Exercise

Below is an extract taken from the article by Katja Kurri and Jarl Wahlström (Kurri and Wahlstrom 2007). They use the extract as an example of what they call “agentless talk”, which is a common phenomenon in psychotherapy sessions and also in everyday life conversations. Agentless talk means that some experiences and actions are spoken of as just happening to a person. The linguistic features of agentless talk comprise a plethora of impersonal constructions – passive voice, nominalizations, zero-person construction, and iterative verbs – which all imply having no control over the described actions. Please read the extract below carefully and identify the lines (which are numbered) and expressions in those lines in which agentless talk can be found. Your second task is to assess what “effect” does agentless talk have on the meaning conveyed, for instance what “moral” implications does it have? You can best approach that by imagining a construction in which agency remains with the speaker; how would it change the impression?

(1) (Presenting the problem)
1  T:  *tota niin. (1) #önn# sää otit, (. ) otit yhteyttää.*
   erin so. (1) #mnn# you made, (. ) made contact,
2  (0.5) ymmärtää, (. ) #m#, ja ymmärsin että olet
   (0.5) under-, (. ) #m#, and I understand that you have
3  pitkään, pohtinut että oisiko (2)
   been thinking for a long time that (2)
oisk-voisko tämmönen tutkimus.
would could this kind of research.

( .) ↓täi, tämmönen hoitojakso olla sulle hyödyksi
( .) or, this kind of treatment period be useful for you

niiden asioiden läpikäynnissä mitä sä oot.
in looking through those things you have.

C: ↓joo-↑o,
↓ye-↑ah,

T: oot miettynä.

have been thinking about.

C: kylläh=↑tai sanotaan nän että, hhh, (2) vuosi sitten
yes=↑or let’s say like: hhh, (2) a year ago

10 tuli jo niin↓ sellasia kokemuksesta
already came like↓ that kind of experiences

11 rupes tulemaa että mä ite niinku.
started to come that I myself like.

12 (1) omalla harkitsemmattomuudella niinku rupesin jo.
(1) with my own inconsiderateness like begun already.

13 (. ) pilamaan niinku omaa elämääni[.hhh,]
( .) to ruin like my life [.hhh,]
((a few lines omitted))

14 C: =niin, (. ) joo, (. ) se tapahtu silleen että:, (1)
=so, (. ) yeah, (. ) it happened like that that, (1)

15 C: .hhh mulloli, (0.5) (aikamoine) rasittava avioero,
.hh I had, (1) a (quite) difficult divorce,

16 [. (. ) tapahtu] ja siinä olit riitaa lapsista ja:
[( .) happened] and there was quarrel over the children

17 T: [.joo. ]
[yeah.]

18 C: (1) .hhh (. ) (semmoesta) käytännön hoijosta ja,
(1) .hhh (. ) (those sorts of ) practical things and,

19 (sitthän) sitä puski päälle vielä paljon sekun siis, (. )
(then) it also pushed over a lot that that, (. )

20 C: mun vaimo lähti mun, (. ) parhaan ystävän kanssa,
my wife left with my, (. ) best friend,

21 .hh- fh (. ) j tämmös( en), (. ) kalakaverin=↑minkä kanssa
.hh- [ fh ( . )] like this, (. ) fishing friend=↑who

22 T: [.joo. ]
[yeah.]

23 C: ollaan monet vuodet oltu yhessä. (1).hhh ja se sitt, (. )
we have often been with. (1).hhh and then she, (. )
ne lähti ja. (.) †kaipa se rassasi=siinä oli sitten sellanen.
they left and. (.) †I guess it bothered me=there was then
such.

hhh (.)pojan hhh, jääkiekkotouhuihin vienti aamulla
hhh, (.) ‘d to take my son hhh, to ice hockey in the morning
ja >mulla petti niinku harkintakyky olin edellisenä,
and my judgment broke down I had last,
(.) yönä, (.) nautimu alkoholia ja sitte jään< hhh,
(.) night, (.) drank alcohol and then I was
(2) ööh hhh ratsiassa kiinni hh hh[hh],
captured< hhh, (2) mmmh hhh by a radar trap hh[hh,] g

T: [joo,]
[yeah.]

C: siis rättjuoppoudesta s-,
like drunk drivin

T: sillon aamulla,
then in the morning,

C: niin.
yes.
((a few lines omitted))

C: ja sit-, (.) sitt sitt vaan toistu tälläset hhh, (1)
and the-, (.) then then they just repeated these hhh, (1)
tiettylläiset ongelmat sen alkoholin käytön. (.)
certain hhh, (1) problems with alcohol abuse. (.)
vaikeut siitä nyt usein ollu mutt että.
although it didn’t happen often except that.

(.) .hhh ei oikeestaan oo semmesta kertaa että.
(,) hhh there hasn’t been a time like that.

(.) alkoholia käytäviä> niin mä sitten vaivun
(,) one would drink |> and didn’t start thinking over

johonkin sellasiin wanahoinen muistel(uihin)
some kind of old memor(ies)
=minkäläista oli lapsuus, (.) useimmten
=what was childhood like, (.) often

ne ei välttämättä herkkua ollu tait sitten
they weren’t necessarily a pleasure or then
mää, (.) .hhh yksinkertasesti rupeen valehtelemaan.
I, (,) .hh simply begin to lie.

(.) puhun ihan mitä sattuu ja: (1) .hhh
(,) say anything a:nd. (1) .hh

sitt sekoilen naisten kanssa vaikka mulla ois
then I mess around with women although I have
hyvä ihmissuhde olemassa täällä hetkellä< ja hh, 
a good relationship at the moment< and hh,

yeah.

References