Laughing Out the Problem: Laughter as an emotional uplifting tool in telephone counseling

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This paper explores the use of laughter in telephone counseling sessions where problems were intensively discussed. The purpose of this study is to examine why and how laughter is used in the context of counseling. The data were collected from Hotline 1323 run under supervision of The Thailand Mental Health Department. Thirty conversations, totaling 782 minutes, were recorded. The analysis revealed that laughter in telephone counseling is not an indicator of humor, but it is interactively constructed as a counseling tool used by the counselors and the clients. Clients, on the one hand, tend to use laughter as a tool of introducing themselves and their life problems. The counselors, on the other hand, use laughter to build rapport, and to diffuse stress in the counseling session. It is argued that laughter can be used strategically as a means of mental health communication for managing stress and emotions of people when interacting with each other as well as when facing troubles talk. It is also argued that laughter can be accounted as a form of social mediation for people's actions.

Key words: laughter, telephone counseling discourse, conversation analysis

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาถึงการใช้การหัวเราะในการให้คำปรึกษาทางโทรศัพท์ ข้อมูลในการวิจัยได้มาจากการบันทึกบทสนทนาทางโทรศัพท์ระหว่างผู้ให้และผู้รับคำปรึกษาจากบริการ 1323 สายด่วนสุขภาพจิต ในการดูแลของกรมสุขภาพจิต กระทรวงสาธารณสุข ข้อมูลมีจำนวนทั้งสิ้น 30 บทสนทนา มีความยาว 782 นาที ผู้วิจัยเก็บข้อมูลตามหลักจริยธรรมการทำวิจัยในคน ผลการวิจัยพบว่า การหัวเราะในการให้คำปรึกษาทางโทรศัพท์มิใช่เป็นเครื่องบ่งชี้ที่แสดงความขบขัน แต่ถูกใช้ในฐานะเป็นเครื่องมือของการปรึกษา ผู้รับคำปรึกษามักจะใช้การหัวเราะเป็นเครื่องมือในการเริ่มต้นพูดถึงปัญหาและแนะนำตัวเอง ในขณะที่ ผู้ให้คำปรึกษาจะใช้การหัวเราะเพื่อสร้างความสนิทใจกับผู้รับคำปรึกษา และลดบรรยากาศที่ตึงเครียดระหว่างการให้คำปรึกษา ผลการวิจัยบ่งชี้ว่า การหัวเราะในการให้คำปรึกษาไม่ได้เป็นเครื่องสนองต่ออารมณ์ขันเหมือนการหัวเราะในบริบททั่วไป แต่เป็นกลวิธีทางการสื่อสารเชิงสุขภาพจิตที่มีบทบาทสำคัญต่อการจัดการทางอารมณ์และความเครียดของบุคคลเมื่อต้องปฏิสัมพันธ์กัน และเมื่อต้องเผชิญกับการพูดเรื่องปัญหา การหัวเราะอาจจัดเป็นเครื่องมือการสื่อสารอย่างหนึ่งในกิจกรรมทางสังคมของคน

คำสำคัญ: การหัวเราะ วาทกรรมการให้คำปรึกษาทางโทรศัพท์ การวิเคราะห์บทสนทนา

1. Introduction

During counseling sessions, it is understandable that stress, anxiety, distress, and other negative circumstances can easily emerge. Such topics as: life failures, tragedies, embarrassments, and the like have led the counseling to be known as one of the most sensitive talks. Burks and Stefflre (1979, p.14) state that counseling is where, “a professional relationship between a trained counselor and a client is designed to help clients to understand and clarify their views of their life space, and learn to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful and well-informed choices and through resolution of problems.” This means that the environment of the counseling profession is filled with anxiety, frustration, stress and success at the same time. As serious as it may sound, it is undeniable that counselors and clients both sometimes make use of laughter during the course of a counseling session. This brings about the research question that this paper wishes to answer, “what is laughter used for in a counseling session?”

Previous studies on laughter in discourse are mostly related to humor and joke analysis (Attardo, 2001; 2015) in the context of daily situations rather than in particular situations like telephone counseling conversation, the topic for the present study. By far, laughter itself is the analysis of humorous texts in interactional discourse and is explained as an overt indicator of humor. According to Attardo, laughter can be created in various ways, and there are many theories explaining the mechanisms by which humor and laughter emerge in discourse. He also points out that laughter may be caused by non-humorous stimuli and does not always follow jokes. In this sense, laughter and humor are two different phenomena. Chapman and Foot (1996), focusing on laughter in young adult communication, illustrates its function as humorous laughter, social laughter, ignorance laughter, invasion laughter, apologetic laughter, anxiety laughter, derision laughter and joyous laughter.

