

Toward Semiotic Coaching (Paris School): Change and Transformation

Laleh Molaei * 

Vol. 12, No. 6, Tome 66
pp. 661-705
January & February 2022

Abstract

In a transmodern world, the current research finds commonalities between the Semiotics of Discourse (Paris School) which is intertwined with other fields such as linguistics, and coaching. The main problem and hypothesis of the present research is to argue that the Semiotics of Discourse (Paris School) can provide 'part of' a comprehensive theoretical framework for conceptualizing coaching and its development as an academic discipline and subdiscipline. Therefore, adopting a descriptive-analytic method based on Fontanille's ideas (Fontanille, 2003, as translated by Bostic, 2006) in analyzing and solving a case study of one of her clients in coaching, and introducing the term 'Khodnavardi' being established and registered in Iran by her, the author examines this problem and hypothesis. In order to make linguistics (its types and subdisciplines), semiotics (its types, and other fields intertwined with it), and other possible, probable fields, institutions, practitioners, skills, and sciences more practical, the current and future objective of this inquiry is to elementarily introduce the process of coaching discourse as an object and corpus of transdisciplinary studies. This trajectory will finally provide the context for the localization of the academic discipline, subdiscipline, and new profession of coaching, and subsequently coaching education and studies, and coaching training: a kind of localization, entrepreneurship and job creation. Pointing out the similarities between the Semiotics of Discourse (Paris School) and coaching, and presenting a model based on "Khodnavardi", the main achievement of this inquiry is suggesting the basics of 'Semiotic Coaching' at an academic level in Iran. In addition, 'Semiotic Coaching' can lead to interactions or commonalities with other fields, institutions, practitioners, skills, and sciences including pragmatism, educational linguistics, edusemiotics, change, transformation, cognitive sciences, philosophy, sociology, psychology, teaching, communication, management, human and organizational resource development, leadership, literature, cinema and theater, etc., and on the other hand, with different types of coaching like linguistic, semantic, ontological, integral, existential, narrative, cognitive, clean language, core energy, neuro-linguistic, academic, developmental, emotional intelligence, and other topics which will not be addressed for the sake of brevity.

Keywords: semiotic coaching, linguistic coaching, educational linguistics, edusemiotics, pragmatism, transformational actant, construction of modal identity, modality and modalization, transdisciplinary, entrepreneurship and job creation, Khodnavardi Model

* Corresponding author: Ph.D. Candidate in Linguistics, Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Tehran, Iran; Email: laleh_molaei@atu.ac.ir, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4488-1973>

Received: 9 June 2020
 Received in revised form: 9 July 2020
 Accepted: 8 August 2020

1. Introduction

Our main question and problem is how the Semiotics of Discourse (Paris School), which we call it SDPS here, based on (Fontanille, (2003 [2006])) can provide ‘part of’ a comprehensive theoretical framework for conceptualizing coaching and its development as an academic discipline and subdiscipline. In addition to pointing to the commonalities between SDPS and coaching which will be mentioned in the literature review, in the present inquiry, in particular, the hypothesis is that according to Fontanille and through the interaction among the intertwined network of ‘transformational actants’, ‘modality’, ‘modal verbs’, ‘modal identity’, and ‘modalization as construction of the actants’ identity’, we can reply some part of this problem and question. Therefore, adopting a descriptive-analytic method based on Fontanille's ideas in analyzing and solving a case study of one of her clients in a voice call coaching session recorded by an MP3 player, the author examines this problem and hypothesis. Introducing the term ‘Khodnavardi’ being established and registered in Iran by her, the author refers to human interaction with oneself, the world, and the other in the coaching process, and to refer to the whole context of the clients’ issues, which is based on some kind of change, transformation, growth, development, and the like. Then, in terms of the achievement of this study, presenting a model based on ‘modal verbs’ and ‘Khodnavardi’, the author suggests the basics of ‘Semiotic Coaching’ at an academic level in Iran. Moreover, in the atmosphere of the ‘transmodern world’ (the title derived from Seif (2017)), ‘Semiotic Coaching’, and of course, different theories and concepts of linguistics, semiotics, and related fields and their subfields can generate interactions and commonalities with other fields, institutions, skills and sciences including pragmatism, educational linguistics, edusemiotics, change, transformation, cognitive sciences, philosophy, sociology, psychology, teaching, communication, management, human and organizational resource development, leadership, literature, cinema and theater, and so forth, as well as with coaching types like linguistic, semantic, ontological, integral, existential, narrative, cognitive, clean

