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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to shed light on how trans people discursively reproduce gendered habitus with regard to semantic means, following from the masculine or feminine designation in Roman languages. For this purpose, 11 interviews were conducted with trans women in prison, work, and private settings in Italy. In addition, three trans people who preferred not to be interviewed shared their diaries. By critically investigating the collected data, the discursive, relational, and symbolic processes, which define the (con)textual structure of gender, were accessed, and the quali-quantitative ALCESTE software was adopted for lexicometric analysis. The results show that the sexualized, dualistic coordinates of the Italian language, on one hand, promote an outward identity conforming to a heteronormative representation of gender, whereas interactions within the private sphere, on the other hand, empower trans people's agency in claiming a peculiar and authentic sense of self. Trans people actually are *talking* and, consequently, *doing gender* through the gendered semantics of Italian in everyday life and are *undoing gender* through the emotional bonds in intimate situations. Coping strategies, based on positive affectivity, should be implemented therefore in all social, institutional, and clinical policies that are devoted to promoting assistance and support for trans people who suffer stigmatization, marginalization, and physical and institutional violence.

It is possible that, for Anglo-Saxon native speakers, it is difficult to understand what it means to talk in a gendered language. In Italian, for instance, the endings of the past participle constructed through the auxiliary "essere" (be) are either intransitive or reflexive verbs that agree with the subject's gender. Accordingly, an announcement such as "I have been in Rome" is expressed in a different manner depending on whether the interlocutor is a woman, *sono stata a Roma*, or a man, *sono stato a Roma*. Consequently, there is no alternative for claiming a linguistic position outside of a gender binary. Therefore, people "whose gender falls somewhere between or outside of the binary system" (Gagné, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997, p. 479) are obligated to decide between one pole or the other in a dichotomous system that is embedded within a masculine representation of social reality due to "a paradigmatic form of the "phallo-narcissistic" vision and the androcentric cosmology, which are common to all Mediterranean societies and which survive even today" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 6).

Furthermore, despite relational, social, and cultural processes, gender identity is circumscribed by precise linguistic borders because "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (Wittgenstein, 2013, p. 68). Accordingly, languages, such as Roman languages, that provide only two lexical genders for describing oneself and others divide discursive practices into two symbolic universes, which "transformed an ascribed status into an achieved status, moving masculinity and femininity from natural, essential properties of individuals to interactional, that is to say, social, properties of a system of relationships" (West & Zimmerman, 2009, p. 114). These practices imply an antinomic distinction between two cultural, social, and psychological capitals, since language objectifies gender with regard to clusters of institutionalized meanings, building up "semantic fields or zones of meaning that are linguistically circumscribed" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 55).

It follows that the gendered, dualistic syntax of Roman languages promotes a hegemonic, masculinized

discursive practice at all levels of interaction, throughout "which speakers may be using language to perform their social and, in this case, sexual identifications" (Levon, 2009, p. 42). This circular process of *con-texts* in *inter-action* produces gendered discourses that are embedded within situated practices, relational scenarios, space-time coordinates, and symbolic universes.

Theoretic framework

The linguistic coordinates proper within a certain cultural frame play an essential role in the co-construction of a socially shared and legitimized representation of gender. Different studies, indeed, have been focused on the sexualized structure of language (Bucholtz & Hall, 2008; Levon, 2009), speech (Whitehead & Stokoe, 2015), and discourse (Greco, 2012) in order to evidence "the relationship between gender and language" (Cameron, 2000, p. 342), on one hand, and "the relationship between language and social meaning" (Levon, 2009, p. 31), on the other hand. Especially languages that are organized along a sexualized lexicon produce and reproduce gender-specific discourses, conventionally associated with women or men speakers (Cameron, 2000). Studies conducted on multilinguistic realities in India, for instance, evidenced how the semantic structure of Hindi builds up zones of sexualized meanings that are defined by a linguistically based predetermination (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, 2008).

Similar idiomatic processes also underlie other languages, such as Portuguese and Italian. However, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical research has been devoted, until recently, to the analysis of the rhetoric strategies through which trans people could claim a personal sense of gender within the dualistic, gendered semantic of a Roman linguistic system whose "grammatical usage involves formal rules that follow from the masculine or feminine designation" (Scott, 1986, pp. 1053–1054).

Such a dichotomous, discursively defined positioning generates a rigorously heteronormativized reality, fostering in trans people, even during their childhood, the internalization of "transphobia and negative transgender identity [which] derive often from primary relationships with attachment figures as well as with peers and significant others" (Amodeo, Vitelli, Scandurra, Picariello, & Valerio, 2015, p. 57). Trans people, moreover, despite being exposed to acceptance or rejection within the family and private sphere (Horn, Kosciw, & Russell, 2009; Myers & Raymond, 2010), inevitably have to face the hegemonic systems of meanings, underlying public scenarios, and institutional realities, such as school (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010) and work (Connell, 2010).

Especially work contexts, organized along linear evaluation parameters, risk splitting employments into female and male universes—that is, "blue-collar occupations and 'women's professions'" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 445). As trans people trespass such antinomic logics while transiting between and across the sexes, normative regulatory processes, which are linguistically defined, may become particularly reifying within most work activities, "shifting the object of analysis from the margins (women, homosexuals) to the center (men, heterosexuals)" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 441). This situation actually excludes trans people from many employment opportunities, promoting, especially for foreigners without regular permits to stay, affiliation with sex-work and other illegal activities, such as drug dealing and extortion (Chianura, Di Salvo, & Giovanardi, 2010).

Because most of these infringements are sanctioned in Italy with custodial sentencing (Chianura, Di Salvo, & Giovanardi, 2010), detainment for trans people often means both a loss of freedom as transgressors and a loss of identity as transgender. As pointed out by Brown (2010), such a denial of their intimate sense of gender in prison might provoke a renouncing of oneself and in extreme cases self-harm and auto-mutilations. Thus, the struggle of identity represents a red line for trans people detained in prison (Brown, 2009; Brown & McDuffie, 2009; Colopy, 2012; Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014; Petersen, Stephens, Dickey, & Lewis, 1996), who progressively risk losing their sense of self among indifference, humiliation, and physical and psychological pain:

> Their gendered behavior in prison can be understood as part of an ongoing, cooperative collusion where their selves are revealed and their relationships with non-transgender prisoners likewise reaffirm an unequal, often violent and always hegemonically male, community. (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014, p. 28)

Indeed, trans women who have not already undergone gender conforming surgery are classified as men, and according to Italian law, they have to be assisted

by prison guards of the same sex and be collocated in so-called protected sections inside the male wings (Hochdorn, Cottone, Camargo, & Berri, 2014). The only prison in Italy in which the section for trans women has been collocated inside the female wing is the prison of Florence-Sollicciano (Hochdorn et al., 2014), where some of the data were gathered.

Each of these social situations, defined by a particular system of norms and meanings, contributes to the understanding of how gender identity develops within an intersectional complex that is embedded within specific (con)textual frames.

Italian and transnational background

According to the latest sociodemographic survey carried out by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2012), in Italy around one million people (corresponding to 2.4% of the national population) identified themselves as homo- or bisexual, 77% of the responders defined themselves as heterosexual, 0.1% as transsexual; 15.6% did not give any answer, while 5% chose the option "other" without further explanation (p. 17).

