

Academic Paper

Semiotic Coaching: Roles/Attitudes as Transitory Identities in the Semiotic Process of Self-Transformation and Empowerment

 Laleh Molaei  (Allameh Tabataba'i University)

Abstract

Reputable evidence-based academic sources provide limited information on the term Semiotic Coaching. To establish and enhance this term, this longitudinal, constructionist qualitative study designed a twenty-month, three-phase semiotic coaching development study (2022-2024) to train three female coaches in Roles/Attitudes (Fontanille, 2003 [2006]) as transitory identities. The study aims to explore the experiences of the coaches regarding Roles/Attitudes trajectory through Semiotic Coaching, and its impact on both their personal and professional lives. The study adopts Braun & Clarke's (2006) inductive reflexive thematic analysis using semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Results indicate significant empowerment and self-transformation under four main themes: competence/being, performance/doing, self-transformation/becoming, and self-realization.

Keywords

semiotic coaching, roles/attitudes, transitory identities, self-transformation, empowerment

Article history

Accepted for publication: 23 May 2024

Published online: 03 June 2024



© the Author(s)

Published by Oxford Brookes University

Introduction

"The term semiotics is derived from the Greek word *semeion*, denoting 'sign'." (Martin & Ringham, 2006: 1). "Semiotic theory ... is a practical reflection on discourse ... Concerned with values and signification, it tries to unravel the meaning hidden below the surface in an attempt to find sense in life." (Greimas, as cited in Martin & Ringham, 2000: vii). Semiotics "... is concerned with the theory and analysis of the production of meaning ..." (Martin & Ringham, 2000: 116). 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. It is the expression of human freedom and creativity in the face of dominant ideologies and

dominant power groups. In the words of Greimas himself, it is a new humanism. (Martin & Ringham, 2006: 2).

The Paris School of Semiotics

“In modern usage the concept semiotics refers to a theory of signification.” (Martin & Ringham, 2006: 2). One of the branches of semiotics under this heading is European semiotics which is:

... represented by the Ecole de Paris [Paris School] and founded by Algirdas Julien Greimas. 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. (Martin & Ringham, 2006: 2).

The Paris School of Semiotics by Fontanille (2003 [2006]): Roles/Attitudes

Algirdas Julien Greimas who “understood his semiotics as a scientific endeavor, at a crossroads between linguistics, anthropology, and formal logic” (Bostic, 2006: xi) was both the teacher and collaborator of Jacques Fontanille. Fontanille's theoretical framework, known as The Semiotics of Discourse, clarified that “... narrative semiotics has undergone a shift away from binary structures and toward emphasis on shades of meaning.” (Bostic, 2006: xiii). Originally published in French in 1998, The Semiotics of Discourse was later translated into English by Heidi Bostic in 2006, based on the revised and updated 2003 edition. This study utilized the English version (2003 [2006]).

Fontanille (2003 [2006]: 45) considers discourse as the unit of analysis in semiotics and believes discourse is an enunciation in action, and this action is primarily an act of presence. He (2003, [2006]: 99-100) believes that a constantly transformable identity is composed of transitory identities. He introduces two types of trajectories:

1. closed, fixed trajectories, of which each stage is foreseeable in advance; the closed identity of the actants or actors would then be composed of one or several roles, actantial roles for some, figurative roles for others.
2. open trajectories, in which the actants and actors dispose of a sufficient freedom of maneuvering in order to invent and construct their own identity, in such a way that each one of the stages that constitute it corresponds to an attitude, and not to a role strictly speaking. (2003 [2006]: 99-100).

He sees roles and attitudes as two different forms of transitory identities along a trajectory. Fontanille (2003 [2006]: 100) says:

The *role* can be recognized only in two scenarios: (1) because it is sufficiently stereotyped in a given culture such that one may identify it immediately, and on the condition that the usage made of it in fact conforms to the stereotype; (2) because it is sufficiently repeated and confirmed in discourse to be stabilized and recognized. But, in both cases, the recognition of the role happens after the fact, after the usage that has fixed it, after the repetition that has stabilized it. The role is an accomplished identity, apprehended at the end of a trajectory, and which presupposes in all cases an enunciative praxis thanks to which it has been stabilized and objectified.” (2003 [2006]: 100).

Literature review

Researchers have explored the relationship between semiotics and coaching (Navarette, 2022; Molaei, 2022a; Bachkirova & Borrington, 2019^[1]; Almeida, 2018; Lureau, 2014; Trif, 2015; McIlvenny, 2011; Chambefort, 2006; Hegland & Andre, 1992). Semiotics is also employed to

enhance personal and professional development and empowerment (Martin & Ringham, 2006: 2). However, limited information regarding the term, Semiotic Coaching as a type of coaching and/or an approach to coaching can be found in reputable evidence-based academic sources. To the best of the author's knowledge, the term, Semiotic Coaching is briefly mentioned only once in a scholarly source, which is a 2014 thesis (Alpert, 2014: 157). This led the current study to question why the term Semiotic Coaching is not prominently featured in reliable academic sources, particularly in books that discuss various coaching approaches such as those by Garvey & Stokes (2022); Passmore (2020); Bachkirova, Drake & Spence, (2017); Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, (2014); Brock ([2012] 2014); and O'Connor & Lages (2007).

Due to the lack of research in this field, the author of this study conducted a data-driven investigation in 2017-2018, which involved further study, presentation and publication. Some of this work can be accessed in Molaei (2021; 2022a; 2022b; 2022c; 2022d; 2022f; [2021] 2023; 2022-3; 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2024a; and 2024b). Molaei (2022a) introduced a model that utilizes modal verbs within the theoretical framework of the Paris School of Semiotics (Fontanille, 2003 [2006]), specifically referencing the term Semiotic Coaching. This article (Molaei, 2022a) considered coaching as a process, as many other researchers have considered coaching as a process (Steyn & Barnard, 2024; Graf, 2012 & 2019; Deplazes, Graf & Künzli, 2018; Brock, [2012] 2014: 2 & 2008: 493; Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Bachkirova, 2017; Bachkirova, Cox & Clutterbuck, 2014: 1; Cox, 2013; and Griffiths & Campbell, 2008).

