me but.

43 (2.0).

44 S: *>perché < dal punto di vista diciamo, (1.0) e::: per rendere.*

because from the point of view let's say e::: to make.

45 *una cosa più completa::: si potrebbe fare quest'intervento qua.*

one thing more complete one could make this surgery here.

46 S: *[.hhh.*

47 P: *[fastidio non me ne dà. (.) >però < [°ehh°.*

discomfort I don't feel it but ehh.

48 S: *[vuole vedere.*

do you want to evaluate.

49 *eventualmente magari mettiamo una- una protezione da lavoro.*

perhaps maybe we can put a a protection for working.

50 *vedere come va:,se dà fastidio poi dopo facciamo 'sto ritocchino.*

see how it goes if it bothers you then we make this little touch up.

51 P: *s'ì.*

yes.

In Ex.3b the surgeon continued to be circumspect in pursuing the suggestion that surgery might ‘be necessary’ to alleviate the problem by employing the same practices of representing surgery as conditional (“*if this bothers you*”, line 41) even following the patient’s apparent acceptance or resignation (“*and so? yes it will be necessary to do a surgery*”, line 40). The surgeon referred to “*a little surgery*” (lines 33–35), describing the surgery as “*a little cut, a fish-mouth cut*” (line 35), and explaining that surgery would ‘homogenise’ or complete the healing process

(lines 33, 37, 44–45). At no point did the patient respond encouragingly to these pursuits by the surgeon, although he was equivocal in not ruling out having discomfort (lines 42 and 47). The surgeon finally deferred the possibility of surgery (at line 50, redefined in terms of “*a little touch up*”) until they “*see how it goes*” (line 50).

iii) Elusive or implicit references to surgery: In the cases above (Exs. 2 and 3) the surgeons prepared the ground for possible surgery by enquiring about problems that the patient might be experiencing, so that surgery could be introduced as a solution to those problems (e.g. “*to improve the tension*” in Ex. 2 line 9). Moreover, surgery was introduced as a possibility (conditional forms); it was described in ‘reduced’ or mitigated forms (e.g. ‘a little’) and was treated as variously accountable (e.g. “*because ... to make one thing more complete*” in Ex.3b line 44–45). In Ex 3b the surgeon’s increased tentativeness in advancing the proposal of surgery (as compared to Ex. 2) oriented to the persistent resistance displayed by the patient to recognize the need for surgery (i.e., to recognize having discomfort), which is also a similarity with the following example. Some of the same practices as those identified in Exs. 2 and 3a and 3b, for introducing the possibility of surgery in mitigated form or circuitously, are also evident in examples 4 and 5 - but in these cases not even ‘surgery’ is mentioned by the surgeon.

Ex.4 [Sur: 120914/P21] [S: Surgeon; P: Patient; CC: Companions] (P lost the thumb of his left hand in a work accident. Since his metacarpal bone residue is too short for anchoring a prosthetic thumb, S checks whether P is already informed about a surgical alternative to prosthesis, which would involve replacing the patient’s amputated thumb with a toe).

01 S: *allora dal punto di vista:: (.) uh- protesico > perché dal.*

so from the uh prosthetic point of view because from the.

((gaze to P)).

02 *punto di vista diciamo (0.2) ricostruttivo:, (.) a questo livello:,*

let's say reconstructive point of view at this level.

((gaze to P)).

03 *forse lei si era = mhm: i-informato:, (0.6) cosa si può fare:, > dal.*

perhaps you mhm looked for information what can be done from a.

04 *punto di vista ricoltruttivo < = ^si è informato::, (.)*

reconstruction point of view did you look for information.

^(gaze to CC)).

^(gaze back to P)).

05 *bisognerebbe trasferire (0.2) un dito:: [del piede ^na cosa u-un.*

it'd be necessary to transfer one digit of your foot a thing r-

^(gazes to CC)).

06 P: *[°ahhm°/(lowers gaze and.*

shakes head rapidly and repeatedly, raises right hand and smiles)).

07 S: *po'::: di'ciamo: molto molto::: = .*

rather let's say very very.

08 CC: *^(both shake their head to say “no” while gazing at S)).*

09 P: *= non ci intere[ssa ((smiling)).*

we are not interested in it.

10 S: *[ecco = hha. (0.2) dal punto di vista protesico, (.)*

there from the prosthetic point of view.

11 *in questa situazione possiamo mettere una protesi a guanto.*

in this situation we can apply a prosthesis like a glove.

