

**“I am my own worst enemy.”**

**A linguistic analysis of  
interactive dynamics of relational patterns  
in business coaching conversations**

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*This book is dedicated to Inge Eder, who attempted to teach me how to sew.*

“A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him.”

William James

“Behind many masks and many characters, each performer tends to wear a single look, a naked unsocialized look, a look of concentration, a look of one who is privately engaged in a difficult, treacherous task.”

Erving Goffman

“People will always show their true selves in the end.”

Leona Lewis



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# 1. Introduction

Business coaching represents a powerful advisory format that is currently on the rise all over the world (cf. *ICF Coaching Study 2012*; Chapter 4). In Germany and Switzerland the numbers of coaches, coaching training programmes, and coaching associations have been steadily growing over the last decade. The practice of business coaching is constantly consolidating its position as a prominent instrument of Human Resources Development, and the annual revenue of the worldwide coaching market adds up to \$ 1.9 billion (USD) (cf. Section 4.3).<sup>1</sup> Overall, the positive effects of coaching are being increasingly acknowledged and used in Western societies.

Incidentally, approximately nine months before this thesis was concluded, I myself undertook a business coaching in order to reflect on my personal career plans. In particular, I planned to address the issue of how I should manage to complete this thesis alongside a full-time job. In the course of the coaching conversation it became evident that a part of me had no interest whatsoever in finishing this thesis at all. In fact, this part of my self had become so accustomed to maintaining an interesting research project in progress that it feared its loss more than looking forward to the reward of finalising it. Faced with this surprising finding, my coach and I decided to design a strategy that would include an appropriate replacement for my research project after its conclusion. In essence, I acknowledged my actual ambivalence toward change and appreciated the usefulness of my 'problem' of not finding the time to finish my thesis. It was only after having brought to light and having understood these underlying aspects that my habitual ways of thinking and acting could be changed. As a result, nine months later a thesis was 'born'.

In fact, the example above demonstrates some of the most striking characteristics of coaching conversations: The issue under discussion was career-related, and the focus of the coaching question appeared to be task-oriented and mainly professional. Yet, in the course of the coaching process, a different, underlying issue came to light. This matter appeared to come much closer to what is perceived as the 'personal', rather than the 'professional' arena. As Rauen (2007: 18) claims in the introduction to his seminal textbook of coaching methodology:

The distinction between a symptom and an actual issue is the core of professional expertise in advisory settings. Coaches who are ignorant in this regard will be in the dark about everything they do.  
(*Translation mine*)

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.coaching-report.de/coaching-markt.html>.

Thus, successful coaching processes may depend on the ability of coaches to see through hidden agendas and superficial communicative manoeuvres, whether they are consciously employed by the coachees or not. Also, coaches must be able to facilitate an atmosphere in which challenges to preconceived notions of problems, situations, and even identities can be accepted by the coachees. Consider another statement by Rauen (2007: 17f):

The significance of the relationship between advisors and clients is almost common ground by now. (...) Relating to each other is as important for humans as the air they breathe. (...) Coaches must influence other people, they must convince them, develop them and challenge them. They need allegiance, trust, respect, and openness from their clients. Among other aspects, coaching is characterised by the fact that an interactant observes and influences another interactant, while simultaneously being observed and influenced himself/herself. In this way, causality turns into circularity. (...) Situations like this cannot be prepared. For situations like this process competence is required, because it will help identify and use the relevant factors in this extremely complex matter.

*(Translation mine)*

In essence, several major aspects inherent in this quote are derived from social constructionist ideas (cf. Zielke 2004). Thus, relationships are conceived of as co-constructed in interactions. Also, communication is regarded as a circular and dynamic phenomenon, rather than a causal path between a sender and a receiver (cf. Bublitz 2009). In the course of the last decade, in linguistics as well as in psychology and other related disciplines, the rise of the social constructionist paradigm led to analogous perspectives on interactions, on relational work, on the self, on self-presentation, and on identity construction. Research on linguistic politeness and face work shifted from an interest in isolated speech acts and from rule-based accounts to discursive approaches emphasising the local negotiability of judgements of (im)politeness (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987; Locher and Watts 2005; Section 5.3).

It is the aim of this thesis to examine crucial aspects of relational work in business coaching conversations. For this purpose, three interrelated levels of analysis will be examined in this thesis (cf. Figure 1.1):

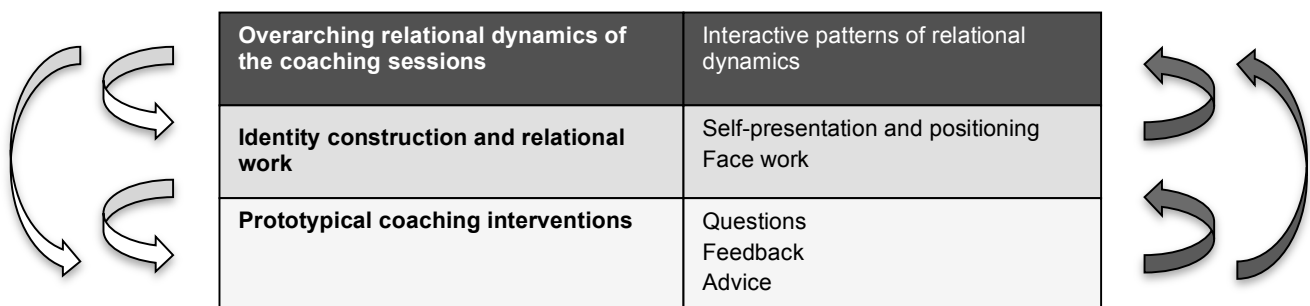


Figure 1.1: Interrelation between levels of analysis

On the first level, prototypical coaching interventions will be explored. In particular, the use of questions, feedback, and advice-related activities by the coaches and coachees will be the focus of this investigation. The second level of analysis will be concerned with issues of identity construction and relational work. In this area patterns of positioning and self-presentation as well as face work will be examined. On the third level of analysis, the overarching dynamics of the individual interactions will be considered. The results from the first two levels of analysis and the results from specific analyses oriented to the emerging interactive systems will be synthesised to gain a full picture of the relational dynamic of the respective coaching sessions.

Conceptually and methodologically, this study essentially draws on the work that emerged in the wake of the constructionist turn in linguistic discourse analysis (cf. Bucholtz and Hall 2005). The frameworks of analysis employed in this study will be based on state-of-the-art linguistic research, for instance with regard to positioning theory and identity theory as well as face work theory (cf. Bamberg et al. 2011; Locher 2011). However, it will also include several aspects from the works of Goffman (1967; 1971) and Holly (1979) that are rarely discussed in the linguistic discourse on face work.

Moreover, as the unfolding argument will make apparent, this study is also designed to bridge a gap between circular models of relational dynamics in transactional analysis and systemic coaching theory, as presented, for example, by Dehner (2009) on the one hand and the linguistic analysis of identity construction and relational work on the other (cf. Section 5.9). Thus, the analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics in coaching conversations will be substantiated with hard linguistic evidence as to the manner in which these interactive patterns emerge by means of the use of questions, feedback, advice, self-presentation and positioning, and face work. In the final step, all of these perspectives will be synthesised to carve out the specific interactive patterns of relational dynamics in the individual conversations. It is a goal of this thesis that the results of its analysis will ultimately contribute to the establishment of linguistic discourse analytical approaches in the emerging interdisciplinary field of coaching research (cf. Aksu and Graf 2011; Section 4.5).

The data in my corpus consist of five business coaching conversations of about 60 to 90 minutes each. The sessions were held in English with five native-speaker coachees and three German coaches who hold an advanced knowledge of English as a foreign language. Interestingly, despite the obvious constraints of the setting of my research project – the interactants knew that they were videotaped, they encountered each other for the first time, they had only an hour to an hour and a half to achieve their interactional goals, and they knew that they might never meet each other again – every single coaching interaction turned out to produce extremely distinctive interactive patterns of relational dynamics. Notably, as my analyses will show, it was not just the coaches, but also the coachees who contributed

significantly to the kind of relational dynamics evolving in their respective sessions.

This study is divided into four parts. Part I contains an introduction to the data (presented in Chapter 3), as well as two chapters containing literature reviews. In Chapter 4, an overview of the history, the roots, and the current status of business coaching both as a practice and as a field of academic interest will be provided. Chapter 5 comprises an extensive review of nine areas of relevant research. In Chapter 6, the results of Part I will be summarised and evaluated.

Chapter 7 contains an introduction to Part II, which revolves around the analysis of coaching-specific communicative interventions. Chapter 8 provides a presentation of both the methodology for the analysis of questions in my coaching corpus and its results. Accordingly, in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively the methodologies and results of the analysis of feedback and advice will be introduced. Further, in Chapter 11 the results will be summarised and evaluated with regard to the research questions established in the previous chapters.

Part III of my thesis is concerned with aspects of identity construction and face work. Chapter 12 will provide a brief introduction, followed by the methodology for the analysis of self-presentation and positioning, and then the presentation of its results (cf. Chapter 13). Likewise, in Chapter 14 the methodology for the analysis of face work will be revealed along with the results of the analysis (cf. Chapter 14). Chapter 15 will contain a summary and evaluation of the previous chapters.

In Part IV the previous results will be synthesised and combined with approaches to the analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics. Chapter 16 will provide an introduction to Part IV, it will establish the methodology, and it will present the results of the analysis in the individual coachings. In Chapter 17, the findings of this thesis will be brought together to a final summary and evaluation.

While the research questions tied to the different analytical perspectives will be developed in the course of the methodological sections, at this point I will provide a brief preview of the main centres of research interest:

- In what way are questions employed by the coaches and coachees in the interactions, and how is the use of questions related to the emerging interactive patterns of relational dynamics?
- In what way is feedback employed by the coaches and coachees in the interactions, and how is the use of feedback related to the emerging interactive patterns of relational dynamics?
- In what way are advice activities employed by the coaches and coachees in the interactions, and how is the use of advice activities related to the emerging

interactive patterns of relational dynamics?

- In what way are strategies of self-presentation and positioning employed by the coaches and coachees in the interactions, and how is the use of strategies of self-presentation and positioning related to the emerging interactive patterns of relational dynamics?
- In what way is face work employed by the coaches and coachees in the interactions, and how is the use of face work related to the emerging interactive patterns of relational dynamics?
- Which specific interactive patterns of relational dynamics emerge in the course of the individual conversations, and to which degree do these patterns reflect aspects of the coaching issues under discussion?

## **Part I: Theoretical foundations**



## 2. Introduction to Part I

Part I of my thesis will provide the theoretical foundations for the frameworks of analysis in this study. In Chapter 3, relevant background information on the context of data acquisition will be provided along with a characterisation of the coaches and coachees who participated in the study. Also, I will present an introduction to the issues and dominant themes discussed in the individual coaching conversations. In Chapter 4, the subject matter of business coaching interactions will be established. The history of business coaching in the German-speaking countries will be briefly recounted, followed by an overview of the current market situation and a characterisation of business coaching as a practice. Moreover, the linguistic view of coaching as a subgenre of advisory interaction will be provided along with a review of current linguistic research in this area.

In Chapter 5, the first three sections will shed light on the broader theoretical context in which this thesis is located. Thus, the eminent contributions to the analysis of face-to-face interaction, of self-presentation and identity construction by Erving Goffman, will be acknowledged (Section 5.1). In particular, I will consider his work on the dramaturgical metaphor and the ritual metaphor as well as the face metaphor. Moreover, a brief survey of psychological perspectives on the self will account for an interdisciplinary view of the subject matter (Section 5.2). As the literature review will show, current approaches to the self in psychology are completely in line with the social constructionist view of identity construction. In Section 5.3, the theoretical foundations for the linguistic analysis of relational patterns will be laid, in particular with regard to self-presentation, positioning, and face work. This section represents to an extent the core of the literature review due to the prominence of self-presentation and relational work in the analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics.

Moreover, in Section 5.4 research on the analysis of questions will be discussed, followed by an overview of the issue of feedback (cf. Section 5.5). Section 5.6 will contain a review of literature on advice, while Section 5.7 will be concerned with the introduction of practical frameworks for the analysis of self-presentation and positioning from the literature. In the following, practical frameworks for the analysis of face work will be presented (cf. Section 5.8), followed by a literature review on the issue of interactive patterns of relational dynamics (cf. Section 5.9). Chapter 6 will conclude Part I of my thesis with a summary and evaluation.

## 3. The data

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains an overview of the data underlying this thesis. First, the context of acquisition will be revealed, and background information on the coaches and the coachees participating in my project will be provided. Second, I will describe the character of the corpus. Third, a brief introduction to the content structures of the five coaching sessions will follow, and the main issues and the contexts of the individual sessions will be highlighted. In addition, brief content analyses as well as previews of dominating themes will be presented. The last section will provide a summary of the data underlying my thesis.

### 3.2 Acquisition of the coaching data

In the initial stage of my project I found that it was difficult to attain authentic recordings of coaching conversations. Several coaches were willing to take part in the research project, but their coachees were reluctant to have themselves filmed and analysed by a stranger whilst unfolding their ongoing professional challenges. Moreover, while operating in Germany I was looking for coachings held in English, which further diminished the pool of potential coachees. During this process, three coaches representing the coaching company D.K. (name altered) suggested that they would participate in the project under the condition that the coachees would be acquired by the researcher. In response, an advertisement was launched on an informal online platform for English native speakers in Germany, offering one session of free business coaching per person in exchange for their permission to use the filmed recordings for linguistic analysis. This strategy proved to be successful: 10 people responded to the advertisement. The first four candidates who signed up for the project were accepted. In addition, during the process of creating the advertisement, a further suitable candidate was recruited through personal contacts of an acquaintance.

### 3.3 The coachees: backgrounds and profiles

Table 3.1 provides an overview of some statistical aspects concerning the coachees in my study. All of the coachees are female. Names were assigned to them randomly in this thesis, i.e. 'Kate', 'Bobbie', 'Rachel', 'Pauline', and 'Olivia'. Bobbie is approximately 30 years old; Pauline is in her mid-thirties; Kate and Rachel are in their forties; and Olivia is approximately 50 years old. Regarding nationality, four of the coachees are American, while Rachel is

British. At the time of the recordings the women had all lived in Germany for at least several years. Three of the five coachees are fluent in German, and two describe themselves as having an intermediate level of knowledge of German. At the time of recording, two coachees were looking for jobs, two of them worked as freelancers, and one of them held a managing position in an international company.

Regarding prior experience with coaching, two coachees stated that they had already possessed quite a lot of knowledge about coaching. Rachel brought a book to the session, claiming that she essentially practiced the principles of coaching in her daily life as a corporate leader. Olivia discussed the option of becoming a coach herself. The other three coachees indicated that they had rather little knowledge about coaching. In consequence, they asked questions about the setting of the coaching process.

Characteristics of the five coachees					
Coachee	Coachee 1 (‘Kate’)	Coachee 2 (‘Bobbie’)	Coachee 3 (‘Rachel’)	Coachee 4 (‘Pauline’)	Coachee 5 (‘Olivia’)
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	Forties	Approx. 30	Forties	Mid-thirties	Approx. 50
Nationality	American	American	British	American	American
Knowledge of German	Fluent	Intermediate level	Intermediate level	Fluent	Fluent
Current employment status	Freelancer	Looking for a job	Managing position in an international company	Looking for a job	Freelancer
Knowledge of and prior experience with coaching	Little knowledge, no prior experience	Little knowledge, no prior experience	Much knowledge, no prior experience	Little knowledge, no prior experience	Much knowledge, prior experience
Coaching issues	Career coaching: new direction/ presenting tips	Career coaching: application strategy	Leadership coaching: conflict, self-management	Career coaching: new direction, application strategy/ conflict with boss	Career coaching: new direction

*Table 3.1: Characteristics of the five coachees*

In relation to the issues discussed in the coaching conversations, four of the coachees raise classic career questions, but one of the career coachings (coaching 1) is also concerned with presenting strategies; and in the course of another career coaching a work conflict emerges as the more pressing issue of the day (coaching 4). The coachee Rachel, who holds a management function, talks about a leadership issue, i.e. a conflict with one of her employees.

### 3.4 The coaches: backgrounds and profiles

The three coaches who participated in my study belong to the same coaching company, which I have randomly named 'D.K.'. This organisation is a fairly representative example of a player in the process-oriented business coaching market (cf. Sections 4.3; 4.4). Thus, D.K. offers a typical portfolio of services with respect to Human Resources Development, such as, for instance, leadership development, team development, organisational development, training, and moderation. Moreover, they provide professional training for future coaches.

The three coaches all have an academic background in business-related subjects, and all of them had worked in leadership and executive leadership positions for many years before they started their careers as coaches and consultants. Moreover, they are extensively trained in different coaching-related areas (such as systemic coaching, organisational consulting, and so on). With more than 10 years of practice as trainers and consultants each they must be considered as experienced representatives of their profession.

Characteristics of the three coaches			
Coach	Coach I	Coach II	Coach III
Active in coachings	Coaching 1, Coaching 2	Coaching 3, Coaching 4	Coaching 5
Gender	Male	Male	Female
Age	Forties	Forties	Fifties
Nationality	German	German	German
Knowledge of English displayed in the conversations	Upper intermediate level, mostly grammatically correct, but not always idiomatic, sometimes struggling for words	Upper intermediate level, mostly grammatically correct, but not always idiomatic, sometimes struggling for words	Intermediate level, mostly grammatically correct, but not very idiomatic, sometimes struggling for words
	Producing fluent and meaningful contributions	Producing fluent and meaningful contributions	Producing fluent and meaningful contributions

Table 3.2: Characteristics of the three coaches

As Table 3.2 demonstrates, Coach I and Coach II participate in two coachings each, while Coach III leads one coaching. Moreover, Coach I and Coach II are male, while Coach III is female. Also, the two men are in their forties, whereas the female coach is in her fifties. While all the coaches are German native speakers, in the conversations recorded for my project Coach I and Coach II display a slightly higher level of competency in the English language than Coach III. However, all three of them are perfectly capable of leading the coaching conversations in English.

### 3.5 The corpus

Table 3.3 compiles the most important facts about the corpus employed as a basis for this study. First, it comprises a total of 403.5 minutes of natural, spoken English interaction recorded on videotapes. This translates into 65,980 words of transcribed text. Three of the coachings take 90 minutes or longer, whereas coaching 2 and coaching 5 are finished after approximately 60 minutes: In coaching 2 the coach and the coachee come to the agreement that the coachee is *perfectly set* and that there is no use talking her issue to death; and in coaching 5 the coachee is 30 minutes late, and the coach has another appointment immediately following the session.

Characteristics of the corpus					
Number of minutes	403.5 min				
Number of words	65,980 words				
Coaching	Coaching 1	Coaching 2	Coaching 3	Coaching 4	Coaching 5
Number of minutes	90 min	64 min	93 min	93.5 min	63 min
Number of words	15,352 words	9,927 words	15,979 words	13,714 words	11,008 words
Participants	Coach I, coachee Kate	Coach I, coachee Bobbie	Coach II, coachee Rachel	Coach II, coachee Pauline	Coach III, coachee Olivia
State	Full recording	Full recording	Full recording	A few seconds missing at the beginning	A few seconds missing at the beginning and at the end

Table 3.3: Characteristics of the corpus

Three of the five recordings are completely intact and cover the entire conversations. Due to technical problems, in coaching 4 and in coaching 5 there are a few seconds missing at the beginning and a few minutes missing at the end of the conversation. In fact, in coaching 5, Coach III brings the recording to a halt after having officially closed the coaching. Thus, the discussion of the coach's own career development, as requested by Olivia is not recorded for the corpus. As follows from the description of the acquisition process, all coachings are set up as one-time encounters between interactants who meet each other for the first time.

### 3.6 Overview of the coachings: content analyses and dominating themes

#### Coaching 1: *I'm my own worst enemy*

As becomes apparent in the course of coaching 1, the coachee Kate is an American freelance translator for corporate clients in a German city. She tells Coach I that she has

established herself as a service provider with a sound base of customers. This holds significance for her, because she is a single mother with two kids. However, she feels that she is *stuck in a treadmill* of routine work, and she wonders whether she should try to move into a more interesting and more creative line of work. One of Kate's first statements in the coaching session sums up her concern (cf. Excerpt 3.1):

**Excerpt 3.1:**

- 1        *K: so now it's uh how do I manage to switch out of it, or do I bother switching out of it.*
- 2        *C: (nodding)*
- 3        *K: or not.*

As will be revealed in the analysis, Kate's dilemma of whether she should alter her work situation or not is formative both for the content structure of the conversation and for the interactive patterns of relational dynamics emerging between Kate and the coach (cf. Sections 13.2; 16.2). Also, Kate offers an alternative issue for discussion, i.e. the question of whether she structures her presentations well enough (00:02:02)<sup>2</sup>. Coach I takes up this suggestion as an issue to work on, but Kate's reactions to his comments, albeit polite, show that she is not in actual need of advice in this area.

In the course of the conversation it becomes clear that the coachee's ambivalence does not only extend to the dilemma in question, or to the agenda of the coaching session. Rather, it appears to be part of a larger, underlying ambivalence Kate experiences with respect to her own self-image. The analysis also looks to see how Coach I reacts to this phenomenon and how a unique interactive pattern emerges between the two participants. This pattern is reflected in the use of questions, feedback, advice, positioning strategies, and face work in the conversation.

In effect, Kate introduces three dominating themes of the coaching early on in the conversation (cf. Table 3.4). These themes are constantly reproduced throughout the session. The first theme consists of the aforementioned dilemma that she wants to switch to another line of work but is not sure whether she should take the risk of doing so. The second theme is the 'official' goal of the coaching, i.e. the coachee's request for advice on public speaking.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, quotes from the coaching corpus that are employed outside of excerpts will be referenced by means of the time at which they occurred in the conversation. The six numbers signify hours, minutes, and seconds respectively.

Dominating themes in coaching 1	Subject matter
<b>1. First problem on the agenda: dilemma</b>	<i>Coaching issue: Kate wonders whether she should stay in her line of work or try something new</i>
<b>2. Official coaching issue: public speaking</b>	<i>Coaching issue: Kate states that she is not sure how well she is prepared for her presentation in F.</i>
<b>3. Negotiations over K's partly negative self-image</b>	<i>Kate claims that she is her own worst enemy; the coach refutes this line of argument</i>

Table 3.4: Dominating themes in coaching 1

The third theme is constituted by the mostly implicit negotiation of the coachee's partly negative self-image, which she captures, for instance, in the metaphor *I'm my own worst enemy* (00:29:12; 01:11:55). While the interactants agree on the second theme as the 'official' goal of the coaching, in actuality they mostly discuss the first and the third theme.

## Coaching 2: *I'm not very problematic*

In some respects, coaching 2 could be seen as a reverse scenario to coaching 1: The coachee Bobbie presents herself in a fairly uncomplicated light, i.e. as an outgoing, good-humoured American singer, who initially came to Germany for a music degree. Due to the tough competition in Europe, she plans to segue out into arts administration. Fortunately, she was offered an assistant coordinator position at a music festival in an American city. There is also a director job available, for which she has applied as well. Thus, from her perspective, she will soon be faced with either a good or even a brilliant career option.

Dominating themes in coaching 2	Subject matter
<b>1. Main issue on the agenda: Bobbie's job search</b>	<i>Coaching issue: Discussion of different career and application scenarios</i>

Table 3.5: Dominating themes in coaching 2

As Table 3.5 illustrates, the main theme in coaching 2 consists of the discussion of career and application scenarios for Bobbie (cf. Table 3.5). Thus, in contrast to most of the other coachings in my corpus, a homogenous topical focus and an extremely confirmative atmosphere emerge in this interaction. Accordingly, both Coach I and the coachee Bobbie agree that she is *not very problematic* (01:04:05). Yet, the analyses of this study will demonstrate that this judgement is carefully co-constructed, rather than self-evident.

### Coaching 3: *A complete knock to my confidence*

As differently as the coachees Kate in coaching 1 and Bobbie in coaching 2 position themselves in the interactions, they both clearly presuppose a high degree of authority on the part of the coach. In contrast, the interactants in coaching 3 start out with an implicit battle about questions of authority. The coachee Rachel is a successful leader in a large international company. Before she opens up to Coach II, she tests his competency on coaching issues. However, after a few minutes, the coach seems to have passed the test, and the interactants ease into a more relaxed atmosphere. By the end of the conversation they have established a positively cordial relationship. Rachel even states plans to have her company hire Coach II as a coach for herself on a regular basis.

The topic of the conversation revolves around leadership issues. Rachel presents herself as a very successful and much appreciated leader, but she states that lately she has been confronted with an uncooperative employee. This employee, whose name is J., has now quit her job after a period of unresolved conflicts with Rachel. Therefore, Rachel feels *betrayed* (00:32:57) and *stabbed in the back* (01:24:10) by J.. Her official goals for the coaching are to clear her mind and to furnish an idea of how she can replace J.'s position as quickly as possible. Moreover, in the course of the conversation, the coach brings Rachel's feelings to the foreground. A major issue that is negotiated in the session is the question how Rachel can manage her emotions, especially because she claims that the conflict with J. has shattered her self-concept as a leader. Thus, the interactants advance to challenge some underlying beliefs inhibiting Rachel's professional self.

A factor which makes this coaching conversation particularly fascinating is the deep level of reflection that the coach and the coachee reach within just 90 minutes. This is likely linked to the fact that Rachel presents herself as a very sensitive person with a high degree of self-reflection and a strong ability to verbalise her thoughts and feelings. However, it is also extremely informative to observe how the coach establishes a safe, appreciative setting for Rachel, especially after the initial challenge of authority. In the end Coach II manages to address Rachel's issues, while at the same time confirming her face.

The dominating themes in coaching 3 can be condensed into three segments (cf. Table 3.6). The first theme occurs only in the opening part of the conversation. It is concerned with the power struggle between the coach and the coachee. After some time, however, this issue appears to be closed, and the interactants engage in mutually confirmative behaviour.



Dominating themes in coaching 3	Subject matter
1. Struggle over authority issues	<i>Rachel challenges the coach's expertise on coaching matters; the coach takes up the struggle</i>
2. Main problem on the agenda: Rachel's conflict with J. and need to rebuild her team	<i>Coaching issue: How can Rachel replace J. and rebuild her team?</i>
3. Underlying problem: self-image as a leader	<i>Coaching issue: How can Rachel rebuild her confidence as a leader?</i>

Table 3.6: Dominating themes in coaching 3

The second theme is the official issue of the coaching as defined by Rachel: She needs strategies for the replacement of her former employee J.. The third theme represents the underlying issue, i.e. Rachel's damaged self-concept as a leader. In this context, Rachel states that the conflict with J. was *a complete knock to [her] confidence* (01:23:14): While she used to conceive of herself as a mother figure to her employees, this concept turned out to be problematic in many respects.

### **Coaching 4: *I'm surprised that I was getting so upset about that.***

Coaching 4 can be classified in part as a career coaching and in part as a coaching on self-awareness and interpersonal communication. The coachee Pauline is an IT programmer who has just been released for operational reasons. Therefore, she searches for new job opportunities and career paths, but she also looks back on her previous work situation. In particular, she struggles to make sense of a conflict with her former boss. At first, however, Pauline claims that this issue is not important to her. It takes several attempts by Coach II to establish the topic as a coaching issue before Pauline acknowledges that the conflict is worth discussing in the first place.

The session is led by Coach II, who also moderated coaching 3 earlier on that same day. As he did in the previous session, Coach II emphasises his expertise in emotional intelligence. Pauline presents herself as a task-oriented, rational personality, but Coach II carefully guides her through the areas involving her feelings and her face. As will be demonstrated, coaching 4 is an especially fine example of subtle challenging on the part of the coach, who carefully triggers a process of self-reflection on Pauline's part. Table 3.7 summarises the two main issues and dominant themes in coaching 4. The first theme represents the first coaching issue raised by Pauline, i.e. the question of how she should continue her career. Although the coach makes quite an effort to help Pauline make up her mind in this area, it turns out that she actually knows what she wants to do and how she will go about doing it.

Dominating themes in coaching 4	Subject matters
<b>1. First coaching issue on the agenda: Pauline's career options</b>	<i>Coaching issue: Pauline wonders how she should go about her next career steps</i>
<b>2. Second coaching issue on the agenda: Pauline's conflict with her former boss</b>	<i>Coaching issue: Pauline wonders how she can prevent conflicts like the one with her former boss from happening again; Coach II extends the issue in terms of a need to process emotions and to work on communicative habits</i>

Table 3.7: Dominating themes in coaching 4

The second theme is concerned with Pauline's conflicts at her former workplace. As indicated above, she initially rejects this topic. However, in the course of the discussion, the coachee starts to embrace the coach's suggestions to discuss issues of emotional processing and of interpersonal communication.

## Coaching 5: *I'm still mourning a little bit*

In coaching 5 the coachee Olivia arrives 30 minutes late for the coaching session and makes a rather hectic entrance. When the camera starts to record the coaching session (for technical reasons the first few seconds are not captured), she has just begun to tell the coach about her professional situation: She is a freelance communication trainer and lecturer, and she works both for universities and for companies. In essence, she claims that she wants to find out whether she should specialise in either of these sectors in order to boost her career.