language, core energy, neuro-linguistic programming, academic, developmental, emotional intelligence, and more. The present study does not cover this part here. Finally, in order to make linguistics (its types and subdisciplines), semiotics (its types, and other fields intertwined with it), and other possible, probable fields, institutions, practitioners, skills, and sciences more practical, the current and future objective of this inquiry is to elementarily introduce the process of coaching discourse as an object and corpus of transdisciplinary studies. This trajectory will finally provide the context for the localization of the academic discipline, subdiscipline, and new profession of coaching, and subsequently coaching education and studies, and coaching training: a kind of localization, entrepreneurship and job creation. It should be noted that it is predicted that in the continuation of this research, at a wider level, various fields, institutions, practitioners, skills and sciences will be engaged: therefore, entering into deeper transdisciplinary studies. One of these sciences is linguistics, which, of course, will not be examined here. This study will apply only SDPS approach, and postpone considering the linguistics section and its subdisciplines. However, in the literature review section we will have a brief summary of the interface between linguistics, language, and coaching. It is worth noting that linguistics is engaged with both semiotics and coaching. Considering semiotics and linguistics, for instance, Chandler says, "... most of those who call themselves semioticians at least implicitly accept Saussure's location of linguistics within semiotics" (Chandler, 2007, p. 8). Also, according to Bostic, "In the sixties, semiotics was constituted as a branch of the linguistic sciences, at the confluence of linguistics, anthropology, and formal logic" (Bostic, 2006, p. Xvii), and then, linked to phenomenology (Bostic, 2006, p. xii). Finally, we will not explain here transdisciplinarity, while merely refer to some of the concepts discussed in the various views of transdisciplinary sources being cited in the following sources: "deep collaboration across and beyond academic disciplines and fields" (Perrin & Kramersch, 2018); "research on, for, and with" practitioners" (Perrin & Kramersch, 2018); "professional knowledge acquired through experience in

the real world, technical knowledge acquired on the job” ... and “language problems in the ‘real world’” (Perrin & Kramersch, 2018); “complexity” (Perrin & Kramersch, 2018; Bernstein, 2014 & 2015); “the human life world and lived meanings” (Bernstein, 2015); “everyday life” (Bernstein, 2014); “bridging the gap between the humanities and sciences” (Seif, 2017); “problem solving” (Bernstein, 2015) and so forth.

Research Question(s):

Our main question and problem is how SDPS (Fontanille, (2003 [2006])) can provide ‘part of’ a comprehensive theoretical framework for conceptualizing coaching and its development as an academic discipline and subdiscipline.

2. Literature Review

Before considering the literature review, we briefly refer to coaching and its interface with SDPS in the point of view of this research. Coaching which is defined and applied in various ways (Brock, 2008, pp. 13-15; Bachkirova, 2017; Abravanel, 2018, p. 1), is addressed under different titles and concepts based on different objectives, functions, theoretical frameworks and approaches. Some of which we refer to: a discipline (Brock, 2014, p. 3; Bachkirova, 2017, p. 23), an applied discipline (Cox et al., 2014), a discursive event or discourse (Graf, 2019).), change (Graf, 2019; Deplazes et al., 2018; Whitworth et al., 2007, p. 1; Folscher-Kingwill & Terblanche, 2019), an industry (Graf, 2019; Fillery-Travis & Collins, 2017), a professional practice (Fillery-Travis & Collins, 2016), communication (Graf, 2019; Brock, 2008), a process (Graf, 2019; Brock, 2008; Deplazes et al., 2018), a conversation (Deplazes et al., 2018; Jautz, 2018), raising awareness (Brock, 2014, p. 1), and so forth. Brock argues that “Coaching emerged from an intersection of people, disciplines and socioeconomic factors” (Brock, 2014, p. 134). She introduces two tap roots for coaching: philosophy and social sciences (Brock, 2014, p. 8). Considering the diversity of coaching in terms of different aspects, we can