Here in Ex.4 the surgeon referred to a “*reconstructive point of view*” (lines 2 and 4) and to “*transfer(ring) one digit from your foot*” (line 5); no explicit reference was made to surgery, though that was implicit or proposed indirectly. The surgeon’s enquiry “*perhaps you looked for information what can be done from a reconstruction point of view did you look for information*” (lines 3–4) - to which the patient did not respond - played a similar role as did enquiries whether a limb ‘bothered’ patients in Exs. 2 and 3, in attempting to establish some common ground between surgeon and patient as to the benefits or necessity of surgery. As in Ex. 3b, the surgeon described what the surgery would consist of (“*transfer one digit of your foot*”, line 5). Nevertheless, surgery was not mentioned explicitly, and the surgeon appeared cautious in elaborating on it (“*a thing*

r- rather let's say very very", lines 5–7) and continually monitored the recipients' reactions by moving his gaze back and forth between the patient and his companions (lines 1–5). More specifically, the surgeon adjusted his progressing, tentative proposal to the aversion or disapproval that was gradually emerging from the patient's and his companions' visible conduct (the patient shakes his head at line 6, then both companions do so at line 8). The patient explicitly rejects the proposal at line 8, at which point the surgeon abandoned that plan to move instead to illustrate the only feasible prosthetic option ("in this situation we can apply a prosthesis like a glove", line 11). Even here, surgery was not mentioned explicitly.

In Ex.5 the surgeon introduced the possibility of surgery through the kind of enquiries made in Exs. 2 and 3, "does it bother you does it hurt" (line 1), and through following up the patient's acknowledgement that it was "sensitive" (line 2) by again asking whether it bothered the patient when he (the surgeon) manipulated another part of the limb (line 5).

Ex.5 [Sur:300708/P14] [T: Technician; S: Surgeon; P: Patient] (P has lost the second and third finger in his left hand following a recent work accident with a mechanical press).

01 S: *le dà fastidio le fa male?*

does it bother you does it hurt.

((holding P's hand for examination)).

02 P: *mh = eh sensibilità.*

mh eh sensitivity.

03 S: *mhm.*

mhm.

04 P: *°sopra°.*

above.

((S examines P's hand for few seconds, consulting T and showing that it is the joint that is stiff)).

05 S: *le dà: le dà fastidio questo?*

does it does it bother you this?

((referring to a point below the second proximal phalanx, the joint with the metacarpal bone)).

06 P: *no, no = no.*

no no no.

07 S: *perché volendo lì : si può togliere questo.*

because if one wants it there one can remove this.

((touches P's hand in the region where the cut can be made)).

08 P: *(1.2)/(P raises gaze on S and lowers on his hand).*

09 T: *glie'l'hanno proposto [di togliere quella] lì .*

did they propose to you to remove that there.

10 P: *[no (.) no.*

no no.

11 S: *perché togliendolo:., °uh:° si può chiudere un pochino di più lo.*

because if removed uh it can be closed a little more the.

12 *spazio della mano.*

gap in the hand.

13 *(0.8).*

14 P: *~ma° (0.2) °non lo so°^.*

well I don't know.

^ ((looks up to S and then down to his hand)).

^ ((looks up to T and smiles)).

15 S: *((bends and lowers head, shrugging his shoulders)).*

16 T: *no. è un informazio:ne. ((raising his shoulders)).*

no it's information.

17 P: *sì .*

yes.

Here, as in Ex.4, the surgeon did not, throughout, refer explicitly to surgery, but instead suggested that he could "remove this" (line 7). Note that the prosthetic technician also referred to removing something (lines 9 and 11), thereby avoiding naming the procedure as surgery. There is some evidence in these cases in Exs. 4 and 5 that surgeons oriented to patients' apprehensions and reluctance about surgery, and therefore

that their indirect references and other mitigating practices are all aspects of the surgeons' methods for managing real and anticipated resistance to surgical options [25].

4. Discussion and conclusion

4.1. Discussion

Data from medical encounters at a prosthetic clinic show that doctors employed different practices to deliver treatment recommendations, orienting to likely patients' expectations. When prescribing prosthesis, doctors delivered information about the steps leading to its application, in a straightforward manner and without opening up discussion or negotiation with the patient, thereby displaying their understanding that this is the treatment patients expected (ex.1). Conversely, when the recommended treatment was surgery, doctors used a variety of communication strategies, sharing a cautious approach and an orientation to align with patients' resistance.

The implementation of these various practices was related to how strongly patients resist or reject the treatment, as well as to the physical conditions of the amputated limb. For instance, one practice was used when a patient's condition prior to prosthesis could be improved. It consists of highlighting a potential issue with the amputated limb during physical examination and then offering surgery as a solution (exs. 2 and 3). When surgery **might** have involved more radical interventions, or **when patients more clearly** displayed resistance to surgery (exs. 4 and 5), surgeons enquired whether patients had already been informed about this option. Such enquiries displayed clinicians' orientation to patients' possible resistance to surgery. This is confirmed by **those indirect** practices such as not referring explicitly to 'surgery', the 'step-wise-entry format' [21], the **online commentary** [23], features such as hesitation markers [24] and unfinished utterances [25,26] that together displayed the clinicians' orientation to surgery as **their preferred treatment option, thereby** disattending patients' expectations.