However, it soon turns out that there is a hidden agenda which is much more crucial to the coachee: Due to committing fraud, she has lost her financial service company, her husband (who is in prison), and her upper class lifestyle. Over the course of the session, it becomes apparent that Olivia sabotages all attempts on the part of Coach III to work with the 'official' coaching question. Instead, she mourns the loss of her old life.

Dominating themes in coaching 5	Subject matter
<b>1. Official coaching issue: career planning</b>	<i>Coaching question: Should Olivia stay in the academic area or should she establish herself as a coach/trainer/consultant in the private sector?</i>
<b>2. 'Unofficial' issue: mourning the current situation</b>	<i>Olivia's deplores her loss of status, her fear of the future, and her frustration over what she experiences as a dissipating identity</i>
<b>3. Mostly implicit negotiations over roles and faces</b>	<i>Olivia undermines the coach's role and face in several ways, and the interactants also struggle over the negotiation of Olivia's own role and face</i>

Table 3.8: Dominant themes in coaching 5

In exercising constant resistance against the coach's interventions, Olivia commits a long series of face-aggravations. Thus, the analysis of this coaching will provide notable insights

with regard to conventions of the coaching genre, because in this interaction the rare case occurs that many of these implicit conventions are violated.

To summarise, there are three main themes in the conversation (cf. Table 3.8). The first one is the official goal of the coaching, i.e. Olivia's career question. Coach III employs several interventions bringing to light that, in actuality, the coachee has a clear-cut idea of her future career; she has resources; and she knows exactly how to reach her goal. However, Olivia displays a strong tendency to switch to the unofficial second theme of the conversation, i.e. her frustration about her current personal and professional situation and her supposedly dark future. The third theme represents the explicit and implicit negotiation of roles and faces in the conversation in the light of an implicitly hostile atmosphere.

### 3.7 Summary

As this brief overview has revealed, the corpus on which this thesis is based contains material that is homogenous in several crucial respects: The five coaching conversations are held by three coaches who belong to the same coaching company and who are fairly representative of the industry of process-oriented business coaching in Germany. All of the coachees are native speakers of English who offer work-related issues for discussion. All of the interactants are meeting for the very first time, and they engage in one-time coaching sessions. While four of the five coachings are concerned with career issues at least in part, there is also one example of a leadership coaching. Further, issues of conflict, communication, and self-management enter the conversations along with practical advice on application strategies and on presenting in front of larger audiences.

Furthermore, each coaching conversation is formed by dominant themes. These themes emerge from the issues the interactants discuss, but, more profoundly, they are intertwined with the negotiation of the self-images that both the coaches and the coachees co-construct in the conversations. As this thesis will demonstrate, in the course of their sessions, coherent and distinctive interactive patterns of relational dynamics emerge between the participants. These interactive patterns reflect the themes and the self-images displayed in the interactions, and they are crucially realised by means of questions, feedback, and advice activities.

## 4. The practice of business coaching

### 4.1 Introduction

In this section the phenomenon of business coaching will be defined and delimited. First, I will discuss different definitions of the concept of business coaching as created by several influential coaching associations. Second, the roots and intellectual influences of coaching theory and practice will be briefly introduced with a focus on the German-speaking coaching tradition. Also, I will outline the current market situation of business coaching. Fourth, the practice of business coaching will be described by means of its most important characteristics. Fifth, the status of business coaching as a field of linguistic analysis will be examined. Last, the results of this section will be summarised in relation to this thesis.

### 4.2 Definitions of coaching and business coaching

Etymologically, the term 'coach' is derived from the English word 'coach' in the sense of 'carriage' (cf. Schreyögg 2012). In the 19th century, it held the meaning of "private tutors for university students"; and later, the term referred to sports trainers (Fischer-Epe 2006: 16). Yet, at the time of writing this thesis, a myriad of competing definitions for the term 'coaching' are in use. In the last few years the term 'coaching' has entered the lexicon of many English-speaking and German-speaking people in the general sense of any service that somehow promises to improve the lives of the ordering parties. Thus, cosmeticians refer to themselves as 'beauty coaches', so-called 'health coaches' offer assistance for a healthy lifestyle, and 'life coaches' claim to help seekers find inner balance and meaning in life. Also, the word 'coach' is at times employed for travel guides as well as for other experts in specialised topics, as reflected in the labels 'voice coach'; 'sewing coach'; '*Nichtraucher-Coach*' (= 'non-smokers' coach), which is the name of an anti-smoking application for mobile devices; and '*Suppenfasten-Coach*' (= soup fasting coach), which refers to a weight-loss advice column in the online magazine *FOCUS Online*. At the time of completing this thesis, a Google word search resulted in approximately 63,200,000 hits for the word 'coaching', and 174,000,000 hits for the word 'coach' (February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014).

In the business context, the label 'coaching' is understood in a more specific sense: It refers to an instrument of leadership development and organisational development that is by now widespread and well-established throughout the professional world. To provide an illustrative picture of this core meaning, I will examine three definitions that are provided by three large coaching federations. First, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) explains coaching as follows:

ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential, which is particularly important in today's uncertain and complex environment. Coaches honor the client as the expert in his or her life and work and believe every client is creative, resourceful and whole. Standing on this foundation, the coach's responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve
- Encourage client self-discovery
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
- Hold the client responsible and accountable<sup>3</sup>

Four aspects are important with regard to this definition: First, according to the ICF, coaching represents a collaborative process in which the coachee is considered a partner. Therefore, the relationship between the coach and the coachee is described as less asymmetrical than in other settings of advice-giving, such as, for instance, psychotherapy (cf. Zumkeller 2010). Second, the definition implies that coachings induce solution-finding processes that are creative and therefore unique. This is a crucial point because it implies that coaching processes can never follow standardised patterns, but they must be tailored to fit the individual needs of the coachees.

Third, the definition holds that it is the goal of a coaching process to empower the coachee in order to maximise his/her potential – note the subjectivity and elusiveness of the phrasing. The success of a coaching process hinges on the interpretations attributed to it by the players involved. In consequence, it is a vital part of a coaching conversation that the coach and the coachee define the criteria for success before the actual coaching starts (Fischer-Epe 2006: 191). Also, this aspect illuminates the importance of a common understanding between the coach and the coachee with regard to the process in which they are involved. Clearly, the negotiation of this common understanding is intertwined with the co-construction of the relational quality of an interaction.

Fourth, an aspect of performance-orientation becomes apparent: While many of the basic assumptions and methods of coaching are derived from humanistic approaches, and while most coaches emphasise the importance of self-realisation and personal happiness, they are also bound to a paradigm of self-improvement, achievements, and success.

The second definition I will consider is provided by the German coaching federation Deutscher Bundesverband Coaching (DBVC):

Coaching is professional consulting, supervision, and support for persons with leading and controlling functions and for experts in companies/organisations. It is the goal of coaching to develop individual and collective learning and performing processes, primarily in the context of professional concerns. Coaching is a result-oriented and solution-oriented form of advising, which serves to increase and preserve the achievement potential of the coachees. Coachings represent advisory processes that

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.coachfederation.org/need/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=978&navItemNumber=567> (March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

are tailor-made to individual needs, and that support the improvement of professional situations and the management of roles under challenging circumstances. By optimising human potential, coachings support the value-adding and forward-looking development of companies and organisations.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, this definition puts far greater emphasis on the institutional aspect of coaching. It addresses persons holding responsible positions in companies and organisations, and it aims more specifically at the development of learning and performing processes. This definition reflects the historical difference between the American origins of coaching, which had a strong tendency toward general life coaching, and the specific reception of the concept of coaching in Germany and Switzerland, which traditionally tends to focus on professional issues rather than private ones (cf. Bresser 2011).

Thus, the definition of the term 'business coaching' in this thesis is based on the definition of 'coaching' by the DBVC, as quoted above. In this perspective, business coaching aims at professional improvement, rather than at general personal happiness (as it is typically the case in life coaching). The economic paradigm influencing the line of business coaching is also apparent in the phrases "optimising human potential", and "value-adding and forward-looking development of companies". However, while business coaching is strongly determined by the idea that coachees inherently strive for high performance and professional success, it may also serve to activate personal potential. Therefore, coaching conversations as well as acts of positioning in the frame of coaching conversations may touch on aspects of the professional domain as well as the personal domain of self-presentation (cf. Section 13.1).

The third definition is derived from the German federation Deutscher Verband für Training und Coaching (dvct):

Professional coaching focuses on the development of the coachee's individual problem-solving skills. The coachee determines the goal of the coaching. The coach is responsible for the process in which the coachee gains new insight and develops alternative choices of action. In the course of this process the coachee becomes aware of the complex interplay between his/her actions and his/her environment. Coaching is a structured dialogue that is temporally limited and tailor-made for the goals and needs of the coachee. The success of coaching is measurable, because the criteria of success are defined at the beginning of the process.<sup>5</sup>

This definition emphasises the central characteristic of so-called 'process-oriented' approaches to coaching (cf. König and Volmer 2000; Schreyögg 2009; Aksu and Graf 2011): According to this perspective, the coach merely provides the setting for a solution-finding process by the coachee. Thus, the coachee is the expert on his/her own situation, whereas

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<sup>4</sup> Translation mine. Source of original text: <http://www.dbvc.de/der-verband/ueber-uns/definition-coaching.html> (March 8th 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Translation mine. Source of original text: <http://www.dvct.de/coaching/definition> (March 8th 2014).

the coach is the expert on the coaching process. Clearly, this view follows the ideal of nondirectiveness that is prevalent in many advisory settings, such as therapeutic talk, academic advisory talk, and related genres (cf. He 1994; Vehviläinen 1999; Locher and Limberg 2012; Angouri 2012; Section 5.6). In essence, the ideal of nondirectiveness suggests that advisors should merely trigger processes of solution-finding in advisees, rather than present solutions to them. The coaches participating in my project share this understanding of process-oriented coaching, as becomes explicitly apparent in one sequence in coaching 1 (cf. Excerpt 4.1):

**Excerpt 4.1:**

- 1        *K: what is the difference between coaching and consulting then.*
- 2        *C: I think uhm the diff- uhm (-) in in coaching you're uhm I try to uh (-) coach you to get your own solution.*
- 3        *K: aha,*
- 4        *C: and the consulting (-) ah environment, I have an idea and I give you a solution from the situation I understand.*

The distinction between coaching and consulting provided by Coach I reflects the view by the dvct, as quoted above. In contrast, the competing association DBVC argues that coaches may include phases of consulting within coaching settings “if this is useful for the advisory process, and if the coach is competent in the respective area of expertise”<sup>6</sup>. Interestingly, the analysis of advice-giving in my corpus will demonstrate that each of the three coaches do provide clear-cut advice that is based on their expertise.

Apart from expertise-based consulting, coaching is further distinguished from psychotherapy. The dvct argues that psychotherapy attends to persons with mental health problems, whereas coaching presupposes that coachees are healthy and resourceful (cf. Schmidt-Lellek 2003).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, coaching is considered as different from training in that training is described as a setting facilitating specific learning processes that follow an ideal course and a predefined goal. In contrast, coaching is regarded as an individual learning process whose goals and course are negotiated during the session.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Original text mine. Translation on <http://www.dbvc.de/der-verband/ueber-uns/definition-coaching.html> (March 8th 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Original text mine. Translation on <http://www.dvct.de/coaching/definition> (March 8th 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Original text mine. Translation on <http://www.dbvc.de/der-verband/ueber-uns/definition-coaching.html> (March 8th 2014).

### 4.3 History, roots, and market situation of process-oriented business coaching in Germany and Switzerland

Process-oriented business coaching is an advisory setting with roots in a range of different contexts, many of which were first synthesised into coaching approaches in North America. In Germany and Switzerland, in particular, business coaching emerged in the late 1980s and in the 1990s. It represented a new format of psychological leadership counselling in a one-on-one setting (cf. *Coaching-Magazin* 01/2012). The concept of business coaching in German-speaking countries was strongly influenced by Systems theory, Systemic Family therapy, and by other therapeutic schools such as Humanistic therapy, Gestalt therapy, and Cognitive Behavioural therapy (cf. Selvini Palazzoli et al. 1996; König and Volmer 2000; von Schlippe and Schweitzer 2003; Baecker 2009; Königswieser 2011).

From these schools of thought business coaching inherited a mix of approaches that typically share a constructivist view of the world (cf. von Schlippe and Schweizer 2003). Moreover, practitioners of business coaching tend to hold a firm belief in self-determination and individual freedom, in self-actualisation, and personal growth. Communicative paradigms and models as developed, for instance, by Watzlawick et al. (1967), Schulz von Thun (2006a), Virginia Satir (1978), Fritz Perls et al. (1951), and Marshall B. Rosenberg (2003) were crucial to the development of process-oriented business coaching.

All of these approaches tend to emphasise the idea that communication is a process of co-construction of meaning with actual consequences for the status of relationships and identities in interactions (cf. Section 5.9 for a further overview of systemic approaches to communication in coaching theory).<sup>9</sup> Also, in the definition of coaching by the DBVC that was discussed in the previous section, it became apparent that the economical setting in which business coachings take place naturally led to the inclusion of elements from management theory and organisational development theory into coaching theory. Thus, coaching magazines and practical textbooks typically discuss topoi such as ‘excellent leadership’ or ‘organisational change management’ (cf. *Coaching-Magazin*, Volmer and König 2000; Fischer-Epe 2006).

By the turn of the millenium, business coaching entered a process of professionalisation in Germany. This development was reflected in the emergence of countless institutes that offered training programmes for coaches, as well as the foundation of numerous coaching associations (cf. Schreyögg 2012). Bresser (2009) estimates that 5,000 business coaches were operating in Germany and between three hundred and five

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<sup>9</sup> An especially popular communicative paradigm is NLP, or Neuro-Linguistic Programming, as presented by Bandler and Grinder (1983). Although its academic foundations are argued to be controversial, the practical methods of NLP are widely acknowledged among business coaches.



hundred in Switzerland in 2008/2009, in comparison to the worldwide number of 43,000 professional business coaches. Thus, both countries belong to the top 10 countries with respect to the proportion of business coaches in relation to the population. In fact, Germany ranked third after the United States and Great Britain, while Austria as the third German-speaking country was categorised as a country in the “growth phase” with regard to coaching (Bresser 2009: 194).

In a more recent study by the ICF, the estimate of the worldwide number of professional coaches increased to 47,500, with an annual revenue of approximately \$1.9 billion (USD). The number of professional coaches in Germany even grew to approximately 8,000 coaches, which means that Germany still ranks third after the United States and Great Britain.<sup>10</sup> Further, as established in Chapter 1, the market analysis by the DBVC in 2011 found that the coaching industry in Germany produced an annual revenue of approximately € 330 million in the year 2011. This number represented a share of 1.7% of the consulting market.

Christopher Rauen, an influential observer of the coaching industry in the German-speaking countries, forecasts the market for business coaching in Germany and Switzerland to grow substantially in the coming years, in particular if the process of professionalisation is further continued. Moreover, he notes that the use of English in coaching sessions is constantly gaining importance in German-speaking countries.<sup>11</sup> Graf (2011a) argues that a vital precondition for the professionalisation process is that the interconnections between academic research and coaching practice should be improved in the German-speaking countries. In this context, Graf (2011a) has demonstrated the specific contribution and the high potential of linguistic discourse analysis (cf. Section 4.5).

## **4.4 Characteristic aspects of the practice of business coaching**

Despite its multifaceted theoretical origins, in practice, business coachings can be linked to a fairly consistent set of characteristics. Thus, business coaching is generally offered for groups or individuals; it can be conducted ‘internally’ by means of coaches who are part of the same organisation as the coachee; or it can be outsourced to external coaches (cf. Zumkeller 2010). Furthermore, coachees may enter business coaching processes on their own initiative, or the processes may be initiated as well as financed by the coachees’ employers (cf. Schreyögg 2012). According to Fischer-Epe (2006), typical triggers for

<sup>10</sup> Source: <http://www.coaching-report.de/coaching-markt.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.coaching-report.de/coaching-markt.html>.

business coaching processes are situations that include professional change (such as, for instance, organisational reorganisation, new production procedures, or promotions); conflicts (e.g. communication problems in teams, conflicts between leaders, or conflicts with superiors); or questions of personal development (for instance, career decisions, excessive labour, or a perceived lack of meaningfulness). Further, Rauen et al. (2009: 151f) mention seven preconditions of successful coaching processes, i.e. 'voluntariness', 'discretion', 'mutual acceptance', 'self-management skills on the part of the coachee', 'openness and transparency', and 'willingness to change'.

Business coaches emphasise the importance of the attitude a coach brings to a coaching interaction. Most coaching textbooks emphasise the requirement of appreciation for the coachee and his/her situation, for his/her resources, his/her previous solutions to a problem, and even for the problem itself (as problems are considered as fulfilling crucial functions for a social system in systemic coaching; cf. Mücke 2003). Moreover, process-oriented business coaches are expected to act neutrally with regard to the kinds of solutions the coachee chooses, because the coachee is considered as the expert on his/her own situation (cf. Weisbach 2012). As a rule, coaches are also considered to be responsible for the management of the relational level of talk, although coaching textbooks tend to provide only superficial instructions as to how this management should be achieved (for a notable exception, see Weisbach 2012).

Also, the complex relational dynamics which may unfold in coaching processes presuppose that business coaches prove a high interest in self-knowledge and personal growth themselves (cf. Zumkeller 2010). Last, a solution-oriented attitude is considered crucial for business coaches, not least because coaching processes tend to be much shorter than therapeutic processes – typically, coachees expect to resolve their issues within less than 10 sessions (cf. Fischer-Epe 2006).

As far as methods and techniques are concerned, business coaching is characterised by a mixed-method approach (cf. Schreyögg 2012). In line with the informality that a genre of spoken interaction brings about, and in accordance with the uniqueness and openness that characterise individual coaching processes, coaches tend to employ the concept of the methodological 'toolbox': They make on-the-spot decisions as to the models, concepts, stories, exercises, and other methods they use to facilitate the process. Bestselling book volumes such as the series *Coaching-Tools* (edited by Christopher Rauen) reflect this trend. The most popular concepts, methods, and models typically represent simplified, accessible versions of academic theories or concepts. In essence, the coaching techniques that are considered the most fundamental are related to questions, feedback, advice-giving, and the art of creating a positive interpersonal atmosphere (cf. Fischer-Epe 2006, Schreyögg 2012, Weisbach 2012). Thus, the research design of my thesis is fundamentally based on these

elements of coaching communication.

A further aspect that characterises the practice of business coachings is the fact that sessions can be analysed according to different phases. While there are several reasonable suggestions as to categorisation and terminology, in principle, there is a consensus that coaching sessions essentially include an orientation phase, a clarification phase, a change phase, and a closing phase (cf. König and Volmer 2000: 32ff; Fischer-Epe 2006: 29; Table 4.1):<sup>12</sup>

Phase of the coaching process	Tasks
<b>1. Orientation phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating <b>rapport</b> with the coachee</li> <li>• Negotiation of the <b>agenda</b> of the coaching session</li> <li>• Negotiation of the <b>goal</b> of the coaching session</li> <li>• Orientation with respect to the <b>setting</b></li> <li>• Orientation with respect to the <b>method</b></li> <li>• Orientation with respect to the <b>role of other persons</b> involved</li> </ul>
<b>2. Clarification phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Free narration</b></li> <li>• <b>Focusing</b></li> <li>• Clarification of <b>deleted memories</b></li> <li>• <b>Paraphrasing</b> and <b>structuring</b></li> <li>• <b>Mirroring</b> of feelings</li> </ul>
<b>3. Change phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition of the <b>next partial goal</b></li> <li>• Identification of <b>previous approaches</b> to the problem</li> <li>• Collection of <b>new solutions</b> to the problem</li> <li>• Evaluation of <b>alternatives</b></li> </ul>
<b>4. Closing phase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fixing the <b>results</b></li> <li>• Development of an <b>action plan</b> for the next steps</li> <li>• Agreement on <b>homework</b></li> <li>• <b>Contracts</b> between coach and coachee</li> </ul>

Table 4.1: The four phases of coaching conversations after König and Volmer (2000: 32ff; translations mine)

As the term suggests, the orientation phase serves to provide the interactants with orientation concerning the practical proceedings and the interpersonal conditions of the coaching session. Also, the interactants create rapport and negotiate their roles in the interaction. The second phase of a prototypical coaching conversation is the clarification phase, which serves for the parties to reach a conjoint definition of the problem. Coaches encourage free narration by the coachees in this stage, and they employ feedback techniques in order to reflect their understanding back to the coachees and to clarify the problematic situation. The third phase, i.e. the change phase, revolves around the process of co-constructing actual solutions for the issues under discussion. In the closing phase the

<sup>12</sup>Fischer-Epe's (2006: 29) categorisation is similar to that of König and Volmer (2000): She suggests that in the first phase the interactants establish rapport ("*Kontakt*") and orientation ("*Orientierung*"); in the second phase they negotiate the situation ("*Situation*") and the goals of the coaching ("*Ziele*"); in the third phase they develop solutions ("*Entwicklung von Lösungen*"); and in the fourth phase they ensure transfer ("*Transfer*").

results of the process are evaluated, and further steps are negotiated between the interactants.

## 4.5 Business coaching as a linguistic genre

From a linguistic perspective, business coaching interactions must be regarded as embedded within a wider super-genre of advisory talk, which also includes different forms of counselling, consulting, and therapy. The analysis of advisory talk in linguistics has a longstanding tradition that began with the seminal study by Labov and Fanshel (1977). In their work *Therapeutic Discourse*, Labov and Fanshel provided a discourse analysis of a session between a psychotherapist and the anorexic young woman 'Rhoda P.' However, while the study introduced the topos of therapeutic talk to linguistics, it focused more on the specific conversational structure of the interaction than on the therapeutic frame of reference in which its meaning was co-constructed.

Yet, in later studies a clear orientation toward the specific practice under discussion emerged. In the field of health care discourse, Heritage and Sefi (1992), Silverman et al. (1992), and Sarangi and Clark (2002) laid the foundations for an understanding of the dynamics of advisory talk. Moreover, He (1994), Vehviläinen (1999; 2001; 2012), and Angouri (2012) are representatives of the linguistic analysis of advisory communication in educational contexts. Furthermore, up to the time of completion of this thesis, a most productive area of research is the linguistic analysis of psychotherapeutic discourse (Antaki 2008; Bercelli et al. 2008; Peräkylä 2008; Vehviläinen et al. 2008; Pawelczyk 2011; Muntigl et al. 2013).

Locher (2006a) and Locher and Hoffmann (2006) discuss the emergence of a fictional advice-giver in an Internet advice column, thus shifting the focus of research toward computer-mediated communication. In Locher and Limberg (2012), a state-of-the-art overview is provided on the status of the linguistic analysis of advisory talk. The analysis of questions, feedback, and advice in my corpus of coaching conversations is fundamentally based on previous linguistic research on advisory talk. Therefore, I will further discuss the above-mentioned studies in the literature reviews in Sections 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6. In this regard the ideal of nondirectiveness; the role of questions, feedback, and resistance in advice-giving; and the structure of advice sequence will be of particular importance.

In contrast to work on comparable advisory settings, the linguistic analysis of coaching or even business coaching as independent genres represents an extremely recent trend. Nevertheless, Graf (2011a) demonstrates that the genre of coaching interactions does not only constitute a worthy research field for applied linguistics, but that a linguistic discourse analytic perspective can contribute remarkably to the ongoing process of

professionalisation and quality assurance in the coaching market (cf. Section 4.3). Thus, a group of researchers recently founded the association LOCCS (*The Linguistics of Coaching, Consulting, and Supervision*), which aims to employ linguistic work in order to bridge the divisions between research and practice, between the various disciplines involved in the academic exploration of coaching, and between distinctive international approaches to coaching (cf. Aksu and Graf 2011; Aksu 2011; Graf 2011a; Graf 2011b; Rettinger 2011). Methodologically, the representatives of LOCCS propose a discourse analytic approach, which focuses on the analysis of authentic data (cf. Aksu and Graf 2011).

In particular, Aksu (2011) opens up the field of supervision as a topos of discourse analytical research. She reveals the limitations of research in this area, arguing that the interactive dynamics between supervisors and supervisees should be brought to attention in academic research. Graf (2011a: 149) describes coaching as a “specific type of professional communication between experts and laypersons, that serves to resolve or answer (professional) questions (...)”. She highlights the role of the communicative tasks coaches and coachees have to fulfil by means of communicative strategies in order to co-construct a coaching process (cf. Graf 2011b). Thus, she reframes classic key terms from coaching theory, such as ‘appreciation’, ‘clarification of goals’, ‘resource orientation’, or ‘change’ in terms of communicative achievements which are conjointly constructed by the interactants. Her analysis of the co-constitution of ‘change’ by means of empirical data reveals the contribution that a discourse analytic approach can provide, for instance, to the exploration of effectiveness of coaching styles.

Rettinger (2011) examines the dynamics of identity and relationship construction in initial sessions of coaching processes. She argues that “the process of identity construction is closely linked to the success of the interaction” (Rettinger 2011: 156). Drawing on membership categorisation theory after Sacks (1992; cf. Section 5.3) as well as on the concept of identity after Zimmermann (1998), Rettinger develops a model for the analysis of levels of identities in coaching conversations (Table 4.2): In essence, she defines situated identities as context-dependent social constellations. As she argues, coaching settings comprise two situated identities, i.e. COACH and COACHEE. On a smaller scale, activity-bound identities, in turn, are identities that emerge by means of prototypical activities which are tied to situated identities. The micro-level of identity analysis is captured in the category ‘discursive identities’. These are described as being locally realised by means of conversational contributions (cf. Rettinger 2011).

The issues raised by the proponents of LOCCS are of major relevance to this research project. My exploration of relational work in coaching conversations is based on the same empirical, data-driven, discourse analytical approach. Moreover, the acknowledged importance of identity construction and relational work to the success of coaching

interactions provides a more than sufficient incentive to focus on these issues as linguistic research topics.

Situated identity	Activity-bound identity	Potential discursive identities
COACH	PROVIDER OF ORIENTATION	INTERACTANT PROVIDING EXPLANATIONS
		INTERACTANT ASKING QUESTIONS
	'LISTENER'	LISTENER
		ADDRESSEE
	INTERVIEWER	INTERACTANT ASKING QUESTIONS
	PRESENTER OF SELF	NARRATOR
		INTERACTANT PROVIDING ACCOUNTS
		INTERACTANT ASKING QUESTIONS

*Table 4.2: Links between different levels with regard to the situated identity COACH after Rettinger (2011: 163; translations mine)*

Like the members of LOCCS, with this study I endeavour not only to contribute to the linguistic discourse on coaching, but also to the professionalisation movement in the coaching market and the growing alliance between academic research and the coaching practice (cf. Rauen et al. 2009).

## 4.6 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the phenomenon of business coaching with a particular focus on process-oriented forms of business coaching and on the German-speaking market in Europe. It was demonstrated that the term 'coaching' is employed in numerous contexts, but that it holds a specific meaning in the context of business coachings. Moreover, three different definitions by three coaching associations were analysed. It was emphasised that the definition of business coaching in this thesis will particularly draw on the definition of coaching by the German coaching federation DBVC. This perspective reflects the predominantly professional orientation of business coaching that is prevalent in Germany and Switzerland. Moreover, the distinction between nondirective process-oriented coaching and directive expert coaching was revealed, and it was argued that the coaching conversations in my corpus predominantly belong to the former category.

In the following section the origins of business coaching were discussed. While the format of coaching conversations emerged in the United States in the 1990s, the theoretical roots were demonstrated to be extremely diverse. Thus, business coachings tend to involve mixed-method approaches from therapeutic schools, communication theory, organisational

theory, and business studies. Further, it was revealed that business coaching is an expanding industry both worldwide and in German-speaking countries in particular. At the same time, the foundation of coaching associations and the development of coaching as a field of interdisciplinary research has brought about an ongoing process of professionalisation.

In addition, the practice of business coachings was described with regard to crucial characteristics, such as specific settings, triggers, and preconditions of successful coaching processes. It was explained that coaching textbooks tend to place strong emphasis on the attitude of the coaches and on relationship management and confirmative communication by the coaches. Yet, it was also highlighted that the question of how relational work can be conducted in practice is generally discarded. Moreover, the concept of the 'methodological toolbox' among business coaches was discussed, and the status of questions, feedback, advice, and relational work as prototypical coaching interventions was outlined. Furthermore, it was established that coaching conversations can be categorised into different phases, such as the orientation phase, the clarification phase, the change phase, and the closing phase.

In terms of a linguistic perspective, business coaching interactions were categorised as constituting a subgenre of advisory talk. It was demonstrated that related subgenres, such as advisory talk in the context of health care, education, or therapy, have been fruitful fields of linguistic analysis. In contrast, business coaching represents a subgenre which has only started to be made accessible for discourse analytic research. In this context, the contributions that originated from the research association LOCCS were discussed as examples of avant-garde linguistic research on coaching conversations. It was established that this thesis is in accordance with the main postulations of the LOCCS researchers. Thus, this project is based on empirical, authentic data; on interdisciplinary approaches; and on the attempt to provide links between academic research and the needs and interests of the coaching practice. In particular, I agree with Rettinger's (2011) claim that the level of identity construction and relational work in coaching communication can be made explicit by means of linguistic analyses. Thus, it is my hope that this thesis will ultimately contribute to this aim.