mention linguistic, ontological, semantic, integrated, narrative, cognitive, clean language, existential, core energy, neuro-linguistic programming, academic, developmental, emotional intelligence, etc. About semiotics, on the other hand, Martin and Ringham quote Grimas as saying that "... [semiotic theory] tries to unravel the meaning hidden below the surface in an attempt to find sense in life" (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. vii). According to them, semiotics "... is concerned with the theory and analysis of the production of meaning ..." (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 116). "... The Paris School is concerned primarily with the relationship between signs and with the manner in which they produce meaning within a given text or discourse" ... "Semiotic practice can thus become a tool of personal empowerment and an expression of social commitment, leading not only to a deconstruction but also to a reinvention of the fundamental values underlying our societies" (Martin & Ringham, 2006, p. 2). Therefore, at the general level, there are many commonalities between semiotics and coaching (its types), some of which are: 1) in quest of meaning (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. Vii; Cox et al., 2014), 2) related to social process or social life (Brock, 2008; Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Martin & Ringham, 2006, p. 2; Eco, 1973, p. 71 as cited in Chandler, 2017, p. 276), 3) related to man, or humanism, or anthropology (Martin & Ringham, 2006, p. 2; Graf, 2019, p. 2; Brock, 2014, p. 6), 4) to explore change (Graf & Dionne, 2021 ; Deplazes et al., 2018; Jautz, 2018; Grzegorzcyk, 2015; Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 103]), 5) related to human empowerment and growth (Martin & Ringham, 2006, p. 2; Graf , 2019, p. 2; Bachkirova, 2011), 6) still developing (Graf & Wastian, 2014; Brock, 2008, p. 493; Martin & Ringham, 2006, p. 4), 7) an open and dynamic process (Brock, 2008, p. 493; Bostic, 2006, p. Xvii), 8) transdisciplinary domains (Seif, 2017; Trifonas, 2015, p. 1; Graf & Ukowitz, 2020; Graf & Dionne, 2021), 9) an applied field (Cox e t al., 2014; Beardsworth & Auxier, 2017, p. 807), 10) problem solving tools and/or methods (Kartinen & Latomaa, 2011; Grzegorzcyk, 2015), and the like. Moreover, at the specific level of the present research, there are many commonalities between Fontanille (2003 [2006]) in SDPS, and coaching.

Some of which are: narrative (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 107]); Drake, 2017), discourse (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 1]); Western, 2017; Graf, 2019), action and/or act (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 45]); Graf, 2019, p. 3), body and/or embodiment (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 56]); Jackson, 2017 ; ICF, 2020), language (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 56]); Graf, 2019, p. 2; Folscher-Kingwill & Terblanche, 2019; Grzegorzcyk, 2015; ICF, 2020), mood and/or modality (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 113]); ICF, 2020; Sieler, 2014), Phenomenology (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 120]); Folscher-Kingwill & Terblanche, 2019), presence (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 14]); Abravanel, 2018; ICF, 2020), feeling, and/or affect, and/or emotion (Graf, 2019, p. 2; Sieler, 2014; Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 124]; ICF, 2020), Rhetoric (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 198]); Van Leeuwen, 2017), dialectic (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 198]); Brock, 2014, p. 28), Speech Acts (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 65]); Sieler, 2014; Grzegorzcyk , 2015; Caccia, 1996), point of view and/or perspective (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, pp. 84 & 156]); ICF, 2020), energy shift (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 41]) ; ICF, 2020; Schneider, 2007, p. 15), values (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 41]); ICF, 2020), beliefs (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, pp. 92 & 118]) ; ICF, 2020), perception (Fontanille, (2003 [2006, p. 8]); ICF, 2020), and others.