In terms of interactional sociolinguistics Gumperz (1982) addresses the issue of which contextualization cues are used to create laughter in conversation. The way in which speakers choose their words or prosodic elements is ultimately influenced by social interaction itself. Interlocutors can play their role and negotiate power as well as construct identity within these interactions. According to Gumperz (1982), contextualization cues are any linguistic features that signal to people knowledge of how to understand a given context. Contextualization cues are used to facilitate interlocutor’s understanding of a situation, their relationship to and the

meaning of utterances. Laughter, in this sense, is constructed within such interactions and can be signaled by and often is contextualization cues.

Counseling session can be seen as communicative event within the dialogic script of troubles talk. In term of 'troubles talk', which is introduced by Jefferson (1984, 1988) in the context of conversation analysis, it is understood as an event, a situation of conversational activity of *telling someone about a personal trouble*, that represents a source of concern, worry, anxiety, or discomfort talk. Several scholars have approached this conversational event in a close relationship or familiar interaction. Buttny (2004) highlights the analysis of conversations mainly concerning social problem such as racial discrimination, teenage parenthood, or family relationship during therapy. Other studies analyzed trouble talks from the linguistic actions performed by cultural differences (Geyer, 1988; Mortenson, 2009) and gender differences (Tannen, 1990; MacGeorge et al., 2004). Tannen (2003) also describes the study of cross-cultural and gendered speech-in-interaction by following Gumperz (1982) methodological steps. She considers the segments in which trouble is evident and looks for culturally patterned differences in signaling meaning that could account for the trouble.

As far as we know however, only a few conversation analysts who have dealt with troubles talk explicitly emphasized the topic of laughter in institutional context of counseling.

Laughter in counseling sessions is also a coping device which clients use to release tension apart from its typical function as a response to humor. Grotjahn (1957) points out that laughter, like tears, can be an expression which follows danger or perceived danger for the client. Jefferson (1988) also discusses that during the counseling, clients would laugh more often than their counterparts to show their abilities of bearing trouble. Nevertheless, it is cautious that while clients are laughing, the counselors should not commit to take part in laughter because it would show their insensitivity and can be perceived as unprofessional. Counselors can only join in laughter when there is a time out from the problem or at the end of the talk (Glenn, 2003).

The previous research has shown the significance of laughter in daily discourse, nonetheless, it has not reported much about the significant role of laughter in particular context such as telephone counseling discourse. Our observation of laughter using in Hotline 1323 counseling discourse in Bangkok, Thailand suggests a different role for laughter than in previous studies. Our data and analysis indicate that counselor's laughter is significant. Not all of them are "join-in laughter" as Glenn mentioned but rather it is initiated by the counselors

themselves. Our analysis examines the role of counselor's laughter together with the client's during telephone counseling and considers how laughter is triggered by both counselors and the clients alike. Particularly during counseling sessions we find our contribution to be related to how mental health communication constructs and displays social relationships between participants.

2. Methods and Data

2.1 Data collection and data transcription

This study focuses on telephone counseling, 1323 Hotline, taking place at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Rajanagarindra Institute. The hotline is under supervision of Thailand's Mental Health Department, the Ministry of Public Health. It was established after an extensive consideration on the rising number of Thai people who are stressful and suffered from depressive disorder. The objective of establishment is to reduce the number of stressful people in Thailand by providing an effective and professional counseling to Thai people.

Our data consists of 26 clients (3 male and 23 female) and 6 counselors (1 male and 5 female). The difference in number of female and male participants has to do with the situational context itself. During the period of data collecting, there were only 4 cases of male and 26 cases of female that are ethically disseminated. Of all the counselors at the hotlines, the female counselors usually outnumber the male. This may suggest that gender may play a significant role in telephone counseling in Thailand. There were more female both as the counselor and the client in counseling.