## **5. Literature review**

### **5.1 Goffman: the stage metaphor, the ritual metaphor, and the face metaphor**

#### **5.1.1 Introduction**

Any research on self-presentation, identity work, face work, or (im)politeness inevitably leads back to one authoritative academic figure: the sociologist Erving Goffman, whose works pioneer not only the aforementioned research fields, but who first established face-to-face interaction as an independent object of research. In this chapter I will discuss Goffman's understanding of the notions of self-presentation, ritual interaction, and face work. First, I will concentrate on Goffman's early work with the stage metaphor, as outlined in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Second, I will discuss Goffman's later work with the ritual metaphor and the face metaphor, as depicted in the collections of essays published in *Interaction Ritual* (1967) and *Relations in Public* (1971). Finally, I will critically evaluate his approaches with respect to different schools of research in linguistics and sociology; and I will highlight particularly those elements on which I draw in my analyses.

#### **5.1.2 *The Presentation of Self in Everyday life* – the stage metaphor**

##### **5.1.2.1. The social stage and the concept of performance**

In 1959 Goffman published the authoritative edition of what would become his most famous book. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (first published in 1956) introduces Goffman's first ambitious attempt to grasp the intricacies of face-to-face interaction. While *The Presentation of Self* broaches all of the issues that prevail in Goffman's thinking (such as the interactional constitution of selves, self-presentation, the quality of subjective reality, the problem of authenticity, and the vulnerability of the interaction order), it illuminates these and other issues strictly within the boundaries of one single metaphor, i.e. the stage metaphor. In reminiscence of Shakespeare's famous words, Goffman claims that all the world is a stage and that each and every social interaction is a performance. A social interactant, according to Goffman, must be compared to a performer who "offers a performance and puts on his show" (Goffman 1959: 17). Goffman defines a performance as "all the activity of a given participant



on a given occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's continuous presence" (Goffman 1959: 17).

Moreover, Goffman discusses the issue of reality and contrivance, as perceived from the interactants' perspective. According to him, laypeople make a distinction between 'real' and 'contrived' performances, in correspondence with ordinary performers and impostors. They assume that 'real' performances are unplanned, that they happen unintentionally, and that they are not constructed purposefully but just emerge monolithically. Contrived performances, on the other hand, are considered as planned, intentional, and purposefully constructed. These features supposedly mark the 'unrealness' of a contrived performance. Goffman, however, dismisses this folk theory of 'realness'. His point is that while some performances are socially more authorised than others, their supposed realness is always the product of diligent construction and mutual collaboration (cf. Goffman 1959: 70). In his view, all participants of social interaction work together to maintain the dramaturgical illusion of the social stage, playing their parts, idealising performances, and gracefully overlooking flaws and accidents, if necessary.

### 5.1.2.2 Impression management

The concept of impression management is widely used in academic discourse today, and it has come to be associated with an entire school of thought in sociology. Principally, impression management is regarded as the art of literally making advantageous impressions on other interactants, and as the study of that art (cf. Tedeschi 1984). However, impression management in Goffman's terms strongly differs from impression management in terms of impression management theory. Goffman does not in any way employ this notion in *The Presentation of Self* to explain how individual interactants manage to make powerful impressions on each other on the basis of manipulative strategies. Instead, he is interested in the question of how interactants avoid performance disruptions for the sake of the integrity of the stage illusion. That is to say, impression management is not about the goals of individuals. Ultimately, its purpose is the conjoint protection of the social stage illusion by all of the performers (cf. Goffman 1959: 208).

Goffman searches for underlying strategies employed by the performers in order to protect this illusion. Also, he claims that interactants prevent incidents with the help of certain attributes and practices. He mentions defensive attributes and practices, i.e. the "measures used by performers to save their own show" (Goffman 1959: 212). Further, he refers to protective practices, i.e. strategies of tact exerted by the audience, in order to save the show

of another performer.<sup>13</sup> Thus, he distinguishes between strategies supporting the performance of the self and strategies supporting the performance of the other interactants.

In sum, according to Goffman, both the performer and the audience put a tremendous amount of energy into the maintenance of the stage illusion. This emphasis on the good order of the stage illusion is the most important distinction between Goffman and the proponents of impression management theory (cf. Schlenker and Pontari 2000; Schlenker 2005).

### 5.1.2.3 Constructed reality in the dramaturgical approach

At this point, two crucial characteristics of Goffman's dramaturgical approach have been established. First, the stage metaphor implies a distinction between two selves: the self as performer and the self as character (Manning 1992: 45). The former is a staged, expressive version designed for the public, whereas the latter consists of the thinking, reflecting, private version only known to the interactant him/herself. Second, the stage metaphor suggests that while social life is a play and while interactants are really performers putting on a show, the nature of the game must, by some implicit social rule, be concealed. Thus, all performers employ strategies of impression management in order to manage their staged impressions and to support the parts of the other interactants. The overarching principle of impression management is that the dramaturgical order must be protected.

From a deeper perspective, the success of the stage illusion is the underlying leitmotif of *The Presentation of Self*. Each and every chapter, typology, and anecdote ultimately addresses the condition under which performances succeed or fail (Goffman 1959: 17; 65; 249). While this focus of the dramaturgical approach may seem cynical upon first impression, Goffman leaves no doubt that subjective realities feel very real to the individual: The college girl playing dumb in front of her boyfriend has to deal with "complicated emotions", such as "alienation from self and wariness of others" (Goffman 1959: 214). Thus, he holds that the maintenance of the stage illusion is a matter of psychological well-being (cf. Hall and Bucholtz 2013). After all, it is a question of tremendous significance whether an interactant evaluates him/herself as sincere or as a mere performer in a play.

What distinguishes the dramaturgical approach from contemporary constructionist accounts of identity (cf. Sections 5.2 and 5.3) is that Goffman's notion of social construction is restricted to the public self. While he suggests that the staged self is a co-constructed,

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<sup>13</sup> A third strategy of impression management coined by Goffman that is less relevant to my approach is tact regarding tact. Here Goffman remarks that an audience cannot be tactful unless the performer in question is cooperative. Thus, the performer has to be sensitive to hints from the audience warning him/her that his/her performance is unacceptable (Goffman 1959: 234f).

interactional product of social dramaturgy, he still describes the private self as a natural, unrepressed essence:

Throughout Western society there tends to be one informal or backstage language of behavior, and another language of behavior for occasions when a performance is being represented. The backstage language consists of reciprocal first-naming, co-operative decision-making, profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate griping, smoking (...). the frontstage behavior can be taken as the absence (and in some sense the opposite) of this.  
(Goffman 1959: 128)

From a social constructionist view (cf. Zielke 2004), of course, there is no reason why the informal backstage behaviour should not be interpreted as a performance, or self-presentation in its own right. Interactants clearly attempt to make impressions in that context as well, but they do so in relation to 'backstage norms'.

#### **5.1.2.4 *The Presentation of Self*: criticism and preliminary evaluation**

Up to the time of completion of this thesis, an extensive critical academic discourse is provoked by *The Presentation of Self* (for an overview of the discussion see, for instance, Manning 1992 or Fine and Smith 2000). However, I will briefly outline only some of the major points of criticism because they can be generally applied to most of Goffman's work, including his ritual approach to face work, which will be discussed in the following section.

The bulk of the contemporary criticism of *The Presentation of Self* addresses its apparently cynical view of face-to-face interaction. Gouldner, in particular, accuses Goffman of moral relativism and of attempting to "shatter conventional cultural hierarchies" (Gouldner 1970, 2000: 245). The discomfort Gouldner, but also other scholars (e.g. O'Neill 1972; Sennett 1974) express about a sociological perspective that subversively questions established hierarchies, social structures, and culturally standardised roles is now generally interpreted as rearguard action against the rising postmodern paradigm in the social sciences (Elliott 2007: 42). In this context, the umbrella term 'postmodernism' is used in Tseelon's (1992, 2000) general sense as a shift of paradigms from objectivist, universalist, essentialist positions to subjectivist, relativist, constructionist viewpoints in the Humanities. With respect to the concept of the self, this notion of 'postmodernism' also implies the tendency toward fragmenting and the emphasis on the personal narrative (cf. Sections 5.2; 5.3). Tseelon (2000: 10) considers Goffman a proponent of this shift from an essentialist 'Cartesian', modern self to the 'post-Cartesian', postmodern self. Thus, Tseelon writes about Goffman's notion of self:

It is a transient self which is situationally and interactionally defined; a social product which does not have existence outside an interaction. It does not rely on a dualistic image of the self but is anchored, instead, in a metaphysics of surface: an interplay of images, of signifiers with no underlying signifiers, a text with no 'reality' behind it. (Tseelon 2000: 11)

Tseelon is certainly accurate in designating Goffman as an avant-garde proponent of a shift towards postmodernism. Goffman's view of the interactionally-constituted public self does indeed correspond to the current interactionist and social constructionist views on identity construction (cf. Gergen 2001; Sections 5.2 and 5.3). He breaks with the objectivist ideas of reality and with the universalist concept of morality that his contemporaries (such as, for instance, Gouldner) still hold dear. Further, he does turn toward a partly anti-essentialist surface model of self which implies that the public self is a co-constructed reality of its own, regardless of individual judgements of congruity.

However, I disagree with Tseelon as to the degree of Goffman's radicalism. I have explained above that according to *The Presentation of Self* it is only the public self that is interactionally co-constructed. The private self, on the other hand, is assumed to be a solid ontological essence. The notions of frontstage and backstage correspond to this distinction, which suggests that there are times when interactants perform and times when they feel free to express their 'real' private selves. Goffman, it seems, was on the verge of developing a 'postmodern', constructionist approach, but at the same time, he maintained some elements of 'modern' essentialism. Therefore, in my view, Goffman is not a representative of postmodernism per se, but he must be regarded as one of its pathfinders in the social sciences. Nevertheless, his concepts are applicable in a constructionist frame of thinking, as I will further point out in Section 5.3.

As far as the alleged cynicism of the dramaturgical approach is concerned, this reproach is certainly not in line with the tone of the book. Rather, Goffman shows an interest in the psychological states of the performers:

Behind many masks and many characters, each performer tends to wear a single look, a naked unsocialized look, a look of concentration, a look of one who is privately engaged in a difficult, treacherous task. (Goffman 1959: 235)

As is evident, Goffman sympathises with the interactant, who has to skilfully master the requirements of a social order that he/she may sometimes very well experience as cynical him/herself. Goffman does not deny the importance of moral conventions to social interactants or to society at large. He simply treats morality as part of the stage scenario and

not as an overarching, universal category. In relativising social values in this way, he antedates another crucial feature of contemporary postmodern thinking (Tseelon 2000: 10).

The second major point of criticism that has been brought forward against the dramaturgical approach concerns Goffman's methodology. In brief, the problematic aspects throughout Goffman's work are firstly his management of concepts and secondly his management of data (cf. Williams 1988, 2000: 80). The structure of Goffman's texts indicate clearly how bulky can be his systems of analysis. His classifications are often heterogeneous, they are not coherently presented, and they touch very different levels of analysis.

Manning (1992: 15) remarks that Goffman uses three different methods: extended metaphors, unsystematic observation, and systematic observation (ethnography). This mix of methods leads to a wild classificatory accumulation of metaphorical extensions, psychological motives, communicative habits, tactical strategies and goals, exceptional borderline cases, social psychological principles, implicit rules, and so on. Often Goffman does not present linear arguments, but circles around certain recurring issues, without settling them conclusively. Another issue, apart from Goffman's imprecision, is his refusal to limit the range of his classifications with respect to common associations. In effect, this means that "commonsense concepts and their associate clusters of meanings are permitted to enter the theoretical vocabulary without apparent care" (Williams 1988, 2000: 80).

The next methodological shortcoming of Goffman's work lies in his data management. Schegloff, the foremost living representative of Conversation Analysis, criticises Goffman's approach rigorously for its lack of empirical coverage (Schegloff 2000: 186).<sup>14</sup> The heterogeneity of the material used by Goffman, "participant observation field notes; newspaper clippings; sections of fictional accounts; and many more scraps" (Williams 1988, 2000:82), is noteworthy; and it raises the question of whether any systematic outcome may be gained from such "unsystematic observation". In the case of *The Presentation of Self* it can be concluded that this is not in fact possible. Schegloff (1988, 2000: 190) also criticises Goffman's use of invented examples; his refusal to analyse recorded data (Schegloff 1988, 2000: 189); his tendency to employ examples merely as illustrations for single points, rather than for exhaustive analysis; and his refusal to make his data available for competitive discussion (Schegloff 1988, 2000: 188). Williams (1988, 2000) makes a solitary argument for Goffman's method, calling it 'articulation' in Baldamus' (1972: 295) sense and defining it as "an analytical process whereby an initially vague and vacillating image of a complex framework is perpetually refined so as to produce an increasingly definite and stable structure" (Williams 1988, 2000: 84). However, it is doubtful that the outcome of Goffman's

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<sup>14</sup> Schegloff's criticism addresses not primarily the 'dramaturgical Goffman', but mainly the later Goffman (1988, 2000: 179). However, the methodological problems mentioned apply to *The Presentation of Self* in the same manner.

spiralled discourse can be called either definite or stable. Rather, he seems to strive to make sure that his frameworks remain vague and vacillating, which lends a great deal of originality and attraction to his writings, but certainly does not improve their methodological quality.

From a linguistic point of view, one of the most substantial problems in *The Presentation of Self* is that Goffman's account of self-presentation hardly relates to language. Fundamentally, Goffman (1959) treats language as a mere vehicle for social interaction, instead of recognising its central constituting role in the construction of meaningful social identities. However, an analytical approach to self-presentation must concentrate on the locus in which it occurs. Thus, the central unit for the linguistic analysis of self-presentation is authentic conversation; therefore, in several aspects of my approach to face work (cf. Sections 5.2; 5.3; 5.8; 14.1), I will depart from Holly's (1979) linguistic advancements of Goffman's concept of 'ritual interchanges', i.e. face-related sequences.

Another critical aspect is Goffman's use of the extended dramaturgical metaphor. It certainly makes sense to consider some aspects through a dramaturgical lens. Metaphors highlight some aspects of things whilst hiding others (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The theatrical metaphor can serve as a model for some aspects of self-presentation. For instance, there are obvious parallels between a stage performance and self-presentation with respect to the requirement of consistency and coherence, and with respect to the evaluation of the performance and to the self-presentation respectively.

On the other hand, some aspects cannot be sufficiently explained by means of metaphors. For example, in the case of the stage metaphor, the question arises of why social life should be a theatre play in the first place. Also, while the distinction between frontstage and backstage and between formal and informal registers intuitively seems to make sense, I have indicated that backstage behaviour is also governed by dramaturgical principles (and incidentally, at times also by formality). From this discussion, the analogy to social interaction has been laid bare. In short, there is only so much systematic extension a metaphor can bear before it loses its explanatory appeal. In the case of the classifications developed in *The Presentation of Self*, at many points the metaphorical categories are somewhat forced upon the objects of analysis.

Interestingly, Goffman is the first to concede that he has overcharged the dramaturgical metaphor.<sup>15</sup> On the last pages of *The Presentation of Self*, in his conclusion, he writes:

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<sup>15</sup> Manning (1992: 44ff) shows that Goffman was initially more positive about the validity and the scope of the stage metaphor, as shown in the 1956 edition of *The Presentation of Self*. Thus, it is only in the 1959 reissue that self-critical comments like the one quoted above qualify Goffman's approach. According to Manning, a "second Goffman 'voice' sets in here, performing a turn towards scepticism and questioning the smooth workings of the 'two selves' within individuals. Now Goffman acknowledges that the dramaturgical metaphor is 'of limited use'" (Manning 1992).

An action staged is a relatively contrived illusion and an admitted one; unlike ordinary life nothing real or actual can happen to the performed characters (...). And so here the language and mask of the stage will be dropped. Scaffolds, after all, are to build other things with, and should be erected with an eye to taking them down. This report is not concerned with aspects of theater that creep into everyday life. It is concerned with the structure of social encounters (...).  
(Goffman 1959: 254).

Thus, Goffman explicitly abandons his entire approach in the end, and he turns to the ritual metaphor and the face metaphor as different perspectives on what is essentially the same field of interest.

## 5.1.3 The ritual metaphor

### 5.1.3.1 The origins of Goffman's concept of ritual interaction

Having rejected the stage imagery of *The Presentation of Self* with ostentation, Goffman turned toward another metaphorical approach that lends itself more readily to his central interest in delicate social situations. The metaphor of the 'ritual' shapes Goffman's work from the 1960s to the 1970s; in particular, the collections of essays published in *Interaction Ritual* (1967) and *Relations in Public* (1971). Goffman's idea of ritual interaction is only fully understandable in the context in which it emerged. In effect, Goffman takes over the early discourse of the academic study of religions in sociology, ethnology, and social anthropology, and applies it to the analysis of face-to-face interaction metaphorically. In this respect, he is especially influenced by Emile Durkheim and by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (Goffman 1967: 47; Goffman 1971: 88ff; cf. Reiger 1992: 105).

The first important element Goffman inherits from Durkheim's work is the distinction between negative and positive cults, as described in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915, 1976). According to Durkheim (1915, 1976: 37), it is "the distinctive trait of religious thought" that it presupposes a differentiation between two domains; one of them profane and the other sacred. Rites, in turn, can be negative or positive. Negative rites are concerned with the separateness of the sacred in contrast to the profane: "They (...) all take the form of interdictions, or as is commonly said by ethnographers, of taboos"<sup>16</sup> (Durkheim 1915, 1976: 299f). Thus, according to Durkheim, negative rites forbid contact with certain sacred areas, persons, foods, and so on. Positive rites, on the other hand, are prescriptive in

<sup>16</sup>Original text: "Les êtres sacrés sont, par définition, des êtres séparés. (...) Tout un ensemble de rites a pour objet de réaliser cet état de séparation qui est essentiel. (...) Pour cette raison, nous proposons d'appeler culte négatif le système formé par ces rites spéciaux. (...) ils prennent donc tous la forme de l'interdit, ou, comme on dit couramment en ethnographie, du *tabou*" (Durkheim 1915, 1968: 428).

that they uphold “positive and bilateral relations” with “religious forces” by regulating and organising ritual practices (Durkheim 1976: 326). Examples for positive cults are offerings and sacrifices. Moreover, Goffman draws on Durkheim's analysis of the collective soul (*mana*) in Australian totemic societies. Here, “the individual soul is only a portion of the collective soul of the group; (...) it is mana individualized”<sup>17</sup> (Durkheim 1976: 264). As will be shown, Goffman uses the idea of the concept of *mana* as a model to account for the interpersonal ‘sacredness’ of individual interactants: He argues that they are treated as gods, because they participate in the ‘sacredness’ of the collective interaction order, i.e. the ritual order.

In addition to Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown is another important source for Goffman's concept of ritual. Goffman (1967: 57) draws on Radcliffe-Brown's definition of a ritual relation as constituted “whenever a society imposes on its members a certain attitude towards an object, which attitude involves some measure of respect (...)” (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 123). It is this notion of respect that Goffman extends to a theory of interpersonal ceremonial activity: He describes ritual communication as performed on the grounds of social conditioning. His account is concerned with the display of attitudes, albeit the actual attitudes are less important than the requirement of convincing displays (cf. Holly 1979: 109).

### 5.1.3.2 Goffman's concept of ritual interaction

In essence, Goffman's ritual approach is founded on the conceptual metaphor: SOCIAL INTERACTION IS RELIGIOUS RITUAL. The basic assumption here is that interactants treat each other like sacred objects. In a famous quote, Goffman states:

Many Gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance. He walks with some dignity and is the recipient of many little offerings. He is jealous of the worship due him, yet, approached in the right spirit, he is ready to forgive those who may have offended him.  
(Goffman 1967: 95)

In this logic, if social interactants are gods, they must be treated with a high degree of ritual care (Goffman 1967: 91): Each interactant deserves a minimum of respect. As is apparent, Goffman applies Durkheim's (1915, 1976: 299f) concept of negative and positive rituals (Goffman 1971: 88) to social interactions. In Section 5.3 it will be revealed that this concept is by this time well established in the linguistic face discourse under the umbrella terms of ‘negative politeness’ and ‘positive politeness’ (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987). In brief,

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<sup>17</sup>Original text: “L'âme individuelle n'est donc qu'une portion de l'âme collective du groupe; c'est la force anonyme qui est à la base du culte, mais incarnée dans un individu dont elle épouse la personnalité; c'est du mana individualisé.” (Durkheim 1915, 1968: 378)



Goffman assumes that interactants must grant each other an appropriate degree of distance and separation, a principle which corresponds to the 'negative cult'.

In practice, this negative cult is exercised in the form of interpersonal avoidance rituals. For instance, every interactant is surrounded by an invisible personal space, which is taboo. Therefore, other interactants must not intrude into this personal space (e.g. by touching him/her) without permission (Goffman 1967: 62).<sup>18</sup> Also, by metaphorical extension, interactants are expected to stay clear of the personal space by avoiding "discussion matters that might be painful, embarrassing, or humiliating to the recipient" (Goffman 1967: 65). Further, interpersonal presentational rituals regulate the instances of reverence that interactants are supposed to offer to each other. This principle clearly corresponds to the 'positive cult'. For instance, at the beginning of an encounter, interactants are expected to salute each other (Goffman 1967: 70). Furthermore, when they notice any change of state in the other person's appearance, status, or repute (such as, e.g., a new haircut), they may ratify it with a compliment. Other presentational rituals include invitations, or minor services (Goffman 1967: 72f).

In this discussion a paradox emerges: The requirements of negative and positive interpersonal rituals fundamentally contradict each other. If one social principle prescribes showing attentiveness and seeking proximity, while the other instructs interactants to avoid this very behaviour, there is clearly some degree of antagonism involved. Goffman acknowledges this himself, arguing that interactants are constantly challenged by the necessity to handle the dialectic of avoidance rituals and presentational rituals: "There is an inescapable opposition between showing a desire to include an individual and showing respect for his privacy" (Goffman 1967: 76). Thus, social interactants must constantly sort out the delicate tension between proximity and distance, between attachment and separateness, and between solidarity and respect. Otherwise, they risk a violation of the complex balance that maintains the ritual order.

Another important aspect of the ritual approach is that relational aspects of communication are never concerned with the speaker's appraisal of him/herself in isolation, but they can only be interpreted in relation to the other interactant(s). Thus, every instance of communication about one's own position is, at the same time, communication about the other's position to which one relates (cf. Schulz von Thun 2006). By bringing to light this interrelation, Goffman is in line with current accounts of social co-construction, according to which social images are never constructed in isolation, but emerge in interactive communication processes (cf. Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

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<sup>18</sup>Goffman borrows this concept from Simmel (1950: 321), who terms the personal space an 'ideal sphere'.

### 5.1.3.3 The ritual order

The basic frame of reference underlying Goffman's ritual principle is the ritual order. Goffman assumes that people feel naturally obliged to comply with this force of regulation in order to participate in a higher social collective. As mentioned above, he takes this idea from Durkheim's (1915, 1976: 264) analysis of the concept of soul (*mana*) in Australian Aborigine cultures. Reinforcing the analogy between religion and social interaction, Goffman claims that interactants must ritually honour the sacred social *mana* they encounter in the form of their co-interactants (Goffman 1967: 47). At the same time, dutiful individuals themselves benefit from the order because they may expect to receive the same ritual care that they show to others. Any individual must be honoured as a representative of the social collectivity: "By virtue of being part of a sacred body – a society – and not being just part of an undifferentiated aggregate, the individual is owed ritual honor and care" (Manning 1992: 60).

Thus, Goffman refers to the collective ritual order as the answer to the question of why human individuals should invest so much energy in complying with ritual rules. He argues that, from a functional point of view, the ritual order is a kind of social order that regulates smooth interpersonal contact and helps in avoiding conflict. As is characteristic of orders, it helps social individuals in making the world a safer and more predictable place. Also, it helps individuals appraise other interactants; if someone complies with the ritual order, he/she can be assumed to be a trustworthy interactant (Goffman 1967: 77).

Furthermore, according to Goffman, the status of the ritual order is such that it is not only indispensable for the regulation of social life, but in fact, it is precisely the ritual order that makes social life possible in the first place. Social selves are inherently created to fulfil ritual requirements, and there can be no personhood outside of the ritual order. In consequence, it is by way of the ritual order that humans mould their personalities: "While it may be true that the individual has a unique self all his own, evidence of this possession is thoroughly a product of joint ceremonial labor (...)" (Goffman 1967: 85). Thus, in Goffman's view, the ritual order is a matrix of social meaning that individuals inevitably relate to when co-constructing social identities. Whenever individuals communicate, they therefore automatically orient to the ritual order, whether or not they intend to or are aware of it.

### 5.1.3.4 Six principles governing ritual interaction

There are, in sum, six principles governing ritual interaction according to Goffman. First, there is the principle of reciprocity, which has been explained above: In line with the concept of individual and collective *mana*, all interactants represent the collective ritual order; and thus, all interactants are entitled to pay respect to the other interactants. In turn, they may

expect to be treated as ritual subjects themselves. While all interactants are responsible for their own ritual wholeness (in that they must show self-respect and take care of their own ritual status), they are supposed to bestow more ritual honour to other interactants than to themselves.

Second, it is important to note that reciprocity does not imply equality. On the contrary, the specific instantiations of ritual respect displayed to individuals depend on the interactants' positions in the social hierarchy. These instantiations are determined by a complex interplay of social factors, so that interactants must anticipate both relations of ritual symmetry and of ritual asymmetry (cf. Goffman 1967). Third, the ritual order is a construction based on superficiality. It is far more important for ritual actions to be plausible than for them to be authentic. Therefore, ritual interactions are concerned with appearances and expressions, rather than with attitudes or actual feelings towards self and other: "It is typically a 'working' acceptance, not a 'real' one, since it tends to be based (...) upon a willingness to give temporary lip service to judgments (....)" (Goffman 1967: 11).

Fourth, the ritual order is fundamentally determined by the principle of balance. This is reflected in two different aspects: As has just been established, interactants must be paid the right amount of ritual care with respect to their social status – both a surplus of allocation and a deficit would endanger the ritual balance. Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, interactants must also even out the tension between negative and positive rituals, i.e. between distance and proximity. The complex requirements of the ritual order must be constantly kept in balance because it is in permanent danger of breaking down.

This leads us to the fifth principle, i.e. the principle of violation: Interactants are able to violate the ritual order, and thus, to threaten its integrity. According to Goffman, some cases of violation occur accidentally, some are brought about on purpose, and some happen as a "by-product of action – action the offender performs in spite of its offensive consequences, although not out of spite" (Goffman 1967:14). The implication is, however, that most of the time all interactants invest a high amount of energy in order not to endanger the ritual balance. The reason for this is that their social existences are bound to the ritual order in such an existential manner that each violation causes a great deal of emotional stress to all interactants (Goffman 1967: 85ff).

Sixth, in case the ritual order has been violated, there is the possibility of ritual repair. The amount and the manner of the repair work must correspond to the amount and the manner of the damage, as well as to the social status of the offended subject. By means of corrective rituals, violations can be remediated, so that the ritual integrity of the subject is repaired and the ritual order restored (Goffman 1971: 124ff).

At least four of the five principles mentioned above (i.e. the principles of reciprocity, symmetry/asymmetry, balance, and violation) were present in Goffman's prior work on the

stage metaphor. The principle of repair, on the other hand, is a new development that Goffman adds to his ritual approach. It is clear that the assumption of an overarching social order concerning face-to-face interaction is one of the most central points throughout Goffman's work.<sup>19</sup>

### 5.1.3.5 Face and face work

Goffman implicitly interlaces the ritual metaphor with another concept, i.e. the famous face metaphor and the term 'face work', respectively. An interactant's face, in this context, stands for his/her entire person and for the social position he/she has in the ritual order: "One's face, then, is a sacred thing, and the expressive order required to sustain it is therefore a ritual one" (Goffman 1967:19). Also, Goffman states:

The term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes (...).  
(Goffman 1967: 5)

Thus, Goffman makes use of the metaphor: A PERSON'S FACE is A PERSON'S SOCIAL VALUE.<sup>20</sup> Several characteristics arise from Goffman's definition. First, face is evaluative in that it comprises a *positive* social value, and interactants try to live up to this positive social value by co-constructing faces in ways that may be evaluated positively. Thus, they do not make random claims about their faces, but they tend to emphasise situated aspects of selves that will be evaluated favourably.

Second, face is interactively constituted and third, other-determined. While a person may try to construct a certain face on the basis of a particular communicative line, it is ultimately the feedback loop connected to the other interactants' actions that matters the most. According to Goffman, the claimed self needs to be socially ratified. Fourth, Goffman mentions the concept of line, which refers to the perceived positionings people take whilst doing face work in particular situations. A perceived line allows for inferences as to how an interactant would like to place him/herself in the social matrix. Thus, people take and give hints as to what kinds of face work are required with respect to their social profiles and status.

Fifth, face is interpretive insofar as it deals with intuitive interpretations of communicative behaviour: Clearly, lines are idealised condensations of interactions.

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<sup>19</sup> Later, Goffman turns to the term 'interaction order', which is centred more on linguistic issues, but which, in essence, further pursues the concepts of the dramaturgical order and the ritual order (cf. Rawls 1987).

<sup>20</sup> Strictly speaking, the face concept does not rely on a metaphor only, but also on the metonymy: A PERSON'S FACE is THE PERSON.