2. 1. SDPS and coaching

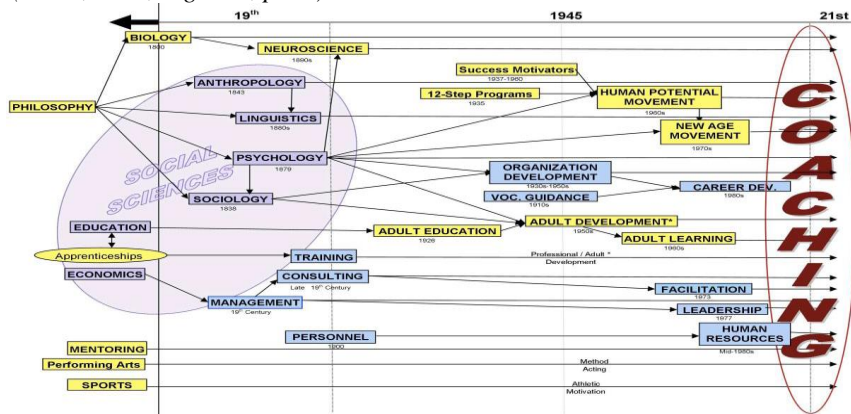
To the author's best knowledge, no works has been done about the interaction between Fontanille's ideas in SDPS, and coaching at a scientific and academic level in Iran. Considering non-Iranian sources, we can refer to Lureau who did not use Fontanille's views, Greimas's student, and rather applied Greimas's ideas. He (Lureau, 2009) states in a research named "Linguistic coaching: learning and teaching the strategic pragmatics of communication" that in a holistic study of language learning and communication skills, to explicitly analyze the tools and techniques of expression and language learning (native or foreign) we should integrate various other dimensions into a normative, and theoretical framework, and do an interdisciplinary research of the various

processes engaged. The different dimensions he puts in his inquiry are: psycho-sociological, linguistics, semiotic and cognitives. Moreover, applying Greimas’s Narrative Program and semiotic tools, examining the problems of change management, and also stressing the School of Palo Alto, and non-separation of the of mind and body, he (2014) in his doctoral dissertation, *Strategic-linguistic coaching: towards a science of change?*, explores two instances of concrete coaching (one mainly linguistic and the other mainly psychological) based on linguistic coaching, and develops the strategic-linguistic coaching (CSL) model. In addition, Gargiulo & Lureau (2012) have a research entitled “Le coaching d’acteur translinguistique: une sémiotique multi-linéaire de l’interprétation”.

2. 2. Linguistics and coaching

In Figure 1 we can observe linguistics-coaching interface as derived from Brock (Brock, 2014, Figure 3, p. 11):

Figure 1
Timeline of root discipline emergence and relationships, derived from (Brock, 2014, Figure 3, p. 11)



To read more about semantic coaching, linguistic coaching, linguistic ontology, ontological coaching and philosophy look at these sources: Brock (2008, p. 71; Winograd & Flores, 1986, p. 174; Sieler, 2014; Dunham, 2009; Caccia, 1996). Linguistics, language, and coaching interface could be found in LOCCS (The Linguistics of Coaching, Consulting & Supervision) as well as these works: Graf, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2019; Graf & Wastian, 2014; Sator & Graf, 2014, pp. 91-122; Graf et al., 2020; Graf & Spranz-Fogasy, 2018; Behn-Taran, 2014; Grzegorzczuk, 2015; Deplazes et al., 2018; Jautz, 2018; Folscher Kingwill & Terblanche, 2019; Angouri & Marra, 2011

2. 3. Pragmatism, semiotics and coaching

Bachkirova & Borrington's study (Bachkirova & Borrington, 2019) on pragmatism and coaching can be related to the present study in terms of some commonalities one of which is Charles Sanders Peirce who is both a semiotician and pragmatist. Moreover, Fontanille in SDPS has applied some of Peirce's ideas. This research does not discuss the interplay among pragmatism, semiotics and coaching here.

2. 3. Others

It is obvious that semiotics interacts with other areas like leadership, ethnography, teaching, organizations, sports, advertising, management, and so forth which were not included in this study. For example, it can be referred to Trevisani who has pointed to leadership and coaching in the title of his LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/semiotics-deeper-leadership-training-coaching-new-trevisani/>.

3. Methodology

Adopting a descriptive-analytic method based on SDPS proposed by Fontanille's ideas (Fontanille, 2003, as translated by Bostic, 2006) in

analyzing and solving a case study of one of her clients in one coaching session, the author (the coach of the client) recorded the voice call session by an MP3 player. Besides, in choosing this datum, sociological, pragmatic, anthropological, and other factors were not considered. It goes without saying that a short session does not naturally cover all aspects of SDPS (Fontanille, (2003 [2006])).