Molaei (2022a) initially utilized semiotics as a qualitative methodology and theoretical framework to analyze coaching discourse. It proposed the inclusion of Semiotic Coaching as a type of coaching in academic literature but emphasized the need for further data and long-term analysis to validate this model. Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of exploring additional dimensions and elements of applying the theoretical framework of the Paris School in Semiotic Coaching to explore the use of the term Semiotic Coaching.

A comprehensive and well-documented conceptual framework is essential for thoroughly analyzing the multidimensional nature of Semiotic Coaching. In order to build upon the previous Semiotic Coaching model, this study explores the journey of Roles/Attitudes within the theoretical framework of the Paris School of Semiotics (Fontanille, 2003 [2006]). It specifically focuses on its relationship with the concept of 'process'. By observing the processes of creating meaning through interaction, we can explore the effectiveness of Semiotic Coaching by exploring how Roles/Attitudes impact coach identity transformation. The objective of this study is to make a contribution to the realm of Semiotic Coaching by investigating the efficacy of Roles/Attitudes. This ongoing study explores the transformation of Roles/Attitudes by examining the coachees journey from both a process perspective and the coach's viewpoint.

Apart from searching for meaning, sense-making, narratives, metaphor, symbolism in objects or pictures, etc., there is little known about the term Semiotic Coaching and/or a semiotic coach, let alone the experiences of coaches with it, when it comes to searching for academic research and resources. On the whole, considering the words semiotics and coaching, we can have various combinations:

1. Using semiotics as a methodology/approach to analyze/explore/examine coaching. This can be a theoretical domain; The semiotics of coaching and/or semiotics & coaching. Here, there are many academic research resources available, such as: Lureau (2014); Dean Garratt & Heather Piper (2016); Bachkirova & Borrington, (2019); Molaei (2022a); and Navarette (2022).
2. A type of coaching and/or other helping goals and fields based on semiotics. This can be a practical/applied domain: Semiotic Coaching. Here, there are different types of literature reviews:

1. Defining and introducing the term Semiotic Coaching or 'Semiotic Coach' in published academic resources as the outcome of providing education and training for a specific type of coaching that results in a degree or certificate: Not found
2. Using the term Semiotic Coaching or Semiotic Coach in published academic research resources. Here only two academic research resources were found: Alpert (2014: 157) and Molaei (2022a).
3. Using the term Semiotic Coaching or Semiotic Coach in non-academic research resources. Here, one post on LinkedIn was found: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/coaching-play-symbols-objects-terence-deto-phd-acc/> (2021). Also, one comment was found: <https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2017/04/links-41717.html> (2017)
4. The practice of semiotics to empower people, businesses, organizations, etc.: Here there are many cases such as: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/semiotics-deeper-leadership-training-coaching-new-trevisani/> (2015)

Therefore, the absence of information about the term Semiotic Coaching in academic resources is evident. This study asserts that coaches need to possess particular skills in order to explore the Roles/Attitudes in Semiotic Coaching from their viewpoint. These skills empower them to communicate their experiences and perspectives by interacting in a semiotic coaching development study, becoming semiotic coaches and/or employing Roles/Attitudes in Semiotic Coaching. Thus, this research explores the experiences of coaches regarding the trajectory of Roles/Attitudes, and its impact on their personal and professional lives.

Therefore, this study incorporated a new component of the theoretical framework (Fontanille, 2003 [2006]), known as Roles/Attitudes, through an extended twenty-month data collection process and study (2022-2024).

Methodology

The starting point of this study explored the limited information regarding the term Semiotic Coaching in reputable evidence-based academic sources. To establish and enhance this term, this longitudinal, constructionist qualitative study designed as a twenty-month, three-phase semiotic coaching development study (2022-2024) to train three female coaches in Roles/Attitudes (Fontanille, 2003 [2006]) as transitory identities. The study aims to explore the experiences of the coaches regarding Roles/Attitudes trajectory through Semiotic Coaching, and its impact on both their personal and professional lives. By doing so, this research can provide data that contributes to academic literature regarding the term Semiotic Coaching: transitioning from the semiotics of coaching and/or semiotics & coaching to Semiotic Coaching.

The philosophical stance of this study is based on the overlap between the discourse analysis approach and the thematic analysis method, specifically in terms of implicit, latent coding and the exploration of underlying meaning. Braun & Clarke (2006) describe this situation as "... thematic analysis that focuses on 'latent' themes tends to be more constructionist, and it also tends to start to overlap with thematic discourse analysis at this point". Aligning with social constructionist thinking, Fontanille's (2003 [2006]) theoretical framework of the semiotics of discourse was selected as the theoretical foundation of this study because it explores the construction of meaning and identity (Fontanille, 2003 [2006]: 84 & 119) through interactive, dialectic and discursive activities and enunciation. It focuses on an in-depth exploration of and helps to unravel the hidden meaning below the surface in an attempt to find sense in life.

Participants

Three female coaches, aged 33-48, with backgrounds in coaching, leadership, and related fields from reputable institutions and a minimum of 6 years of work experience were purposively

selected. They were not familiar with Roles/Attitudes and their associated elements before participating in this study. However, they were acquainted (Clarke & Braun, 2013: 88) with the researcher-coach's work, courses and workshops and had gained insight into the interaction between semiotics, linguistics, coaching, and similar fields, recognizing the benefits of applying this interaction in their personal and professional lives. Consequently, they provided written consent to engage. This study was dedicated to maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants (P1, P2, and P3). Throughout the process (2022-2024), P1 spent 56 hours, P2 spent 59 hours, and P3 spent 47 hours involved in the study.