We recorded 30 cases, 782 minutes of counseling talk which all is done in Thai. 67 excerpts with laughter were selected. Almost all of the selected data indicates that laughter always occurs at the beginning of the conversation as frequent as at the end of the conversation. Only some of them occur in other part of the conversation. This suggests that laughter may function as an introducing and terminating tool in counseling. Each excerpt was transcribed into and was translated into English later on. All of the transcriptions were reviewed at least 3 times to ensure the accuracy of verbal content.

Laughter is transcribed here in a bracket at the initial or at the end of people utterances to be attempting its function in talks rather than its physical characteristics, such as articulatory, acoustic or auditory.

The data was analyzed using Tannen's talk-in-interaction to get the most insightful of how laughter is brought into play.

Concerning ethical permission, as the data collecting was in process, the objective of study was explained to the clients and the clients' consent was obtained verbally. Sometimes, this consent was obtained before the recording; other times, it was obtained at the end of talk. Researchers left it up to the counselors to determine appropriateness. If the patient refused to participate in the study, the tape would immediately be erased. Consent was also obtained from the counseling staff. Counselors who did not wish to participate in the study were assigned to work in other slots so as not to conflict with the data collecting session timetable

2.2 Methods

Interactional discourse analysis and ethnography framework are cornerstone of this analysis since they provide an insightful explanation about how laughter is projecting in people talk and what are contextualization cues that are used to create laughter in such interaction. The recordings were done with the help of digital recorder and audio recordings were collected right after the counselor picked up the phone. Using ethnographic method to observe what has been happening at the real time and setting, we noticed a great many advantages as opposed to the traditional audio tape-recorder method.

Following Tannen (1984, p. 160-161) we have used a series of steps that need to follow in analysis and excerpt of laughter in counseling talk-in-interaction.

-Recording (with consent) of as many telephone counseling talks as possible.

-Identifying marked segment, such as laughter, cooperative communication.

-Studying the segments that have been identified, transcribing the elements of counseling talk such as introduction, topic maintenance, turn-taking, interruptions, overlapping, pauses, and laughter by using conversational convention system.

-Comparison of features found in various examples.

-Asking for the reactions and interpretations of the counselors, who gave permissions, at the end of counseling.

-Trying the interpretations out in the real world.

The conclusion following the interactional discourse analysis displayed the function of laughter used by the counselors and the clients. Our study did not aim at finding a gendered

different tendency as it was based on Tannen's work. Our aim was to find the laughter functions that would be generalized as a model of mental health communication in Thai society.

3. Results

Considering how both counselors and clients use laughter in counseling, this study has shed light on the clients' and counselors' uses of laughter in telephone counseling; specifically how clients and counselors are "laughing out" in the counseling session and how laughter plays different roles for both client and counselor. The results are presented in more detail in the following session.

3.1 Laughter of clients as a tool for introducing themselves and their problems

Our analysis found that during counseling sessions, clients most often used laughter during life story narratives where they recount their problems. Their laughter can be interpreted as self-introducing to the audience, in this case the counselor, since it usually occurred at the beginning of the conversation. Also, laughter often downplays serious life failures of the clients as well as suggests the incongruity of the problems.

During a counseling session, it is understandable that clients would struggle to disclose publicly their selves and their problems to an audience they do not know. Some of them have never experienced telephone counseling via hotlines, in fact for most of them this is the first time that they will be engaged in counseling. They might have trouble at the very beginning of the conversation during the period of what is known as "troubles talk" where they will disclose their troubles to the counselors. This seems that clients will be faced with difficulties in overcoming their self-esteem to let the counselor help them tackle with the problems. Laughter is appeared as a tool of introducing self and life problems as illustrating in example 1.

Example 1

Pare (the client) is a government officer. When she has a problem with her colleague and gets angry, she will have sweaty hands and feel nervous. She feels worried that these are symptoms of mental disorder. C. is counselor.

Pare: It's (.) It's:: ah:: kind of worried that (laughter) if I let it be that way, I might have a mental disorder.(laughter)

C.: HmhmhmhmhmIt's like. (.) It's good (.) that you've called (.) g-good. Actually, you seem to have your own solution for this trouble. (.) And you have already done it too. So, that's why you know if you take it out of your mind::. Well, if you think this is other people's word. It is. Do you agree that it is not easy to stop people from mounting badly at each other? It depends on. It depends on:: personal traits. (.) Do you agree that (.) we cannot change others, and others are (.) different from us. The ways they think are different from us.

