



Questioning Practices in Executive Coaching: A Discussion of How to Integrate Practical and Scholarly Perspectives

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Panel: Professional Practices and Contexts – Perspectives of
Practitioners and Scholars

Outline

- Questions in helping professions
- Executive Coaching
- QueSCo – Questioning Sequences in Coaching
- Discussing the potentials of transdisciplinarity
- Transdisciplinarity & ‘Effective Linguistics’

Questions in helping professions

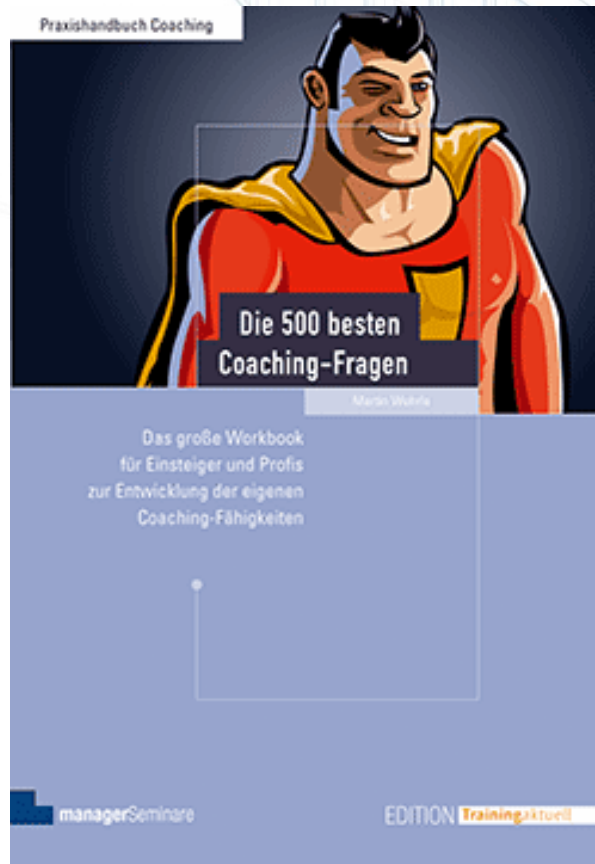
“questions originate in the human aptitude to initiate **hypothetical imagination processes** prone to transform into **self-reflection processes**; questions allow for new experience given that they entail a **change of perspective** and a possible **change in one’s point of view**. Questions help to localize **knowledge gaps**, to express **knowledge requirements**, to articulate one’s interest in **reasons**, [and] to **relate to the present as well as to the past** “

(cf. Köller 2004: 662, Graf et al. 2020a: 225)

Executive Coaching

“... a helping relationship formed between a **client who has managerial authority** and responsibility in an organization and a **consultant** who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to **assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance** and personal satisfaction and consequently to **improve the effectiveness of the client’s organization** within a formally defined coaching agreement” (Kilburg 2000, 65f)

Questions in Executive Coaching



- Asking questions is “the coach’s most important task” (Schreyögg 2012: 269)
- Questions guide the client’s reflection (e.g. Loebbert & Wilmes 2013) as well as the coaching process (e.g. Fischer-Epe 2012)
- Coaches should ask a multitude of questions and make use of wide array of types