Notwithstanding, such data already reveal the strong ambiguity concerning intimate choices and/or processes of identity-claiming (coming out) in hard contrast to the dominant heteronormative hegemony, still promoting the dualistic isomorphism between sex and gender. One of the criticisms, indeed, the same ISTAT (2012) pointed out about the findings emerged from their study, regards the social desirability bias of the responders, though a rigorous anonymity has been granted throughout all research procedures. Out of the results, for instance, emerged that the percentage of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people is much lower in elder populations (0.7%) while it has increased in northern regions (3.1%) in Italy compared to the central (2.1%) and southern (1.6%) parts of the country. Such data might suggest that discrimination of LGBT people could be related to more conservatively—and traditionally—oriented *habitus*.

Indeed, as has been underlined by Amodeo et al. (2015), the *coming out* of trans people highly depends on the intensity and frequency of positive attachment styles within either the private or the public sphere. Trans people, therefore, who suffer discrimination, exclusion, avoidance, and isolation are more likely to internalize transphobic representations and self-devaluation (Amodeo et al., 2015). Such processes become even stronger in contexts such as workplaces (Priola, Lasio, De Simone, and Serri 2014) and prisons (Hochdorn et al., 2014), where trans people are exposed to a loss of identity in a world of isolation, surrounded by a "sound of silence" as Priola, Lasio, DeSimone, and Serri (2014) emblematically highlighted in an empirical study, conducted in cooperative labor environments in Italy.

This social silence, consequently, makes trans people mostly invisible in public life, and consistent and up-to-date sociodemographic data about trans people in Italy, therefore, like occupational status, sociofamiliar situation, and so forth, are difficult to obtain. Concerning the national situation in prison, for example, the latest available published data showed that a total of 78 trans people have been detained inside the male wings of eight prisons from southern to northern Italy, predisposing only in a few cases so-called protected sections (Chianura et al., 2010, pp. 221–222). Recently, more case-specific studies (Hochdorn & Cottone, 2012; Hochdorn et al., 2014), however, showed that the number of trans prisoners and institutes where they are incarcerated constantly varies and highly depends on region-specific agreements among local prison administration and the national Ministry of Justice, such as the decision made by the penitentiary direction of Florence-Sollicciano to transfer the protected section for trans people from the male wing to the female wing.

Otherwise, contrary to many studies (Garfinkel, 1967; Hird, 2002; McLelland, 2002; Richardson, 2007), the *undoing of gender* in Italy is not always challenging the traditional structure, whose symbolic coordinates seem to be exclusively based on a patriarchal organization common to most Mediterranean cultures (Bourdieu, 2001). An example could be the gender-variant expression of Naples's *Femminielli*, a social representation of gender beyond the sexual binary, whose roots are deeply anchored within the historical tissue of this southern Italian metropolis (Zito & Valerio, 2010). Other experiences of gender transition as an integral part of cultural affiliation have been observed in many societies such as the *Sworn Virgins* in Albania (Young, 2000), the *Hijras* (Nanda, 1999) and *Sadhin* (Shaw & Ardener, 2005) in India, and the *two-spirit* persons among some North American native communities (Roscoe, 1998).

Such considerations, indeed, must be implemented, while promoting an interpersonally recognized and culturally legitimized visibility of trans people in society.

The current study

This empirical research intended to deepen the findings of a previous study (Amodeo et al., 2015) concerning the way trans people might internalize transphobia if constantly exposed to negative interpersonal attachment styles. Because the authors asserted that "psychological interventions could be directed also onto the development or reinforcement of individual resources to cope with transphobia experienced in different life contexts" (p. 57), three social situations—that is, prison, work, and the private sphere—have been taken into account for the current study in order to examine how different (con)texts of interaction produce different representations of self as a gendered being, which could be recognized or ignored, accepted or rejected, and consequently included or excluded by both the significant other and the generalized other. As attachment styles emerge from a co-construction of interpersonal relations—mediated among agents and contexts—discursive practices and rhetoric strategies among trans people doing or undoing gender in the above mentioned realities, have been accessed.

Research aims

Accordingly, the study presented in this paper has been structured along the following central questions:

1. Language: As the Italian language defines a priori a gendered representation of self, which rhetoric strategies do trans people adopt while talking in a sexualized Roman language?
2. Context: Do different contexts produce different representations of self, others, and society, enabling paradigmatic and pragmatic changes of the gender binary?
3. Relationship: Do emotional bonds reinforce trans people's agency in claiming an authentic representation of self within private and intimate situations?
4. Identity: Are trans people necessarily *doing gender* while transiting from one gender pole to the opposite one, or might they also be undoing gender by claiming a representation of self beyond the gender dualism?

Methods

Research procedures

Given the goals and theoretic frame of the present research, the intersectional relationships among

linguistic structures (Bucholtz & Hall, 2008; Cameron, 2000) and communication practices (Speer & Parsons, 2006), the psychological relevance of interactions (emotions and motivations) (Wodak, 2007) and socially legitimized plans and actions (norms, beliefs, and ideologies) (van Dijk, 1993) have been critically studied.

Indeed, discourse develops through the complex interdependencies among the intentional organization of talk, the pragmatic function of speech, and the paradigmatic structures of communication, adapting "the discursive expression of (semantic) mental models—content, information, etc.—to the ongoing communicative situation" (van Dijk, 2006, p. 171). Understanding how linguistic meta-artifacts (lexicons, grammatical rules) form a shared communicative event (semantic), while interacting with others and with context, makes it possible to access the symbolic processes that are implied in the co-construction of sexualized rhetorics (semiotic), which are "cognitively and emotionally effective, given the contents of the various levels of contextual and co-textual assumptions and the subtle pragmatic devices involved" (Wodak, 2007, p. 218). Such (con)textual frames, which circumscribe situated interactional processes, can be accessed by investigating both the linguistic meanings (Cameron, 2000) and the implicit strategies (Wodak, 2007) defining the discursive production of gendered rhetorics. The principal aim of the present study is to put forth evidence of the intersectional circularity between gendered language and (con)text.

Participants

As the corpus consists of discursive repertoires that were gathered in three social situations—that is, prison, work, and the private sphere—the data has been divided into three main archives according to either the contexts' range of agency or the textual sources:

1. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with trans women (five Italians and one Brazilian) in professional and private settings. Three interviews were conducted directly at the workplace (a broadcast studio in Milan, where the interlocutor is employed as a cosmetician; a kennel in South-Tyrol, of which the interviewee, a postoperative transsexual woman, is the owner; and a studio in Verona, where the interlocutor works as a private teacher). The remaining interviews were conducted in private accommodations (a flat in Milan

Table 1. In-depth interviews with trans people (1–6) in working and private contexts.

Origin	Biological sex	Gender	Age	Occupation	Place of interview	Language
1. Milan	Male	Transgender	35	Cosmetician	Broadcast-studio in Milan	Italian native
2. Milan	Male	Woman	30	Secretary	Flat in Milan	Italian native
3. Milan	Male	Woman	33	Accountant	Flat in Milan	Italian native
4. Minas Gerais	Male	Woman	45	Hairdresser	Flat in Fermo	Italian low
5. Verona	Male	Transgender	50	Private teacher	Studio in Verona	Italian native
6. Meran/Merano[a]	Male	Woman (operated)	55	Freelance	Kennel near Meran(o)	Italian-German

[a]Autonomous region in northern Italy with bilingual cultural background; the interview has been conducted therefore in both languages.

that two interlocutors share and an apartment in Fermo (in central Italy) where an Italian family sometimes provides accommodation for a Brazilian trans woman). Details are available in Table 1.