Therefore, face can never consist of clear-cut black and white categories. Interactants can only ever *assume* what lines the others have taken and why they have done so. Thus, individuals must hope for the best when trying to do face work, because they have no guarantee for success.

In point of fact, the five characteristics of the face concept mentioned in Goffman (1971) are still in large measure in line with present-day conceptions of face and face work (cf. Bargiela-Chiappini 2003; Locher and Watts 2005; Spencer-Oatey 2005; Arundale 2006), although it would likely be more accurate to describe them as in line with state-of-the-art research *again*: The initial reception of the face concept by Brown and Levinson (1987) took a somewhat different, less dynamic and less interactive approach (cf. Section 5.3), and this approach dominated the linguistic literature for decades. In the last decade, many (but not all) researchers of face work, (im)politeness, and identity have increasingly demanded a return to the roots of face work theory after Goffman (cf. Bargiela-Chiappini 2003; see Section 5.3 for a brief comment on Goffman's alleged incompatibility with social constructionist thinking).

However, in one respect, Goffman's account differs from more recent concepts of face: In his terms, faces are bestowed upon interactants, but only on the condition that the interactants prove worthy. At the worst, people are out of face. On the other hand, many present-day scholars would argue that face is an aspect of the relational level of talk (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2005; Locher 2006b). Likewise, in my approach, face will be defined as an aspect of identity; and I would argue that just as no one can interact without some sort of identity, no one can act outside of face-related concerns.

### 5.1.3.6 Goffman's concept of ritual interchanges

As opposed to his successors Brown and Levinson (1987; cf. Section 5.3), who pursue a speech act-oriented approach, Goffman makes it very clear that he regards face work as an interactive process:

(...) interpersonal rituals have a dialogistic character (...). When a ritual offering occurs, when, that is, one individual provides a sign of involvement in and connectedness to another, it behoves the recipient to show that the message has been received, that its import has been appreciated, that the affirmed relationship actually exists as the performer implies, that the performer himself has worth as a person, and finally, that the recipient has an appreciative, grateful nature.  
(Goffman 1971: 89)

Thus, Goffman's idea of ritual practice holds that people engage in ritual interchanges, i.e. "little ceremonies" (Goffman 1971: 90), which often consist of two moves. The first move is

the 'ritual offering'; the second move represents the 'ritual appreciation' expressed in return. Goffman exemplifies ritual interchanges through hospitality toward guests by hosts, in which one "inquires into another's health, his experience on a recent trip, his feelings about a recent movie, the outcome of his fateful business, the neighbourly act of lending various possessions and providing minor services" (Goffman 1971: 92). In these cases, the inquiries into another's health, his/her experience on a recent trip, etc., form the first moves, i.e. the ritual offerings. The responses to the inquiries contain the second moves, i.e. ritual appreciation.

As already established, Goffman adopts Durkheim's (1976: 37) idea of 'positive cults', or positive rituals, and 'negative cults', or negative rituals. He holds that positive rituals have confirmative, reinforcing, and pacifying effects on interpersonal relations, and that they mark the accessibility of the interactants to each other (cf. Goffman 1971: 88f). In other words, although Goffman does not point this out, the two moves of the ritual offering presented above actually only refer to positive rituals. It is no coincidence that the pair pattern of the supportive sequence resembles the 'adjacency pair', as developed in the school of Conversation Analysis (CA). While the proponents of CA were influenced by Erving Goffman, he, in turn, frequently drew on their work as well. In one footnote, he states explicitly that "Sacks has been an originator in the close study of conversational sequencing", and that he is "much indebted to him" (Goffman 1971: 150f).<sup>21</sup>

In order to avoid terminological confusion, I will briefly explain the links between supportive interchanges after Goffman and adjacency pairs after Sacks (cf. Sacks 1992). Adjacency pairs are defined as "two adjacent speech acts provided by two interactants and consisting of a first pair part that triggers a second pair part" (Schegloff 1990: 59). As the overview in Section 5.8 will show, some adjacency pairs are inherently face-related and, thus, always form confirmative sequences with respect to face work (e.g. GREETING – GREETING, and INVITATION – ACCEPTANCE). Moreover, all supportive interchanges share some characteristics with adjacency pairs: They follow a symmetrical pair structure (CONFIRMATION – CONFIRMATION); and they form at least two interrelated, corresponding turns, often in immediate proximity to each other. Furthermore, the first pair part of a supportive interchange triggers the second pair part.

Yet, there are some important differences between the two concepts. Most importantly, supportive sequences *can* be formed by adjacency pairs, but they must not necessarily be formed as such. A first pair part, such as SHOWING INTEREST (e.g. by asking a question) may activate, for instance, an elaborate narrative, rather than a single speech act. As a rule, supportive sequences can be realised by an infinite range of speech acts or succession of speech acts; and they are functionally determined.

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, Goffman has been strongly criticised for his tendency toward concept appropriation, especially regarding concepts that originated within Conversation Analysis (Williams 1988, 2000: 81).

Goffman also discusses negative rituals, which work by way of prohibitive, avoiding, and distancing communicative behaviour. Therefore, they do not necessarily occur in the form of dialogical sequences, for “ordinary circumspections ordinarily call for no responding comment” (Goffman 1971: 90). In this context, Goffman claims:

More important, when an infraction occurs, then a dialogue is indicated, the offender having to provide remedial accounts and assurances and the offended a sign that these have been received and are sufficient; in brief, a ‘remedial interchange’ occurs. (Goffman 1971: 90)

Thus, remedial interchanges are described as sequences of ritual repair.<sup>22</sup> Goffman emphasises the marginal status of ritual offences in everyday interaction: Ritual remedies in conversations are mostly based on “tacit collaboration” on the part of the interactants in order “to get traffic moving again” (Goffman 1971: 138). Disturbances of the ritual order are not concerned with substantial issues of guilt, but they revolve around interpretations of pieces of communication, “transforming what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable” (Goffman 1971: 139).

Ritual interchanges, or as I will refer to them, face-related sequences, represent a crucial analytical issue in this thesis. Having given a broad overview of the concept with respect to face work in general, in Section 5.8 I will discuss Goffman’s concrete framework for the analysis of ritual interchanges. Also, I will consider the contributions from a linguistic perspective by Holly (1979). In Section 14.1, I will present my own modified approach before applying it to the analysis of the coaching conversations in my corpus.

## 5.1.4 Conclusion

More than 50 years after the publication of *The Presentation of Self* and 30 years after his death, Goffman’s works are still an abounding, challenging source of academic discussion. In his unique way of thinking, Goffman provides milestones for the study of the self, identity, self-presentation, face work, and (im)politeness. Up to the time of completion of this thesis, sociologists as well as psychologists and linguists are continuously engaging with his rich body of research, striving to turn into coherent theory what Goffman himself never took interest in systematising. His essays provide acute observations and analyses of everyday

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<sup>22</sup> However, Goffman’s terminology is not quite clear: Technically, remedial interchanges should also be in place when an infraction of a positive ritual has occurred. For instance, if the interactant A forgets to respond to the greeting of the interactant B at the beginning of an interaction, this must be regarded as a violation of the ritual order due to a missing positive ritual. In this situation the interactant A may provide a remedial move (for instance, by saying *oh sorry, hi B!*). Therefore, remedial interchanges should not be categorised as instances of negative ritual, but as instances of repair sequences with respect to positive OR negative rites. The terminology is, of course, ambiguous, because the fact that the remedial sequence is supposed to ‘undo’ an unwanted aspect of communication might also be seen as a ‘negative’ function. Also, violations of positive face wants are probably harder to detect because, again, they tend to be based on omission and failure to act.

behaviour, and they are praised for their witty, elegant style.

Moreover, Goffman takes a crucial shift away from essentialist concepts of identity. Instead, he emphasises the interactive co-construction of 'outer' selves. His 'depth model of self' implies an inner, subjective, 'real' self and an outer, interactional, staged self (cf. Manning 1991; Tseelon 1992; Gergen 1991). In this respect, present-day scholars would disagree with him, arguing that identities in general emerge in interactional construction (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Also, it is important to bear in mind that Goffman does not provide a fully developed model or theory of face-to-face interactions. The large majority of academic voices claim that Goffman's methodology is not vindicable on academic grounds. As is often pointed out, this fact corresponds to the scepticism Goffman displays towards the validity of academic constructs, including his own (Hettlage and Lenz 1991: 27). It is not without intention that he writes each new book or essay from a blank slate, replacing his own labels with new ones without commenting on doing so (cf. Smith 2006: 5). As far as general theories are concerned, Goffman notes, "better different coats to clothe the children well than a single splendid tent in which they all shiver" (Goffman 1961: xiv).

Nevertheless, Goffman's ideas are valuable for an in-depth understanding of both the issue of identity construction and self-presentation and the history of the study of self-presentation. In particular, *The Presentation of Self* was the first to open up the field of research on face-to-face interaction, self-presentation, and identity construction. While the stage metaphor is limited in terms of an academic methodology, it has provided an early perspective on the interactive construction of selves in talk. The ritual metaphor, while sounding potentially awkward to secularised linguists with no prior history of anthropological studies, is extremely useful for the discussion of self- and other-presentation, because it illuminates the delicacy of relational communication, the brittleness of individual images, and the significance of interpersonal balance. The religious imagery also illuminates the fact that people generally fulfil the requirements of face work without questioning its legitimization in further detail.

The face metaphor ties in with the ritual approach, and it represents a powerful resource for the analysis of the relational level of communication. Goffman makes the convincing point that face work continually accompanies all communicative action – sometimes more ostensibly, and sometimes more subtly, but always with a focus on social evaluation by means of superficial expression. The face metaphor is supported by the present-day axiom in psychological discourse that all humans share a strong self-enhancement motif (cf. Section 5.2). Moreover, Goffman's outline of positive and negative interchanges represents a novel approach to the analysis of face work on the discourse level (cf. Section 5.8; Chapter 14). I will focus particularly on this aspect in the analysis of face work in my corpus of coaching interactions.



## 5.2 Psychological perspectives on the self

### 5.2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will account for the psychological perspective on the self and on self-presentation. Naturally, I will only be able to provide a small glimpse on a topic that has occupied legions of scholars from different schools and backgrounds for more than 100 years. Nevertheless, I will attempt to give a condensed overview of this topic, starting with the research history of the psychological self, and followed by an account of the systems perspective. Afterwards, I will briefly consider the internal structures of the self, and the difference between the individual self and the social self. Moreover, I will discuss the concept of self-evaluation, the three self-motives, and the psychological approach to self-presentation, before evaluating the psychological view of the self with respect to my linguistic framework.

### 5.2.2 The history of research on the self in psychology

As is the case with many current-day psychological topoi, the first genuinely psychological perspective on the self was brought forth by William James (1890; 1892). His seminal work, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), discusses at this early time central concepts related to the self, such as consciousness and continuity, selectivity, self-relevant emotions, the diverse aspects of self, self-esteem, the self-as-knower, and many more concepts (Mischel and Morf 2005: 16f). Yet, in the first half of the 20th century, psychology “did not pick up where James left off for many years” (Leary and Tangney 2005: 4). This was essentially due to the fact that with Freudian psychoanalysis and behaviourism there were two major paradigms dominating the discipline, neither of which lent itself to creating much interest in the topic.<sup>23</sup>

However, with the neo-Freudian school of the 1950s and 1960s, matters changed. Scholars such as Horney, Adler, and Sullivan departed from Freud’s teachings in that they laid more emphasis on interpersonal aspects. Thus, the clinical disciplines of ego psychology, self psychology, and object relations theory evolved (Leary and Tangney 2005:4). Henceforth, the study of the self was enriched by the aspect of the coping functions

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<sup>23</sup> Behaviourism, on the one hand, completely eliminated intra-psychological processes from its agenda of research. Instead, it concentrated exclusively on the observation and interpretation of behaviour. Freudian psychoanalysis, on the other hand, tended to employ rather idiosyncratic conceptual and terminological constructs, thus making it difficult to connect their thoughts with the predominating frameworks of academic psychology (Leary and Tangney 2005: 4). Moreover, the Freudian concept of the ego was largely determined by unconscious id-based motivations, such as sex and aggression (Mischel and Morf 2005: 17) – a conceptualisation which naturally led away from the study of the self as an agentive subject.

of the self (e.g. self-regulation and self-defence), by self-evaluative functions of the self (e.g. self-esteem), and by the concept of identity (Mischel and Morf 2005: 17).

Also, the humanistic movement of the 1950s, as represented by Carl Rogers, moved the focus to agentic aspects of selfhood (Mischel and Morf 2005: 17). At the same time, it was confronted with the classic homunculus problem: In essence, this term refers to the personification of cognitive processes as an independently acting “little man in the head”. As Allport (1961: 129f; quoted in Mischel and Morf 2005: 17f) remarks critically: “The psychologist does not like to pass the buck to a self-agent. (...) It is unwise to assign our problems to an inner agent who pulls the strings.” Scholars would not find ways to avoid the homunculus dilemma before systems theory was introduced to psychological thought, and so it remained a central research problem for decades.

In the second half of the 20th century, several influences were of special importance to the study of the self. The cognitive revolution of the 1970s brought a comeback of the mind as a locus of investigation: Now the focus was on cognitive knowledge structures, and the computer metaphor with its model of the mind as an unmotivated information-processing machine inspired much research. In the 1980s, “the self became motivated, driven by goals and by a wide range of motives, expectations, beliefs, values and so on” (Mischel and Morf 2005: 18). The rise of social constructionism reinforced the consideration of interpersonal aspects of the self as well as the construed nature of cognition (cf. Zielke 2004). Further, over the next 20 years, systems theory as well as connectionist neurological network models gained considerable importance in psychology. These approaches offered entirely new perspectives; among others, they have by now established the aforementioned solution of the homunculus problem. Thus, the agentic nature of the self can be explained without evoking the homunculus scenario: The self is conceptualised as a cybernetic self-control process possessing the ability for self-regulation (cf. Leary and Tangney 2005: 9)<sup>24</sup>

There is a common understanding in psychological research on the self that much of the wealth of perspectives elaborated in the course of the last century should be integrated in a comprehensive theory of the self. However, this goal is extremely difficult to achieve. The present state of the field is generally characterised as overwhelmingly rich and fuzzy. Nevertheless, for the purposes of a linguistic study of relational work, there is more than enough common ground knowledge that can be adapted from current psychological research. In the following section, I will outline these basic assumptions.

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<sup>24</sup> However, Leary and Tangney (2005: 9) concede that “none of these models can easily account for precisely how people make conscious, deliberate, intentional choices”. In their opinion, it is vital to understand how consciousness can arise from biological matter first, before psychologists are in a position to explain how that consciousness manages to direct its attention to itself.

### 5.2.3 A self-organising system of multiple selves

In everyday language, 'selves' refer to entire persons or personalities. However, as argued above, psychologists now describe the self in terms of a self-organising system. This system is based on knowledge structures, on emotions, and on interaction, which is why it is called "an organized dynamic cognitive-affective-action system" (Mischel and Morf 2005: 23). Another central feature of this system is that it is continually constructed and re-constructed in the course of interpersonal exchanges. Moreover, while people often conceive of themselves as having fairly monolithic selves, in fact, they operate with a multitude of context-relevant selves: "(...) [this] self-as-prototype might be abstracted from multiple, context-specific mental representations of self – self at work, self at home, self with friends, and the like" (Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein 2005: 70).

It is very important to acknowledge the gap between laypeople's everyday concept of the self and the psychological, scientific view of the self. The first approach mirrors the efficient construction work that humans do in order to satisfy their need for consistency. The second approach allows for an explanation of the wide variability of human behaviour in terms of context (Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein 2005: 70). According to Showers and Zeigler-Hill (2005: 54), the multiple structure of selves fulfils an important function: It is the basis for self-differentiation and self-complexity (in that individuals do not have to regard themselves as all good or all bad).

The knowledge structure that represents the self-concept may consist of idiosyncratically defined categories. According to the multiple selves approach, those categories "typically correspond to distinct roles, contexts, relationships, activities, traits, states, and the like"; and they "include attributes (...), emotional states, behaviours, and episodic memories of past experience" (Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein 2005: 49; Simon 2004). It is clear that the multiple selves approach entails a crucial consequence for the study of identity and relational work: While interactants often conceptualise themselves as having one core self, it is important to remember that in actuality they refer to situational self-aspects of their selves, i.e. their working selves.

Moreover, laypeople chiefly imagine selves to be homogeneous entities that hardly change over time. In consequence, they assume that knowledge about the self is stable as well and that it can simply be retrieved from memory. However, this is not the case. Instead, connectionist approaches suggest that knowledge is not stored in fixed units at separate places. Rather, concepts and memories correspond to "different patterns of activation across many units" (Mischel and Morf 2005: 24). Thus, concepts and memories are not actually retrieved, but reconstructed "each time there is activation in the system" (Mischel and Morf 2005: 24). As will be shown, the active effort individuals make to integrate change over time

into their self-presentations is also a central argument in positioning theory (cf. Section 5.3).

Due to the connectionist nature of the system, generations and reconstructions of particular patterns automatically activate neighbouring patterns, and each update of a connection reinforces the links between the concepts involved. In this way, each reconstruction of a concept or a memory will slightly alter the knowledge structure. This point is further evidence of the fact that self-presentation is not based on a one-to-one relation between an 'inner self' and a 'presented self'. Neither is there a simple two-way relationship between a private, inner self and a public, staged self, as Goffman suggested (cf. Section 5.1). Instead, the self-concept is about highly contextualised processes of cognitive activation and interactive negotiation.

The situated self-concept underlying an interactant's self-presentational actions is also referred to as the 'working self-concept' (Showers and Zeigler-Hill 2005: 48). It is by means of these constructions that interactants handle the plenitude of self-relevant information in memory. Working self-concepts enable interactants to process and manage acts of self-presentation in purposeful terms. Most importantly, working self-concepts are not static entities either, but they are constantly reconstructed online, and they adapt to feedback loops from both social interaction and inner movements.

## **5.2.4 The internal structure of the self concept**

In essence, the self is defined as a particularly elaborate cognitive knowledge structure that represents oneself, "including all that one knows about oneself" (Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein 2005: 69). Knowledge, on the other hand, can be represented as either perception-based, i.e. as mental images, or as meaning-based, i.e. as propositional knowledge. The first knowledge type produces the so-called self-image. This includes, for instance, a mental picture of an individual's body. However, what is relevant to this thesis is the category of meaning-based knowledge, which corresponds to the self-concept. Self-concepts are constructed on the basis of two types of memory: episodic, autobiographical memory; and semantic, context-free knowledge (Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein 2005: 72). For instance, when someone remembers having won a writing contest in elementary school, this is a feature of the self stored in episodic memory. In contrast, when somebody knows that he is male, Italian, and sensitive, these are features of the self stored in semantic memory.

As a large bulk of research has shown, episodic and semantic self-knowledge may interact, but the two types of knowledge seem to be stored separately (Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein 2005: 82). Thus, when individuals are asked whether or not they feature a certain trait (e.g. extraversion), they may produce inconsistent answers at different points in time. To a large degree, the result depends on whether people are supposed to 'check' their semantic

self-knowledge or to recall and evaluate autobiographical episodes. Often, the relationship is such that “episodic memory for behavioural exceptions can qualify self-descriptions from semantic memory” (Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein 2005: 79).

In other words, when an interactant presents him/herself explicitly (for instance, by describing him/herself as *fairly relaxed*, *ambitious*, or *tolerant*), first and foremost, we encounter a revelation of beliefs about the self. However, these beliefs may often be inconsistent and sometimes even contradictory to elements of episodic self-knowledge. Thus, even the consciously accessible parts of self-knowledge are much less reliable and consistent than they may be perceived by individuals.

It is an even trickier feature of self-knowledge that parts of it seem to be inaccessible even to the individual constructing them. Much of how we experience our selves is influenced by hidden sources:

There are multiple ways in which one may be unaware of the source of influence on thoughts, feelings, and behavior. For example, one may be unaware of the existence of the source of influence, whereas in other circumstances one may consciously and accurately perceive the source of influence while being unaware of its causative role in self-evaluation.

(Devos and Banaji 2005: 154)

In sum, we encounter the confusing phenomenon that people often feel, think, or do something for certain reasons, while they believe that they feel, think, or do it for completely other reasons.

Psychologists define the ‘explicit self’ as the part of the self which is subject to conscious awareness, control, intention, and self-reflection (Devos and Banaji 2005: 153), whereas the ‘implicit self’ is not accessible to conscious regulation. It is the explicit self that corresponds to the deliberate mode of being that accounts for the subjective experience of individual autonomy. People attribute most of what they do, think, and say to the explicit self, while it actually originates in the implicit self. Likewise, explicit self-knowledge tends to be more rational, more fully considered, and more controlled than implicit self-knowledge.<sup>25</sup> In sum, these findings underline the claim in contemporary narrative analysis that personal stories are sites of identity construction, rather than reflections of identities (cf. Section 5.3).

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<sup>25</sup> There is a slight overlap between the terminology of explicitness versus implicitness in the psychological and in the linguistic sense. Strictly speaking, the linguistic distinction between explicit and implicit self-presentation refers to the degree of communicative directness. For instance, the utterance *I am smart* is regarded as an instance of explicit self-presentation. On the other hand, the utterance *I’ve been to London several times* is classified as an instance of a more implicit claim about the self. The psychological terms, on the other hand, refer to the distinction between conscious and unconscious parts of the self.

## 5.2.5 Individual selves and social selves

Another important psychological aspect of the self is the difference between individual selves and social selves. In brief, the 'individual self' refers to the part of the self that is constituted on the basis of individual, private, distinctive traits. The 'social' or 'collective self', on the other hand, is the aspect of the self that is tied to membership in groups.<sup>26</sup> While most of the discussion so far has taken an individual perspective on self-aspects, individuation from others is but one angle of self-construction: "(...) social identity is an extension of the self-concept that entails a shift in the level of self-representation from that of the individual self to that of the collective self" (Brewer 2005: 480).

The collective self is, quite apparently, a construction based on social categorisation. Self-categorisation theory holds that at times people perceive themselves as being part of a group, rather than as individuals (Devos and Banaji 2005: 153f). Also, we see ourselves as part of certain social groups (in-groups) and as not being part of others (out-groups). We then apply the characteristics we associate with the in-groups to ourselves – regardless of their correspondence to individual self-aspects. While "the activation of the social self leads to the incorporation of idealised group qualities to the private self, the reverse [is] also true" (Devos and Banji 2005: 155): When someone states that he/she is optimistic, because she belongs to the membership group of Americans (as the coachee Olivia does in coaching 5), he/she assimilates the in-group to her own self-concept.

Group membership fundamentally shapes the way individuals construct their selves. Moreover, it also shapes the way others see individuals, a perspective that is mirrored back to them on the basis of social feedback processes. Groups provide social orientation; they are "a way of locating ourselves in relation to other people" (Hogg 2005: 462). However, apart from the fact that group membership can be a fuzzy and intuitive matter, not all group memberships are salient to individuals at all times. Instead, memberships are activated during the construction processes of situation-specific working selves.

The reason why it is important to make a theoretical distinction between the private self and the collective self is quite simple: "(...) retrieval cues that activate the 'private' self-representation generate self-cognitions that are quite different from the self-cognitions retrieved when the 'collective' self is activated" (Brewer 2005: 481). In this context, the concept of self-stereotyping is especially crucial. It is defined as a mechanism "for matching the self-concept to characteristics of particular group memberships" (Brewer 2005: 484). According to Brewer (1005: 488), self-stereotyping is especially common when the

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<sup>26</sup> In fact, some psychologists distinguish between three different aspects of the self: "the individual self (defined by personal traits (...)), the relational self (defined by dyadic relationships that assimilate self to significant other persons), and the collective self (defined by group membership (...))" (Hogg 2005: 464). In general, however, the relational self is considered as an aspect of the individual self, rather than as an independent category of its own.

interactant's in-group is in a minority situation. Therefore, the frequent references to nationality in my corpus could be due to the fact that all the five coachees are expatriates in Germany in conversation with native Germans. Also, there is the possibility of counter-self-stereotyping, i.e. of describing oneself in opposition to a particular membership group.

## 5.2.6 Self-evaluation

From an evolutionary point of view, the survival of humans depends on their social acceptance within the group. Thus, it is vital for each individual to keep track of his/her current social status. As Tesser (2005: 278) suggests, an instrument that helps people accomplish this goal is self-evaluation: It provides a moment-to-moment analysis of one's position with respect to internalised standards and to particular contexts; and if the self-evaluation turns out to be negative, this is considered as a signal to do some social 'repair work'.

The concept of self-evaluation actually overlaps with the concept of self-esteem. What distinguishes self-esteem from self-evaluation is that it covers both the long-term construct developed over the span of a lifetime and the snapshots of self-appraisals made in particular situations. William James coined the terms 'trait self-esteem' and 'state self-esteem' to represent those two dimensions (Crocker and Park 2005: 291). Self-evaluation, on the other hand, is merely concerned with situational aspects of self-appraisal and thus equates to state self-esteem (cf. Table 5.1). In this thesis, I will concentrate exclusively on self-evaluation and state self-esteem respectively.

Long-term appraisal of the self	Situational, contextual appraisal of the self
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trait self-esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State self-esteem</li> <li>• Self-evaluation</li> </ul>

Table 5.1: Trait self-esteem vs. state self-esteem and self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a special case of evaluation, which, in turn, works as an appraisal of the psychological value of 'noun-like' things. In other words, evaluation determines whether a person, place, idea, or object is "good or bad, valuable or worthless, pleasant or unpleasant" (Crocker and Park 2005: 275). As an overwhelming majority of people seek to evaluate their selves favourably, positive self-evaluation is linked to positive affect, whereas negative self-evaluation is tied to negative affect.

However, there are great differences in self-evaluation with respect to the relevance of the categories of evaluation involved. Some domains are absolutely crucial to the self-esteem of individuals, whereas others are of little importance. Whatever the preferred contingencies of self-worth may be, their status for the self system is crucial: "Contingencies

of self-worth have implications for much of people's experience. In particular, they shape interpretations of situations, emotional reactions to events, and personal goals" (Crocker and Park 2005: 295).

Yet the desire to evaluate one's own self positively is not the only main factor driving social interactants. According to social psychological findings, all humans share three central self-motives, namely self-enhancement, self-assessment, and self-verification (Tesser 2005: 280).<sup>27</sup> Self-enhancement is defined as the motive to self-evaluate positively and, thus, to gain high self-esteem. Self-assessment refers to the motive to self-evaluate appropriately and in accordance with social feedback. Self-verification corresponds to the motive to self-evaluate in accordance with one's trait self-esteem in order to gain consistency.

All three self-motives are relevant factors that guide and qualify the negotiation of selves in interactions. Self-enhancement is the guiding factor behind all of the phenomena described in the previous section in the context of face work: Individuals use a wide range of strategies in order to achieve positive self-evaluation and to avoid negative self-evaluation. So self-evident is this fact that linguistic approaches to interpersonal negotiations of self and other have implicitly adopted it as the only major motive of relevance (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987). As divergent as the linguistic views on the topic may be, the research tends to concentrate on the self-enhancing function of face work (cf. Section 5.3).

From the evolutionary perspective mentioned above, it is logical that social acceptance should be a dominant driving force in people. However, it is important to acknowledge that interactants do not automatically restrict themselves to the search for positive feedback for the sake of social acceptance. While most people certainly hope for favourable self-evaluations, and while self- (and other-) enhancement is a necessary condition for successful acts of presentation, in some situations it may be more important to receive an accurate picture of one's social status, whether it may be good or bad (Tesser 2005: 279). This self-assessment motive is indispensable to the interpretation of coaching interactions. After all, the goal of assessing and improving one's professional performance as well as one's professional relations is in itself a defining feature of coaching. It is a constituting part of the coach's role to provide the coachee with a possibility to self-assess. Essentially, clients enter coachings due to a fundamental need for objective feedback, for advice, and for personal progress – but they want these needs to be fulfilled in a friendly environment.

The third self-motive mentioned in the psychology of the self is self-verification. It is defined as the need to confirm one's self-concept in order to maintain a reliable basis of interpretation (cf. Swann, Milton, and Polzer 2000). The idea that frames this concept is that

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<sup>27</sup> Sometimes, a fourth motive is mentioned, i.e. self-improvement.



people have a basic need for consistency and that self-concepts fulfil a central function for a consistent interpretation of the world:

People's self-views represent the lens through which they perceive reality, lending meaning to all experience. Should people's self-views flounder, they will no longer have a secure basis for understanding and responding to the world because they will have been stripped of their fundamental means of knowing the world.  
(Swann Jr., Rentfrow, and Guinn 2005: 368)

The self-verification motive implies that people want their situational self-evaluations to be broadly in line with their long-term self-concepts – otherwise they may experience unpleasant dissonance. For instance, if for someone it is a source of high trait self-esteem that he/she is a successful leader, he/she will strive for verification of that self-aspect when it is up for evaluation (as will become obvious during the discussion of the coachee Rachel's issues in coaching 3). Thus, when people generally hold positive self-views, self-verification and self-enhancement will work along the same lines because both motives aim for positive self-evaluation. Negative trait self-esteem, on the other hand, can only be confirmed by negative self-evaluations. While all people share the self-enhancement motive and therefore seek out positive self-evaluation, those individuals with a negative self-view may sometimes find it more comforting to see this negative view confirmed, as it would at least show that there is consistency in their lives.<sup>28</sup> In this case, the self-verification motive and the self-enhancement motive are in conflict (cf. Pelham and Swann 1994). My analysis will show that there are indeed examples of ambivalent communicative patterns in my corpus that appear to correspond to a conflict of self-motives on the part of the coachees involved. Although self-derogative behaviour does not make sense from a purely face-oriented perspective, it can be explained on the grounds of the self-verification motif.