Table 1: Participant-Coach and Researcher-Coach demographics overview

Participant-Coach & Researcher-Coach	Gender	Age	Residence	Coaching qualification	#Years coaching experience
Participant-Coach 1 (P1)	Female	33	Tehran, Iran	ACTP & ACSTH, ICF	6
Participant-Coach 2 (P2)	Female	48	Tehran, Iran	ACTP & ACSTH, ICF	6
Participant-Coach 3 (P3)	Female	44	Karaj, Iran	PCC & ACC, ICF	6
Researcher-Coach	Female	45	Tehran, Iran	18-month ICF Accredited Certified Ontological Coaching and Leadership Program, Ontological Coaching Institute, Melbourne Ph.D. candidate in Linguistics; applied, transdisciplinary author/researcher/practitioner focusing on the interface of linguistics, semiotics, coaching, leadership, mentoring, education, and related fields ACSTH, ICF	6

Data collection

The study conducted three phases: Phase 1 July 2022- December 2022; Phase 2: December 2022- August 2023; and Phase 3: August 2023-April 2024. Data was collected using various tools (Braun et al., 2019: 850) deployed during these phases:

- Group sessions (using Google Meet): to position participants' way of being, explain the file of wheel of life (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House & Sandahl, 2007) along with this study's specifically designed various questions and sections about Roles/Attitudes and their related components, compare their situations in phases 1 and 3, and ask participants to choose a period from the past to the present in order to determine their goals and topics, evaluate the balance and satisfaction of their current personal and professional lives, and design their desired future;
- A specially designed researcher-directed diary (Clarke & Braun, 2013: 147) called 'Khodnavardi^[2] Self-Journaling' rooted in an integrated, holistic approach, which focused on the self-observation of one's way of being, including questions, tables, and exercises such as story completion and visualization techniques. It explored the relationship among Roles/Attitudes, language/thought (metaphors, expressions, mottos, visualization, etc.), embodiment, physical environment, emotions, modality, communications, habits, storytelling/narratives, and actions;
- Personalized coaching sessions along with interviews: the participants' assignments and answers to the questions in the wheel of life file, Khodnavardi Self-Journaling diary, and any emerging questions were reviewed during personalized coaching sessions along with interviews. Additionally, participants familiarized themselves with Roles/Attitudes and their related components, and explored them through the materials provided, as well as envisioned their desired future and Self. They engaged in self-reflection, self-observation,

evaluation, and writing exercises. As part of this process, the practice of ‘Semiotics in Coaching’ was emphasized to bring us closer to Semiotic Coaching. Depending on participants’ needs regarding Roles/Attitudes, data, and context (Braun et al., 2019: 852), the researcher-coach cited various sources about coaching approaches and topics instead of directly referencing sources related to the theoretical framework of the semiotics of discourse (Fontanille, 2003 [2006]), including those referenced in her books (Molaei, [2021] 2023 & 2023a). During personalized coaching sessions along with the interviews, she explained embodiment (Jackson, 2017), ontological coaching (Sieler, 2014), narrative coaching (Drake, 2017), metaphor & clean language coaching (Dunbar, 2017), coaching discourses (Western, 2017), and modal verbs in semiotic coaching (Molaei, 2022a), and if needed, provided examples and shared her personal and professional experiences (Clarke & Braun, 2013: 303-304) due to the scientific nature and complexity of the material;

- Repeated and longitudinal in-depth semi-structured interviews in Phase 1 and Phase 3: to explore participants’ experiences and perceptions of learning Roles/Attitudes and their related components, as well as evaluate the wheel of life related to that previous period;
- Systematic observations and in-between follow-ups.

Table 2: The three phases of the semiotic coaching development study

Phase 1: July 2022- December 2022	Phase 2: December 2022- August 2023	Phase 3: August 2023-April 2024
<p>Before Roles/Attitudes through semiotic coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The preparation of sampling and design • Group virtual sessions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- This study’s specifically designed wheel of life file 2- This study’s specifically designed Khodnavardi Self-Journalling diary <p>Roles/Attitudes through Semiotic Coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized coaching sessions along with interviews • Systematic observations and in-between follow-ups and assignments • Phase 1’s in-depth semi-structured interviews 	<p>Sessions stopped</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants’ self-observation, self-reflection, self-evaluation, experiencing and doing based on the self-awareness and competence acquisition resulted from Phase 1 	<p>Roles/Attitudes through Semiotic Coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized coaching sessions along with interviews • Systematic observations and in-between follow-ups and assignments <p>After Roles/Attitudes through semiotic coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This study’s specifically designed wheel of life file • Phase 3’s in-depth semi-structured interviews

Data analysis

This qualitative, inductive (Braun, Clarke, Terry & Hayfield, 2019: 853) study utilized Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step reflexive thematic analysis to explore the perceptions and experiences of the coaches regarding the implementation of Roles/Attitudes in their personal and professional lives. Therefore, the study applied selective coding (Clarke & Braun, 2013: 206-207) in identifying just Roles/Attitudes themes and comparing them in phases 1 and 3. The study encompassed the open, reflexive, and flexible process outlined in Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six steps. These steps include; 1) familiarising yourself with your data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report.

Phase 1 took place from July 2022 to December 2022. The assignments, replies, files, diaries, and follow-ups were gathered and discussed during the personalized coaching sessions, along with questioning and focusing on Roles/Attitudes and their related components. Based on the repeated and longitudinal in-depth semi-structured interviews method in this study, the first interview was utilized at the end of Phase 1. The recorded personalized coaching sessions and interviews were transcribed verbatim and listened to several times. Then, Phase 2, which involved ceasing sessions for action-taking and self-observation, began in December 2022 and completed in August

2023. After Phase 2, Phase 3 began in August 2023 to advance the topic and goal derived from the evaluation of the wheel of life through personalized coaching sessions along with interviews. Again, the assignments, replies, files, diaries, and follow-ups were gathered and discussed during the personalized coaching sessions, along with questioning and focusing on Roles/Attitudes and their related components. For the second time, at the end of Phase 3, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with more extensive and detailed questions compared to Phase 1. Before the interview sessions of Phase 3, pilot interviews were conducted to review key meaning-based patterns, awareness and results and potential emerging themes. All of the new sessions in Phase 3 were transcribed verbatim. The interview sessions from both Phase 1 and Phase 3, as well as the sections on the topic of Roles/Attitudes in the life wheel from both phases, were selected and included for coding, using the six steps of the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