2. Five in-depth interviews with trans women, all of Brazilian origin (three from São Paulo and two from Minas Gerais), were conducted inside a protected section of the female wing of the prison of Sollicciano near Florence where they have been detained. The crimes they were arrested for mainly consist of the exploitation of prostitution, extortion, theft, and drug dealing (principally cocaine). Details are available in Table 2.

3. Because three trans people preferred not to be interviewed they proposed sharing written narratives about their lives—that is, extracts selected by a trans woman who studies law in Bologna from her diary, written when she was a teenager (between 14 and 17 years of age), and two autobiographical life stories written by a trans woman who works as a general contractor in Verona and a postoperative transsexual man, who works as a computer technician in Verona. Details are available in Table 3.

Sampling procedures

The participants in work and private environments, along with those who shared their written narratives, have been recruited through *snowball* sampling, mostly in sociopolitical associations in northern and central Italy, while five out of 18 trans women,

detained at that time in the Florence-Sollicciano prison, agreed to be interviewed. The choice for this specific prison, furthermore, was motivated because it was and still is the only institute in Italy at which the protected section for trans women has been collocated inside the female wing.

All participants took part voluntarily in the present study, and informed consent forms explaining the detailed goals of the research were distributed to all subjects before being interviewed or sharing their diaries. The methods, tools, and analytical procedures were in full compliance with the ethical guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (2010) and the National Board of Italian Psychologists (Ordine Nazionale Psicologi, 1989). For the interviews that were conducted in the prison, the appropriate permission was obtained from the Department of Prison Administration of Tuscany (Provveditorato regionale dell'amministrazione penitenziaria per la Toscana).

Furthermore, we refer to all agents involved as trans women and trans people. *Transsexual woman* and *transsexual man* are only used for two subjects who underwent sexual reassignment surgery because they identified themselves throughout these discursive representations: *sono un/a uomo/donna transessuale operato/a* (I am a postoperative transsexual man/woman).

Data collection

As the aim of the current study consisted in accessing the discursive structure of gender in different contexts,

Table 2. In-depth interviews with trans people (1–5) in the prison of Florence-Sollicciano.

Origin	Biological sex	Gender	Age	Crime	Activity in prison	Detention period	Language
1. Minas Gerais	Male	Variant	31	Sex-work exploitation and drug dealing	Cleaner	5 years, 6 months	Italian low
2. São Paulo	Male	Variant	35	Sex-work exploitation	Student	1 year, 2 months	Italian excellent
3. Minas Gerais	Male	Woman	40	Extortion and drug dealing	Cleaner	6 years	Italian good
4. São Paulo	Male	Variant	25	Theft and extortion	Student	Awaiting trail	Italian low
5. São Paulo	Male	Variant	26	Sex-work exploitation	Clerk[a]	4 years	Italian low

Note. All inmates are from Brazilian origin.
[a]Inside the prison there is a little bar-shop.

Table 3. Written narratives of three trans people (1–3).

Origin	Biological sex	Gender	Age	Occupation	Type of narrative
1. Verona	Male	Transgender	35	General contractor	Autobiographical life story
2. Bologna	Male	Woman	30	Student	Diary (extracts)
3. Verona	Female	Man (operated)	33	Computer technician	Autobiographical life story

Note. All narratives have been written by Italian native speakers.

principally in-depth interviews have been adopted in order to create as far as possible a naturally situated interaction while reducing the inference of the observer on the observed reality. Such method has already been used in previous researches for performing (critical) discourse analysis on interviews conducted with trans people (Greco, 2012; Speer & Parsons, 2006). The in-depth tissue of the interviews, furthermore, allowed participants to talk spontaneously about a life in transition not only between genders (man and woman) but also between cultures (Brazil and Italy) and contexts (freedom and detainment). The choice of a nonstructured modality was made also for facilitating communication with some Brazilian participants, who showed a very low level of literacy. Using a semistructured interview would have been therefore an improper decision. The central queries, asked to the participants during the interviews in all contexts, were principally the following (among others):

– Do you completely feel like a woman?
– When, along your life history, did you became conscious about your gender identity?
– Do your family members and partners consider you a woman?
– Does your social context usually adopt the lexical female gender while interacting with you?
– Have you always talked spontaneously using a female lexicon?

For the interviews conducted in prison, moreover, questions were specifically focused also on the experience of detainment:

– Do you receive full recognition of your gender identity while interacting with the other inmates and/or staff members?
– Do you feel more recognized while being detained in a special section inside the female ward?
– Have you experienced previous incarcerations in male sectors either in Italy or abroad?
– May I ask you for the circumstances that made you commit the crime you were arrested for?

The written narratives, instead, which have been shared by three trans people who preferred not to be interviewed, allowed researchers to critically investigate the linguistic organization of gendered talks, which have been spontaneously produced by the authors themselves.

Furthermore, for the objectifying property of written language, these autobiographical narratives make clearly emerge, more than oral interaction, the reifying imprint of Italian's sexualized semantic on the personal and social representation of gender.

Measures

To comprehend how (con)text shapes gender, by systematically investigating the "distribution of knowledge in assertions and presuppositions, lexicalization, syntactic structure and intonation, among many other 'stylistic' aspects of discourse" (van Dijk, 2006, p. 171), the ALCESTE software, which combines qualitative data with statistically supported tools of analysis, has been adopted:

It maintains a specific interest, while adopting hierarchical descending classification, on one hand, and lexicographic analysis of textual material, on the other hand, for contexts that are characterised by a specific vocabulary and for those elements that constitute the vocabulary itself. (Camargo, 2005, p. 512)

For applying the software's lexicometric tasks to the textual data, discursive repertoires had been organized along so-called initial units of context (Unités de Contexte Initiales [UCIs])—that is, portions of text that are associated with the specific focuses of the investigation and that are defined ex ante. Because the main goal of the current study consists in analyzing the discursive construction of gender with regard to different socionormative frames, a UCI has been associated with each of the three contexts that are taken into account—that is, prison, work, and private sphere. Hence, the program elaborated a hierarchical descending classification of lexical classes and then analyzed the distribution of lexemes along clouds of semantic

meanings. These two operations made it possible to demonstrate the co-occurrences of single linguistic clusters with regard to various discursive events produced by trans people in different situations and contexts. By analyzing the organization and distribution of the lexical classes, intertextual relationships among the different discursive events were accessed, showing how trans people produce and reproduce certain narrative genres while interacting in different situations.

Data analysis

The analytical steps of the lexicometric tasks in ALCESTE were reported by providing detailed descriptions according to the findings that emerged from the statistical procedures performed. Once the transcribed textual material had been imported into ALCESTE, the program proceeded to conduct the hierarchical descending classification, identifying specific types of vocabularies, with each type being composed by nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that represent a specific entity, action/sequence, quality or property, respectively, which were then associated with five stable classes.

The lexical content of the classes and the interaction among them are described in the following two sections, linking the findings to the theoretic framework and to background information the current study has been based on. Finally, a third section (divided into four subsections for each of the three contexts taken into account) included the most significant extracts from the interviews and diaries providing additional information that deepened the critical analysis of the quali-quantitative results.