Image: managerseminare.de

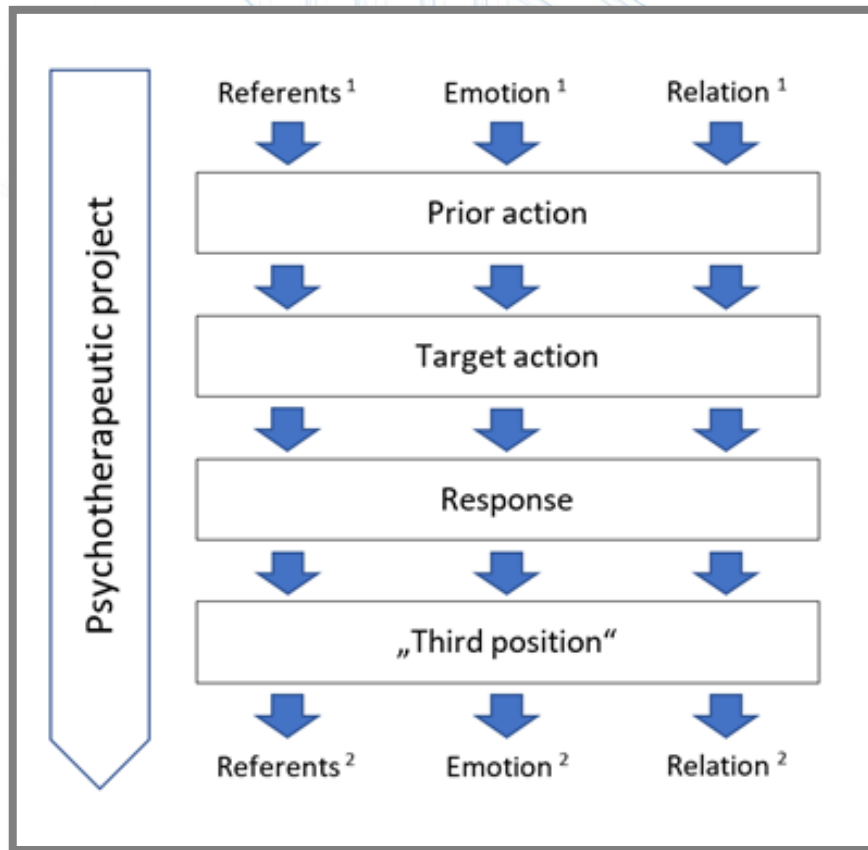
Questions in Executive Coaching

- Question types include: miracle questions, circular questions, hypothetical questions, reframing questions, resources questions, solution questions, provoking questions, scaling questions, etc. (Graf & Spranz-Fogasy 2018, Deplazes 2016)
- Avoidance of ‘closed’ questions in favour of ‘open-ended’ questions (e.g. Fischer-Epe 2012, Schreyögg 2012)
- Based on professionals’ engagement in practice => BUT not yet empirically verified with authentic data!

Questioning Sequences in Executive Coaching

- Shift from monological view of questions in practice literature to questioning sequences in linguistics
 - i.e. question/first position – response/second position – follow-up action/third position
- Sequentiality and intersubjectivity as agents of change

Transformative Sequences: Investigating Local Effectiveness



“(e)ach utterance in the continuum of actions involves a momentary documentation of referents, emotion, and relation. Each next utterance involves such documentation as well, but necessarily something has changed: The next speaker attends to the referents, emotion, and relation as they were in the prior turn, but in his or her turn, they also become different. This is where the psychotherapeutic [/coaching, FD] process takes place” (Peräkylä 2019: 267)

Figure: Peräkylä 2019: 267

Appropriate Responsiveness

- Coaches' use of questions based on what's currently best for the client according to
 - In-situ development of the coaching conversation: theory of interaction
 - Underlying professional theory of change: theory of change

⇒ **appropriate responsiveness** (Kramer & Stiles 2015)

⇒ Need to combine applied linguistics and psychology

QueSCo:

Questioning Sequences in Coaching

- Interdisciplinary: Applied Linguistics + Psychology
- Interprofessionality: Researchers as practicing coaches
- Mixed-methods: qualitative (linguistics and psychology) and quantitative (psychology)
- Authentic coaching data (Graf et al. 2020b)

QueSCo: Questioning Sequences in Coaching

Goals

- Developing a coaching-specific typology of questioning practices
- Investigating the **local** (process/interaction) and **global** (phases of change) change potential of questioning sequences
- Relating successful and less successful questioning sequences (= **local effectiveness**) to the overall goal attainment of the process (= **global effectiveness**)

Discussing the potentials of transdisciplinarity

- problem identification, i.e. (dis-)alignment of academia and practice as regards what is worth investigating (e.g. questioning practices) (Sarangi 2002; Graf & Dionne in press)
 - Use of practitioners' knowledge as PROMPT => self-imposed research goals

Discussing the potentials of transdisciplinarity

- accessibility, i.e. gaining access to professional data sites given that “other-initiated gaze and criticism may be a dispreferred activity” (Sarangi 2002: 102; Graf & Dionne in press)
 - Dependence to considerable degree on coaches for the success of the research project

Discussing the potentials of transdisciplinarity

- coding and interpreting discourse requires insider knowledge, and (ideally) collaborative interpretation to guarantee ‘ecological validity’ (cf. Cicourel 1996) of findings (Sarangi 2002; Graf & Dionne in press)

Discussing the potentials of transdisciplinarity

- Ideally, collaborative interpretation with coaches as ‘key informants’ (Sarangi 2007: 580)
- Concretely integrating scholarly and practical perspectives, e.g.
 - Operationalization of the categorization/labelling of question types and functions

Transdisciplinarity & ‘Effective Linguistics’

- ‘Effective linguistics’ as the integration of academic findings in practice (Sarangi 2005: 370)
- Purpose for practice of developing a typology of questions based on descriptive-phenomenological AL and normative-theoretical psychological understandings of authentic coaching processes
 - **Professionalization of coaching**
 - **Evidence-based coaching literature & training**