While conducting and recording personalized coaching sessions, in-between follow-ups, and interviews, the researcher-coach herself also noted the summary of important points and key and meaningful phrases related to Roles/Attitudes. During the process from Phase 1 to Phase 3, she became more and more familiar with the data and Roles/Attitudes by interacting with each participant during their sessions, that is, reviewing and repeating and reading her notes from previous sessions to each participant in their subsequent sessions (step 1: familiarization). Regarding the direct or indirect questioning of Roles/Attitudes, in some cases, questions and assignments directly addressed Roles/Attitudes in the files and interviews from Phase 1 to 3. However, in other instances, Roles/Attitudes were indirectly implied. Participants' responses in the files and interviews revealed insights into Roles/Attitudes both overtly and covertly. All transcriptions and collected data were reviewed to correct any potential mistakes. The main part of the analysis was done at the end of phase 3. After becoming familiar with the data (step 1), this research manually focused on the topic of Roles/Attitudes in all transcribed, collected, and noted data from the wheel of life and interviews, using a selective coding. Irrelevant data was identified and removed. Repeated sentences, words, phrases, and paragraphs that contained significant, meaning-based patterns and content that were "evident in explicit (semantic) or conceptual (latent) ways" (Braun et al., 2019: 848-849) were compiled into a single file for each participant. These were then combined for initial code generation (step 2), followed by theme identification and review (steps 3 and 4). Each theme was given a title, and refined multiple times until a final name was chosen (step 5). To assess the quality and consistency of the analysis, the study utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-Point Checklist and integrated the researcher-coach's unique 'style' (Braun et al., 2019: 857) and way of being by interacting with participants during every session. The findings were then compiled into a report (step 6), which will be discussed in the following section on findings and discussion.

Findings and Discussion

The research led to the identification of one theme in Phase 1 and four themes in Phase 3.

Themes of Phase 1

Data analysis in Phase 1 identified one main theme: competence/being. Self-awareness and competencies were acquired that reflected participants' experience of Roles/Attitudes and their related components. During the initial part of Phase 1, participants entered the course with their existing way of being (competence) and no prior knowledge of Roles/Attitudes and their related components. Through the course, they gained an understanding of Roles/Attitudes and their related components, becoming more self-aware and acquiring competencies in the process. For example:

When I got to know it here, that's when I had a breakdown. I doubted that I had made a mistake in my roles and attitudes and reacted incorrectly! Up until now, I believed I was doing the right thing. This is where my doubts arose, and I felt like my whole self was crumbling. It was an enlightening moment for me. I had never viewed people and myself via roles and attitudes before. There was another side of me that I had yet to discover... (P2)

I'm now aware of it ... if I weren't in this process, some things about Roles/Attitudes were hidden from my eyes. (P1)

Knowing the roles and priorities is like a mirror that guides you forward ... I act consciously by prioritizing my roles and having self-knowledge... I am capable of being in the roles that I consciously choose to give love to. (P2)

I realized that all my attitudes have a common root ... Some of it was awareness, some of it was learning. Another thing is that in order for me to make a change or achieve something, my role must naturally align with the goal I have chosen. (P3)

Themes of Phase 3

Competence/being was still evident in this phase. Self-awareness and competence acquisition continued to emerge throughout the study. For instance:

It was truly shocking for me to learn that attitudes can transform into roles. Understanding this topic was excellent for me ... I tried to balance different roles that I have, such as being a mother, sister, daughter, etc. (P3)

I felt as sharp as an eagle, able to see everything clearly ... I see the impact of this more clearly in my career: being holistic, logical and making informed decisions. (P2)

The four themes of Phase 3 are as follows: 1) Competence/being, 2) Performance/doing, 3) Self-transformation/Becoming, and 4) Self-realization. Due to space constraints in this article, these themes can be summarized as follows:

Participants applied their competencies and self-awareness gained from Phase 1, along with self-observation of their way of being, as they moved on to performance and doing in Phase 3. As participants participated in acting and doing, combined with self-observation during phases 1-3, they were approaching self-actualization. Gradually, they began using expressions and concepts related to 'Self' and 'I', focusing on unleashing potential. The more they observed themselves and the integral coordination among the different components of their way of being were embodied in them, the closer they became to the Self, self-belief, and self-actualization. As such it can be argued their integral way of being was changed and continues to evolve. For instance, there are some examples:

I believe in the power of expression and use 'is' in introducing myself, emphasizing the word 'I'. I now focus on the phrase 'an authentic, powerful explorer' ... Following this transformation into an explorer, I declared that my identity 'is' to be an explorer. My identity became centered around the verb 'to be'. The emphasis on 'becoming' became more significant to me ... (P1)

Before taking this course, my mind was constantly busy and mental chatter and lack of clarity made my speech awkward and uncertain. I felt exhausted, overwhelmed, physically drained, and loose ... Now, mentally, things have quieted down and my priorities have become clearer. I can see my skills improving and my words becoming more powerful. This journey has raised my self-awareness and allowed me to embrace my physical, emotional, and verbal experiences... I

now introduce myself with more quality, capability, and self-confidence. I now believe I have the potential to be an entrepreneur and innovator. (P2)

Compared to the last 2 years, when I introduce myself now, I do so more assertively. My words are more expressive, and my body language is more authoritative. I feel proud and excited when introducing myself in this manner. (P3)

One factor that helped participants transition from doing to actualization and becoming was self-belief. In terms of roles and attitudes, as two different forms of transitory identities, various changes occurred. As shown in Table 3, certain attitudes like a spiritual person, creative person, explorer, action-oriented, detail-oriented, realistic, results-oriented, and entrepreneur emerged for P1 in March 2024 that were not present in November 2022. Additionally, some attitudes like researcher and lover disappeared for her in March 2024.