Though the language of the discursive data is principally Italian, the interview with the transsexual woman in South-Tyrol contains many passages in Tyrolese German because of the bilingual cultural background of this autonomous region of northern Italy. These passages have been excluded therefore from quantitative analysis and investigated separately, because the lexicometric tasks of ALCESTE can only by applied for one language at the time.

Results

Findings of the quali-quantitative analysis

The findings of the statistical analysis, contributed to an intertextual understanding of how socially shared and normatively legitimized discursive practices could promote an internalized representation of self, embedded within the symbolic and normative constraints of a naturally situated cultural field. Each lexical class, indeed, contains a semantic imprint, characterizing a rhetorical script acted on the stages of the specific contexts of interaction, that the current study has been focused on.

Content-analysis of the stable classes

The hierarchic descending classification of ALCESTE individuated five stable lexical classes.

The first class mainly contains nouns (number (N) = 23 with frequency (F) = 185) that refer to the cultural contexts of either "Brasile" (Brazil) or "Italia" (Italy) and to the institutional contexts of either "carcere" (prison)" or "scuola" (school) Indeed, seven of the 14 trans people were of Brazilian origin. Additionally, five interlocutors were interviewed in prison, while school represents the first experience of interaction in public life, with nearly all the trans people noting relational difficulties in positioning themselves according to a social and symbolic frame that is mostly defined by a heteronormative-based organization. Other nouns, such as "avvocato" (lawyer), "polizia (police), and "reparto" (sector), are strictly associated with the experiences of detainment, because such a sharp and profound life experience significantly permeates the overall discursive production of trans women in prison. Interestingly, the only adjective categorized in this class, "sbagliato" (wrong), and its superlative variant, "sbagliatissimo/a" (most wrong), declined either with the masculine or the feminine suffix, underlines a representation of the self that is linked to inexpediency, diversity, incomprehension, stigmatization, and finally deviance. Indeed, "wrong" is repeated nine times inside this same class. Accordingly, verbs such as "dimenticare" (forget), and "adattare" (adapt), and the adverb "niente" (nothing) reinforce such feelings of rejection.

Class 2, compared to the class 1, contains more verbs ($N = 11$, $F = 52$) than nouns ($N = 7$, $F = 31$) characterized by more-fluid and more-informal semantics. Different from class 1, the few nouns are connoted with meanings that are less institutionalized and refer to personal experiences, such as "cambiamento" (change), "senso" (sense), or "persona" (person), while the verbs and, above all, the adjectives ($N = 3$, $F = 9$) allude to a more ego-syntonic representation of the self—that is, "riesco" (I can), "sentire"

(feel), and "aspetto" (I await) in the case of the former lexical forms and "completo/a" (complete), "normale" (normal), "vivo" (alive) in the case of the latter lexical forms. Evidently, the interlocutors' talking practices are prevalently focused on their lives in transition, mostly between genders (man and woman) but also between cultures (Brazil and Italy).

In addition, the words that are included in class 3 move from personal aspects to relational aspects. Trans people speak about their families, the ways in which they position themselves, and how they are recognized by the others by using nouns ($N = 7$, $F = 28$) such as "madre" (mother), "altra/e" (other/s), "famiglia" (family) and "rapporto" (relationship), verbs ($N = 7$, $F = 18$) such as "capiva" (understood), "nasce" (born), "sanno" (they know) and finally the only two adjectives included in this class, i.e., "vivo" (alive) ($F = 2$) (also contained in class 2), which is associated with "sessuale" (sexual) ($F = 1$).

Furthermore, class 4 mainly contains announcements concerning their desire to obtain more agency in their public and private lives. Indeed, they claim their own authentic way of (un)doing gender, their sexual, emotional and personal choices, and their intimate right to make decisions according to their body and identity. This affirmation among self, context, and society is expressed through the few nouns ($N = 5$, $F = 17$) such as "tutti" (everyone), "mondo" (world), "seno" (breast), and "voglia" (desire) and verbs ($N = 11$; $F = 85$) such as "voglio" (I want), "capire" (understand), and "cambiare" (change), in addition to adjectives such as "bella/o" (cute) and "gay," which contrasts with "eterosessuale" (heterosexual). Interestingly, there are also some adverbs (denoted with merely connective properties in all other classes), i.e., "qualcosa" (something) ($F = 9$), "veramente" (really) ($F = 6$), "soltanto" (only) ($F = 5$), and "magari" (maybe) ($F = 5$), which, considering the context in which they have been produced (see the in-depth analysis of the extracts), emphasize a struggle among indecision, affirmation, and recognition.

Finally, class 5 mostly contains lexemes that refer to social representations that promote a general tendency to label such experiences within clusters of deviant and pathologizing meanings. Nouns ($N = 12$, $F = 46$) such as "problema/i" (problem/s) ($F = 14$) are strictly associated with "omosessuale" (homosexual) ($F = 6$), "sesso" (sex), ($F = 5$) and "uomini" (men) ($F = 3$), which still maintain a strong heteronormative connotation that homologates trans women to homosexual men and considers their lives in transition to be a disease. Out of the four adjectives, the adjectives "sieropositivo/a" (HIV-positive) and "solo" (alone) are repeated nine and 10 times, respectively, which suggests that trans people are marginalized within a jail of profound loneliness. Consequently, feelings of rejection and indignation become a permanent trait of trans people's everyday lives, as shown by the adverbs "senza" (without) and "basta" (stop).

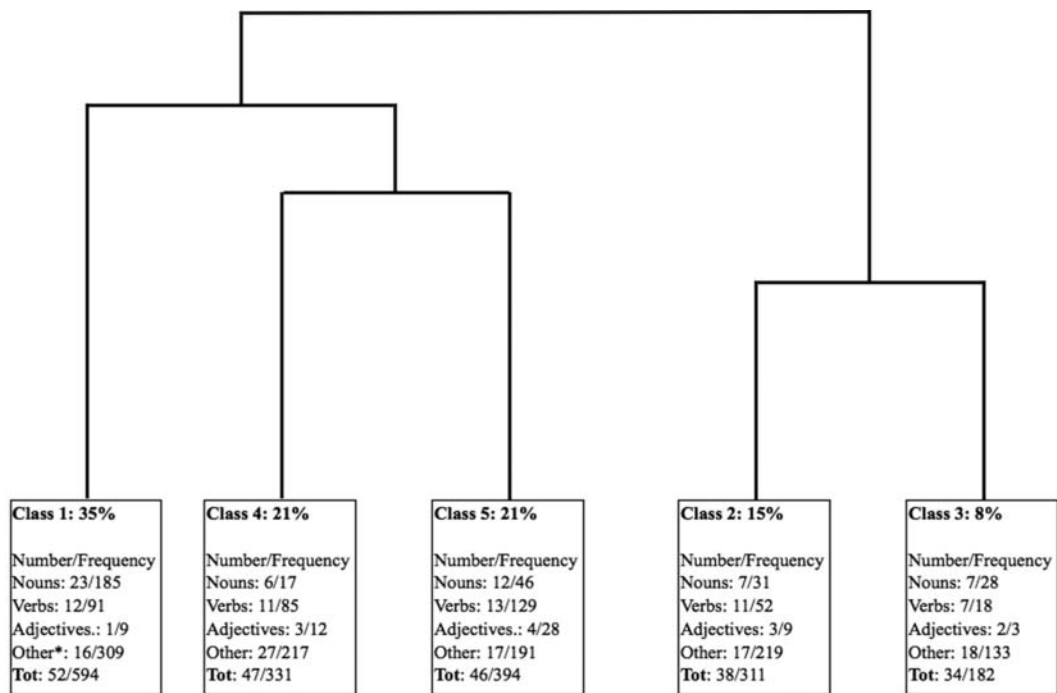### Interaction between the stable classes

To understand how these stable classes interact within the overall textual corpus, a tree diagram (Figure 1) clearly shows the proportional interdependences among them.