### 5.2.7 Self-presentation

The psychological research field of self-presentation has been fundamentally influenced by Goffman's sociological work, in particular *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (cf. Leary 1995: 6; Section 5.1). In the wake of this publication, impression management theory emerged, an approach that defines impression management as "the goal-directed activity of controlling information in order to influence the impressions formed by an audience". Moreover, impression management theorists describe self-presentation as occurring "when

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<sup>28</sup> The Austrian artist Georg Kreisler once said about Vienna, "Why is Vienna my home? Well, I can identify with the Vienna character, which does not exactly lend itself to be evaluated positively, but at least I can rely on its negative aspects." (Original quote: „Warum ist Wien meine Heimat? Nun, ich identifiziere mich mit dem Wiener Charakter, der zwar nicht sehr positiv zu beurteilen ist, aber dafür kann ich mich auf seine negativen Aspekte verlassen.“ Quoted in a review of Eva Menasse's "Wien. Küß die Hand, Moderne" in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* by Cathrin Kahlweit, 17. 09. 2011.)

people try to control impressions of themselves” (Schlenker 2005: 492).

The issues of academic interest in this context are, for instance, the question of authenticity and gamesmanship, the question whether self-presentation occurs in automatic or controlled ways, the issue of audience design, and strategies of self-presentation (cf. Schlenker 2000; Schlenker 2005). Moreover, there is research on motives, social norms and roles, values, and self-presentational successes and failures, to name but a few topics (cf. Leary 1995). In brief, the psychological approach to self-presentation touches on numerous issues that are also discussed in the linguistic discourse on face, identity, and positioning.

However, the methodological approach in psychology tends to concentrate on laboratory experiments as well as questionnaires. It does not focus on spoken interaction as a major locus of self-presentation, and it does not take linguistic structures into account. Therefore, from the perspective of linguistics, this account of self-presentation tends to provide interesting and useful information as to the general background of self-presentation, but it does not offer any concrete frameworks for the linguistic analysis of talk.

Despite this finding, there is one contribution to the psychological research on self-presentation that I will include in my discussion: The difference between high self-monitors and low self-monitors, as first explored by Snyder (1974). High self-monitors are defined as interactants who are especially “sensitive to cues regarding appropriate demeanour”, who are able to “adjust their behavior to the contingencies of particular encounters”, and who “use this ability to control how they come across to others” (Leary 1995: 62). Thus, high self-monitors alter their self-presentations relative to the context in which they interact. Low self-monitors, on the other hand “are not as sensitive to social cues regarding appropriate behavior and self-presentation”, and they do not do conscious impression management to the same degree (Leary 1995: 62). Low self-monitors tend to present themselves in the same way, independently from the context. This is a distinction that will help in explaining why the self-positioning strategies of one of the coachees in my corpus is much less refined than those of the others.

### **5.2.8 Discursive approaches in psychology**

The lack of appreciation for the role of language in the discipline of psychology was reversed in the ‘turn to discourse’ within the social sciences in the 1980s. The school of discursive psychology emerged, which draws on Austin and Searle’s Speech Act Theory, on Foucauldian post-structuralism, on ethnomethodology, and on Rom Harré’s (1979) work on ethogenics (cf. Edley and Wetherell 2008). A core idea of discursive psychology is that language is not just reflective or referential with respect to social meaning, but it is constructive and constitutive. Thus, a major aim of discursive psychology is to “make claims

about the patterning of culturally constructed entities such as minds, worlds, selves, identities and sexualities which discourse brings into being“ (Edley and Wetherell 2008: 165).

Methodologically, discursive psychologists are strongly influenced by Conversation Analysis (cf. Sidnell and Stivers 2013). In many respects, they facilitate the current trend of convergence in the analysis of identity and relational work in linguistics and psychology tremendously (cf. Section 5.3). In terms of research issues, discursive psychologists have concentrated particularly on the study of discursive gender constructions in relation to ideological discourses (e.g. Speer 2005 or Wetherell and Edley 1998). In addition to this brief account, I will devote additional space to positioning theory in Section 5.3. This psychological approach has been influenced by discursive psychology; it is highly influential to the linguistic discussion of identity; and it is an important conceptual and methodological resource for my own study.

## 5.2.9 Conclusion

The discussion of the psychological view on the self has exhibited a perspective that is equally complex and enriching. The psychological discourse on the self is very complex, but it provides valuable insight into the concept of the self: Thus, the self is best regarded as a complex self-organising, cognitive-affective action system that produces a multiplicity of different situational working selves in interaction with the social context. In particular, selves are conceived of as knowledge structures that are continually reconstructed. Thus, self-presentation can be described as a contextualised process of cognitive activation and interactive negotiation. Different knowledge types are stored separately, and social interactants may contradict themselves when describing their personalities by drawing on different aspects of self-knowledge. In addition, selves can be divided into explicit selves (which work with consciously accessible and controllable self-knowledge) and implicit selves (which refer to the self-knowledge that is not consciously accessible or controllable). In sum, self-knowledge is much less reliable and less consistent than laypeople assume it to be. This view is in contrast with the traditional essentialist assumption of laypeople that selves are monolithic entities.

Another important point is the distinction between individual selves and social selves. Individual selves are addressed when individuals activate self-aspects on the basis of individual and private traits. Social selves come into play when individuals bring membership groups to the fore. Moreover, humans constantly evaluate their selves with respect to internalised standards. In this context, psychologists use the terms ‘self-evaluation’ and ‘state self-esteem’ to refer to self-appraisals made in particular situations. In this thesis, the issue of a need for self-evaluation will be accorded a prominent place in the analysis of self-

presentation and face work (cf. Chapters 12 and 13).

Furthermore, there are three self-evaluative motives discussed in psychology. The self-enhancement motif (which is dominant in the discourse on face work) stands for a need to evaluate one's own self positively. According to the self-assessment motif, humans also share a need to evaluate their selves accurately, i.e. in line with the evaluations of other social interactants. Thirdly, the self-verification motif represents the desire to evaluate one's self consistently with one's trait self-esteem. The inclusion of all three motifs, rather than just the self-enhancement motif, will be very enlightening with respect to the self-presentations of some of the coachees in my corpus.

Also, I will draw on the difference between high self-monitors and low self-monitors, as described in impression management. In a brief account of the discursive perspective in psychology, I have prepared the ground for the interdisciplinary arena in which the analysis of identity construction and relational work in naturally occurring interactions takes place. In Section 5.3, the convergence in the fields of politeness, impoliteness, face, and identity will be made explicit. In sum, the psychological view of the self has been demonstrated as very enlightening with respect to the foundations of the analysis of the construction and negotiation of selves in interactions.

## **5.3 Linguistic approaches to politeness, face, relational work, and identity**

### **5.3.1 Introduction**

The study of face, identity, and relational work in linguistics follows a longstanding tradition. In the early growth stages of this field, linguists conceptualised these issues mainly from the perspective of one particular element of relational work, i.e. politeness in the sense of face-threat mitigation (cf. Locher and Watts 2005). In the last two decades, a gradual turn to a constructionist, discursive, postmodern paradigm (also see Sections 5.1 and 5.2) has led to a progressing conjunction of discourses on politeness and face work with discourses on identity and positioning (cf. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013). In this respect, I have been lucky to conduct my study in the wake of an exciting movement toward a theoretical synthesis of different research strands.

In the following sections, I will briefly outline this development, starting with the early approaches to politeness, particularly the influential theory by Brown and Levinson. In Section 5.3.3, I will provide a broad overview of more recent advancements in the field, in particular in relation to the discursive turn in politeness theory. Following this, I will give an

account of current views of face work and relational work; and I will position my own methodological choices with regard to these issues. In Section 5.3.4, contributions of linguistic identity theory and positioning theory will be outlined. Last, I will evaluate the issues discussed in connection with my own research aims and my methodological approach.

### 5.3.2 Early linguistic approaches to politeness and face work

The study of linguistic politeness originated in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the form of what are now called the 'first-wave approaches' (cf. Culpeper 2011; Kádár and Haugh 2013). The formative influence of the time was Speech Act Theory after Austin (1975) and Searle (1969), along with Grice's (1975) concept of the Cooperative Principle (CP). According to the CP, all communication is based on cooperation and relies on adherence to four conversational maxims. As a consequence of these conceptual influences, the early approaches to politeness share a focus on universality, on speech acts as units of analysis, and on elicited speech, rather than on naturally occurring talk (cf. Sifianou 2010; Kádár and Haugh 2013). Also, as Kádár and Haugh (2013: 26) point out, they display a "general tendency to describe linguistic politeness as a system of forms and strategies".

Thus, the earliest influential politeness researcher, Robin Lakoff (1973: 298), introduces three rules of politeness, i.e. 'Don't impose', 'Give options', and 'Make A feel good, be friendly'<sup>29</sup>. Leech (1983: 16) complements Grice's Cooperative Principle with a Politeness Principle. According to Leech, interactants orient toward six politeness maxims: the 'Tact maxim', the 'Generosity maxim', the 'Approbation maxim', the 'Modesty maxim', the 'Agreement maxim', and the 'Sympathy maxim'. As stated above, Lakoff's and Leech's theories are designed to explain apparent violations of maxims of the CP by means of politeness strategies. Moreover, both theories attempt to capture the phenomenon of politeness in terms of rules and principles; and both conceive of politeness as primarily serving to avoid conflicts (cf. Eelen 2001).

A very similar frame of thinking can be claimed for the politeness theory presented by Brown and Levinson (1987). Undeniably, it has served as the central approach to the linguistic analysis of politeness for decades, and the entire field of research on (im)politeness and face work owes much to this theory. In the following discussion, I will outline a few of its characteristics, emphasising those elements that are most relevant to this thesis.

One of the most important elements in Brown and Levinson's (1987: 62) approach is their reliance on Goffman's concept of face, as introduced in Section 5.1. However,

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<sup>29</sup> 'A' refers to the other interactant (= alter).

compared to Goffman, Brown and Levinson's approach reframes the notion in more static, individualistic, and cognitive terms (cf. Bargiela-Chiappini 2003). Thus, they introduce a 'Model Person' that is characterised as a 'rational agent' and as someone who has 'positive face' and 'negative face' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 59). Positive face is defined as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others". Negative face is explained as "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62).

Brown and Levinson hold that social interactants strive to "maintain each other's face" by fulfilling positive and negative face needs. However, they claim that "some acts intrinsically threaten face" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 60). In this respect they provide an extensive catalogue of intrinsically 'face-threatening acts' (FTAs), such as, for instance, orders and requests, suggestions and advice, reminders, promises, compliments, expressions of disapproval, expressions of violent (out-of-control) emotions, expressing thanks, excuses, and acceptance of offers. The list of FTAs is ordered according to the kinds of face they threaten, i.e. the negative and the positive face of the speaker and the hearer respectively (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 65-68). Moreover, Brown and Levinson provide a formula which is designed to compute the weightiness of FTAs:

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$$

Their claim is that the weightiness of an FTA  $x$  depends on the distance  $D$  between the speaker  $S$  and the hearer  $H$ , on the power that  $S$  holds over  $H$ , and on the rating  $R$  of the imposition of  $x$  in a particular culture (Brown and Levinson 1987: 76).

The main thrust of Brown and Levinson's theory is that interactants may desire or be compelled to commit FTAs despite the potential for interpersonal conflict. In these cases, speakers may choose between a range of ways to move forward: At the extreme poles of the spectrum, they can either commit FTAs 'baldly' (and thus cause a maximum of face-offence), or they can formulate them in very indirect terms by making the statement 'off record', e.g. by means of metaphors, irony, and other kinds of hints (and thus, they may risk being misunderstood). The median options would be the use of positive politeness or negative politeness strategies. These strategy types include approach-based and avoidance-based mitigation tools respectively (Brown and Levinson 1987: 68-71). In summary, Brown and Levinson's theory is mainly concerned with the speakers' efforts to avoid and mitigate FTAs to positive and negative face by means of positive and negative politeness. Essentially, they equate politeness with face work, and face work with mitigation strategies (cf. Locher and Watts 2005).

It is now commonly accepted within the field that there are no intrinsically face-threatening speech acts, but that the role of context is crucial in detecting face-threats in natural conversations (cf. Fraser and Nolan 1981; Spencer-Oatey 2005; Locher 2006b,

Locher and Watts 2008). However, Brown and Levinson's discussion of triggers of face-threatening situations has provided the groundwork for innumerable linguistic analyses and discussions. In the case of my coaching corpus, several of Brown and Levinson's 'intrinsic FTAs' correspond to what I regard as prototypical activity types, whose management by the coaches and coachees is crucial for the success of the coaching sessions. For instance, I focus on the face-related implications of advice-giving, of complimenting (making positive evaluations), of criticising and challenging other interactants, but also on the breakdown of physical control over one's body. Moreover, in coaching 5, the mentioning of taboo topics, as well as blatant non-cooperation in an activity (such as interrupting) will come into play (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987; also see Sections 5.8; 14.3).

Brown and Levinson's distinction between positive and negative politeness, which is broadly derived from Goffman's adaption of Durkheim's notion of positive and negative cults (cf. Durkheim 1915; Goffman 1967; also see Section 5.1) is partly reflected in my analysis of face-related sequences after Goffman (1967) and Holly (1979; also see Sections 5.1; 5.8; 14.3): Many of the positive politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson can be regarded as triggers for confirmative sequences. For instance, the positive politeness strategy 1: 'Notice, attend to H' corresponds to the category 'rituals of identificatory sympathy', and strategy 10: 'Offer, promise' is a pendant to the category of 'ritual offerings'. Furthermore, one strategy is crucial in the context of remedial sequences (i.e. the negative politeness strategy 6: 'Apologize'; cf. Sections 5.8; 14.3). However, as established above, most of the linguistic instantiations of politeness put forward by Brown and Levinson are designed as face-saving strategies realised by the mitigation of FTAs, rather than as face-enhancing or face-repairing strategies.

In sum, Brown and Levinson's comprehensive approach to the analysis of politeness and face work (of which this brief account has offered only a glimpse) has led to the emergence of an entirely new research field in linguistics. It is mainly on the basis of and in opposition to Brown and Levinson's theory – by applying it to empirical data, by assembling points of criticism, and by reflecting on its underlying assumptions – that the linguistic discourse in the field has gradually taken a social constructionist and discursive turn. In the next section I will outline some important aspects of this development.

### **5.3.3 Politeness, face work, and relational work in current linguistic research**

As a result of the publication of Brown and Levinson's theory, much linguistic research has emerged that revolves around aspects of their theory. For instance, as Watts points out, many empirical studies of the time focused on the question of "how different speech acts and

speech events with face-threatening potential are realised“; and many set out to “test the claims for universality by carrying out cross-cultural and contrastive studies“ (Watts 2010: 45). To an exceeding degree, the approach to politeness by Brown and Levinson has become the subject of criticism. One focal point for criticism is their claim to universality on the one hand and their anglocentric bias on the other (cf. Gu 1990; Ide 1989; Blum-Kulka 1992).

Another important line of criticism is concerned with their essentialist, individualistic, and cognitive reinterpretation of Goffman’s concept of face (cf. Watts, Ide and Ehlich 1992; Eelen 2001; Bargiela-Chiappini 2003): As established in Section 5.1 above, Goffman is interested in communicative interchanges, and he conceives of face as a ‘social value’ which is tied to the evaluations of other interactants (Goffman 1976: 5). Brown and Levinson’s concept of face, on the other hand, emphasises the cognitive reasoning and the psychological wants of the individual; it represents a static and essentialist concept with a clear “speaker bias“ (Culpeper 2005: 39). Also, their proximity to the presuppositions of Speech Act Theory leads Brown and Levinson to analyse speech acts as isolated instances, regardless of context. A related issue that is often criticised is their reliance on elicited data (cf. Sifianou 2010).

There are many other areas of debate concerning Brown and Levinson’s theory, such as, for instance, their “paranoid view“ of social interaction with its strong emphasis on conflict avoidance (cf. Schmidt 1980; cf. Kasper 1990); the false dichotomy of positive and negative politeness strategies; the disregard of impolite and competitive communication; and the questionable equation of face work with politeness, mitigation, and indirectness (cf. Locher and Watts 2005). For comprehensive overviews of the discussion, see Eelen (2001); Watts (2003); Sifianou (2010); Watts (2010); Kádár and Haugh (2013).

All of these local areas of debate regarding politeness and face work evolved discursively in the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, and they have produced a substantial amount of theories that are designed to revise or replace Brown and Levinson’s approach in different ways (for a synopsis, see, for instance, Eelen 2001). By the turn of the millennium, this discursive turn gradually shifted the paradigm in which the individual discussions take place (cf. Coupland 2007; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013). As argued above, this turn toward discursive approaches occurred within a large-scale paradigm shift in the social sciences:

The more general shift from rationalist approaches, which rely on the assumption of objectively given phenomena in the world beyond us, to the cognitive, constructionist belief that we produce our own internal worlds through our interaction with others in the physical world has begun to affect our approach to politeness.  
(Watts 2010: 59)

Arguably, the discursive, postmodern view of politeness and face work (cf. Terkourafi 2005)



has its roots in earlier work (most importantly, Watts 1992), but it is particularly triggered by Eelen's (2001) monography *A Critique of Politeness Theories*. Other publications that elaborate the perspective are, for example, Mills (2003), Watts (2003), Locher (2004), Locher and Watts (2005), and Locher (2006b).

In general, the discursive view is characterised by the following aspects: First, it concentrates on "stretches of real oral discourse" as the locus of analysis (Watts 2010: 52). Second, it holds that politeness is a term of evaluation which is contested and negotiated in a processual way by situated interactants in particular discourses with specific contexts (Eelen 2001: 249). Thus, politeness is described as a vague and dynamic notion that is up for debate, rather than as a set of precisely defined communicative rules, principles, or linguistic forms. Third, the subject of this interactive negotiation process by interactants is referred to as 'politeness1', as 'first-order politeness', or as the 'emic', laypeople's view. In contrast, academic theorising about the concept of politeness is referred to as 'politeness2', 'second-order politeness', or the 'etic' approach (cf. Locher 2006b). From this perspective, almost all traditional theories of politeness follow a second-order approach. Yet, the discursive view claims that politeness research should be mainly concerned with politeness1:

We consider it important to take native speaker assessments of politeness seriously and to make them the basis of a discursive, data-driven, bottom-up approach to politeness. The discursive dispute over such terms in instances of social practice should represent the locus of attention for politeness research.  
(Locher and Watts 2005: 17)

The fourth important argument brought forward by the discursive view is that politeness and face work should be treated as different phenomena. Locher and Watts (2005) argue that politeness is but one aspect of the interpersonal level of communication. According to Locher (2004: 51), 'face work' and 'relational work' are two interchangeable terms that refer to "the process of defining relationships". In Locher and Watts (2005: 11), relational work is described as "the 'work' individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others". In principle, this view of face work is at least partly in accordance with the contributions of other scholars, notably Spencer-Oatey (2005: 96), who introduces the term 'rapport management', i.e. "the management (or mismanagement) of relations between people".

In the specific approach advocated by Locher and Watts, relational work is further categorised in light of norms of appropriateness in particular settings. According to this view, interactants often display appropriate behaviour with respect to social norms. This kind of behaviour is also referred to as 'politic' (Locher and Watts 2005: 12). Polite behaviour, in turn, represents a special case of politic behaviour, for it is positively marked with respect to norms of appropriateness. Unmarked politic behaviour, on the other hand, is called 'non-polite'. Moreover, there are two types of negatively marked behaviour, i.e. 'impolite' and

‘overpolite’ communication. As established above, Locher and Watts emphasise the fact that norms of appropriateness are specific to different interactional frames, or ‘Communities of Practice’ (Locher 2006b: 28; cf. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). Thus, the linguistic analysis of politeness only makes sense in relation to context-specific norms. Another result of this categorisation is an increased interest in ‘impoliteness’ as a phenomenon in its own right (see, for instance, Culpeper 2005; Bousfield and Locher 2008).

Having described the relevant areas of research, the approach of this thesis can now be methodologically positioned in relation to them. The discussion of different aspects and connotations of the concept of face and face work (within as well as outside of the discursive approach) is in fact very extensive, and to unfold its historical course would be far beyond the scope of this. I refer to Bargiela-Chiappini (2003), Spencer-Oatey (2005), Haugh (2009), Arundale (2010), and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013) for deeper insights into the debate. In this chapter, I will merely outline the most important elements of my definition of face, face work, and relational work.

In principle, I will draw mostly on the claims proposed by the discursive view. First and foremost, I support the idea that a contemporary theory of politeness, face work, and/or relational work must be based on social constructionist premises – this is both in line with the psychological view of the self and identity, as described in Section 5.2, and with current views of identity, positioning, and self-presentation (cf. Section 5.3.4). Furthermore, I agree with the description of politeness as a norm negotiated in situated interactions. Also, I concur with the argument that relational work and face work must be considered as entirely different, more comprehensive phenomena than politeness. To this end, in this thesis I will disregard questions of politeness altogether, whereas the analysis of face work will be of major importance (cf. Chapter 13).

I do not align with Arundale’s (2010) claim that ‘identity’ is a long-term concept, whereas ‘face’ is constructed in situ. In my opinion, both phenomena are socially constructed concepts that emerge in talk, although they are co-constructed with help from cognitive knowledge structures on the part of all interactants (cf. Langlotz 2010; de Fina 2006). Moreover, in my view there is no reason to discard the concept of face based on the argument that Goffman’s horizon of thinking cannot be classified as genuinely social constructionist, as Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013) demands. In Section 5.1 it was established that Goffman’s concept of the self is ahead of its time, but that he does retain some essentialist notions; however, there does not seem to be any clear reason not to transfer his concepts into a more constructionist frame of thinking. In the same way, I will employ Brown and Levinson’s concept of the face-threatening act, regardless of its initially very ‘un-constructionist’ context (cf. Sections 5.8; 14.1; 14.3): the term ‘face-threatening act’ is a very powerful metaphorical expression that captures the potentially upsetting experience

of receiving communicative messages that contain negative social evaluations.

With respect to the equation of face work with relational work in Locher (2004: 51), I will take a different stance: I share her view of 'relational work' as an umbrella term for the work interactants do on the relational, or interpersonal, level of communication. In this respect, relational work is closely intertwined with interactive identity construction. However, I will employ the label 'face work' in a slightly different way. I conceptualise it as a metaphor that highlights a certain aspect of identity work, i.e. the relational work resulting from the sensitivity of human interactants toward the social evaluation of their identities in interaction. In Section 5.2, I established the link between the three self-motives and face work: The human need for self-enhancement corresponds with Goffman's idea of the requirement to confirm and protect 'sacred' faces in interactions (even though it is a well-established point that in many contexts interactants gladly 'desecrate' their fellow interactants for various reasons, cf. Bousfield, 2008). The self-assessment motif, on the other hand, may set the desire to be evaluated favourably by others in competition with the need to be assessed accurately. Moreover, the self-verification motif may lead interactants with partly negative self-concepts to strive for negative evaluations, thus causing clashes with their self-enhancement motives and ultimately producing ambiguous patterns of self-presentation (cf. Section 5.7; Chapter 12).

The terms 'face' and 'face work' are theoretical second-order terms, and metaphorical terms in particular. As such, they do not necessarily fit into a framework for the analysis of identity like a missing piece of a puzzle – rather, they are part of a metaphor that adds another perspective to the overall picture. As argued above, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 10), metaphors inevitably highlight some aspects and hide others; and Goffman's own conceptual extensions of his metaphorical approaches are often overcharged with aspects that are not highlighted very well (cf. Section 5.1). However, to my knowledge, there is as yet no analytical concept that captures the issues discussed above as neatly as the face metaphor, especially in combination with Holly's (1979) improvements. For this reason, I have chosen to juxtapose different approaches to the analysis of relational work in my study, despite the fact that they often overlap in some ways. To further support this point, in the following section, I will turn to linguistic identity theory as well as to positioning theory.

### **5.3.4 Linguistic approaches to the analysis of identity**

The linguistic analysis of identity has many roots. To reiterate, a general observation is that numerous different approaches are initiated in different academic disciplines and schools; and as different as their basic principles and their methodologies may be, in the beginning most of them tend to conceive of identity in more or less static and essentialist terms. Yet, in

the course of the turn toward a concept of identity as interactively constructed, the approaches become more dynamic and context-oriented. In this respect, there are clear parallels between the history of research on politeness and face work and the history of research on identity; this is apparent because these developments are all embedded in the larger constructionist turn in the social sciences (as established above). The second overarching characteristic is that proponents of the different approaches to the study of identity display an increasing openness towards synthesising their efforts.

Although there are many disciplines, schools, and fields associated with the study of identity, in this section I will selectively refer to contributions made in the contexts of sociolinguistic theories, the study of talk-in-interaction, the study of narratives, and psychological positioning theory. Other relevant influences, such as Critical Discourse Analysis, linguistic anthropology, or social identity theory will not be covered in this chapter (cf. Bucholtz and Hall 2005; de Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006).

In traditional sociolinguistics, the early variationist approach after Labov (1966) concentrates on the connection between linguistic variation and social variables (such as ethnicity or gender). Social categories are presupposed to be ontologically existent, clear-cut entities that are 'out there' (cf. de Fina 2007). In contrast, recent sociolinguistic approaches employ qualitative analyses of naturally occurring interactions; they emphasise the role of context (which they regard as a fluid and dynamic phenomenon); they view social categories as co-constructed in talk; and they focus on clusters of linguistic characteristics, rather than on single properties (cf. Coupland 2007).

A crucial category in the sociolinguistic approach to identity is the concept of 'style' (cf. Coupland 2007). It is described as "a highly context sensitive discourse strategy to present personas or groups", and, as such, "a situational resource for identity displays" (de Fina 2007: 57). In linguistic terms, style represents an array of characteristic features, such as prosodic patterns (e.g. tone, tempo, rhythm), lexical choices, pragmatic strategies, 'performance devices' like reported speech, and repetition, or preferences for specific communicative genres (cf. de Fina 2003: 24; Auer 2007: 12). As these features only convey social identities implicitly, they are referred to as 'indexical' (cf. Bucholtz and Hall 2004). The concept of indexicality implies that "linguistic features do not 'mirror' social identity categories in the simple sense of the word", but that their social meanings are negotiated locally (Auer 2007: 7). Crucial focal topics in the sociolinguistic discussion of identity are, for example, the roles of topic management, language choice, code-switching, or the use of reference terms to co-construct identities (cf. de Fina 2007).

The proponents of the talk-in-interaction method offer an approach to identity that is influenced by classic Conversation Analysis (cf. Sacks 1992) and by ethnomethodology (cf. Garfinkel 1967). Their analysis of identity in interactions relies on the identification of the

'occasioning' of social categories, i.e. the interactional achievements that make identity categories salient in talk (cf. Antaki and Widdicombe 1998: 3):

The idea that having an identity means being cast into a category related to certain characteristics draws attention to how identities are connected to social categories that get defined based on their association with activities.  
(De Fina 2008: 208)

An important aspect of the talk-in-interaction approach is the rejection of 'pre-existing' social categories as a source of analysis. Instead, only those categories that are occasioned in talk are regarded as relevant to the interaction, as well as to the analysis. Thus, there is a strict focus on situated interactive co-construction of identity in talk (cf. Antaki and Widdicombe 1998). In a related approach, the proponents of membership categorization analysis (MCA) identify situated category-bound activities on the micro level of talk (cf. Sacks 1992). In this view, activities may be tied to particular categories, so that "people establish identities in terms of doing age or doing gender" (Bamberg, de Fina and Schiffrin 2011: 184).

A recent essay by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) summarises the foundations of different linguistic approaches to the analysis of identity. It includes five principles that underlie most of the academic work in this area undertaken within the social constructionist paradigm. According to the 'emergence principle', identity emerges in particular interactive contexts. The 'positionality principle' holds that different identity positions are co-constructed in single interactions. These positions may be related to macro level categories as well as to cultural positions or temporary stances and roles. The 'indexicality principle' states that different, more or less explicitly communicated indexical processes are at work when identities are constructed. The 'relationality principle' emphasises the fact that identities are intersubjectively co-constructed. The 'partialness principle' claims that:

[A]ny given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction.  
(Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 606).

The authors conclude that identity is a dynamic and multiple concept that is constantly shifting; for this reason, it is now often referred to as 'identities', rather than as 'identity' (cf. de Fina 2006). In brief, Bucholtz and Hall sum up the common ground of identity research after the social constructionist turn. This is especially apparent with respect to the focus on dynamic and socially co-constructed concepts, on interactivity and performativity, as well as on the importance of context (cf. de Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006; Bamberg, de Fina and Schiffrin 2011). Many of these aspects can be traced back to poststructuralist theories

(Bourdieu 1977; Butler 1990; for a criticism of the disregard of the second wave of practice theorists in linguistics, see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013).