แพร คือ (.) คือ::มัน::มีความรู้สึกว่า (หัวเราะ) ถ้าเราปล่อยไปอย่างงี้มากๆ เราจะเป็นโรคจิตรึเปล่า (หัวเราะ)

จนท. อืมๆๆๆๆ อย่างงี้ค่ะ (.) ดี (.) ตอนเนี้ย ที่หนูโทรมา (.) ดิ ดีแล้ว จริงๆหนูเองอยู่แล้วนะ (.) นะ แล้วหนูก็ได้แก้อยู่แล้วหละ หนูก็ได้รู้ว่า:: (.) ถ้าหนูหนูมีทางแก้ปัญหาของปล่อยวาง:: จริงๆ ถ้าหนูคิดว่าปากเขา:: คนเรายอมรับไหมว่าคนเรามันห้าม (.) ห้ามการว่า การนินทาไม่ได้ มันขึ้นอยู่กับ ขึ้นอยู่กับตัว::แต่ละคนอะเนาะ (.) ยอมรับไหม (.)ว่าเราเปลี่ยนคนอื่นไม่ได้:: แล้วคนอื่นเขาก็ถูกเลี้ยงดูมา:: (.) ต่างจากเรา วิธีคิด เขาก็ต่างจากเรา

According to the excerpt above, Pare (the client) used laughter in her turn where the topic about her mental health is introduced. She starts the topic by using hedges, e.g. *"ah::" and "kind of",* to suggest her hesitation. Then, she chuckles both before and after the introducing herself *"kind of worried*" and *"I might have a mental disorder."* These show that the client uses laughter as a barometer to measure her feeling levels of safety and security with the counselor, whether or not the topic can be introduced. In this case, the counselor responsed positively to the topic as she gave positive comments during the counseling turn. This ensures the client to follow a more serious statement about this topic afterwards.

The topic of talk in this excerpt could be called introducing self as well as a sensitive topic about mental health which is an embarrassing issue to push up publicly. Laughter is used not only to introduce the client to the counselor, but also to mitigate her own self-embarrassment so as to bring up the issue. Thus, it could be said that laughter here is used as a tool to downplay a sensitive topic.

A sensitive topic is often discussed as 'trouble'. The clients sometimes reveal their troubles comically. They laugh at their failures and make fun of themselves sarcastically. We propose the reason for doing so is that clients may get overdone with the problems. In this case, the laughter emerges as sarcasm in discussing their trouble in order to mitigate their suffering. Excerpts in example 2 can illustrate this point.

Example 2

Fon (the client) broke up with her boyfriend because she has found out that her boyfriend having an affair with another woman. Pitifully, she was in despair and depressed. Moreover, she was annoyed by her new boyfriend's lover.

Fon: I don't know (.) I didn't expect that she would text me that way:: And she's like (.) She taught me like:: (.) like (.) He didn't care about you anymore. So, why you're still here. Why don't you break up with him:: [that's kind of things

C.: [Hm

Fon: Anyway, that's good. When I'm in trouble, I will lose my appetite. Then, I will be skinny, and look good (laughter)

ฝน ไม่รู้ซิ (.) หนูไม่คิดว่าเค้าจะพิมมาแบบนี้:: แล้วก็แบบ (.) มาสอนหนูว่า:: (.) เหมือน (.) ก็ผู้ชายเค้าไม่สนใจแล้ว แล้วพี่จะอยู่ทำไม ก็เลิกไปซิ:: [อะไรอย่างเงี้ย

จนท. [อืม

ฝน ก็ดี หนูมาเจอเรื่องแบบนี้แล้วหนูก็กินข้าวไม่ลง จะได้ผอม จะได้สวย (หัวเราะ)

In this excerpt, laughter occurs in the client's turn. It can be pointed out that laughter here is used right after a sarcasm clause *"Anyway, that's good. When I'm in trouble, I will lose my appetite. Then, I will be skinny, and look good."* This utterance shows how the client managed her feeling towards trouble and used laughter to reconstruct a new effect of trouble to get over her dilemma. Allport (1968) pointed out that clients sometimes use laughter and humor as an expression of rebellion and dissatisfaction with life so as to show their resistance towards problems. In other words, we could say that clients use laughter as a problem transforming tool. It is understandable that clients could make fun of their tragic moments, for it implies that they are able to cope and accept their emotional experience in some ways.