The tree diagram (Figure 1) shows that class 1 is the only class that correlates with all other classes.

The results of class 4 are strictly associated with class 5 because discourses of identity affirmation, in contrast to preconceived roles and statuses, constantly confront discourses promoted by socially legitimized representations of attitudes and behaviors. Living in a sexualized world implies a gendered positioning among all members who share the same social context. Accordingly, the masculine domain becomes a parameter for reproducing symbolic signifiers on all levels of interaction, from the micro to the macro level.

Class 2, which refers to personal dimensions, correlates with class 3, which focuses on relational and emotional topics, by the time that the interactions with significant others (family members, partners, and friends) collocate the self within an intimate system of confidence and reciprocal recognition. Therefore, classes 4 and 5, which contain semantics concerning affirmation and conventions, respectively, and discourses of the self (class 2) and relationships (class 3) are interdependent; while classes 2 and 3, on one hand, and classes 4 and 5, on the other hand, are found to be nearly independent, if not indirectly, through class 1.

Indeed, class 1, which represents 35 percent of the overall textual production, correlates with the remaining classes, given that nouns grammatically declined with either feminine or masculine suffixes, such as "bambino/a" (child) (o for boys/a for girls), "figlio/a" (son/daughter), "signore/a" (sir/lady) or nouns that allude to antinomic poles, i.e., "madre" (mother),

Class 1: 35%	Class 4: 21%	Class 5: 21%	Class 2: 15%	Class 3: 8%
Number/Frequency	Number/Frequency	Number/Frequency	Number/Frequency	Number/Frequency
Nouns: 23/185	Nouns: 6/17	Nouns: 12/46	Nouns: 7/31	Nouns: 7/28
Verbs: 12/91	Verbs: 11/85	Verbs: 13/129	Verbs: 11/52	Verbs: 7/18
Adjectives.: 1/9	Adjectives: 3/12	Adjectives.: 4/28	Adjectives: 3/9	Adjectives: 2/3
Other*: 16/309	Other: 27/217	Other: 17/191	Other: 17/219	Other: 18/133
Tot: 52/594	Tot: 47/331	Tot: 46/394	Tot: 38/311	Tot: 34/182

*Other refers to adverbs, numerals, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries, and so forth, that are normally used only as lexical connections and not associated to significant means for analysis.

Figure 1. Tree-diagram of the hierarchical descending classification.

"padre" (father), "maschio" (male), in addition to several terms that concern institutionalized systems of power, such as "carcere" (jail), "polizia)" (police, "scuola" (school) and "Dio" (God), constitute a cultural capital, an ideological matrix that, because of the dualistic, Westernized, strongly heteronormative representation of gender, profoundly permeates the discursive production of all the trans people involved in this study. Lexically, class 1 contains a narrative genre that identifies trans people with the normative expression of a mistake—that, "sbagiato" (wrong) and "sbagliatissimo/a" (most wrong), promoting a socially shared representation due to illness—that is, "sieropositivo/a" (HIV-positive), and disease—that is, "problema" (problem) (class 5).

In synthesis, through the quali-quantitative analysis of text and discourse, it was possible to understand how semantic expressions—that is, portions of lexical contents—produce particular narrative genres, defined by Wodak (2007) as intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Correlations among the five stable classes produce a circular process between paradigmatic representations (norms and language) and pragmatic practices (positionings and discourse), wherein "the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is social, collective" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 126). Accordingly,

gendered talk defines a habitus—that is, "a socialized subjectivity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 126).

Findings of the qualitative analysis

To deepen the analysis, some significant extracts are reported based on what emerged from the quali-quantitative findings. Accordingly, some transcriptions are chosen from the overall corpus of interviews and diaries. The inclusion criteria for the following extracts were motivated according to their thematic affinity with the topics faced throughout the current study. They clearly show, indeed, how the gendered structure of the Italian language builds up semantic fields, which are circumscribed by dualistic linguistic means, and that move in a feminine or masculine direction. These discursive fragments shape the heteronormative-based organization of sexualized contexts, while demonstrating how trans people are trying to *undo* gender by adopting different coping strategies, in order to safeguard their own authentic self-representation as a gendered being.

Talking gender at work

The first extract is chosen from an interview that was conducted with a 33-year-old trans woman inside the

fitting room of a television studio in Milan, where she does the make-up for news anchors and TV presenters before broadcasts. While talking about a former employment in which she was engaged as a clerk in a perfumery, the interlocutor underlines how within professional contexts claiming a precise gender identity becomes a relevant parameter for positioning oneself toward the other agents who participate in this social situation.

Extract 1

1. Visto che dovevo vendere un prodotto

Because I had to sell a product,

2. che fosse un ombretto o qualcos'altro,

which could have been an eye shadow or something else

3. per alcuni era opportuno avere un'identità ben precisa,

it was an opportunity to claim a precise identity,

4. o sei maschio o sei femmina

either male or female.

Normative genderization emerges from the association between a commercial product, "eye shadow" (line 2), and a dichotomous representation of gender, "precise identity" (line 3). Discursively, this rhetorical association is emphasized through the contraposition of the nouns "male" and "female" (line 4), which is lexically expressed in the double conjunction "either … or." Hence, symbolic meaning, despite its being semantically defined, emerges from a shared representation due to the sociocultural context in which the discourse is produced. If some products of consumption are identified according to a specific gender, the gender depends not on the object itself, the eye shadow, but on the symbolic capital attributed to it. Indeed, several artifacts of aesthetic care are strictly associated with meanings that follow from the masculine or feminine designation. Thus, because sexual differences on an anatomic level have been reified through linguistic constraints—that, "male or female" (line 4), they become a monolithic symbolic universe, promoting representations of gender from the heteronormative dualism. Accordingly, work contexts become discursive processes that generate historical, social, and cultural capital.

Talking gender in prison

In prison such normalization processes become even more evident because this sharp and harsh condition deprives inmates of "many aspects of their 'outside' identities, seeking to substitute the identity of prisoner" (Codd, 2003, p. 7). More than in other social situations observed in the current study, such a highly institutionalized context perfectly reflects the idea that gender identity is mostly associated with anatomic sex in Westernized cultures and societies. Accordingly, any representation of self that differs from the heteronormative domain constitutes an anomaly for prison administration on ideological, functional, logistic, and psychological levels.

The following extract is selected therefore from an interview conducted with a Brazilian trans woman, who has been arrested for sex-work exploitation in northern Italy, within a classroom inside the female wing of the prison of Florence-Sollicciano in which she was detained. Born in São Paulo, she moved to Italy when she was 17; and because she has spent nearly 15 years living in different Italian cities, her Italian was on a native-speaker level. Furthermore, she gained an A-level at a Brazilian high school and was enrolled in a bachelor's course in economics inside the university unit of the prison.