Another approach that follows a social constructionist direction and that has been extremely influential for the linguistic analysis of identity is research on narratives. Initially, Labov and Waletzky's (1967) narrative theory pursues a structural path. However, psychological theorising brings the importance of autobiographical 'life stories' in identity construction to the fore (cf. Bamberg 2009: 136). In the course of the interactive turn, the concept of 'small stories' is introduced:

Our aim then has been to shift emphasis from stories about the self, typically long, teller-led, of past and single non-shared events to stories about short (fragmented, open-line) tellings about self and other of ongoing, future or shared events, allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, etc.  
(Georgakopoulou 2013: 59)

De Fina (2003: 19f) points out that narratives fulfil different functions with respect to identity construction: Narrators simultaneously perform cultural ways of telling stories; they negotiate their social roles; and they express membership in social groups (cf. Georgakopoulou 2010).

In the last decade, narrative analysis in the sociolinguistic tradition has increasingly joined forces with the psychological school of positioning analysis. Its earliest representatives are van Langenhove and Harré (1999), who defend against static and mentalist approaches to identity in psychology; and who define positioning as a "discursive process" (Harré 2010: 53). The act of positioning is characterised as "the assignment of fluid 'parts' or 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories" (van Langenhove and Harré 1999: 17). In this view, interactants constantly position themselves and others with respect to social meanings. An initial positioning act (a 'first order positioning') may be contested and challenged; in this case the interactants implicitly negotiate to come up with a 'second order positioning' (van Langenhove and Harré 1999: 20). Bamberg (2004; 2008; 2007; 2009) further advances the theory, but he also "aims at scrutinizing the inconsistencies, ambiguities, contradictions" and the navigation "between different versions of selfhood and identity in interactional contexts" (Bamberg 2009: 140).

By now, a shared academic discourse has emerged in narrative research in psychology and linguistics, as linguists have come to embrace positioning theory, just as psychologists have adopted linguistic ideas and methods (cf. Bamberg, de Fina and Schiffrin 2011; Georgakopoulou 2013; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013; Miller 2013). In particular, there are two central aspects that positioning theory contributes to the analysis of identity in discourse: First, it distinguishes between three levels of narrative analysis. The first level is concerned with the question of "how characters are positioned within the story". The second level relates to the manner in which the "speaker/narrator positions himself (and is

positioned) within the interactive situation". The third level refers to the issue of "how the speaker/narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regard to dominant discourses or master narratives" (cf. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 385). Thus, the focus of analysis is not merely on the narrative itself, but also on its function in the ongoing interactive situation. Personal stories are not regarded as reflections of identities, but as sites for the construction of identities (cf. Günthner 2007: 435; cf. Section 5.2). Moreover, by including the social macro level in the form of master narratives, positioning theory manages to bridge the gap between the macro level and the micro level of identity analysis, or 'capital D' and 'small-d' discourses (cf. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 380).

Furthermore, positioning theorists argue that narratives enable interactants to navigate between three identity dilemmas:

- (a) sameness of a sense of self over time in the face of constant change; (b) uniqueness of the individual vis-à-vis others faced with being the same as everyone else; and (c) the construction of agency as constituted by self (with a self-to-world direction of fit) and world (with a world-to-self direction of fit). (Bamberg 2009: 132)

Thus, the construction of identities by means of acts of positioning is considered as an ongoing struggle to manage these dilemmas, to accommodate storylines in the face of shifting contexts, and ultimately to succeed in having the other interactants agree to one's identity claims. In sum, positioning theory is an approach that lends itself usefully to the existing linguistic discourse on the analysis of identity in conversations. This is true not only with respect to the genre of narratives, but also regarding a more general scope of interactive analysis.

At this point, the conceptual and methodological links between the study of identity and the study of face work, politeness, and impoliteness have been made clear. I have shown that these research fields have experienced an interactive and dynamic turn rooted in the social constructionist paradigm shift. Moreover, the concepts of 'face work', 'relational work', and 'identity construction' are clearly overlapping to a strong degree. Also, the methodological tools used in the studies are increasingly converging, as evidenced in the growing number of researchers who use mixed-method approaches in their analyses and who combine different issues within the fields of (im)politeness, face, and/or identity (see, for instance, Holmes and Schnurr 2005; Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain 2007; Holmes, Marra and Schnurr 2008; Marra and Angouri 2011; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Bou-Franch and Lorenzo-Dus 2013; Miller 2013, Georgakopoulou 2013).

### 5.3.5 Conclusion

As established above, in this thesis I will examine the ways in which relational work and self- and other-presentation (or identity construction) are realised in the genre of business coaching communications. Regarding this aim, I will draw on the rich tradition of research on face and identity both in linguistics and in its neighbouring disciplines. In this chapter I have provided an overview of several research strands that have originated in different disciplines, fields, and schools, and that are increasingly converging within a constructionist, interactive paradigm.

Identity research within the sociolinguistic tradition has explored the notions of indexicality and style; and thus, it has contributed to the investigation of the relations between clusters of linguistic features and social categories that are co-constructed in talk. The talk-in-interaction approach has brought the importance of the local occasioning of social meaning to the forefront, and further, it has introduced the categories of Conversation Analysis to the analysis of interactions. The proponents of membership categorisation analysis have pointed out that social categories may be inferred on the grounds of prototypical activity types only. Narrative theorists have opened up a central genre for the analysis of identity. The shift to small stories as a focus of interest has brought further insight into the local negotiations of self- and other-presentations. Positioning theory provides an apt concept for these negotiations: The notion that individuals use positioning acts to navigate between different versions of identity and to manage emerging dilemmas is crucial to the analysis of identity construction. Moreover, it is very useful to distinguish between the three levels of positioning postulated in positioning analysis (i.e. positionings within the narrative, positionings within the ongoing interaction, and positionings concerning dominant discourses). Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five principles summarise the common ground in current identity research: Identities emerge in the form of different positionings of identities by means of indexical processes. Identities are co-constructed interactively; and they are complex and variable with respect to intentionality.

The linguistic analysis of face and face work provides an additional perspective to the issues of relational work and identity construction. I will employ Goffman's concepts of face and face work in my study, even though I will draw on Holly's improved version of a linguistic analytical tool for the analysis of face-related sequences. In addition, despite the fact that they operate within a different paradigm, I will use Brown and Levinson's notion of the 'face-threatening act' (FTA). My analysis of face work with respect to coaching-specific activity types will benefit from their collection of linguistic structures that may trigger face-threatening acts (even though I do not consider these structures as intrinsically face-threatening in the way that Brown and Levinson have described them).



Furthermore, my view of face and face work fundamentally relies on the advancements put forward by the representatives of the discursive view of politeness (such as Locher and Watts 2005), who regard face as a dynamic and relational co-construction that continually shifts in context. I also agree with the claim that (im)politeness and face should be treated as different concepts: In my approach I will disregard the former and concentrate on the latter. As I have stated, I will embrace the term ‘relational work’ in the sense of a superordinate label for those aspects of communication that are concerned with the interpersonal level. In this respect, the term complements the label ‘identity construction’, which points to the same relational communicative activities from the perspective of the co-construction of individual images. Face work, in my view, differs from these terms in that it functions as a spotlight for those aspects concerned with superficial social evaluations in interactions. The concept of face and face work is based on a powerful and enlightening metaphor, which is the motivation for my addition of this concept to my framework of analysis as one perspective on relational work along with the others. As has been established, it is one of the main goals of this study to demonstrate the usefulness of a mixed-method approach to the analysis of relational work and identity construction. I will delve deeper into these matters at a later point, in particular in relation to the analysis of coaching-specific activity types.

## **5.4 The analysis of questions**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

Questions represent an essential communicative resource in coaching conversations. In this section several approaches to the analysis of questions will be reviewed. First, I will give a brief account of the role of questions in the coaching literature. Second, different linguistic frameworks from the area of grammar and general discourse analytical studies and from studies of advisory talk will be discussed. In the last section I will summarise the findings with regard to my own approach to the analysis of questions (cf. Section 8.1).

### **5.4.2 Questions in the coaching literature**

In coaching theory and in other advisory contexts, questions are recognised as a central “analytical means to receive information”, as a “strong intervention”, as a strategy to steer the advisee’s attention in particular directions, and as a way to prompt the solution finding process (Prior 2004: 49). Moreover, due to the widespread ideal of nondirectiveness (cf. Locher 2006; Section 4.3), it has been suggested that the use of questions is less directive,

and therefore more advisable than the use of statements, because their use indicates that the advisees should rely on their own perspectives (cf. Mücke 2003). In contrast, Weisbach (2012: 26) claims that questions may be perceived as intrusive or as challenging by the coachees, and he states:

If someone does not want to talk about something yet, a question will not make him/her do so either.

Thus, Weisbach argues that coaches should check for face-threatening potentials before they ask any questions. While he concedes that questions will always be indispensable in coaching conversations, he recommends the frequent use of statements.

In general, coaching theorists tend to intersperse categorisations of questions according to form with categorisations according to function. For instance, Zumkeller (2010: 51ff) introduces the terms ‘open and closed questions’, ‘circular questions’, ‘scalar questions’, ‘hypothetical questions’, ‘problem-oriented and solution-oriented questions’, ‘paradoxical questions’, and ‘alternative questions’. While open and closed questions and alternative questions are categories relating to form, the remaining question types represent functional categories. Since the functional frameworks for questions offered in different approaches vary considerably (cf. Fischer-Epe 2006; Schreyögg 2012; Zumkeller 2012; Weisbach 2012) and are not directly relevant to my own approach, I will focus on the three formal categories introduced above, which are commonly employed in the coaching literature.

Zumkeller (2010: 50) defines open questions (or ‘*wh*-questions’) as questions that “encourage the responding interactant to reflect and describe [his/her answer] in greater detail”. In turn, closed questions (or ‘*yes/no*-questions’) force the responding interactants to make a decision between a positive and a negative answer. Alternative questions, on the other hand, are characterised as requiring a choice between fixed options offered by the questioner (Zumkeller 2010: 53). Again, due to the common ideal of nondirectiveness in coaching theory (cf. He 1994; Section 4.3), it is assumed that advisors should employ open questions, rather than closed questions, because the former serve to involve the advisee in “constructive solution finding processes” (Prior 2004: 52). Moreover, alternative questions are characterised as having an activating function:

Questions about several desirable alternatives prompt the client to think along unfamiliar lines and to take responsibility for their own actions.  
(Fischer-Epe 2006: 60)

Clearly, the discussion of formal question types in the coaching literature is strongly influenced by the discussion of directiveness and nondirectiveness.

### 5.4.3 Questions in linguistic approaches

Naturally, the linguistic literature on questions pursues a more fine-grained approach to the subject than the frameworks developed in coaching theory. Typically, in common grammar books (e.g. Cowan 2008, Ungerer et al. 2009, Greenbaum and Nelson 2009) the same formal distinction between *wh*-questions (i.e. open questions), *yes/no*-questions (i.e. polar questions), and alternative questions is made as that which was discussed in the context of the coaching literature (cf. Section 5.4.2). Yet, the categorisations include a more genuinely linguistic perspective: For example, *yes/no*-questions are described by means of the verb-initial position and subject-operator inversion. *Wh*-questions are characterised by their use of interrogative words or phrases and by their function of prompting missing information from the hearer (Greenbaum and Nelson 2009). Furthermore, additional formal categories, such as ‘rhetorical questions’, and subcategories, such as ‘tag questions’ and ‘declarative questions’ are employed to analyse the subject (cf. Cowan 2008).

However, Tsui (1994) argues that the issues subsumed under the term ‘question’ are much more complex. In order to account for different discourse functions, she introduces the term ‘elicitation’, which refers to “those utterances which elicit solely a verbal response” (Tsui 1994: 80). She further distinguishes between the subclasses ‘elicit:inform’ (*H: What time will you be finished? – X: Lecture finishes at about quarter past twelve.*), ‘elicit:confirm’ (*F: John would know would he. H: Yeah, John would know.*), ‘elicit:agree’ (*A: Lovely day, isn’t it? B: Yes, beautiful*), ‘elicit:commit’ (*J: Can I talk to you? – S: Sure. Come in. Let’s close the door. Have a seat.*), ‘elicit:repeat’ (*What did you say?*), and ‘elicit:clarify’ (*What do you mean?*; Tsui 1994: 81ff; transcription conventions altered). Thus, Tsui shifts away from the categorisation of questions according to syntactic form. Rather, she introduces a range of important functions that are realised on the discourse level of talk.

In a further discourse-oriented approach, Stenström (1999: 88) embeds the issue of questions into the wider subject matter of the ‘initiate’, which she defines as “the first obligatory move in the exchange” (a definition that is similar to the concept ‘adjacency pair’ cf. Section 5.8). According to Stenström, the initiate ‘question’ prompts an ‘answer’. Further initiates are ‘statements’ (which generate ‘replies’) and requests (which prompt ‘answers’). In Stenström’s approach, questions “ask for information or confirmation and expect to be answered”. Also, questions are subcategorised as ‘identification questions’ (*A: who do you have for tutorials this year – B: Professor Lurch*), ‘polarity questions’ (*A: locked yourself out – B: yes*), and ‘confirmation questions’ (*A: uhm. you can’t say that worth is adjectival right – B: no*; Stenström 1999: 92f; transcription conventions altered). Following these definitions, it can be stated that identification questions correspond with the grammatical category of *wh*-questions, polarity questions can be linked with *yes/no*-questions, and ‘confirmation

questions' are identical with Tsui's category 'elicit:confirm'.

Overall, Tsui's and Stenström's more encompassing linguistic approaches to questions reveal the complexity of the concept. Also, they highlight the difference between formal and functional categories, and the difference between a definition of questions on the level of syntax and on the discourse level. In addition, the linguistic study of advisory discourse has embraced the analysis of questions as a central area of research. Heritage and Sefi (1992) examine the practice of advice-giving in interactions between health visitors and first-time mothers. In this context questions are considered as preparatory moves facilitating advice sequences. Heritage and Sefi demonstrate that questions can be employed by advisees in order to request advice. In this case questions are followed by advice directly (cf. Heritage and Sefi 1992: 370). Also, advisors may produce 'step-wise entry' by means of questions, initiating the following pattern:

- Step 1: HV: initial inquiry.
  - Step 2: M: problem-indicative response.
  - Step 3: HV: focusing inquiry into the problem.
  - Step 4: M: responsive detailing.
  - Step 5: HV: advice-giving.
- (Heritage and Sefi 1992: 379)

According to Heritage and Sefi (1992), this pattern may be varied, but in principal, the questions preparing the ground for advice serve to establish the relevance of the ensuing advice; to topicalise the solutions; and to reduce resistance on the part of the advisee. Vehviläinen (2012) further supports Heritage and Sefi's study of questions. In her analysis of Finnish academic supervisions she confirms that she found four functions of the 'question preface' to advice:

- (1) To topicalise and pre-signal problematic or 'advisable' issues. (...)
  - (2) To design fitted advice and to avoid redundant advice. (...)
  - (3) To explore the student's knowledge or understanding. (...)
  - (4) To circumvent potential resistance to their own corrective feedback.
- (Vehviläinen 2012: 479)

Overall, the linguistic studies of advisory communication highlight the fact that questions are inextricably linked to the practice of advice-giving.

## 5.4.4 Conclusion

This section provided a brief introduction to questions as an analytical category. It was revealed that open questions (i.e. *wh*-questions) are considered less directive and more useful than closed questions (i.e. *yes/no*-questions) in the coaching literature. Moreover,

alternative questions are considered as strategies to activate coachees. Overall, the crucial role of questions in coaching conversations is recognised in coaching theory, but the frameworks of analysis represent a mix between formal and functional categories.

In traditional grammatical approaches, questions tend to be categorised according to form. This typically includes *wh*-questions, *yes/no*-questions, and alternative questions, but also additional categories and subcategories, such as declarative questions and tag questions. Approaches on the discourse level, such as those by Tsui (1992) and Stenström (1999), present questions as functional categories. Moreover, they represent questions through an interactive context, highlighting their power to prompt responses by the hearers. The discourse analysis of advisory talk by Heritage and Sefi (1992) and by Vehviläinen (2012, weitere Ref.) demonstrated that questions are often embedded in larger clusters of advice-related sequences. Thus, questions represent a powerful means to steer the conversation, to elicit the advisee's perspective, to prepare the ground for advice, and to reduce resistance. In Section 8.1, I will discuss my own approach to the analysis of questions, which will draw on many aspects of the formal and functional categories introduced in this chapter.

## 5.5 The analysis of feedback

### 5.5.1 Introduction

In my analytical approach, 'feedback' is treated as an umbrella term for return information provided in response to communicative contributions. In coaching conversations this phenomenon is relevant on both the factual and the relational level: While feedback secures mutual understanding, and while it facilitates the constant adjustment of perspectives, it also contains an evaluative component that orients to the relational aspect of the interaction. The feedback literature in both coaching and linguistics features strong terminological parallels between labels such as 'feedback', 'active listening', 'passive listening', 'backchanneling', 'empathy', 'paraphrasing', 'attunement', 'formulations', 'reinterpretations', and so on.

My framework for the linguistic analysis of feedback represents an eclectic array of concepts and terms from these approaches, for which I will account only briefly in this section. Yet a range of exemplary, while often overlapping, approaches to different aspects of feedback will be discussed. First, I will present two approaches from coaching theory, followed by a discussion of several concepts taken from linguistic fields. Last, I will summarise those aspects that are central for my own framework of analysis.

## 5.5.2 Feedback and related concepts in the coaching literature

In her compendium of coaching theory and methodology, Schreyögg (2012: 262f) emphasises the function of feedback as a “fundamental basis of any conversation between humans”. Thus, she conceives of the term ‘feedback’ as referring to return information comprising, for instance, listening activities, questions, and assessing statements. In particular, Schreyögg (2012: 266f) distinguishes between different types of listening, i.e. ‘passive listening’ and ‘active listening’. According to this view, passive listening refers to the practice of providing non-verbal and para-verbal signals in order to demonstrate attention. This includes the acoustic signals *hm* and *aha* as well as mimic and gestural feedback, such as nodding (Schreyögg 2012: 267).

Moreover, active listening is further subdivided into the categories ‘paraphrasing’ and ‘verbalising’. Schreyögg (2012: 268) holds that paraphrasing occurs when the coach produces summarising statements that do not add any meaning to the coachee’s utterances. In her view, paraphrasing mainly serves to check understanding at the factual information level. Verbalising, on the other hand, is defined as a broader type of feedback. When producing feedback categorised as ‘verbalising activities’, the coach reads between the lines and also interprets the coachee’s non-verbal communication. Thus, he/she adds interpretative content to the feedback, but is still strongly oriented towards the client’s utterances (Schreyögg 2012: 268f).

In his practical compendium on coaching practices, Weisbach (2012) discusses similar aspects as Schreyögg, although he employs different terminology. Weisbach introduces the notions of ‘showing understanding’, ‘interpreting’, and ‘active listening’, which he conceives of as one and the same category denoting a special form of listening (thus, these terms overlap with both ‘feedback’ and ‘active listening’ in Schreyögg’s terms). Weisbach (2012: 54) argues that, evidently, the first precondition for active listening is that the coach is actually silent for some time, tolerating pauses when they occur. Moreover, he describes active listening as a way of checking whether the coach has understood what is essential about the coachee’s utterances in the form of summarised statements. In order to achieve this goal the coach also interprets non-verbal and para-verbal signals, but stays as close to the utterances of the coachee as possible (Weisbach 2012: 34). In addition, Weisbach differentiates his concept of active listening by means of further subcategories (cf. Table 5.2):

#### Components of active listening according to Weisbach (2012)

- Repeating in one's own words
- Summarising
- Clarifying, putting something in a nutshell
- Using a qualifying repetition (*'at the moment, you cannot imagine ever talking to him again.'*)
- Using a hyperbolising confirmation (*'you don't want to talk to him ever again.'*)
- Putting things into relation (*'so on the one hand...but on the other hand...'*)
- Questions of clarification (*'what do you mean by...'*)
- Complementing and giving food for thought
- Carving out wishes
- Discussing feelings

Table 5.2: Components of active listening according to Weisbach (2012: 55)

As the table illustrates, Weisbach's compilation is potentially problematic from a linguistic point of view because it touches on several different levels of communicative structure and meaning. However, the overview is evidence of the complex array of forms and functions of feedback activities. As will be further outlined in Section 9.1, in my framework of analysis I will take up the label 'repeating'. Further, the expression 'questions of clarification' will occur in my approach to questions, and 'complementing' will be part of the analysis of advice-giving (cf. Sections 8.1 and 10.1). In addition, Weisbach (2012: 255f) introduces the concept of 'feedback', which he regards as an explicit comment on aspects of the coachee's problems, his/her behaviour, or his/her ideas.

As to the functions of active listening, Weisbach makes the valid point that this activity comes with an accepting attitude. In other words, by repeating or interpreting the coachee's utterances in a tone of casualness, the coach conveys the message that everything the coachee has to say is appropriate in the given situation. This can be especially important when coachees discuss their emotions (Weisbach 2012: 60). Weisbach admits that sympathetic listening does not necessarily advance the conversation directly, but he argues that advice-seekers react to it by elaborating their narratives (Weisbach 2012: 35). In essence, Weisbach (2012: 52) emphasises the fundamental importance of active listening for the relational level of coaching conversations:

(...) the coach physically mirrors the emotions of another person in an attenuated form; in consequence, s/he feels these emotions themselves; and s/he can feel empathy with the other person. At the same time, s/he reflects this emotional experience back to the other person, who perceives the mirroring act as a signal of understanding.

To summarise this perspective, active listening is an integral part of the coaching and a central means of building rapport on the part of the coach. Note however that, characteristically, both Schreyögg and Weisbach focus on the coach, but not on the coachee as the source of feedback activities.

### 5.5.3 Feedback and related concepts in linguistic approaches

The study of different types of feedback is well-documented in the linguistic literature. For instance, Stenström (1994: 110) highlights the distinction between acknowledging a statement and agreeing with it. While she defines an acknowledgement as a “signal that B accepts what A said as a valid contribution to the conversation”, she describes an agreement as a signal that “indicates that B approves of what A means” (Stenström 1994: 111; also see Bercelli et al. 2008: 51). Moreover, she demonstrates that acknowledgements and agreements may be realised by the same forms (for example, *OK*, *all right*, and *right* may fulfil both functions).

Bublitz (1988; 2009) discusses hearer reactions in the context of supportive strategies. He distinguishes between six types of activities that confirm the contributions of fellow speakers. First, interactants may repeat elements of the other interlocutors' previous utterances. Second, they may evaluate the utterances (for instance by means of interjections such as *how absolutely awful*; Bublitz 2009: 16). Third, interlocutors may complete the previous utterances; fourth, they may supplement them; and fifth, they may paraphrase them. Furthermore, in a sixth scenario, interactants may confirm their fellow participants by objecting to utterances in which speakers evaluate themselves negatively (*A: I'm probably too old for it all to mend. B: rubbish you can only be about fifty*; Bublitz 2009: 281).

Evaluating in Bublitz' sense also emerges in politeness theory in the form of 'compliments'. Holmes (1995: 118) describes compliments as offering

(...) a positive critical evaluation of a selected aspect of the addressee's behaviour or appearance, or whatever, which in some contexts may carry some communicative weight.

There is also a wealth of literature in linguistics that is concerned with the systematics of evaluation as a wider phenomenon of attitudinal judgements. The most recent accounts tend to conceive of evaluation in multi-dimensional terms (Thompson and Hunston 2000; Bednarek 2006), employing dimensions such as COMPREHENSIBILITY, EMOTIVITY, EXPECTEDNESS, or IMPORTANCE (Bednarek 2006: 42). However, my use of evaluation both in the area of feedback and in the field of self-evaluation (cf. Section 13.1) will be restricted to a simple polarity between positive and negative assessments.<sup>30</sup>

Several frameworks that cover feedback activities are rooted in the conversation

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<sup>30</sup> Another different use of the term 'evaluation' occurs in Labov's (1972) narrative theory, in which an evaluation captures the point of a story. However, it will be shown that this use also is not relevant to my approach.



analysis of therapeutic discourse. Pawelczyk (2011: 74f) refers to Goodwin's (1986) concept of "backchannel cues or continuers", which are realised by forms like *yeah*, *right*, and *uh-huh*. She argues that backchannel cues do "supportive work in the interactional context(s) in which they occur". Continuers, on the other hand, "reaffirm the interlocutor's right to an extended (...) turn" (Pawelczyk 2011: 75).

A further crucial concept related to feedback activities is the notion of 'formulations'. Antaki (2008: 31) explains that Heritage and Watson (1979) coined the common use of this term for a statement of the form "*so-you're-saying-that-X*". Formulations necessarily delete parts of what they reflect, select others, and transform "the selected material into a (supposed) summary of what the previous speaker has said" (Antaki 2008: 31). Moreover, formulations may bring implicit meanings to light. Linguistic research has illuminated the importance of formulations in the therapeutic process, as they facilitate both the management of creating emotional affiliation (cf. Muntigl et al. 2013) and of steering the coaching process (cf. Antaki 2008). Yet the exact definition of the term varies in different approaches. Antaki (2008: 27) presents an array of formats therapists can employ to "display their grasp of (...) the client's account of their experiences", which can be placed on a cline of cooperativeness. While 'challenges and corrections' are the most combative response, 'reinterpretive statements' are considered less offensive, as they represent interpretations by the therapist. 'Extensions' are described as accounts that combine parts of what the client has actually said with new additions by the therapist. 'Formulations', on the other hand, merely reflect the client's own words (cf. Antaki 2008: 30). Thus, 'formulations' in Antaki's sense correspond with Schreyögg's paraphrasing activities, while 'reinterpretive statements' denote largely the same aspect as Schreyögg's verbalising activities.

In contrast, Bercelli et al. (2008: 46) conceive of formulations "as something that was implicitly meant by the client", while they define 'reinterpretations' "as something that, though grounded in what the client has said, is caught and expressed from the therapist's own perspective" (Bercelli et al. 2008: 47). In turn, a 'reformulation' in the sense of Muntigl et al. (2013) represents a formulation by a therapist taking up the formulation by a client. Furthermore, Peräkylä (2008: 101) highlights the specific meaning of 'interpretations' in a psychoanalytic sense: The idea of psychoanalysis is based on the idea that "to interpret means to make an unconscious phenomenon conscious". Therefore, the act of interpreting the patient's acts or utterances represents the actual centre of the therapeutic process.

## 5.5.4 Conclusion

In sum, this short account of the literature on different aspects of feedback has brought to light two points. First, feedback activities can be placed on a cline ranging from essentially

neutral to strongly evaluative signals. The phenomenon to which authors refer as ‘backchanneling’, ‘continuers’, ‘passive listening’, or ‘acknowledging’ merely displays the validity of the contribution of an interlocutor. On the other hand, it has been established that interactants may agree with contributions, reinforce them, or comment on them in positively evaluative ways (as well as reject them and evaluate them negatively; cf. Section 5.6 on resistance). Second, on a similar cline, a summary of the contribution of another interactant may simply repeat parts of the contribution, or it may add layers of interpretation to it. The fluidity of the concepts in this area is reflected in the wealth of terms such as ‘formulation’, ‘interpretation’, ‘reinterpretation’, ‘reformulation’, ‘verbalisation’, ‘mirroring’, ‘extension’, and so on.

In my approach to the analysis of feedback I will draw on several of the approaches, concepts, and terms introduced in this section, in particular the terms ‘backchanneling’, ‘mirroring’, ‘repeating’, ‘interpreting’, and ‘evaluating’. As none of the frameworks are entirely suited to the purposes of my study, selected concepts will be rearranged and redefined according to the data and following the interests of this research (cf. Section 9.1).

## **5.6 The analysis of advice**

### **5.6.1 Introduction**

Advice is a key intervention in business coaching conversations, and as the analyses in Chapter 9 will highlight, advice is also key to an understanding of the relational dynamics of coaching interactions. Since Labov and Fanshel’s (1977) work *Therapeutic Discourse*, the study of advice-giving genres has been well established in linguistics. However, while Labov and Fanshel mainly focused on therapeutic talk as a special case of conversation, research interests developed more and more towards the specific genres and practices which facilitate advice-giving activities themselves (Locher 2006: 21, 35). In this section, I will provide a brief account of relevant research on advice. In particular, I will discuss selected works that have established fundamental parameters for the analysis of advice. However, I will organise this section according to the parameters under discussion, rather than by the authors themselves who contributed to establishing them. Ultimately, I will summarise the review with respect to my own approach to advice.

### **5.6.2 Parameters of the analysis of advice**

The first relevant aspect of the discussion of advice is an inherent dilemma with which advisors are confronted in many contexts: While advice-seekers expect the help of advisors

in order to solve problems, and while they expect the advisors to enlighten them with regard to their problems, the 'ideal of nondirectiveness' is prevalent in many advice-giving contexts (cf. He 1994; Sarangi and Clarke 1992; Vehviläinen 1999, 2001; Locher 2006; Locher and Hoffmann 2006). This ideal of nondirectiveness is most relevant to the genre of business coaching conversations (cf. He 1994; Limberg and Locher 2012; Chapter 4). Vehviläinen (2001: 373) states:

Counseling entails an inherent contradiction: Clients should be 'empowered', their self-directedness increased, and their own experience treated as the relative starting point. At the same time, counseling often has other aims that contradict these ideals and put the professional in the position of an authority.