Table 3: Comparing emerging attitudes of P1

Emerging attitudes of P1 in March 2024	Emerging attitudes of P1 in November 2022
Spiritual person; creative person; explorer; action-oriented; detail-oriented; realistic; results-oriented; entrepreneur	Researcher; self-coach; enabler; adventurer; flexible; realistic; lover

Table 4 indicates that certain roles like employee, entrepreneur, buddy, explorer, narrator, creator, and analyst emerged for P1 in March 2024 that were not present in November 2022. Additionally, some roles such as stewardess and instructor disappeared for her in March 2024. P1 has put 'explorer' in both emerging attitudes in March 2024 and her roles in March 2024. She is in the way of becoming and transforming the attitude of being an explorer into the role of an explorer.

Table 4: Comparing roles of P1

Roles of P1 in March 2024	Roles of P1 in November 2022
Employee; entrepreneur; partner; coach.	Content strategist; coach; instructor; stewardess; writer; colleague; project manager.
Buddy; roommate; friend.	Roommate; friend; confidant; companion.
Explorer; adventurer; tourist; reader; travel companion; traveler; entertainer.	Adventurer, tourist; reader; travel companion; traveler; entertainer.
Explorer; coach; predecessor of coach; book reader; movie watcher; analyst; observer.	Self-coach; book reader; movie watcher; listener; writer
Narrator; writer; observer; analyst; partner; creator	

The priorities of participants regarding their lived roles changed in March 2024. As shown in Tables 5 to 7, some roles have disappeared, while others have emerged or been displaced, leading to a change in their quality.

Table 5: Prioritization in lived roles of P1

Prioritization in lived roles of P1 in March 2024	Prioritization in lived roles of P1 in November 2022
Explorer, friend, travel companion, roommate, cyclist, traveler, teacher, child	Companion; roommate; cyclist; coach; teacher; content strategist; child

Table 6: Prioritization in lived roles of P2

Prioritization in lived roles of P2 in March 2024	Prioritization in lived roles of P2 in November 2022
Me, myself. This is me, the mighty one, who is carrying out these roles with my own ability.	Mother; spouse; counsellor; coach; psychologist; daughter-in-law; girl; sister-in-law; sister; friend; colleague; neighbor

Table 7: Prioritization in lived roles of P3

Prioritization in lived roles of P3 in March 2024	Prioritization in lived roles of P3 in November 2022
Leader; investor; learner	Wife; mother; leader; researcher

Therefore, some attitudes emerged, some disappeared, some were reinforced, some were displaced, and some transformed into roles. Furthermore, some roles were established based on previous attitudes, some were displaced, and some disappeared. Some previous roles were solidified and accomplished, leading to self-realization. For instance, considering P2 in Table 8, as well as her replies in the interviews and follow-ups, P2 has been working as a coach, counsellor, and psychologist from the beginning of the course. However, she has written about being an employee and described it just in March 2024: employee (an established, self-confident, entrepreneurial, decisive and relatively stable career identity):

Table 8: Comparing roles of P2

Roles of P2 in March 2024	Roles of P2 in November 2022
Mother/wife; employee (established, self-confident, entrepreneurial, decisive and relatively stable career identity); coach; counsellor; psychologist; and other relative roles	Mother; wife; daughter; daughter-in-law; sister-in-law; counsellor; coach; psychologist; friend; colleague; neighbor

Furthermore, there are also some examples indicating from doing to the emergence of belief:

This allowed me to actually deepen my observation further. It became clearer to me and it was added later... and actually my action and acting... and the belief behind that topic... (P1)

We can see a process from performance/doing to self-belief and self-transformation/becoming:

The impact of changing my roles and attitudes on my personal life was getting closer to my true identity. I faced a series of shadows and fears, some of which stemmed from my family and beliefs ... This encounter increased my patience and tolerance, prompting me to take action and believe in empowerment ... movement from attitudes to roles ... I transitioned from performing roles in a fake, superficial way to a more authentic manner. (P1)

The emergence of creativity and the attitude of entrepreneurship: P1 mentioned that she used to play the role of a facilitator in a group that didn't align with her true self. However, she now realizes that working in the field of verbal intelligence is more fitting for her, rather than any type of narration and exploring. During the Phase 3 interview, P1 revealed that by learning and implementing Roles/Attitudes, a new attitude had emerged. This new attitude made her reflect on entrepreneurship and creation:

It's becoming more real, both in action, in communication, and in changing the angle of my view... this approach of role and attitude: more accurate and real, the distance between identities has decreased. In my opinion, it was the most prominent in terms of finance ... Getting closer to the real role... based on that, the idea of entrepreneurial creativity that I had previously was reignited ... This led to tangible accomplishments and also enhanced my growth and capacity in my ability. (P1)

During phases 1-3, P2, as an active actor, utilized the awareness and competencies acquired previously, unlocking her potential. As she describes it, she transformed from innocence and orphanhood to self-belief and entrepreneurship:

I used to prioritize my roles as a wife, mother, daughter, etc. I saw some roles that I based my actions on. That means I was nowhere in this story. Maybe at that time, I thought that the combination of all these roles would be me. But, this course has shown me that these roles

originate from me. Above all, before any of these roles, this is me - they are a part of who I am. When I put the role of 'I' first and I began prioritizing myself, I became more self-centered. My actions and behaviors, both in my family and professional life, are now based on my own capabilities rather than those roles. I no longer adjust based on the needs of others. I present myself based on my strengths and competencies, and I have confidence in myself. I used to see myself as weak in terms of needs, but now I see myself based on my competencies; I see my strengths ... I became much more holistic. I do a lot of self-observation. I try very hard to observe others, without judgment and with a lot of faith and confidence, ... or the same self-belief in myself and in others... My mind is transitioning from that innocence and orphanhood to that of a creator, sage, etc. ... This self-belief led to entrepreneurship ... (P2)

Roles and attitudes as transitory identities:

These identities came close to each other, and somehow roles were established and attitudes were transmitted to roles ... I am consciously moving towards this role and I consciously know ... while not before ... it was not a real role before ... the effect of roles and attitudes was getting closer to the real role ... and it increased growth and capacity in discussions ... my ability increased... that is, due to the knowledge I had about exploring and narrating, etc... I could ... it seems that this time I entered a business discussion with a financial partner more consciously... this increased my acting in career and wealth ... now I have self-confidence and actually the strength I was looking for... less fear and stress... (P1)

Entrepreneurship, self-belief and creativity were so influential that P1, whose attitude was an organizational training designer in phase 1, transitioned to an organizational training designer in phase 3: She transformed her attitude into a role.