Extract 2 (A: Interviewer; B: Interviewee)

1. **A**: Lei si vede come donna?

Do you feel like a woman?

2. **B**: In parte sì! (…)[*]

Yes, in part! (…)

3. Cerchiamo di non restare mai alla metà

We try never to be both

4. quando facciamo la trasformazione. (…)

when we carry out the transformation. (…)

5. Non una cosa oscena, una cosa, una cosa mostruosa.

Not an awful thing, a thing, a monstrous thing.

6. Dobbiamo apparire per le persone normali (…)

We have to appear for normal people (…)

7. con una femminilità dall'apparenza esterna completa.

completely feminine, on the outside.

8. Quindi dobbiamo fare le nostre cure ormonali, (…)

Therefore, we have to take our hormones, (…)

9. dobbiamo cercare di non avere barba, (…)

we need to avoid having beards, (…)

10. di fare le nostre chirurgie plastiche.

have plastic surgeries.

11. Non siamo mai come le donne in realtà,

We never will really become women,

12. ma possiamo arrivare almeno all'ottanta percento.

but we can get to at least eighty percent.

13. Io penso che rimanere a metà strada è una cosa indefinita.

I think remaining between genders is an undefined thing.

14. Un'indefinizione nel mondo transessuale non é una cosa benvenuta. (…)

Undefinedness within the transsexual world is not a welcomed thing. (…)

15. Allora é meglio essere definita.

So it is better to be defined.

*Some passages that were irrelevant for analysis have been cut and marked with an ellipsis in brackets—that is, "(…)".

With regard to discursive positioning about the self-representation of gender, this extract is one of the most significant in the overall corpus. To the question, "Do you feel like a woman?" (line 1), the interlocutor replies affirmatively, demonstrating, however, an impartial position: "Yes, in part!" (line 2). Her answer clearly reflects that trans people do not necessarily claim an identity in accordance to the binary system. Indeed, she, a woman-affirmed trans person, asserted that trans women attempt to identify themselves as much as possible with a socially shared and legitimized habitus of femininity to satisfy a normative duty to maintain a heteronormative representation of gender, despite transitioning between sexual poles: "We try never to be both" (line 3). She actually does not want to appear as something that stands in stark contrast to widespread cultural capital and that consequently risks suffering ear-splitting processes of rejection and depersonalization: "an awful thing, a thing, a monstrous thing" (line 5).

This announcement is in line with the findings from the quali-quantitative analysis, where the adverb "something," repeated nine times in class 4, is used as a negative attribute to deny people's subjectivity and to discriminate against a human being as an abnormal, an inanimate and, indeed, an "awful thing." Trans people, despite their own ways of undoing gender, thus force themselves to do gender by "taking hormones" (line 8) and "having plastic surgeries" (line 10) simply to "appear for normal people completely feminine, on the outside" (lines 6–7). However, according to what she notes at the beginning of the extract, trans women "never will really become women" (line 11); but for the sake of social desirability, they "get to at least eighty percent" (line 12), which is better than "remaining between genders" (line 13). Accordingly, by hiding part of their identity, they attempt to avoid being labeled, not only within the heteronormative domain as "an undefined thing" (line 13) but also among people who themselves have passed across the gender dualism boundary: "Undefinedness within the transsexual world is not a welcomed thing" (line 14). Therefore, as she concludes, it would in any case be preferable "to be defined" (line 15).

The next extract has been chosen from another interview conducted in the same prison of the former interviewee. The interlocutor is a 25-year-old trans woman from São Paulo, who recently came to Italy in order reach friends who rent an apartment in Tuscany for sex-work activities, which is where she was arrested for theft and extortion.

Extract 3 (A: Interviewer; B: Interviewee)

1. **A**: Lei si sente donna?

Do you feel like a woman?

2. **B**: No! io non mi sento donna,

No! I do not feel like a woman,

3. io non mi sento donna.

I do not feel like a woman.

4. Per niente, io mi sento me.

Not at all, I feel like myself.

5. Mi piacere essere transessuale.

I like to be transsexual.

At the same question of the former extract, "Do you feel like a woman?" (line 1), the interlocutor absolutely disaffirms. Her short and concise answer emphasizes, even more so than the interviewee in Extract 2, the struggle between outward identity and authentic sense of self. The way she does not identify herself with a representation of self in line with a dualist representation of sex—that is, being a woman, is reinforced by the double reiteration of her answer in lines 2 and 3. Moreover, she concluded, affirming to "feel like myself" (line 4) and, above all, to appreciate being a transsexual. Throughout such a discursive position, she overcomes the highly normativized organization of penitentiary contexts, which often become, despite a restriction of freedom, a limitation of individual agency.

Also interesting is her rhetoric choice in omitting the undefined article before "transessuale *transsexual*" in line 5. In order to claim discursively an identity beyond the gender binaries, gendered expressions should be avoided as much as possible, because undefined and defined articles in the Italian language follow from the masculine and feminine designation. Thus, the interlocutor had to choose between "un" or "una transessuale," if she had decided to use the article. Instead, throughout this neutral form, she was *untalking gender* and, therefore, *undoing gender* in a context in which people are usually obligated to *do gender*.

Talking gender at home

Despite being discursively defined between context and society, gender identity, according to these two trans woman detained in prison, also makes claims in private and intimate interactions. In the following extract, from an interview with a postoperative transsexual woman from South-Tyrol, the interlocutor talked about her relationship with her son, who was conceived with the sister of her actual husband, before undergoing gender confirming surgery.

Extract 4

1. Mein Sohn sagt tatsächlich mit sechzehn Jahren zu mir,

My son actually told me at sixteen years old

2. Papi du musst des* tun wo du glücklich bist. (…)

Daddy, you have to do what makes you happy. (…)

3. Ich war so was von überrascht,

I was so surprised,

4. weil es wär die grösste Panik für mi gewesen,

because my greatest fear would have been

5. wenn mich mein Sohn abgelehnt hätte (…)

if my son had rejected me (…)

6. dann hätte ich mich auch nicht operiert.

then I would not have gone through with the operation.

7. Dann wäre i lieber gestorben. (…)

Then I would even have preferred to die. (…)

8. und dann hat der Psychologe ihm gesagt,

and then the psychologist told him

9. er kann sich jetzt ein andres Wort aussuchen;

to choose another word;

10. er muss ja nit von ein Tag auf den anderen Mami sagen.

he does not need, from one day to the next, to say Mom.

11. Er kann sich ein Wort aussuchen

He could choose a word

12. und dann hat er gesagt Mapi (laughter);

and then he said "Mapi" (laughter);

13. dann war i immer die Mapi.

then I was "Mapi."

*The original South-Tyrolese dialectic form, which differs from standard German (Hochdeutsch), has been maintained in the transcription.

One of the most limiting elements, interfering with her decision to undergo gender confirming surgery, was the way her son would perceive this radical transformation of the person who, until the definite moment of transition, had been, for himself and all other agents participating in his everyday life his father. As the interlocutor noted, it was her son who

availed in her desire to conduct a publicly claimed transition: "Daddy, you have to do what makes you happy" (lines 2). Being rejected by her own son would have been her "greatest fear" (line 4). Indeed, she "would not have gone through with the operation" (lines 6) if it had meant losing her son, the most important emotional bond in her life. Consequently, she would have suppressed her most authentic mode of existence, being a woman: "Then I would even have preferred to die" (line 7).