The analysis also shows that, in implementing these practices, doctors used a more bilateral type of prescription [19], as compared to the format used to prescribe prostheses. In those cases in which surgery was mentioned, doctors explored patients' stance by asking whether they wanted surgery or had heard about this solution. Data also showed that doctors promptly aligned with patients' negative perspective about proposed surgery, by deferring or backing away from it. These findings are in line with those documented in a recent study on surgery consultations [27], showing that addressing patients' ideas, concerns and expectations and aligning with them might not always result in full engagement with the patients' perspective or with sharing decision-making. Indeed, doctors' compliance with patients' perspective, as documented in our data by doctors' immediate withdrawal from surgical proposal as a result of patients' resistance, can pre-empt patients' full access to and understanding of all the options offered in order to make an informed decision.

5. Conclusion

These results suggest that doctors prioritised setting up the decision-making process in a shared and bilateral way with the patient when the proposed treatment is understood as contrary to their expectations, as with surgery. Considering the mission of the clinic, at their first visit to the centre, amputated patients' main expectation is to have a prosthesis applied. This is demonstrated by doctors' prescribing prosthesis in a straightforward and unproblematic manner. In cases where the physical examination of the limb leads doctors to consider and introduce surgery as an alternative to prosthesis application, they adopt communicative strategies orienting to surgery proposal as likely to be resisted by patients. In line with the principles of patient-centred care, the design and sequential progression of the surgery proposal displayed doctors' incli-

nation to elicit the patients’ stance, casting the decision as ostensibly conditioned by patients’ acceptance. The cautious and circuitous manners doctors used to introduce the surgical option, as well as the doctors’ monitoring patients’ responses and their promptness in detecting and aligning with the patients’ upcoming resistance, display the delicacy of this endeavour and doctors’ orientation to patients’ expectations.

5.1. Practice implications

The doctors’ promptness in accommodating patients’ resistance to surgery and the consequential referral (ex. 3) or withdrawal (ex. 4 and 5) of the surgery proposal might entail a decision-making process that does not necessarily go in the direction of the best solution for the patient. While the withdrawal of a proposal that patients reject or resist can be considered a patient-centred solution, in practice it might not be such, insofar as it can preclude a comprehensive information and understanding of the proposal. This study’s findings demonstrate that doctors are aware that shared decision-making and patient-centred care are important, especially when life-changing decisions such as the application or not of a prosthesis to an amputated limb are at stake and patients display their concern, hesitancy and resistance. However, these findings also pose important practice implications and interrogate the clinicians’ exercise of their authority in delivering treatment recom-

mendation. In line with this, while doctors should be aware of the extreme delicacy of their task, as indeed our data show they are, they should also realize that understanding the patients’ concerns and aligning with their perspective should not curtail the amount and depth of the information provided.

Doctors in prosthetics clinics might adopt a balanced communicative strategy that takes into account patients’ perspectives, concerns and expectations, **whilst providing patients** with the necessary information to collaborate meaningfully in decision making.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Monica Simone: Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis. **Renata Galatolo:** Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis. **Paul Drew:** Methodology, Conceptualization. **Piera Margutti:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

As a corresponding author, on behalf of all the authors, I declare that all the authors of this paper do not have any competing interests that could have inappropriately influenced our work.

Appendix.

Transcription Key .

A. Some aspects of the relative timing of utterances

[] square brackets	Overlapping talk
= equals sign	No discernible interval between turns
(0.5) time in parentheses	Intervals within or between talk (measured in tenths of a second)
(.) period in parentheses	Discernable interval within or between talk but too short to measure (less than 2 tenths of a second)
<	'jump' started talk

B. Some characteristics of speech delivery

Punctuation symbols are designed to capture intonation, not grammar and are used to describe intonation at the end of a word/sound, at the end of a sentence or some other shorter unit:

. period	Closing intonation
, comma	Slightly rising intonation (a little hitch up on the end of the word)
? question mark	Fully rising intonation
- dash	Abrupt cut off of sound
: colon	Extension of preceding sound – the more colons the greater the extension
<u>here</u> underlining	Emphasised relative to surrounding talk
CAPS	Increased amplitude (loudness)
.tch or.t	Tongue click
hhh.	Audible outbreath (number of h's indicates length)
.hhh	Audible inbreath (number of h's indicates length)
> Talk <	Speeded up talk
< Talk >	Slowed down talk
#	Croaky or creaky voice
£ or \$	Smiley voice
Hah hah or huh huh etc.	Beats of laughter
() empty single brackets or words enclosed in single brackets	Emphasis or single brackets words or uncertain of hearing
((word)) words enclosed in double brackets	Transcribers' comments
↑↓	Marked change in pitch

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