About roles and attitudes, its most tangible achievement was that I used to wear a mask in my role, which I played. But with this change ... the identity shifted towards the career identity, bringing me closer to my true self. The distance I once saw between myself and others in my first wheel of life became much smaller, and this closeness had a more effective impact on my professional communication and interactions ... On a personal level, it allowed me to empathize with myself and others more ... It was an attitude that moved towards a role, as the mask I wore began to feel more authentic ... Another impact was the enhancement of career identity ... It was established. (P1)

In Phase 3, the life wheel of all participants changed both quantitatively and qualitatively, resulting in various types of transformations. These changes were evident in the personal and professional aspects of their lives, altering their integral way of being. P1 even changed the titles of some areas of her wheel of life and changed the shape of the wheel of life from a circle (phase 1) to an asymmetric oval (phase 3).

Conclusion

As mentioned before, results indicate significant empowerment and self-transformation under four main themes: competence/being, performance/doing, self-transformation/becoming, and self-realization.

The results showed the effectiveness and transformative, empowering impact of Roles/Attitudes through Semiotic Coaching on coaches' personal and professional lives. In Phase 3, the life wheel of all participants underwent changes both quantitatively and qualitatively, resulting in various types of transformations in both the personal and professional aspects of their lives. Participants applied their competencies and self-awareness gained from Phase 1, along with self-observation of their way of being, as they moved on to performance and doing in Phase 3. As participants participated

in acting and doing, combined with self-observation during phases 1-3, they were approaching self-actualization in their personal and professional lives, particularly in their career identities as a coach and in other related areas like a leader, mentor, counsellor, etc. Gradually, they began using expressions and concepts related to 'Self' and 'I', focusing on unleashing potential. The more they observed themselves and the integral coordination among the different components of their way of being were embodied in them, the closer they became to the Self, self-belief, and self-actualization. Their integral way of being has changed and is evolving. One factor that helped participants transition from doing to actualization and becoming was self-belief. The process of identity transition in relation to Roles/Attitudes as two different forms of transitory identities was observed by them. In terms of roles and attitudes as two different forms of transitory identities, various changes such as emergence, disappearance, displacement, quality transformation, etc. occurred.

In this study, we can enhance the previous semiotic coaching model of Molaei (2022a) by incorporating Roles/Attitudes of the theoretical framework of Fontanille (2003 [2006]) in coaching:

The wheel of life was used for positioning way of being. In the semiotics of discourse theoretical framework of Fontanille (2003 [2006]: 56), this is referred to as 'taking of position'. The 'taking of position' being considered as the first act of discourse, instituting a 'field of presence,' which includes enunciative taking of position, of discursive orientation (57 & 110). It also includes 'partners of enunciation' (115), which here means participants and the researcher-coach. The open, dynamic interaction between participants and the researcher-coach, referred to as 'enunciation in action' (45) and 'semiotic act' (200), along with the participants' actions/doing and the researcher-coach's active role (assignments, referring to various sources and her own books, and training topics such as Roles/Attitudes, embodiment, etc.) within and between sessions and assignments, all contribute to the interactive process of 'shared knowledge' (115) establishment. Both participants and the researcher-coach entered a 'field of enunciation' (112) and a 'field of presence' (60). This situation in the process of coaching is somehow similar to what Bostic (2006: xx) says: "This point of view will be that of discourse in action, of living discourse, of signification in a state of becoming."

Throughout the various phases of 'semiotic process' (112), the participants have enhanced their self-awareness and competencies by learning Roles/Attitudes and their related components in Phase 1. They have also improved their way of being by actively self-observing, self-reflecting, self-evaluating, and experimenting in a 'field of presence' and a 'field of discourse' during phases 2 and 3. In Phase 3, they encountered 'a doing in a discourse' (115) where several changes and transformations took place. Certain roles were fixed, realized, modified, solidified, accomplished, or left open. The transition from Attitude to Role and vice versa, as well as identity transition in terms of Roles/Attitudes, has commenced: 'identity in becoming' (100). They utilized the self-awareness and competencies developed in phase 1 throughout the process, leading to self-belief, self-actualization, and self-realization in phase 3. This continuous and dynamic cycle is ongoing and constantly evolving. In this study, we considered various dimensions and analyzed their interaction with Roles/Attitudes. However, in the present article, we only discussed Roles/Attitudes.

Therefore, this study has shown that semiotics can be utilized for empowerment, as stated by Martin & Ringham (2006: 2):

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. It is the expression of human freedom and creativity in the face of dominant ideologies and dominant power groups. In the words of Greimas himself, it is a new humanism.

We are now delving into the concept of Semiotic Coaching, which can be recognized and considered a cornerstone in books and academic research materials and resources. This study is laying the foundations for Semiotic Coaching and building its evidence base. As shown in the

previous model (Molaei, 2022a), which emphasized an open, non-linear, reciprocal, flexible, and dynamic relationship, the phases of the process in the current study still remain open, reciprocal, flexible, dynamic and non-linear. Further in-depth, cross-cultural, and transdisciplinary research is still required.