One of the most difficult parts for clients in obtaining counseling is that they are expected to come up with their own resolutions by themselves. Counselors are there only to stimulate and facilitate them to think, not to give them the exact solutions (Burks and Stefflre, 1979). Thus, during the process of thinking, the clients can get into a bit of self-confusion easily. As unprofessional as it may sound, the realization of self-confusion leads the clients to an effective way of getting out of the problem. This can be explained in that the realization of self-confusion always comes with the self-recognition of the boundary between the confusing

things which can be later called “a congruity of the problems”. When the clients realize this congruity, they may invite laughter to show their relief as appears in example 3.

Example 3

Ying (the client) broke up with her boyfriend whom she planned to live her life with. She tried to commit suicide, but she couldn’t succeed it.

Ying: (7.65) Well, I think (.) it’s. It’s. It’s kind of contrasting (laughter) (2.00). I think that (.) yesterday, how could I do it. Didn’t I think about my mom and dad? (.) By then, I think that why do I have to wake up again?

C.: Yeah

Ying: I didn’t want to wake up again. Why did I?

หญิง (7.65) ก็คิดว่า (.) มันๆๆ เหมือนขัดกันอยู่ (หัวเราะ) (2.00) หนูคิดว่า (.) เมื่อวานเราทำลงไป ได้ยังไง ไม่คิดถึงพ่อแม่เลยเหรอ (.) แต่ก็คิดด้วยว่า เราจะตื่นขึ้นมาทำไม (.)

จนท. ค่ะ

หญิง ฉันไม่ได้อยากตื่นขึ้นมาซักหน่อย ทำไมจะต้องตื่นขึ้นมา

In the excerpt 3, laughter is invited in the client’s turn. Just before that, the client found the congruity of her problem as stated that there is a contrastive view on her thought. She wanted to commit a suicide, but she also felt guilty to her parents. This contrastive view leads to a realization in a congruity of the problem to her, so soon after that she laughed. The laughter, at this point, is used to suggest some signs of self-realization on the clients. In this case, Ying was laughing out to show that she has taken a step further in understanding herself and her problem more profoundly. So, the data convinces us that laughter here can be used as a tool to suggest an understanding of the clients in an incongruity of life.

Apparently, laughter in the counseling conversation of the client is used as a mean of representing the self of client to the world and to let the people, particularly, the counselor, know their troubles or their life problems. Consequently, they could manage, more or less, their feelings, their emotions as well as their own attitudes towards problems while talking about these issues to the counselor. To some extent, the client may not want any suggestions from the counselor; they just need someone to listen.

3.2 Laughter of a counselor as a tool of building rapport and diffusing stress

Laughter on the counselor's side is not quite as common as it is with the clients. The clients may use laughter to relieve tension, but laughter might be considered as inappropriate and unprofessional for the counselor. However, our study found that laughter is used by the counselors. It plays the crucial role of building rapport, and also the role of diffusing stress during a counseling session.

3.2.1 Building rapport

As Jefferson (1988) and Glenn (2003) mentioned, when there is an occurrence of laughter from counselors, it is mostly identified as responsive laughter. Counselors do not generally initiate laughter with the client. In doing so, it demonstrates the intention of the counselors that they want to use laughter as a tool to build rapport with their clients, so they can make the client feel less self-defensive and elicit a desire to continue a dialog.

The below excerpt is a continuous part from example 1. Researchers have brought this example up again in this section because it is an example that can show a distant relationship between the client and the counselor clearly. As interesting as it may sound, this example can show the process of how the client and the counselor build on their rapport by the use of laughter.

Example 4

Pare is an officer. When she has a problem with her colleague and gets angry, she will have a sweaty hand and feel nervous. She is worried and wonders if these signs may trigger the mental disorder. .

Pare: Hm:: Is it because I think that. Expectation. Is that because of the expectation?

C.: Right:: It's because we expected. Uh. Expectation. We must We must accept that when we expected. You're (.) so clever. You realize that you have expectations. Most people don't even realize that they have expectation. When we expect, it's not always succeed because when we expect, whom do we expect with?

Pare: Hm

C.: Other person, isn't it?

Pare: Right. Right.