Interestingly, because the change in her gender identity had to be aligned with the change in her parental role from father to mother, during a meeting with a psychologist, there was the discursive positioning that her 16-year-old son created. Indeed, because such a radical change could not be performed just "from one day to the next" (line 10), an intermediate position had to be defined to allow a slow adaption to a completely new way of interacting with his parent. Because, to the best of our knowledge, no lexeme in any language provides a word defining a third parental degree between mother and father, her son invented a neologism by proposing a synthesis of the German nouns *Papi* (dad) and *Mami* (mom)—"Mapi" (lines 12 and 13).

This neologism excellently reflects the main goal that this study is focused on—that is, the manner in which gender identity is defined within a dichotomous linguistic structure. However, throughout this neologism her son created a new modality of interaction beyond the gender binary, showing therefore, that it is possible to undo gender.

Writing gender

Furthermore, the struggle between linguistic dualistic coordinates and the authentic representation of self is shown in the following two passages, chosen from the written narratives. The first of these two extracts is selected from the autobiographical report of a 50-year-old trans woman who works as a general contractor in Verona.

Extract 5

1. ERA UN INCUBO*!

IT WAS A NIGHTMARE!

2. Da qualunque parte mi girassi c'era qualcuno che mi derideva,

Wherever I was, there was someone who made fun of me,

3. che mi faceva notare la mia anormalità,

who made me notice my abnormality;

4. anormalità che era rappresentata, più che mai da quel piccolo seno,

abnormality that was enhanced more than ever by these little breasts,

5. così strano in un ragazzo, in un ragazzo molto esile, quel piccolo seno

so strange on a boy, on a very tiny boy, these little breasts,

6. che i compagni di classe nell'ora di ginnastica cominciarono a notare

which my classmates began to notice during the gym lessons

7. quando per la prima volta mi tolsi la maglietta per indossare la tuta.

when, for the first time, I took off my shirt in order to put on my training clothes.

* The caps have been reported as they appear in the original, handwritten version.

Rhetorically, the author of this extract made an interesting choice. On one hand, she used the imperfect (imperfetto) "mi derideva" (made fun of me) (line 2), "faceva" (made), (line 3) "era" (was) (line 4) for referring to a continued or repeated state in the past. On the other hand, she chose the remote past tense (*passato remoto*) for indicating an event occurring once that happened far in the past: "cominciarono" (began) (line 6) and "mi tolsi" (I took off) (line 7). As for the former verbal form, she underlined a process of exclusion and discrimination she was continuously exposed to during her adolescence. Indeed, she stated, "Wherever I was, there was someone who made fun of me" (line 2; sense of exclusion) and twice repeated the noun "abnormality" (lines 3 and 4; sense of discrimination) in order to underline a continuous deja vu of symbolic violence that transformed her life into a "NIGHTMARE" (line 1). With regard to the latter verbal form (the remote past tense), in her diary, she tended to use the simple past (*passato prossimo*) in any perfective situation, as most northern Italians do. Accordingly, as the stylistic choice of the remote past tense sounds strange and is unusual for native speakers from Veneto, she voluntarily connoted this passage

with an archaic and quasi-epic meaning. The extract refers to her period at high school when she was 12 years of age and still at the beginning of her gender transition. Until that moment, she represented herself as a boy. Therefore, the use of the remote past tense indicates an episode that is situated in the past and no longer belonged to her current representation of self. The embarrassing moment in the changing room, when her classmates noticed her "little breasts, so strange on a boy, on a very tiny boy" (lines 4–5), evidenced the *division bell*, which marks the linguistic separation between two psychologically, socially, normatively, and culturally defined antipodes: man versus woman.

Feeling as though the body is a jail of identity represents a red line across the discursive productions of nearly all of the trans people who participated in this study. Such a feeling has also been reported in this last extract, which has been selected from the life story, written by a postoperative transsexual man who works as a computer technician in Verona.

Extract 6

1. Ma per un bambino incastrato in un corpo di bambina,

   But for a boy trapped in a girl's body,

2. tutti i sogni si trasformano in paura.

   all dreams evolve into fear.

3. E quando tutti ti portano a credere che sei sbagliato,

   And when everybody makes you believe you are wrong,

4. la tua strada della vita diventa proibita, e il futuro, inesistente.

   the path of your life becomes forbidden and your future, nonexistent

As noted by the author of this autobiographical narrative, feeling as though one's gender is shut in a sexualized body that contrasts with one's own representation of oneself—that is, being a "boy trapped in a girl's body" (line 1)—promotes emotions that are linked to uncertainty and existential struggle: "all dreams evolve into fear" (line 2). Accordingly, because the representation of oneself does not develop in line with the social representations of sexual dualism, one's existence is at risk of being relegated within the

symbolic borders of deviance and isolation, with one's life becoming "forbidden and your future, non-existent" (line 4). With regard to the results of the hierarchical descending classification, the adjective "wrong" (line 3) is repeated several times in class 1, confirming that the experiences of gender transition promote a discursive representation of the self that is linked to inappropriateness and maladjustment. Indeed, due to the manner in which trans people defy heteronormative conventions, loneliness and avoidance become an intertextual feature of their discursive representations of the self.

What emerged from the analysis of talk and speech are two different discursive positionings according to one's own sense of gender: (a) trans people who talk and consequently do gender and (b) trans people who bypass the dualistic syntax of Italian language throughout a strategic use of rhetorics, enabling challenges to the gender binary.

Discussion

With regard to the aims of the current study, the analysis shows that the genesis of a language, mainly Italian, which lexically follows from a dichotomous sexual order, produces shared representations of gendered realities that can be expressed semantically in only two ways: as either masculine or feminine. Consequently, such linguistic practice reifies discourse to a symbolic and cultural capital, defining a habitus in accordance with a widespread heteronormative representation of gender in society.

Indeed, the lexemes principally contained in class 1, which circumscribe institutionalized universes and macro systems of value, underline the relationship between norms and discursive practices, generating gendered words within masculinized worlds. Words such as "padre" (father) and "Dio" (God) actually enhance the strong masculine connotation of a gendered Roman language in which the male gender refers not only to men but also to more generally universal or neutral meanings. The Italian noun "uomo," for instance, not only means man but also means human being. This discursive structure implicitly connotes systems of knowledge, cultural horizons, and everyday interactions with dominantly patriarchal representations of reality, as "the masculine linguistic position undergoes individuation and heterosexualization required by the founding prohibitions of the

Symbolic law, the law of the Father" (Butler, 1990, p. 27).

Especially, the lexical structure of class 5 promotes a pathologized and problematized representation of people who pass between and across the genders. Such a discursive positioning permeates interactions at all levels of the social order, including work and prison, as noted previously by Schilt and Westbrook (2009) and Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014), respectively, even influencing negatively on trans people's representations of themselves (Amodeo et al., 2015).