Implications

Considering this study and its previous literature (Molaei, 2024a, 2023b, 2022d, etc.), the practice and function of semiotics and linguistics can be seen in various contexts and fields: semiotic coaching, semiotic self, educational semiotics/edusemiotics, educational linguistics, ontological/linguistic/semantic coaching, organizational semiotics, organizational linguistics, semiotic leadership, linguistic leadership, educational leadership, organizational leadership, etc. The scope of Semiotic Coaching is vast, extending from personal to professional life, from academic to non-academic fields, from formal to informal contexts, from specialized to non-specialized fields, from real to virtual spaces, and from industry to art, technique, skill, profession, business, and beyond. However, we need to understand the underlying meanings and functions of these terms and fields as Garvey (2004) says: "... in whatever setting the terminology is used, there needs to be a common understanding of meaning within that setting."

Endnotes

[1] ↩

The paper referenced on pragmatism and coaching can be connected to the current study based on some commonalities. One of which is Charles Sanders Peirce, who serves as both a semiotician and a pragmatist. Moreover, Fontanille (2003 [2006]) has incorporated some of Peirce's ideas. However, this research does not delve into the interaction among pragmatism, semiotics, and coaching in this context.

[2] ↩

A Persian word coined and registered by the author, which literally means 'Self-Climbing'.

References

- Almeida, L. C. L. (2018). *O hiperdesempenho e o design de si: uma análise do coaching executivo*. (Master's thesis, Brasil). Available at: <https://repositorio.ufrn.br/jspui/handle/123456789/27793>.
- Alpert, E. R. (2014). *Language, Gender, and Ideology in Japanese Professional Matchmaking* (Doctoral dissertation). Available at: <https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2017/04/links-41717.html>.
- Bachkirova, T., Cox, E. & Clutterbuck, D. (2014). Introduction. In E. Cox, T. Bachkirova & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.), *The complete handbook of coaching* (2nd ed., 1-18): London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bachkirova, T & Smith, C. (2015). From competencies to capabilities in the assessment and accreditation of coaches. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*. 13. 123-140.
- Bachkirova, T. (2017). Developing a knowledge base of coaching: Questions to explore. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence, & D. Drake (Eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching* (23-41): London, England: SAGE.
- Bachkirova, T., Drake, D. & Spence, G. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of coaching*.
- Bachkirova, T. & Borrington, S. (2019). Old wine in new bottles: Exploring pragmatism as a philosophical framework for the discipline of coaching. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 18(3), 337-360. DOI: [10.5465/amle.2017.0268](https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2017.0268).
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. DOI: [10.1191/1478088706qp0630a](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a).
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Terry, G. & Hayfield, N. (2019). Thematic Analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed), *Handbook of Research Methods in Health and Social Sciences* (843-860): Springer. DOI: [10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_103](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_103).

- Brock, V. G. (2008). *Grounded theory of the roots and emergence of coaching*. [Doctoral dissertation, Maui, HI: International University of Professional Studies].
- Brock, V. G. ([2012] 2014). *Sourcebook of coaching history* (2nd ed.): Vikki Brock.
- Chambefort, C. (2006). Coaching: pour la promotion d'une idéologie normative?. *Communication et organisation. Revue scientifique francophone en Communication organisationnelle*, (28).
- Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*: London, UK: Sage.
- Cox, E. (2013). *Coaching Understood: A Pragmatic Inquiry into the Coaching Process*: London: SAGE Publishing.
- Cox, E., Bachkirova, T. & Clutterbuck, D. A. (2014). *The complete handbook of coaching* (2nd ed.): London, England: SAGE.
- Dean G. & Heather, P. (2016). Too hot to handle? A social semiotic analysis of touching in "Bend it like Beckham", *Sports Coaching Review*. 5:1, 102-115. DOI: [10.1080/21640629.2016.1198580](https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2016.1198580).
- Deplazes, S., Graf, E. M. & Künzli, H. (2018). Das TSPP-Modell–Eine Blaupause für die Coaching-Prozessforschung. *Coaching| Theorie & Praxis*, 4(1), 69-82.
- Drake, D. B. (2017). Working with narratives in coaching. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence, & D. Drake (Eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching* (291-309): London, England: SAGE.
- Fontanille, J. (2003 [2006]). *The Semiotics of Discourse* (H. Bostic, Trans.): New York: Peterlang. (Original work published 2003).
- Garvey, B. (2004). The mentoring/counseling/coaching debate: Call a rose by any other name and perhaps it's a bramble?, *Development and Learning in Organizations*, Vol. 18(2), 6-8. DOI: [10.1108/14777280410519554](https://doi.org/10.1108/14777280410519554).
- Garvey, B. & Stokes, P. (2022, 4th ed.). *Coaching and Mentoring: theory and practice*: Sage, UK.
- Graf E. (2012). Coaching meets Applied Linguistics. In R. Wegener, A. Fritze & M. Loebbert (Eds.). *Coaching entwickeln Forschung und Praxis im Dialog* (148-156). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. DOI: [10.1007/978-3-531-19343-4_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19343-4_14).
- Graf, E. (2019). *The pragmatics of executive coaching* (Vol. 303): John Benjamins. DOI: [10.1075/pbns.303](https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.303).
- Griffiths, K. & Campbell, M. (2008). Regulating the Regulators: Paving the way for International, Evidence Based Coaching Standards. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 6(1), 19-31. Available at: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/8cc34160-8136-4dd2-b185-1cdd24c6984f/1/>.
- Hegland, S. & Andre, T. (1992). Helping learners construct knowledge. *Educational Psychology Review*, 4(2), 223-240.
- Jackson, P. (2017). Physicality in coaching: Developing an embodied perspective. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence & D. Drake (Eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching* (256-271). London, England: SAGE.
- Lureau, M. (2014). *Le coaching strategico-linguistique: vers une science du changement?* [Doctoral dissertation, Paris X-Nanterre; Sapienza Università di Roma (Italie)].
- Martin, B. & Ringham, F. (2000). *Dictionary of semiotics*: London: Cassell.
- Martin, B. & Ringham, F. (2006). *Key terms in semiotics*: London: Continuum.
- McIlvenny, P. (2011). Video interventions in everyday life: semiotic and spatial practices of embedded video as a therapeutic tool in reality TV parenting programmes. *Social Semiotics*, 21(2), 259-288.
- Molaei, L. (2021). *Coaching: Philosophical, Linguistic, Social and Cognitive Approaches (with reference to Linguistics and Semiotics)*. Tehran: Logos. (As a translator & an author). Available at: [ايارىE2%80%8Cى](https://irlogos.com/products/recently-published/ايارىE2%80%8Cى).
- Molaei, L. ([2021] 2023). *Coaching: Philosophical, Linguistic, Social and Cognitive Approaches (with reference to Linguistics and Semiotics)* (2nd ed.). Tehran: Logos. (As a translator & an author). Available at: [ايارىE2%80%8Cى](https://irlogos.com/products/recently-published/ايارىE2%80%8Cى).
- Molaei, L. (2022a). Toward Semiotic Coaching (Paris School): Change and Transformation. *LRR*; 12 (6): 661-705. Available at: <https://lrr.modares.ac.ir/article-14-43544-en.html>.
- Molaei, L. (2022b). *Coaching & Linguistics*. Linguistics Scientific Association of Allameh Tabataba'i University (Molaei, L., 29th January 2022)
- Molaei, L. (2022c). *Coaching, Why and How to Act: Semiotic Coaching in Personal, Professional and Organizational Change and Transformation*. The Boot Camp of Innovation Incubator Center of Faculty of Literature and Foreign Languages of Allameh Tabataba'i University (Molaei, L., 29th August 2022).
- Molaei, L. (2022d). *Modality: From Educational Semiotics/Edusemiotics and Semiotic Coaching to Educational Linguistics and Ontological/Linguistic Coaching*. *Second National Conference on Recent Developments in English Language Teaching*, Literature and Translation in Shiraz, Iran Affiliation: Shiraz University. Available at: <https://civilica.com/doc/1584498/>.
- Molaei, L. (2022f). *Academic Manner in the Wheel of Life Based on Coaching*. Arabic Translation Scientific Association of Allameh Tabataba'i University (Molaei, L., 28th & 30th July 2022).