It has been demonstrated in many contexts that advisors may reconcile these contradicting requirements by means of mitigation advice, and by way of co-constructing advice together with the advice-seekers (cf. Heritage and Sefi 1992; Silverman et al. 1992; Locher 2006; Vehviläinen 2001).

In relation to mitigation strategies, a clear parallel with the mitigation of face-threatening acts can be made: In essence, complying with the ideal of nondirectiveness while realising advice represents a face-saving endeavour. Thus, unsurprisingly, the mitigating actions discussed in the context of advice are the same as those in the context of face work (cf. Section 5.3). This includes indirect construals by means of hedges, bushes, and shields (cf. Caffi 2005). Often speech acts realising advice are mitigated with respect to agency (cf. Locher 2006), or they are phrased in the form of conditionals in order to "display optionality" (Limberger and Locher 2012: 86).

Furthermore, on the discourse level of analysis, the co-construction of advice has been proven as a valid means to reduce the knowledge asymmetry between the interactants that advising contexts imply (cf. Heritage and Sefi 1992; Silverman et al. 1992; Vehviläinen 1999, 2001; Locher 2006; Angouri 2012). Heritage and Sefi (1992: 367) claim that advice sequences highlight "uncertainty about an appropriate course of action" on the side of the advisee, as well as a lack of "knowledge or competence concerning the issue at hand". For this reason, advice-giving is generally considered as an activity with a large face-aggravating potential (cf. Section 5.8; Brown and Levinson 1987; Locher and Hoffmann 2006).

Heritage and Sefi argue that advisors who realise a 'stepwise entry into advice-giving' may increase the chances that advice is received favourably. They observe that some advice-givers (in their case, nurses who advise young mothers) employ a 'step-by-step' procedure following the pattern 'initial inquiry' by the advisor – 'problem-indicative response' by the advisee – 'focusing inquiry into the problem' by the advisor – 'responsive detailing' by the advisee – 'advice giving' by the advisor (Heritage and Sefi 1992: 379). Thus, questions, but also feedback activities are regarded as a crucial means to realise stepwise entry (cf.

Section 5.4). Overall, stepwise entries manage to “establish the relevance of advice” in a “successive process”, they topicalise measures for the solution, they develop the “course of advice in a nonadversarial fashion” and they “are not managed in such a way as to determine clearly that the mother is ignorant or at fault” (Heritage and Sefi 1992: 380).

Silverman et al. (1992) support the finding that step-by-step sequences of advice-giving increase the chances that advisees will show uptake of the advice. Vehviläinen (2001: 392) establishes the fact that stepwise entry provides certain powers to the advisor: By ‘going second’, the advisor can access information by the advisee, and he/she can decide “when it is time to provide his or her own recommendation”. Moreover, stepwise entry is “used to create alignment” of advice with the advisee’s perspective (Vehviläinen 1999?: 258). In turn, advice that is not made relevant by grounding it in the advisee’s experience is prone to receive resistance (cf. Heritage and Sefi 1992; Silverman et al. 1992; Vehviläinen 1999, 2001). These issues are evidence of the fact that the acceptance of advice is dependent on the relationship between the interactants: If advisors manage to create a positive atmosphere and a trusting relationship, their advice is much more likely to be received well by the advisees (cf. Locher and Hoffmann 2006: 74).

A further important parameter concerning advice-giving is the question of whether it is solicited or unsolicited. In Heritage and Sefi’s (1992: 370) study, at times, advisees produce direct requests for advice. In doing so, they establish “the relevance of subsequent advice”, “the problem area for which advice is requested”, their own “uncertainty about some aspect of that problem area”, and the legitimacy of the following advice. However, advisors may also provide unsolicited advice, i.e. by self-selecting to give advice, thus “assuming” the role of the advice-giver, rather than having it “granted” (Locher 2006: 39; cf. Locher and Limberg 2012). However, it can be argued that the setting of the business coaching genre creates a context in which, principally, the right of advice-giving is tied to the role of the coach, although this role-related aspect does not in any way subtract the face-related needs of the advisees.

With regard to the advisees’ receptions of advice, Heritage and Sefi (1992: 391) introduce three different types: The term ‘marked acknowledgement’ refers to responses to advice “that acknowledge its character as advice and its informativeness”. Moreover, it implies “acceptance of the advice offered”. Heritage and Sefi claim that marked acknowledgement may include repetition of parts of advice, but that it is rare in their data. ‘Unmarked acknowledgement’, on the other hand, includes responses to advice “that avoid acknowledging it as informative and that avoid overtly accepting it.” The authors argue that unmarked acknowledgements may imply passive resistance (Heritage and Sefi 1992: 391). The third category, ‘assertion of knowledge or competence’ describes responses that “do not reject the advice to which they respond”, but represent instantiations of passive resistance

“and achieve this resistance by indicating that the advice is redundant” (Heritage and Sefi 1992: 391).

Vehviläinen (1999: 209) introduces a different approach to the analysis of advisees’ responses. She distinguishes between three different response types: First, advisees may accept the advice. Second, advisees may produce ‘minimal responses’, i.e. “responses which do not clearly perform acceptance nor rejection”. Third, advisees may display overt resistance against advice. Moreover, Vehviläinen (1999: 234ff) examines reactions to resistance: According to her study, advisors may “reactivate the problem at hand”, thus highlighting the relevance of the advice once more. Also, advisors may “pursue the advice-giving”, or they may “argue for the advice”. In any case, it is apparent that advice is typically negotiated over longer stretches of talk in oral conversations. As Angouri (2012: 120) remarks:

Advising however is not a static linear act involving a sender and recipient in passive roles. Negotiating issues/problems and finding common ground between the interlocutors (...), providing information or direction (...), reaching a common resolution and the take up/negotiation of advice are all interwoven in the same event.

This point leads to the practical issue of how instances of advice-giving can be delineated in linguistic analysis. Locher (2006) provides a framework in which she categorises instances of advice-giving according to their syntactic realisations (i.e. as questions, statements, imperatives, or conditionals). However, as Locher (2006) and Locher and Limberg (2012) argue, advice is not necessarily tied to specific linguistic forms, as there is no “single and universal pattern of how advice is realised” (Locher and Limberg 2012: 28). Vehviläinen (1999: 209) describes the problems with which analysts are faced:

Again, counting and categorizing cases is slightly difficult. Some advice sequences are very long and the same problem area is dealt with on several occasions. The student’s responses may change over the course of the sequence, so that overt resistance may turn into acceptance if the counsellor convinces the student, or acceptance may turn into minimal response if the counsellor ‘drags on’.

In essence, in order to identify advice, analysts must rely on the interactive process of negotiation: Ultimately, it is not linguistic markers, but the co-constructions and negotiations of the interactants that bring advice to light (cf. Limberg and Locher 2012).

### 5.6.3 Conclusion

The literature review on advice has revealed several relevant parameters for the analysis. First, the genre of business coachings, as with many other contexts of advice-giving, is confronted with a dilemma: While the 'ideal of nondirectiveness' holds that advisors should avoid influencing their advisees in directive ways, there is a general expectation of the advisor that he/she should somehow facilitate the success of the advising process.

Second, in order to manage this dilemma, as well as the potentially face-threatening character of asymmetrical advising scenarios, advisors mitigate their activities. On the propositional level and the speech act level of talk, indirectness strategies and other forms of mitigation downtone the display of superiority. Moreover, on the discourse level, advisors may create stepwise entry to advice by means of questions and feedback. Thus, they co-construct both the problems and the solutions with their advisees. Moreover, it has been shown that stepwise entry provides a position of power to the advisor, as he/she 'goes second'. Also, it contributes to the creation of supportive relationships, which are a precondition for successful advice-giving activities.

Third, advice can be solicited or unsolicited: At times, advisees ask for advice by means of direct request. In these cases, the advisees establish their problems as such, and they legitimise the ensuing advice. Unsolicited advice occurs without direct requests by the advisees. However, as the coaching genre itself activates a frame of advice-giving, unsolicited advice is at least partially legitimised by the role of the coach. Nevertheless, these role-related rights must be kept in balance with the face needs of the advisees.

The fourth parameter is related to the receptions of advice by the advisees. Two different categorisations of responses to advice have been presented, i.e. that of Heritage and Sefi (1992) and of Vehviläinen (1999). Both frameworks distinguish between different stages on a cline ranging from acceptance of advice to resistance against it. Moreover, Vehviläinen (1999) also examines reactions to resistance against advice.

The fifth parameter is concerned with matters of practical analysis: As advising is not tied to specific linguistic forms, and as it is a discursive activity that can develop over long sequences, the delineation of units tends to be problematic. Thus, analysts must consider the ensuing negotiations in the interaction in order to identify advice activities as such.

All of the parameters discussed in this section are relevant to my approach, though I will regularly combine the concepts and frameworks in new ways, and complement them with additional categories. I will present my approach to the analysis of advice in Section 10.1. For now, I will emphasise just two characteristics of my framework. First, I will concentrate on overarching sequences on the discourse level, rather than on speech acts. Second, I am interested in the links between advice-giving, identity co-construction, and the interactive

dynamics emerging between the participants (cf. Angouri 2012). In brief, my main interest is to analyse advice with respect to the question of how the interactants position themselves by participating in advice sequences and how their positionings are determined by and determine the relational dynamic that characterises the individual dyads.

## 5.7 The analysis of self-presentation and positioning

### 5.7.1. Introduction

In this section I will provide a brief summary of the concepts and tools which have inspired my approach to the analysis of self- and other-presentation and positioning. In the first section I will focus on general aspects of self- and other-presentation and positioning, as presented by several researchers. In particular, I will discuss Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy (2002), Culpeper (2001), and research in sociolinguistic identity theory and positioning theory. Following that, I will focus on the revealing function of metaphors in the context of self- and other-presentation. Then I will dedicate some discussion to the issue of self-evaluation and modulation. Lastly, I will summarise the discussion in light of my thesis.

### 5.7.2. General characteristics of self-presentation

The essential factors that pertain to self- and other-presentation are captured in several valuable approaches. For example, the German linguists Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy (2002: 215) provide a condensed overview of what they label ‘self-presentation’ (*Selbstdarstellung*). They define self-presentation as “all those aspects of linguistic and non-linguistic actions with which people present each other their personalities with respect to cultural, social, gender-related, and individual qualities”.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy quote Sandig’s (1986) distinction between consciously controllable and therefore intentional self-presentation on the one hand, and uncontrollable and therefore symptomatic self-presentation on the other. Furthermore, they demonstrate that self-presentation can be done explicitly or implicitly. According to this view, explicit self-presentations openly state *what* is supposed to be conveyed, while implicit self-presentations can be inferred from the *manner* in which interactants communicate (for instance, by means of conversational style, register,

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<sup>31</sup> Translation mine. The original German text is: “Unter Selbstdarstellung verstehen wir all diejenigen Aspekte sprachlichen und nicht-sprachlichen Handelns, mit denen Menschen im Gespräch einander ihre kulturellen, sozialen, geschlechtlichen und individuellen Persönlichkeitseigenschaften präsentieren.”

communicative strategies, topical choice, or narratives). In addition, Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy (2002: 216ff) claim that self-presentation is also realised by means of overarching communicative behaviour, such as consistent friendliness or the compliance with a particular role.

Moreover, Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy state that self-presentation and other-presentation are highly intertwined, because interlocutors design their self-presentations in relation to the hypotheses that they are constantly forming about other interactants. Thus, factors that influence self-presentations are the broader communicative setting, the transactional goals, and the degree of cooperativeness between the interactants (cf. Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy 2002: 219; 226). Altogether, self-presentation is described as a process of negotiation in which interactants “accept, support, problematise, undermine, or fight” the self-presentations of other interactants (Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy 2002: 229).

In a principally unrelated approach, which is designed to analyse characters in fictional drama, Culpeper (2001) arrives at similar conclusions with regard to self- and other-presentation, although he reserves the terms ‘self-presentation’ and ‘other-presentation’ for explicit character statements only (Culpeper 2001: 167; for an ensuing approach focusing on the construction of ‘expressive identities’ in fictional television shows, see Bednarek 2010). Thus, according to Culpeper, self- and other-presentation are realised by means of ‘explicit characterisation cues’. In contrast, he talks about ‘implicit characterisation cues’ as signals from which interactants have to “infer (via causal schemas, for example) character information from linguistic behaviour” (Culpeper 2001: 164).<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, Culpeper provides a comprehensive checklist of resources that can provide implicit cues. The list contains elements from the areas of conversational structure, conversational implicature, lexis, syntactic features, accent and dialect, verse and prose, paralinguistic features, visual features, and kinesic features (Culpeper 2001: 174-222).

Furthermore, Culpeper discusses the fact that characterisations, whether they are concerned with self or others, “are likely to be motivated by strategic reasons” (missing reference here). For this reason, Culpeper introduces the ‘discounting principle’, which holds that those aspects of a character-presentation that appear to be distorted by strategic factors should be discounted (cf. Culpeper 2001: 268). However, he remarks that, according to psychological research, human minds “are predisposed to take what someone says at face value.” (Culpeper 2011: 171). While this statement is certainly credible, it may be expanded even further: I established in Section 5.2 that the contradictive potential of self-knowledge, the predominance of implicit self-aspects, and the complex interplay of different self-motives makes it difficult to identify those elements of self-presentation which are ‘strategic’.

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<sup>32</sup> The third category, i.e. ‘authorial cues’, “where character information comes relatively directly from the author” is not relevant for naturally occurring interactions, so this term will not be discussed any further (Coupland 2001: 164).



Therefore, the discounting principle is likely more useful in conceptual terms than in terms of a practical framework.

An important source for my framework is positioning theory, as introduced in Section 5.3. It is compatible with the approaches discussed above in many respects: It operates with the concepts of ‘acts of identity’ (in the sociolinguistic tradition of LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985; cf. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 385) or ‘identity claims’ in the sense of ‘acts’ through which people create new definitions of who they are (De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg 2006: 3). Georgakopoulou (2010: 123; 127) distinguishes between ‘self-identity claims’ and ‘other-identity claims’, which convey personality traits with positive and negative attributes. Moreover, the difference between explicit and implicit (also ‘tacit’) identity claims is emphasised (cf. Van Langenhove and Harré 1999: 22). As De Fina (2007: 63) puts forth:

Another important point about identities is that they are not managed in a unique way: they can be conveyed, performed, hinted at, negotiated, openly proclaimed, etc. Identities are made relevant in context sometimes through open categorizations, but often implicitly through reference to social norms, schemas, and prejudices that are in some way attached to social roles and figures.

Moreover, positioning analysts also discuss the possibility for strategic, ‘machievellian’ self-presentation (Van Langenhove and Harré 1999: 22), as well as the analytic care which is required in the face of the constant processes of “negotiation and (re)fashioning” of context-specific positionings (cf. Georgakopoulou 2010). In essence, positioning theory holds that interactants must engage in constant positioning activities in order to accommodate their emerging identities to the contexts of the interactions (cf. De Fina 2007). In this respect, interlocutors may choose from the repertoire of their own personal ‘versions of selfhood’ and from a shared inventory of discursive means in order to navigate their working-selves through “inconsistencies, contradictions, moments of trouble and tension” (cf. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008).

Furthermore, I have established that positioning theory introduces three ‘identity dilemmas’ (cf. Bamberg 2008; Section 5.3). The third dilemma is particularly relevant to my approach. It describes the necessity to attribute more or less agency and therefore more or less responsibility to one’s actions. In essence, speakers must construe themselves either as being formed by the world as passive undergoers, or as forming the world as actors (cf. Bamberg 2008). Thus, Bamberg, De Fina, and Schiffrin (2011: 195) state:

Drawing from discursive repertoires to mark outcomes of actions as caused by volition, unintended accidents, or unwillingly tolerated reveals a horizon of subjective viewpoints and values – often implying moral and ethical standards that are overtly embraced or covertly implied.

As I will demonstrate, the aspect of agency is indispensable for the analysis of self-

presentation in coaching conversations, especially in the area of problem presentations and problem definitions (cf. Section 13.1).

A further important aspect of self- and other-presentation and positioning is concerned with the distinction between different domains of identity construction. Following social identity theory (cf. Simon 2004), Holmes (2006: 167) distinguishes between 'personal' identities on the one hand and 'social', or 'group' identities on the other:

Individual identity is thus conceived as a unique complex of interacting aspects of different group and personal identities. (...) The approach is a dynamic one, allowing for constant flux and interplay between different aspects of an individual's diverse social and personal identities in response to contextual influences.

Moreover, Holmes mentions 'professional identities', which may comprise features such as 'professional status', 'team solidarity', or 'authority responsibilities' (Holmes 2006: 176). Accordingly, the second identity dilemma in positioning theory is described as the requirement for interactants to present themselves in terms of sameness and difference in relation to others "as a way to navigate between uniqueness and a communal sense of belonging" (Bamberg, De Fina, and Schiffrin 2011: 177). This positioning can be realised more or less explicitly by means of alignment with or dissociation from groups or individuals (cf. Bamberg, De Fina, and Schiffrin 2011: 188). In sum, the distinction between different domains of identity construction is in line with the psychological findings about differing self-aspects and about social and individual identities (cf. Section 5.2).

### **5.7.3. The role of metaphors in self-presentation and positioning**

Metaphorical speech is a feature of self- and other-presentation and positioning that is not/does not seem to be highlighted in the approaches described above. Nevertheless, in cognitive linguistics it is clear that metaphors may serve as 'windows to the mind' (cf. Handl and Schmid 2011) in general and thus to concepts of self and other in particular. Since the cognitive turn in linguistics, metaphors are considered as underlying conceptual structures, rather than simply as embellishing rhetorical figures (cf. Handl and Schmid 2011).

Fundamentally, the cognitive theory of metaphor assumes that the "essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5). For instance, an expression such as *your claims are indefensible* is regarded as one of many linguistic manifestations of the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR (Kövecses 2002: 5). In this conceptual metaphor, WAR is the source domain which enlightens the more abstract target domain ARGUMENT by means of a mapping scope (cf.

Ungerer and Schmid 2006). As Schrauf and Schmid (2011: 224) argue, conceptual metaphors are highly influential to the ways in which people interact with the world: “A person who regards his body as a machine has a different view of physicalness than a person who regards his body as a home”<sup>33</sup>. Accordingly, Schröder (2011) explores the methodological use of metaphors in coaching sessions, arguing that metaphors help reveal implicit attitudes and subjective belief systems of the coachees. Overall, the illuminating character of metaphors as analytical concepts is well established in the literature. Therefore, I will include this feature in my approach to the analysis of self- and other-presentation and positioning.

#### 5.7.4. The linguistic analysis of self-evaluation

My approach to self-evaluation draws on three concepts: It is based in part on the psychological concept of self-evaluation (as described in Section 5.2), in another part on the definition of evaluation as a positive or negative assessment of interactants (as provided in Section 5.5), and in third part on the concept of modulation, which I will briefly discuss in this section.

The term ‘modulation’ refers to strategies with which speakers mitigate or reinforce the forces of their utterances (cf. Caffi 2007). While Caffi (2007) presents a refined framework of mitigating devices (featuring ‘bushes’, ‘hedges’, and ‘shields’), and while some researchers use the terms ‘attenuation’ and ‘downgrading’, many discourse analysts simply apply the terms ‘hedge’ and ‘hedging’ to all types of mitigation (for an overview see Schneider 2010). Holmes (1995: 74f) presents a broad range of mitigating devices; for instance modal verbs, fall-rise intonation, tag questions, “lexical items such as *perhaps* and *conceivably*”, “pragmatic particles such as *sort of* and *I think*”, and “paralinguistic signals such as pauses and vocal hesitations like *um* and *er*”. On the other hand, reinforcement can be realised by means of ‘boosting devices’. Holmes’ (1995: 77) compendium of reinforcing elements includes “prosodic features such as strong stress and high volume”, syntactic constructions, modal verbs like *must*, pragmatic particles like *of course*, “lexical items including swear words and modal adverbs, such as *incredibly*”, rhetorical devices like repetition, and paralinguistic signals such as pauses.

Modulation is well-studied in relation to face work and politeness (cf. Schneider 2010). Yet, in Section 13.1 a slightly different approach to the concept will be introduced. In essence, while the notion of face work is closely tied to the self-enhancement motive in particular, my analysis of self-evaluation will consider all three self-motives.

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<sup>33</sup> Translation mine. The original quote is: “Ein Mensch, der seinen Körper als Maschine betrachtet, hat eine andere Sichtweise zum Körperlichen als ein Mensch, der seinen Körper als Zuhause sieht.”

### **5.7.5. Conclusion**

Several researchers (in particular, Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy 2002; Coupland 2001; Holmes 2006; Georgakopoulou 2008; Bamberg 2008; and Bamberg, De Fina, and Schiffrin 2011) have contributed to the establishment of the fundamental aspects of self- and other-presentation and positioning. These contributions can be summarised as follows: First, self- and other-presentation can be realised explicitly or implicitly. In the latter case, positionings must be inferred from indexical clues. In part, interactants can produce strategically controlled acts of identity, but in actuality they have a limited degree of control over their positionings. Self- and other-presentation are interrelated phenomena in that each act of positioning has implications for all of the interactants, and positionings are constantly negotiated during interactions. Also, interlocutors must choose between more or less agentic self- and other-presentations; and they must position themselves in alignment to or in contrast with groups and individuals. Moreover, co-constructed identities activate self-aspects from different domains, such as the personal, the professional, or the social domain of the self.

In addition, I have demonstrated that metaphorical speech bears much explanatory potential with respect to self- and other-presentation and positioning: Since metaphorical expressions can be linked with underlying cognitive structures, the analysis of conceptual metaphors is rewarding in the context of self- and other-presentation. Lastly, I have taken up the notion of self-evaluation, establishing that the analysis of evaluative directions of positioning acts must be supported by an analysis of reinforcing and mitigating modulation devices. The concepts and tools discussed in this section will be taken up again in Section 13.1 in the presentation of my approach to self- and other-presentation and positioning.

## **5.8 Concepts and tools for the analysis of face-related sequences**

### **5.8.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will present further concepts and tools for the analysis of face-related sequences that are discussed in the literature. First, I will give a brief account of the different orientations of face work. In particular, I will discuss the concepts of face-enhancing, face-maintaining, face-saving, and face-aggravating behaviour, as well as face-repairs. In the next chapter, I will present a particular aspect of Goffman's concept of face work, i.e. his discussion of ritual interchanges (or, as I will refer to them, face-related sequences). I will

begin with Goffman's characterisation of negative and positive ritual interchanges. Following this, I will consider the crucial advancements concerning supportive interchanges by the German linguist Holly (1979). Lastly, I will evaluate all of the approaches with respect to my own methodology.

## 5.8.2 Orientations of face work

It is generally accepted in the field of face theory that face work (as discussed in Sections 5.1 and 5.3) can be analysed through different orientations. Goffman's initial version of the concept principally refers to face-enhancing (i.e. confirmative) communication. Also, he discusses the aggressive use of face work, i.e. face-damaging behaviour, which must be repaired by means of remedial sequences (cf. Goffman 1967: 24ff; see Section 5.8). Yet his basic assumption is that interlocutors work together in face-enhancing terms to keep the ritual order intact (cf. Goffman 1967: 77; cf. Section 5.1). In Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, on the other hand, there is an almost exclusive focus on face-saving behaviour in the sense of prevention of face-threats (cf. Locher 2006b). As I have established in Section 5.3, Brown and Levinson are interested in avoidance and mitigation strategies designed to downtone face-threatening behaviour.

In recent approaches to face work and relational work, a broad range of orientations is assumed by most researchers. Spencer-Oatey (2005: 96), who employs the term 'rapport management' for a concept similar to 'relational work' (cf. Locher 2006b; Section 5.3), mentions four different orientations: while 'rapport-enhancement' refers to "a desire to strengthen or enhance harmonious relations between the interlocutors", 'rapport-maintenance' implies the protection of these harmonious relations. The term 'rapport-neglect orientation' designates "a lack of concern or interest in the quality of relations", and a 'rapport-challenge orientation' is concerned with the "desire to challenge or impair harmonious relations".

The distinction between 'rapport-maintenance' and 'rapport-enhancement' corresponds to the discussion of politic behaviour in the discursive approach to politeness: According to Eelen (2001), Watts (2003), or Locher (2004) much of the behaviour interactants produce is politic in that it complies with the norms of a specific context. Thus, it is unmarked social behaviour "which goes unnoticed, a part of what Bourdieu (1990) calls our 'feel for the game'" (Locher and Watts 2008: 96). Polite behaviour, on the other hand, is regarded as positively marked with respect to social norms. In my approach I will take up the terms 'face-enhancing' and 'face-maintaining' orientations<sup>34</sup> in this sense of positively marked

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<sup>34</sup>Some researchers also use the label 'face-constituting' (cf. Terkourafi 2008; Arundale 2010) or 'face-supporting' behaviour (Miller 2013).

versus unmarked desirable social behaviour. Taking up these terms in this way will demonstrate how this theoretically plausible distinction will sustain when applied to the analysis of confirmative sequences in my coaching corpus (cf. Section 5.8).

With respect to the face-saving orientation, i.e. the avoidance or mitigation of face attacks before they occur, Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness strategies represents the seminal contribution to the exploration of mitigation on the speech act level. There is ample evidence for the multiple ways in which interactants employ mitigating devices in order to attenuate potential face-threats. Classic verbal mitigation devices include hedges, bushes, and shields (cf. Caffi 2007; also see Schneider 2010). Miller (2013: 80) discusses 'perturbations' such as "pauses, hesitations, repairs, laughter, and/or repetitions". As my focus is on the discourse level of talk, however, I will neglect such elements. Rather, I will search for mitigating strategies extending over longer sequences of talk. For instance, Miller (2013: 80) refers to the strategy of "embedding 'delicate' material within longer syntactic or interactional material, delaying its utterance and thereby neutralizing it".

Regarding the face-threatening (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 60), 'face-attacking' (cf. Culpeper 2011), 'face-damaging' (cf. Bousfield 2008), or 'face-aggravating' (cf. Locher and Bousfield 2008) orientation, I will draw on Spencer-Oatey's (2005: 106) definition:

I propose that people's claims to identity face are based on the positive social values that they associate with their various self-aspects. Some of their self-aspects are more important to their identity than others, and so sensitivities develop around these self-aspects. Then, if these self-aspects sensitivities are challenged or undermined, people may perceive a threat to their face (...).

While I will not make use of Spencer-Oatey's term 'identity face', I agree with her claim that face sensitivities revolve around the social evaluation of salient self-aspects.<sup>35</sup> Evidently, this is in line with the psychological self-enhancement motif (cf. Section 5.2).

Two important aspects of the face-attacking orientation are discussed in the rising field of impoliteness research. One aspect is the role of intentionality: Much debate is taking place in this area, but it seems to be widely agreed upon that the perceptions interactants hold about the intentions behind face-aggravating behaviour are crucial to their reactions (cf. Locher and Watts 2008). The other aspect is the role of context: Arguably, face-attacks are much more common in certain interaction types than in others; and in some cases, face-attacks are at least considered more appropriate than in others (Culpeper 2005: 64f) mentions "interaction between family members or among close friends, competitive forms of interaction such as political debate", and "rigidly hierarchised forms of interaction, e. g., in the

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<sup>35</sup> Some examples of self-aspects that may be touched by face-attacks are 'bodily features and control', 'possessions and belongings', 'performance/skills', 'social behavior', and 'verbal behavior' (Spencer-Oatey 2005: 104).

military services“). At the same time, Culpeper (2005: 67f) argues that “people can and do still take offense” despite recognising frames that sanction face-threats.

Thus, one goal of my analysis of face work is to estimate the degree to which face-threatening behaviour seems to be expectable in coaching conversations that resemble the conversations in my corpus (cf. Section 14.1). Moreover, the claim that there is a difference between face-maintaining and face-enhancing behaviour raises the question of whether there are also different degrees of severity concerning the face-aggravating orientation. Certainly, Brown and Levinson’s (1987: 76; cf. Section 5.3) rigid formula for the computation of the “weightiness of an FTA“ ( $W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$ ) is not a suitable approach within a dynamic, interactive framework (cf. Culpeper 2001). Yet, I will explore the question whether face-attacks in my corpus may be according to their severity.

### **5.8.3 Goffman’s approach to the analysis of ritual interchanges**

#### **5.8.3.1 Supportive interchanges after Goffman**

In undertaking the analysis of face-enhancing and face-maintaining orientations, I will draw on Goffman’s concept of ‘supportive interchanges’. I have established in Section 5.1 that Goffman defines supportive interchanges as ritual sequence types which aim at the “positive” (in Durkheim’s [1915: 37] sense) protection and confirmation of faces. Goffman claims that these sequences typically consist of two steps, i.e. the ritual offering and the ritual confirmation. In this context, Goffman mentions that supportive interchanges could be categorised with respect to two different aspects, which he refers to as “shared interpersonal theme” (Goffman 1971: 92) and as “specialized functions” (Goffman 1971: 93), respectively.