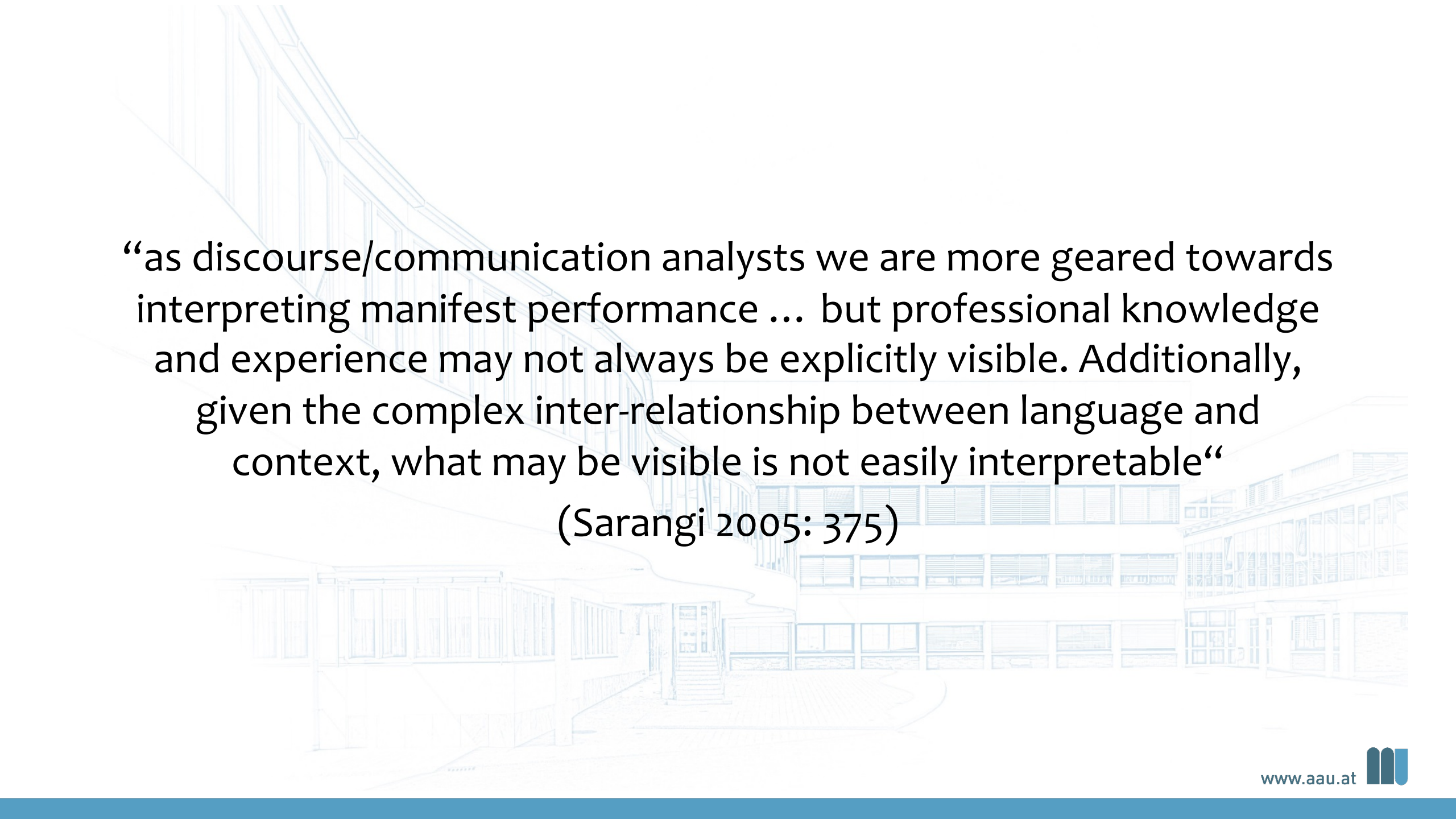
Transdisciplinarity & ‘Effective Linguistics’

Interprofessional dialogue requires *developing a shared language* among linguists, psychologists and coaching practitioners, i.e. necessarily integrating scholarly and practical insights



Thank you for your attention!

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“as discourse/communication analysts we are more geared towards interpreting manifest performance ... but professional knowledge and experience may not always be explicitly visible. Additionally, given the complex inter-relationship between language and context, what may be visible is not easily interpretable“
(Sarangi 2005: 375)

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