- Molaei, L. (2022-3). Toward the Linguistics of Coaching and Linguistic Coaching in Iran. *Gozare: Biannual Journal of Theoretical, Applied and Historical Linguistics*. Vol. 8, No. 8-9: 171-192. Available at: <https://farhangi.atu.ac.ir/fa/page/9738/%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87>.
- Molaei, L. (2023a). *Coaching: Counseling/Consulting, Mentoring and Supervision*. Tehran: Logos. (As an author). Available at: <https://irlogos.com/products/recently-published/اكوچينگرهياريمشاوره-هدايتگرى-و-نظ/>.
- Molaei, L. (2023b). *Linkage among University, Industry and Society for Job Creation and Entrepreneurship: Educational Linguistics, Educational Semiotics, Organizational Semiotics, Semiotic Coaching, ...* The 10th Summer School of the Linguistics Society of Iran (Molaei L., 1st September 2023) Available at: <https://lsi.ir/post/news/510>.
- Molaei, L. (2023c). *Current Student of Linguistics and Semiotics; Future Self-Employed Person, Job Creator and Entrepreneur*. *Scientific Linguistics Association of Allameh Tabataba'i University* (Molaei, L., 18th July 2023).
- Molaei L. (2024a). *Modal Verbs: From Semiotic Coaching and Educational Semiotics/Edusemiotics to Educational Linguistics and Ontological/Linguistic Coaching*, 20th coaching and mentoring research conference at the Oxford Brookes University, England (18th January 2024). Available at: <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/getmedia/9e73b1aa-e747-4fda-bce6-8c12d4981bc5/20th-coaching-and-mentoring-research-conference-programme-1.pdf>.
- Molaei, L. (2024b). A Report on the Presentation Named 'Current Student of Linguistics and Semiotics; Future Self-Employed Person, Job Creator and Entrepreneur'. *Gozare: Biannual Journal of Theoretical, Applied and Historical Linguistics*. Vol. 9, No, 10: 118-132. Available at: <https://farhangi.atu.ac.ir/fa/page/9738/%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87>.
- Navarette, P. A. (2022). Du discours aux représentations du coaching: sémiotique d'une pratique protéiforme. *Actes Sémiotiques*, 127. DOI: 10.25965/as.7685.
- O'Connor, J. & Lages, A. (2007). *How coaching works: The essential guide to the history and practice of effective coaching*: London: A & C Black.
- Passmore, Jonathan. (2021). *The Coaches' Handbook: The Complete Practitioner Guide for Professional Coaches*: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. DOI: 10.4324/9781003089889.
- Shoukry, H. & Cox, E. (2018). Coaching as a social process. *Management Learning*, 49(4), 413-428.
- Sieler, A. (2014). Ontological Coaching. In E. Cox, T. Bachkirova & D. A. Clutterbuck (Eds.). *The complete handbook of coaching* (2nd ed., 104-116): London, England: SAGE.
- Steyn, L. & Barnard, A. (2024). Personal Transformation: Developing Self-Processing Competence Through Coaching. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*. 22 (1), 68-83. DOI: 10.24384/hb5x-vw76.
- Trif, V. (2015). Spatial Cognition: Theoretical Considerations. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 187, 168-172. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.03.032.
- Western, S. (2017). The key discourses of coaching. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence, & D. Drake (Eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Coaching* (42-61): London, England: SAGE.
- Whitworth, L., Kimsey-House, H., Kimsey-House, K. & Sandahl, P. (2007). *New skills for coaching people toward success in work and life*: California: Davies-Black Publishing.

About the author

Laleh Molaei is a Ph.D. candidate in Linguistics at the Department of Linguistics in the Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Language at ATU. As an applied, transdisciplinary author, researcher, and practitioner, she focuses on the interface of linguistics, semiotics, coaching, leadership, mentoring, education, and related fields in personal, professional, educational, organizational, and business contexts.