4. Results and discussion

Applying Fontanille's ideas in SDPS about different types of modal identities and modal verbs, transitory identities, and the construction and transformation of the actants' identity in the transformation trajectory based on the theory of modalities, the author examined a case study in the process of one coaching session in terms of 'discourse in action'. Determining the state of the client of this research (or an actor) based on the different combination of modalities such as M^0 , M^1 , M^2 , M^3 , and M^4 , this study recognized the actor as a transformational and trajectory actor. Moreover, regarding the modal dimension of the coaching session discourse, the author described the actor's doing (performance) based on modalized predicates and her being (competence) based on modal predicates. Additionally, it was shown that the main class of transformation of the actor in the very session derived from communication (the sender and the receiver).

5. Conclusion

Based on the present case study, introducing general commonalities between semiotics and coaching as well as specific commonalities between SDPS and coaching, and considering modality, modal verbs, transformational actants, and modalization as construction of the actants' identity which Fantanille has developed in Paris School, this research argued that SDPS can provide 'part of' a comprehensive theoretical framework for conceptualizing

coaching and developing it as an academic discipline and subdiscipline. Our datum here was consistent with Fontanille's ideas, though just one case is not good enough to consider the order of the occurrence of modal verbs and their combinations in Persian's coaching corpus. Moreover, the author also mentioned that the term 'Khodnavardi' refers to the always ongoing, open process and trajectory of man's confrontation with himself, the other, and the world, as if he were always 'navarding'. Therefore, considering the order of occurrence of modal verbs and their combinations in the process of construction of modal identities in the trajectory of transformation, the demarcation between these verbs and phases is not necessarily exactly the same because, as Sator & Graf (2014, p. 117) say, we have different types of clients and different discursive trajectories. It is also difficult to delineate exactly these verbs and phases because we have shades of meaning in a form of a mass and intertwinement. Finally, the present inquiry thus develops its model in Figure 2 based on the interaction of 'Khodnavardi' and the mentioned modal verbs in this study:

Figure 2

Semiotic Coaching Model based on the interaction between Khodnavardi, & the mentioned modal verbs in this study



To some extent, the circular shape of this model can be consistent with the field of presence, the field of discourse, and the field of enunciation proposed by Fontaille. This model has some features some of which were observed in this study such as: open, flexible, fluid, cyclic, intertwined, networked, selective, eclectic, generative, presence-based, and so forth. There are other aspects like embodiment, tension, emotion, affection, aesthetics, creativity, and the like that are related to this model but were not put in this research. In this model, the interplay among modal verbs is fluid, continuous, and conducted in any direction and any way. Also, the relationship among modal verbs is in the form of dashed line to present not only non-absoluteness and gradation, but also the state of breakdown, disjunction and conjunction of discourse at any moment. Additionally, the interaction among the components of the model is

recursive/reciprocal, because the order in which verbs emerge, and the type of actor in terms of modal identity, can be differently constructed for each actor in each part of the transformational, ongoing, and becoming process of coaching. In this model, 'Khodnavardi' exists at every moment and phase in the process of change, transformation, and development. In accordance with the above, the present study suggests 'Semiotic Coaching'. It is the hope of this research to further enrich the basics of 'Semiotic Coaching' in Iran. And as mentioned, in the future process, different fields, sciences, institutions, practitioners, skills, and many more will be intertwined in this transmodern settings that we will enter into transdisciplinary studies: some kind of localization, entrepreneurship, and job creation. In terms of a linguistic approach, many studies can be arranged for this research, both based on the interaction of linguistics with semiotics, and also according to the types of linguistics and its subdisciplines. Moreover, in terms of SDPS, at the macro level, the approach of this research is in some aspects consistent with Bachkirova & Borrington (2019), and on the other hand compatible with some dimensions of Lureau (2009 & 2014) whose case, according to the author of the present study, may overlap to some extent with edusemiotics and educational linguistics. However, the present study did not put and explain the details here. It goes without saying that this inquiry was just a brief report on the beginning of its research trajectory that did not address the very broad aspects and components existing at the macro and micro level in the beginning of transdisciplinary researches.

Notes

1. In terms of the publication of the original source of the theoretical framework of this study, we should refer to Bostic, the translator of Fontanille's book, who says:

The Semiotics of Discourse was initially published in 1998; the present translation is based upon the revised and updated edition, which appeared in 2003. While it remains close to the original, the revised edition is enriched in a number of ways. (Bostic, 2006, p. xi)