C.: Ar:: So that why we're disappointed very often because it's hard to control other person. This is [You will

Pare: [(laughter)

C.: (laughter) if we don't expect. Not even on ourselves, we do not expect too.

แพร มันเป็นเพราะหนูคิดอย่างงี้ คาดหวัง มันเป็นเพราะว่าเราคาดหวังรึเปล่าคะ

จนท. ใช่::เป็นเพราะเราคาดหวัง อุความความหวังเนี่ยยอม ต้องยอม พอเราคาด น้อง (.) เก่งมากที่น้องรู้ว่าน้องคาดหวัง หลายคนไม่รู้ว่า ตัวเองคาดหวัง เวลาเราคาดหวังทุกอย่างนะคะ จะไม่สมหวัง เพราะเวลาเราคาดหวัง เรามักจะไปคาดหวังกับใคร

แพร อืม

จนท. คนอื่นเนาะ

แพร ใช่ๆ

จนท. เอ้อ:: มันไม่สมหวังหรอกเพราะเราเปลี่ยนคนอื่นไม่ได้ อันเนี่ยแหละ [น้องจะ

แพร [(หัวเราะ)

จนท. (หัวเราะ) เราไม่คาดหวังแล้ว แม้กระทั่งตัวเราเอง เราก็ไม่คาดหวัง หวังได้นะคะแต่อย่าคาดหวัง

According to the above excerpt, laughter was used 2 times; on the client's (Pare) turn and the counselor's turn. Just before these turns, the excerpt shows that the client tried to come up with some ideas about the root of the problem. Then, she proposes expectation as the answer which pleases the counselor. So, she laughs to show her content towards the counselor's comment. Simultaneously, there is laughter from the counselor. It is responsive laughter. Counselor uses responsive laughter here to show her agreement that she too feels content with the situation. Thus, rapport is built. The client does not have to maintain a role in finding the answer for herself. At the same time, the counselor does not have to maintain a role of thinking stimulator anymore. Then, their roles are merged, and laughter is used to identify that merging.

While talking about problems during a counseling session, clients might be faced with their flaws or imperfections which hold them back from happiness. A counselor will be expected to be there to ensure that their imperfections are common. And sometimes, laughter will appear at this point to show the lightness of the problem.

Example 5

Pam (the client) is a housewife. She is worried about her son who is addicted to a computer game. He has become arrogant and unhelpful.

Pam: Gradually connected him with. [When he is angry, he is too furious. =
C: He is not. He is not a kind of, kind of low IQ kids. [He's been nice, though he is=
Pam: [yeah::
C.: =inactive and slow. He's still doing his jobs. That's OK. [Clean the house at 11 p.m.=
Pam: [Um::
C.: =is fine. Wash dishes. Wash dishes at 11 p.m. is alright too. (.) but your son will go to bed late. (laughter)

แพม คงต้องค่อยๆ โยงมาถึงตัวเค้า เวลาเค้าโกธรอารมณ์เค้าขนาดนี้เลยเนี่ย
จนท. เค้าไม่ใช่ เค้าไม่ใช่คนๆ ที่แบบว่าไอคิวต่ำสักหน่อย [เค้าเป็นเด็กดีนิเนาะ ลูกเราถึงแม้ว่าจะทำช้าหน่อย แต่=
แพม [ใช่::
จนท. =ได้ทำก็โอเคนะ [ถูบ้านให้ 5 ทุ่มก็ยังดี เนาะ::ล้างจานล้างจาน 5 ทุ่ม ก็ไม่เป็นไร (.) แต่ลูกนอนดึกอะ=
แพม [อือ::
จนท. =(หัวเราะ)

In the excerpt, the counselor and the client are talking about the imperfection of the client's son. The client expects her son to be very obedient and helpful, but her son is slow and inactive because he spends a lot of time playing a computer game. So, she is disappointed. However in her turn, it is clear that the counselor tries to ensure the imperfections of her son. She said, despite the fact that her son is lazy, he is responsible. This utterance presents the normal state of imperfection among human beings. No one is born flawless. It seems the client begins to understand this as she listens actively through the use of agreeing terms "*yeah" "um*". By the end of this excerpt, the counselor laughs. Just before that, she has marked the tiniest imperfection about the boy if he stays up late "*Your son will go to bed late.*" Then, the counselor laughs. Laughter in this position is used to suggest the non-serious effect of the event. The counselor wants to ensure the client that everything will be fine even if her son goes to bed late. It could be said that laughter here is used to remark counselor's assurance that is given to the client to show the non-seriousness of the problem.