These results perfectly fit with the macro-situation of trans- and LGB people in Italy (ISTAT, 2012). The dualistic vision of sex and gender, indeed, promotes a climate of implicit transphobia, because whoever passes through and across the genders might enable a paradigmatic and consequently ontological change of society's most fundamental distinction (West & Zimmerman, 2009). Thus discrimination, more than a modality of psychological and physical violence, turns within the current study into a rhetoric strategy for safeguarding the solidified mechanisms of social order. Many trans people, therefore, prefer to conform their outside identity to those parameters of social justice, which seem to be culturally more acceptable. The *undefinedness*, indeed, that the interlocutor of Extract 2 is talking about, generates confusion not only for the heterosexist domain but also for trans people, who often label (and stigmatize) themselves throughout an interiorized transphobia, as has been previously noted by Amodeo et al. (2015). Such confusion makes people less aware of what they really are and desire, promoting at the same time systems of collective conformism. This last aspect, as highlighted by Asch (1956), influences many of the ways people are making decisions for themselves and the others according to what has been established, shared, and legitimated by a unanimous majority.

The findings of a large-pan survey, carried out by ISTAT (2012) across Italy, clearly demonstrate how these processes of conformism produce uncertainty. If the majority of Italian citizens (77%) identified themselves as heterosexual, this could be due to social desirability in some cases. The 15 percent of participants of that survey, instead, who preferred not to reveal anything about their intimate choices and/or gender identity, along with a 5 percent who chose the option "other," claim something that does not necessarily match with wider

systems of social means. These people, within a cultural field, which does not conceive alternatives to the heteronormative domain, represent themselves as something different and indefinable. Accordingly, the results of the current study suggest that 20 percent of Italian citizens do not know how to negotiate their own claim of identity within a society, which does not permit redefining its dualistic and sexualized imprint, reified by linguistic practices and discursive processes.

Consistent with the findings of previous studies (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Greco, 2012), the interdependencies among the five lexical classes reproduce the distribution of normative aspects that reflect the hegemonic representation of a gender binary on a linguistic level. As discussed in Bucholtz and Hall (2005), regarding the talking practices of Hijras (people who are undoing gender in India), the linguistic gender system in Italian, as in other Roman languages (e.g., Portuguese), presupposes a clear discursive positioning according to an antinomic semantic, "where verbal gender marking is often obligatory" (p. 589). The findings of the lexicometric analysis clearly evidence a similar linguistic process, as shown by the continuous alternation of masculine and feminine suffixes: "sbagliatissimo/a" (most wrong) in class 1 or "sieropositivo/a" (HIV-positive) in class 5, for instance.

However, the talking practices included in classes 2 and 3, which are characterized by a more personal and ego-syntonic vocabulary, empower trans people's agency as they claim their own and authentic sense of gender, independent of the contextual frame of interaction. Accordingly, from the discursive positioning of Extracts 2 and 3, though being produced in prison, emerged a representation of self in contrast to a dualistic perspective of gender, as shown by the trans woman from São Paulo (Extract 3), who did not perceive herself as a woman, but rather as a "transsexual." Actually, her identity does not underlie wider social meanings and, instead, she simply prefers to be herself, evidencing that trans people "disrupt the assumption that sex (…), sex category (…), and gender (…) correspond with each other" (Connell, 2010, p. 32).

On a linguistic level, the strong gendered structure of the Italian lexicon can be undone by playing on the words, as the interlocutor of Extract 3 did by omitting an undefined article or as the interviewee in Extract 5

did by choosing the remote past tense instead of the simple past, in order to avoid conjugations throughout the auxiliary "essere" (be), which requires gendered suffixes. Consistent with Bucholtz and Hall (2005), who evidenced that Hijras typically speak in a feminine semantic in Hindi, "but violate gender norms of appropriate Indian femininity in other ways, such as through the use of obscenity" (p. 589), the trans people in the current research violate similar sexualized rules proper of the Italian syntax through the strategic use of the semiotic beyond the semantic. Interestingly, this is also the choice of the language by bilingual individuals, such as in the case of the postoperative transsexual woman from South-Tyrol (Extract 4). Referring to aspects regarding both her gender identity and private sphere, she preferred to speak in German, a language that does not conceive gendered designations. On the other hand, she chose Italian when referring to institutional and public realities. Such a stylistic choice has been observed in another publication by Bucholtz and Hall (2008), where talking practices of bilingual (English and Hindi) Indians were analyzed:

> While boys are bilingual in Hindi and English, they often talk about sex in Hindi, to the dismay of some of the group's more veteran members. Their use of Hindi at key moments in English-speaking discussion groups thus signals not an allegiance to traditional sexual values, but rather a rejection of the upper-class sexual model. (p. 421)

Considering, therefore, the complexity of different contexts in interaction, along with several repercussions of psychological and emotional relevance, it is possible to undo gender throughout the rhetoric strategies of wider discursive universes. Indeed, six out of the 14 trans people who took part in this study do not necessarily "interact in ways that convince others that they are "really" members of the opposite sex category" (Connell, 2010, p. 51). This evidences that, though Roman languages define gendered talking practices, someone might trespass such antinomic logic in different ways and manners.

Consistently to what has been pointed out by Amodeo et al. (2015), the findings of the current study suggest that trans people embedded within a validating relational network, better claim their most intimate and authentic sense of gender, confirming that "people with a secure attachment style are more likely to have a positive transgender identity than those with an insecure attachment style" (p. 56).

Limitations

This study investigated the way trans people are *talking gender* with regard to the sexualized, dualistic structure of the Italian language. Since six out of 14 trans people were from Brazil, though speaking fluent and, in some cases, excellent Italian, future research should be conducted in Brazil by gathering discursive data produced in Portuguese. Other Roman languages underlying different systems of meanings may bring forth different discursive practices among (trans)people who are (un)doing gender. Especially the Brazilian reality accounts for a wide range of cultural, geographical, and social peculiarities, which produce a myriad of intra-, inter-, and extra-personal expressions of identity. Research conducted in postmodern Brazil would create new perspectives for the understanding of gender as an intersectional process between language, discourse, and context. Accordingly, analyzing cultural-specific ways of communicating and interacting could challenge the socially shared and historically anchored paradigm of the sexual binary. Indeed, the construct of gender dualism itself might assume diversified meanings in societies outside the so-called Western world. A critical and, at the same time, transnational view would offer important implications for proposing a redefinition of both common sense and scientific discourses, which still promote a hegemonic distinction between sex, sex category, and gender.

Conclusion

The results principally showed that discourses present different narrative structures, whether speech concerns public topics (norms, culture, interactions with the generalized other) or private dimensions (representation of self, affections, interactions with the significant other). Symbolic and ideological processes change from context to context and depend on the situativity of social events and historical frames. Indeed, different contexts shape different discourses, producing different representations of others and oneself.

In synthesis, three main aspects, contributing to a critical and intersectional understanding of gender, emerged from the present study. Firstly, trans people

are *doing gender* on the stages of everyday life according to the symbolic and normative coordinates that frame a specific cultural field. Furthermore, as language becomes the script of social interaction, circumscribing discursive practices within antinomic and sexualized semantic meanings, (trans)people are *talking gender*. These two processes (re)produce shared and legitimized representations of the heteronormative binary, confirming those feminist theories that conceive gender as a hegemonic, symbolic means of legitimating the most fundamental antinomy of society. Finally, trans people may be *undoing gender*, whether the relational network grants substantial emotional bonds that are co-constructed between the self and significant others.

Coping strategies, based on positive affectivity, should be implemented therefore in all social, institutional, and clinical policies that are devoted to promoting assistance and support for trans people who suffer stigmatization, marginalization, and physical and institutional violence.

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