3.2.2 Diffusing the stress

During a counseling session, the situation can get serious and stressful easily. The clients need resolutions while the counselors are expected to provide them with effective strategies. Thus, laughter sometimes has been invited at this point to diffuse the seriousness and stressful feelings during a conversation.

Example 6

Noi (the client) is retired. She rented a tailor shop to run her own business for more than 10 years. Unfortunately, the leaser needs to lease her shop to other rentals who can pay more. She has to move out soon.

Noi: A sewing machine is very heavy. [And I am too old. Um::
C.: [Um:: I see (.) then you might have to pick up some clothes from the customers in the morning, and finish sewing in the afternoon. If the customers are not in hurry, you can negotiate (.) and ask them to pick up their clothes tomorrow, or the day after. For how long you will have to move. Take time to think [Um::
Noi: [Ar:: About 2 to 3 months
C.: Oh 2 to 3 months. Take it easy. (laughter)

น้อย มัน จักรมันหนักนะ [เราอายุมากแล้ว อืม::
จนท. [อืมๆ ค่ะ (.) ถ้างั้นก็ต้องไปรับตอนเช้า แล้วตอนเย็นเอาไปส่งเค้าอะ ถ้าคนไหนไม่ด่วนก็ค่อยว่ากันอะไรอย่างเงี้ย (.) ก็ขอกันไปอาจจะเป็นพรุ่งนี้ มะรืนนี้ นี่อีกกี่เดือนนะคะจะได้โดนย้าย ค่อยๆ คิดก็ได้ [อืม
น้อย [ค่ะ ก็ประมาณ 2-3 เดือนเนี่ยค่ะ
จนท. โอ๋ 2-3 เดือนใจเย็นๆ (หัวเราะ)

According to the example 6, the counselor used laughter in the last turn. In the preceding turns, they, the counselor and the client, are helping each other to find a working solution, but it doesn't work out well. Evidentially, the client has a lot of excuses starting from the beginning turn of this excerpt. The counseling process seemingly does not work well. So, it results in a stressful environment. The counselor is the first one who noticed this stress. Thus, she responds immediately by shooting out the question which leads to a new topic *"For how*

long you will have to move?" As the client answers, it reveals the facts that there is still time for considering her options. So after a reassuring statement, the counselor explodes laughter. This shows that the counselor has released her stress, and thus, resulting in a better environment for counseling.

4. Conclusion

As we have discussed about the usages of laughter in a telephone counseling we conclude that laughter in a counseling session is not stereotypically the same as a response for humor. It is indeed an emotional uplifting tool for all the clients, the counselors, and the counseling session as a whole. Due to the fact that counseling sessions are a problem-related discourse. It is hard to avoid a stressful climate. Therefore, laughter is brought into play, not to respond to a joke but to lessen the seriousness of talk. It is obvious that clients objectively use laughter to ease themselves during a counseling session while counselors strategically use laughter to create a relaxing environment for counseling. As a whole, laughter has brought a lighter and friendlier environment to the counseling session.

Not only has laughter led up a comfy environment, it also works as a marker to a sensitive and delicate nature of counseling session. To clarify, when counselors or clients pick up laughter as a communicative tool, it's always in the context of responding to something sensitive. For example, the clients choose to use laughter when they consider the topic too sensitive to introduce. In the same way, when counselors need to make a comment on an imperfection of the client, they always use laughter. To summarize, laughter in this study has worked in two ways; first as an emotional uplifting tool and second as a marker of emotionally sensitive events. Thus, these strategies have indicated the cultural and institutional use of laughter specifically that laughter is not always attached to a funny situation, but also a fatalistic situation. Laughter, then, may not be considered as something that the speaker is responding to, but rather that laughter can be managed as an interactional resource in social interaction.

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NOTES

Glossary of transcript symbols

(laughter)	The word 'laughter' in parentheses indicates laughter.
(.)	A dot in parentheses indicates a brief interval.
(0.0)	Number in parentheses indicated elapsed time in tenth of seconds.
::	Colons indicate prolongation in word.
[	A left bracket indicates an overlap onset.
=	Equal sign indicates on break or gap.