As far as the aspect of shared interpersonal theme is concerned, Goffman mentions only one example: “identificatory sympathy”. According to Goffman, identificatory sympathy refers to any face-related action that is based on an empathetic anticipation of the other interactant’s need for solidarity (Goffman 1971: 92). In the second subcategory, which is organised around the criterion of “specialized functions”, he mentions the interchange types “rituals of ratification” (Goffman 1971: 93) and “access rituals” (Goffman 1971: 107). Rituals of ratification, on the one hand, acknowledge change in an interactant’s status. According to Goffman, they serve as “reassurance displays” which “express that in fact things are what they were in spite of the acknowledged change” (Goffman 1971: 94). He gives several examples of rituals of ratification, e.g. congratulations at marriage, condolences at deaths, but also “the ribbing and joking that results when a youth appears among his friends wearing his skiing accident in a cast” (Goffman 1971: 94.). Access rituals are described as “ritual

displays that mark a change in degree of access” (Goffman 1971: 107). In other words, they comprise greetings, goodbyes, and social introductions. To summarize, Goffman mentions two categories (i.e. ‘shared interpersonal theme’ and ‘specialized functions’) with three subcategories of types of supportive interchanges, i.e. identificatory sympathy, rituals of ratification, and access rituals.

I would argue that while Goffman’s concepts are very inspiring, they do not constitute a linguistic approach to the analysis of ritual. A further weakness can be seen in the way that the definitions of the categories and subcategories partly overlap, for instance, in the case of the subcategory ‘identificatory sympathy’ and the category ‘shared interpersonal theme’. Further, it is not quite clear why Goffman would name a category with only one subcategory. Also, Goffman does not develop the two-step structure of the confirmative interchange any further. Therefore, I will turn to Holly’s (1979) useful advancements later in this section to complement the concept of supportive interchanges with a more genuinely linguistic perspective.

### **5.8.3.2 Remedial interchanges and afterburn sequences after Goffman**

As argued above (cf. Section 5.1), a remedial interchange is a device intended to restore the ritual balance after ritual incidents have occurred. In other words, remedial sequences are supposed to ‘repair’ offended faces. Goffman provides an example of a typical remedial sequence:

“Deed:           A trips over B.  
                  A: ‘Sorry.’  
                  B: ‘S’okay.”  
(Goffman 1971: 173)

In this example, the interactant A commits a ritual deed, or a ‘priming action’ when he/she trips over B, thereby invading his/her personal space. In consequence, A provides a remedy – in this case an apology – correcting the incident and thereby restoring the ritual balance that was disturbed by the deed. B, in turn, responds with a signal of relief, declaring the incident corrected and the ritual balance to be intact once again. The elements ‘remedy’ and ‘relief’ constitute a round<sup>36</sup> (cf. Figure 5.1):

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<sup>36</sup> Goffman holds that in some cases, remedial sequences may consist of an additional round (consisting of appreciation of the forgiveness by the offender; and minimalisation of the act of forgiveness by the offended interactant; cf. Goffman 1971: 173ff).



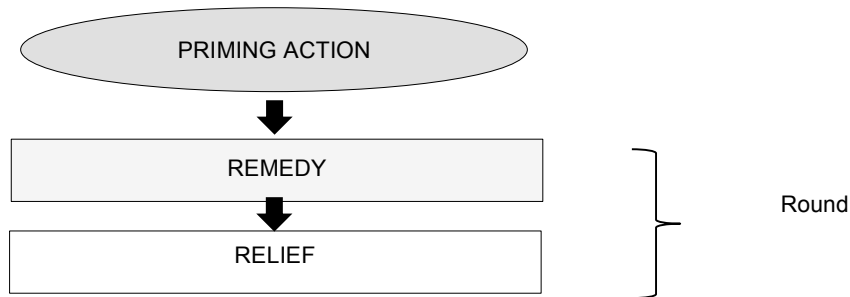


Figure 5.1: Remedial interchanges according to Goffman (1971: 173-177)

According to Goffman (1971: 151f), once the remedial sequence is completed, “usually, but not inevitably, [it] will leave the participants in a position to act as if the issue can be dropped.” Regarding the triggers of face-damaging incidents, Goffman pays much attention to instances of self-offence and self-repair. In this context he states “that the individual is concerned to manage not merely the offence he might give to others but also the defamation of himself that his current situation might produce” (Goffman 1971: 161).

If remedial sequences are initiated immediately after a ritual incident has occurred, afterburn sequences provide a special case: They occur as a remedy in secondary interactions. In fact, there are situations in which an interactant (the offended interactant or a bystanding observer) feels that the ritual balance has not yet been restored in the primary interaction. In this case he/she may bring up the topic once more, presenting it to a third party in a secondary conversation, in order for the remedial sequence to be completed and the offended image to be repaired (Goffman 1971: 187). In principle, afterburn sequences follow the same patterns as do remedial sequences: The priming action is repeated; a remedy is provided, and relief is expressed; and occasionally, the two steps of ‘minimalisation’ and ‘appreciation’ may follow as well. It is only when the secondary interaction has delivered a remedy for the offence in the primary interaction that the ritual balance is restored to order.

#### 5.8.4 Holly’s approach to the analysis of supportive interchanges

In 1979 the German linguist Werner Holly completed a thesis entitled *Imagearbeit in Gesprächen. Zur linguistischen Beschreibung des Beziehungsaspekts*, of which the English translation is *Image work in conversations: The linguistic description of the relational aspect*. In this research, Holly advances Goffman’s essays on face, image, and ritual interchanges from a linguistic point of view. Holly works with a mixed corpus of empirical data, and provides a very impressive early approach to the systematic, linguistic analysis of face work in interactions. I will briefly outline Holly’s advancement of Goffman’s outlines in the area of

ritual interchanges. In particular, I will focus on his classification system of supportive interchanges. As Holly's interpretation of remedial interchanges is rather similar to Goffman's approach, I will not delve into this aspect of his work any further in this discussion.

Holly (1979) develops his book under the influence of two dominant paradigms, i.e. Speech Act Theory and Conversation Analysis. His approach is an original attempt to organise Goffman's ideas on ritual communication into a coherent system, and to apply it to the analysis of natural conversations. He begins by providing a more precise explanation of what Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967) call the "relational aspect" of communication (as opposed to the aspect of content). According to Holly (1979: 19f), speech acts are complex with respect to relational meanings; he describes "layers of speech acts" (*Sprechaktschichten*).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, he holds that one of these layers is constituted by ritual interchanges and image work, i.e. activities that ensure the mutual affirmation of interactants as respected individuals (Holly 1979: 23). Holly also demonstrates that all aspects of relational work are closely interconnected, which accounts for why it is impossible to describe ritual interchanges in isolation (Holly 1979: 25). In this respect, Holly avoids the trap in which Brown and Levinson (1987) seem to have been caught – he does not translate Goffman's concepts into context-free analyses of single speech acts, but he concentrates on the discourse level of communication.

After discussing the status of ritual interchanges with respect to relational work, Holly goes on to develop his own interpretation of ritual interchanges after Goffman, which he then applies to a small corpus of recorded conversations. This corpus contains conversations gathered mainly from TV or radio talk shows, from academic contexts (e.g. a linguistic exam, and conversations recorded in class), and from a self-awareness group. In partial analogy with Goffman (1971), Holly (1979: 51f) mentions four types of supportive interchanges, which he generally refers to as confirmative 'sequences' (*Sequenzen*):

- a) Ritualisation of identificatory sympathy
- b) Ritual offerings
- c) Rituals of ratification
- d) Access rituals

While it appears that Goffman uses the term 'ritual offerings' as a synonym of 'confirmative interchanges' and, simultaneously, as a label for the first step of a confirmative interchange (cf. Goffman 1971: 93), Holly interprets Goffman's somewhat ambiguous description differently. He treats 'ritual offerings' as constituting a subcategory in their own right, using

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<sup>37</sup> The other three layers are described in terms of the elementary illocution (which indicates how the hearer is supposed to understand the proposition), turn taking (which provides the microsocial context), and role taking (which constitutes the macrosocial context) (Holly 1979: 22f).

the label for examples such as POLITE OFFERS, INVITATIONS, WELCOMING and INTRODUCING. In Holly's system there is a strong overlap between the categories of 'identificatory sympathy' and 'ritual offerings'; for this reason I will subsume the latter category under the former in my own approach (cf. Section 14.1).

In addition, Holly elaborates the two-step structure of supportive interchanges by means of prototypical activity types that are employed as initiations and acknowledgements respectively (cf. Table 5.3). Holly (1979: 50) attributes the couples OPENING – CONFIRMATION and CLOSURE – CONFIRMATION to Schegloff (1968) and Sacks and Schegloff (1973), but he mainly designates couples of activity types on the basis of his own corpus analyses. His system follows a rather clear-cut logic: The first set of rows in Table 4.8.1 lists confirmative sequences of the type (a) (ritualisation of identificatory sympathy); and it is concerned with those interchanges which are directed at the initiating interactant's image. The prototypical action type couples that Holly mentions in this context are SEEKING INTEREST – SHOWING INTEREST, SEEKING INFORMATION – PROVIDING INFORMATION, and SELF-PRAISE – AGREEMENT/CONFIRMATION.

The next set of rows in the table also contains confirmative interchanges of the type (a), but the prototypical action type couples enumerated here are concerned with those interchanges directed at the responding interactant's image: SHOWING INTEREST – THANKS/AGREEMENT, ASKING QUESTIONS AS EVIDENCE OF INTEREST – THANKS/ANSWERING QUESTIONS, and COMPLIMENT, PRAISE – THANKS/AGREEMENT; THANKS/MITIGATION; THANKS/DEFLECTION; THANKS/RECIPROCATION; or THANKS/POLITE RENUNCIATION.

The following sets of rows provide similar examples with respect to the other three types of ritual interchanges, though it must be noted that Holly does not name any examples for ritual offerings directed at the initiating interactant's image.

As can be seen from the last example, for some types of supportive interchanges Holly provides a wide range of possible responses. However, the variants of confirmative responses have in common their ratifying function: It is only when the second move, i.e. the confirmative response, is done that the first confirming move is accepted as a valid ritual act. Also, Holly emphasises the fact that most of the patterns he presents do not only have a ritual function, but also an instrumental one. For instance, while an introduction of the interactant A to the interactant B is a ritual move, at the same time it fulfils the primary purpose of providing information about interactant A to interactant B (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2005). Thus, according to Holly (1979: 51), the distinction between ritual and instrumental functions of interchanges is analytical rather than empirical in nature.

However, Holly claims that not all confirmative moves are ratified with other confirmative moves.

Type	INITIATION	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
<b>a) Ritualisation of identificatory sympathy</b>		
(a - I) (= Type a - directed to the initiating interactant)	SEEKING INTEREST	SHOWING INTEREST
	SEEKING INFORMATION	PROVIDING INFORMATION
	SELF-PRAISE etc.	AGREEMENT/CONFIRMATION
(a - R) (= Type a - directed to the responding interactant)	SHOWING INTEREST	THANKS/AGREEMENT
	ASKING QUESTIONS AS EVIDENCE OF INTEREST	THANKS/ANSWERING QUESTIONS
	COMPLIMENT, PRAISE, etc.	THANKS/AGREEMENT; THANKS/MITIGATION; THANKS/DEFLECTION; THANKS/RECIPROCATATION; THANKS/POLITE RENUNCIATION
<b>b) Ritual offerings</b>		
(b - R) (= Type b - directed to the responding interactant)	POLITE OFFER	THANKS/ACCEPTANCE
	INVITATION	THANKS/POLITE DECLINE
	WELCOMING	THANKS
	INTRODUCING	APPRECIATING (with respect to third parties)
<b>c) Rituals of ratification</b>		
(c - I) (= Type c - directed to the initiating interactant)	NOTIFICATION (of change)	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT; APPRECIATION; AGREEMENT; EXPRESSION OF UNDERSTANDING; CONGRATULATION; EXPRESSION OF AMAZEMENT; EXPRESSION OF CONDOLENCES
(c - R) (= Type c - directed to the responding interactant)	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT; APPRECIATION; AGREEMENT; CONGRATULATIONS; EXPRESSION OF CONDOLENCES	THANKS/MITIGATION, etc.
<b>d) Access rituals</b>		
(d - I/R) (= Type d - directed to the initiating and the responding interactant)	GREETING	GREETING
	SAYING GOODBYE	SAYING GOODBYE
	OPENING	CONFIRMATION
	POSSIBLE PRE-CLOSING	ACCEPTANCE/DECLINE
	CLOSURE	CONFIRMATION

Table 5.3: Compilation of the four types of confirmative ritual interchanges and a selection of typical action types exemplifying them; Holly 1979: 51f; translation and explanations in the left column mine

For instance, he argues that compliments are often followed by instances of self-criticism (*SELBSTKRITIK*) or by downtoning reactions (*ABSCHWÄCHUNG*), which are based on the ritual requirement of modesty (Holly 1979: 78). Also, he remarks that interactants may feel the need to attenuate overly positive self-presentations of their fellow interactants. I will return to this important phenomenon in the contexts of the analysis of positive feedback (cf. Chapter 9), self-evaluative clusters (cf. Chapter 13), and face work (cf. Chapter 14). All in all, Holly's approach to the analysis of confirmative sequences offers a useful analytical tool for linguistic research on face-enhancing sequences.

### 5.8.5 Conclusion

To summarise, I have described in this section different concepts of orientations of face work in the literature. In this context I have discussed the claim that has been made, for instance, by Spencer-Oatey (2005) and by the proponents of the discursive view of politeness (among others) (cf. Eelen 2001; Watts 2004; Locher 2004), that face-enhancing communicative behaviour may be marked or unmarked with respect to a particular context. Thus, I will put to the test notions of face-enhancing and face-maintaining behaviour as two versions of confirmative behaviour – the former positively marked and the latter socially unmarked. Face-saving behaviour is defined as the use of strategies for avoiding or mitigating face-threats. This issue has been primarily explored on the speech act level (notably in the form of Brown and Levinson's [1987] mitigation strategies), but I will focus on face-saving behaviour on the discourse level. Moreover, I will explore face-threatening, or face-damaging, behaviour, which Spencer-Oatey (2005) has described in relation to sensitivities tied to self-aspects. In particular, it is my aim to make an assessment of the degree of (in)appropriateness of face-attacks in conversations resembling those in my corpus. Furthermore, I will pursue the question as to whether the face-attacks in my corpus may be categorised according to different degrees of severity.

In the next chapter I will concentrate on Goffman's work on ritual interchanges. As I have argued above, Goffman deserves much credit for the fact that he has opened up the field of 'ritual interchanges' by means of essayistic reasoning. His observations are astute both with respect to the pair structure of confirmative sequences and to the potentially more complex structure of remedial sequences. However, as I have established above, his approach to supportive interchanges does not provide a practical framework for the linguistic analysis. Goffman's work on remedial interchanges, on the other hand, represents a good starting point for the purposes of my study (cf. Section 14.1).

Holly (1979) makes a valuable contribution to the analysis of confirmative sequences (in his own and in Goffman's terminology: 'supportive interchanges') by transferring elements

of Goffman's conceptual outlines into a systematic account suitable for linguistic analysis. Holly has provided the fundamental ground rules as to how confirmative sequences may be analysed and categorised in the context of spoken interactions. Many of his assumptions are unexpectedly close to what has been commonly understood in linguistics for only a few years: He emphasises the interactive, dialogic character of face-related interactions; he concentrates not only on speech acts, but also on sequences; and he chooses an empirical approach, analysing natural conversations (cf. Section 5.3).

As mentioned above, I will employ a modified version of Holly's approach in my analysis of face work (cf. Chapter 14). In this context I will make some systematic alterations that seem more suitable for my data (cf. Section 14.1) Ultimately, I will present an overview on face-related sequence types, as emerging from my corpus of coaching interactions.

## **5.9 The analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics**

### **5.9.1 Introduction**

As established in Section 5.3, state-of-the art linguistic approaches to identity construction, face work, and positioning hold that selves are not constructed by individuals in isolation, but that they are co-constructed in talk. This view can be linked to approaches in coaching theory focusing on the specific relational dynamic which can evolve between interactants. In this section I will introduce a range of approaches that capture aspects of this dynamic. First I will discuss the analysis of interactive patterns in the area of systemic therapy and coaching. In particular, I will give a brief account of the visualisation of relational dynamics. Afterwards, the concept of psychological games from transaction analysis after Berne will be introduced. In my final conclusion I will evaluate these approaches with respect to the purposes of my analysis.

### **5.9.2 The concept of circular interaction structures in systemic therapy and coaching**

The systemic approach to therapy and coaching has been increasingly influential in Central Europe in the last two decades (cf. Königswieser 2011). The intellectual sources of this paradigm are, for instance, "Cybernetics, Information Theory, Communication Theory, Game Theory, General Systems Theory, Chaos Theory and Radical Constructivism" (von Schlippe

and Schweitzer 2003: 12). According to the systemic view of therapy and coaching, advisory communication should focus on the social systems of which an advisee is part, rather than on intrapsychological problems. Social systems, in turn, are formed by persons who communicate with each other and who continuously interpret these communications as part of their subjective perceptions of reality (cf. Bateson 1972).

A seminal work on which systemic approaches draw in this regard is Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson's title *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (1967). Famously, Watzlawick et al. (1967) interpret the relational dynamic between the characters Martha and George in the play *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf* by Edward Albee. As the authors argue, Martha and George have co-constructed an interactional dynamic that is characterised by enmity and the shared wish to outlive the other participant. Yet Watzlawick et al. (1967: 148) also claim:

(...) in its more general aspects, it appears to be collaborative conflict, or conflictive collaboration: there may be some "upper limit" to their escalation, and there are shared rules, as already implied, on how the game is played.

Thus, George and Martha participate in a dyadic social system constituted by stable interactive patterns reinforced by means of feedback loops. A notable aspect of Watzlawick et al.'s approach is their suggestion that the individual communicative patterns displayed by the participants cannot be understood in isolation from the overarching interactional structure in which they emerged. Nevertheless, Watzlawick et al. argue that from the perspective of the individuals, interactional patterns are not perceived as circular, but as linear in the sense that the other interactant is considered as having initiated a pattern, "whereas the individual concerned conceives of himself only as reacting to, but not as provoking, those attitudes" (Watzlawick et al. 1967: 99).

Up to the time at which this thesis was written, the circular view of interactional patterns represents a cornerstone of the systemic theory of therapy and coaching. König and Volmer (2000: 202-210) summarise the characteristics of interactional structures as follows:

- (1) Interactional structures are recurring behavioral patterns of the participants.
- (2) Interactional structures emerge on the basis of subjective interpretations of the participants: The other participant's behaviour is interpreted negatively; one's own behaviour is interpreted as an reaction to the other participant's behaviour.
- (3) Interactional structures are influenced by rules.
- (4) Interactional structures do not have an actual cause, but they emerge in the course of feedback processes within social systems.
- (5) Dysfunctional interactional structures obstruct the development of social systems.

Naturally, a perspective influenced by the goals of therapy and coaching tends to focus on pathological and problematic aspects of interactional patterns, as patients and clients enter advisory settings in order to solve problems. In consequence to this view, a vital part of communicative analyses within systemic therapy and coaching revolve around the question of how dysfunctional interactional structures may be altered into more viable ones. For instance, König and Volmer (2000: 210ff) mention the options of reframing interpretations, creating distance, avoiding to repeat solutions, and metacommunication.

In line with the concept of interactional structures, Schulz von Thun (1989b) introduces eight 'styles of personality and relationships': First, the needy-dependent style, second, the helping style, third, the self-less style, fourth, the aggressive-devaluating style, fifth, the overly assertive style, sixth, the dominating-controlling style, seventh, the distanced style, and eighth, the talkative-dramatising style.<sup>38</sup> According to Schulz von Thun, interactants with complementary communicative styles may enter into dysfunctional interactional structures which represent vicious circles. For instance, figure 5.2 depicts the vicious circle that may emerge between an interactant adhering to a needy-dependent style (A) and an interactant following a distanced style (B). As A feels miserable and unloved he/she behaves accordingly, appealing to B that he/she should come to help. B, however, feels disturbed and is afraid he/she might become exhausted. Thus, he/she behaves accordingly and distances himself/herself from A, which further reinforces the vicious circle.

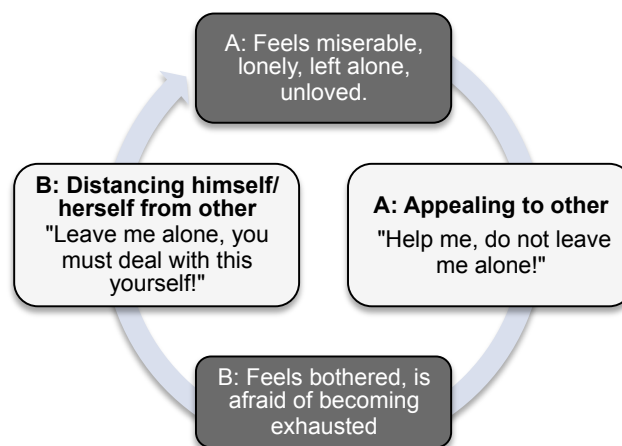


Figure 5.2: Vicious circle between needy-dependent style and distanced style (cf. Schulz von Thun 1989b: 69; translations mine)

A further insight which is particularly relevant to this thesis is concerned with the fact that dysfunctional interactional patterns may not merely be talked about in therapy or coaching

<sup>38</sup> A related influential categorisation of communicative patterns is Satir's (1972) distinction between 'placating', 'blaming', 'computing', and 'distracting' styles, all of which are described as coping reactions to feelings of low self-worth.



sessions, but they may also emerge between the advisors and the advisees themselves. Following De Shazer (1985), von Schlippe and Schweitzer (2003: 37) relate this phenomenon to three different types of 'contractual offers' on the part of the advisees: Some advisees present themselves as 'visitors', who do not actually have explicit problems, and who do not really authorise the advisee to initiate change: "In this case, the interactions merely exchange compliments and positive interpretations of previous solutions, but no therapy and no tasks are offered". The second category of contractual offer is made by 'complainants'. While this type of advisee discusses problems, he/she expects that the solutions should be provided by others, whereas he/she is not willing to change anything about his/her own behaviour. Only the third type of contractual offer allows for a successful solution-finding process: 'Customers' do discuss problems, but they are also willing to make an active contribution to alter them. Thus, they are willing to commit themselves to a 'contract of change'.

In contrast, if therapy or coaching interactions are conducted in a setting in which no actual contract of change exists, interactional structures in advisory systems may turn into dysfunctional patterns, such as, for example:

- The advisor makes suggestions; the client rejects them with the phrase "yes-but".
- The advisor is attacked and defends himself/herself.
- The advisor introduces rules which are not observed  
(König and Volmer 2000: 220)

Thus, there is a common understanding in therapy and coaching literature that advisory talk can be conceived of on different levels: While interactions may display cooperative patterns at first sight (i.e. the client asks for help, and the therapist or coach provides advice), underlying motives may steer the process into circular interactional patterns that follow a completely different logic. In the following section, a particularly influential approach to the analysis of these dynamics, i.e. the concept of 'games' in transactional analysis will be introduced.

### **5.9.3 The concept of psychological games in Transactional Analysis**

Another influential approach to the analysis of interactions is the concept of 'psychological games' by Eric Berne (1964). He develops this approach in the context of Transactional Analysis, claiming that social interactants frequently play games:

A game is an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. Descriptively it is a recurring set of transactions, often repetitious, superficially plausible, with a concealed motivation; or, more colloquially, a series of moves with a snare, or “gimmick”.  
(Berne 1964: 48)

Berne provides an example for a typical game, which he calls ‘If It Weren’t For You’. In this game a woman uses her husband’s dominance as an excuse for her own passive lifestyle. Thus, she claims that she would participate in social activities and learn how to dance if only her husband let her. Yet, when her husband changes his attitude as a consequence of couple’s therapy, she realises that she is actually scared of social situations. For this reason, she used to play the game ‘If It Weren’t For You’ with her husband, who “was performing a very real service for her by forbidding her to do something she was deeply afraid of” (Berne 1964: 50).

The approach of transactional analysis presupposes the phenomenological existence of types of social games. It is the goal of a transactional analyst to identify and categorise games according to criteria such as ‘number of players’, ‘clinical types’ (e.g. ‘hysterical’, ‘obsessive-compulsive’, ‘paranoid’, ‘depressive’), or ‘zonal’ (e.g. ‘oral’, ‘anal’, ‘phallic’; Berne 1964: 62). This terminology clearly reveals the clinical and psychoanalytical roots of transactional analysis.

However, the notion of psychological games is highly pervasive in current coaching theory. Dehner (2009) transfers the concept into the context of coaching conversations, arguing that the analysis of psychological games can be key to the discussion of conflicts in coaching sessions and that games can also emerge between coaches and coachees. Dehner and Dehner (2013: 201) describe two classical games typically occurring in coaching settings. The ‘Yes-but’ game was already described in the previous section in the general context of dysfunctional interactional structures of coaching sessions (cf. König and Volmer 2000; Section 5.9). The so-called ‘drama triangle’ includes three roles, i.e. the ‘victim’, the ‘saviour’, and the ‘persecutor’ (cf. Figure 5.3):

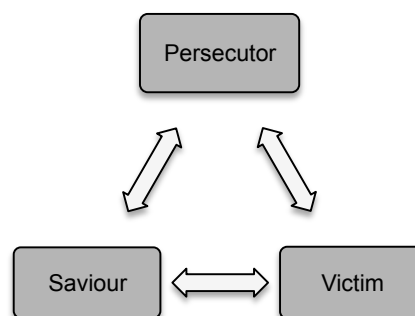


Figure 5.3: The drama triangle after Dehner (2009: 305)

As Dehner (2009: 305) puts it, these three roles suffice to produce plenty of drama within a psychological game: The persecutor is typically not present in the coaching session, but is construed by means of narratives by the coachee. The coachee presents himself/herself as a victim and simultaneously offers the role of the saviour to the coach. The concept of the drama triangle is highly reminiscent of Goffman's notion of 'afterburn sequences' (cf. Goffman 1967; Section 5.8). From the perspective of transactional theory, it could thus be argued that the completion of afterburn sequences by the coach for the purpose of face repair bears the possibility of maintaining a psychological game that ultimately prevents the coachee from change.

Therefore, König and Volmer (2000: 220) hold that coaches should attempt to identify and interrupt psychological games as early as possible by means of 'second-order solutions' based on a change of strategies and on metacommunication. Often methods of visualisation such as vicious circles, drama triangles, arrows symbolising conflicts, etc. are recommended in order to highlight the dynamic of communicative games to the coachee (cf. Figures 4.2, 4.3).

## 5.9.4 Conclusion

In this section several approaches were introduced that focus on interactional patterns emerging in relationships. Watzlawick et al. (1967) provide the seminal groundwork for the systemic view of advisory interactions: Their analysis of the dyad 'Martha-George' in the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* reveals the mutual interdependence of relational patterns emerging by means of continuous feedback loops. According to König and Volmer (2000), despite the circular character of interactional structures, social actors commonly interpret their own contributions as reactions caused by the behaviour of other interactants. Generally, interactional structures discussed in the discourse of therapy and coaching represent dysfunctional patterns that prevent social systems from developing. Thus, advisory talk is regarded as a means of changing interactional structures.

Furthermore, it has been shown that Schulz von Thun (1989b) describes different styles of personality and relationship that may influence interactional patterns. He demonstrates that vicious circles of communication may emerge as a consequence of complementary communicative styles. The potential gap between the superficial goals and the underlying motives that interactants contribute to the dynamics of an advisory conversation is further illustrated by von Schlippe and Schweitzer's (2003) distinction between three types of contractual offers: While visitors do not present any problems, complainants do not authorise advisors to actually provide advice to them. Only those advisees belonging to the category of 'customers' are serious about entering a contract of change. In essence, it was established that dysfunctional interactional patterns may obstruct

coaching processes.

The concept of psychological games which is derived from transactional analysis provided an additional perspective on the dynamics emerging between interactants (cf. Berne 1964). Games were defined as stable interactive structures with fixed rules that are characterised by the fact that they predetermine the result of an interaction. Two games that are common in coachings were introduced, i.e. the 'Yes-but' game and the drama triangle (cf. Dehner 2009). Overall, the literature provided ample evidence for the fact that interactional patterns of relationship dynamics determine the course of coaching interactions to a decisive degree. The approaches presented in this section exclusively focused on the analysis of long-term relational patterns. Nevertheless, as will be illuminated in Chapter 16, interactional patterns of relational dynamics may be clearly detected and made explicit from a linguistic perspective in first-time interactions extending over only 60-90 minutes of coaching talk.

## 6. Conclusion to Part I

In this section the conclusions of the individual sections of the literature review will not be repeated, but rather, several common threads running through them will be highlighted. As became apparent in Section 5.1, Goffman's work with the stage metaphor and the ritual metaphor foreshadowed the turn to social constructionist views of the self, to communication, and to relationship creation in the social sciences. In particular, his focus on delicate social situations and on the care interactants take to preserve certain images of themselves and others is highly relevant to the understanding of relational dynamics in general, and to the relational dynamics of coaching interactions in particular.

The review of current psychological models of the self further revealed a perspective of situated interactions as the locus in which working-selves are negotiated and in which the self-organising knowledge structures that constitute self-concepts are regularly 'updated' with social return information. Further, the review of linguistic research both in the area of face work and politeness and in the area of the analysis of identity demonstrated how discourse analytical studies can make these negotiation processes explicit. Also, a strong tendency toward convergence came to light in the interdisciplinary discourse of this research area.

In the remaining sections, a panoramic view of several relevant research fields was opened up. It was demonstrated that all of the topics under discussion contribute to the analysis of relational dynamics in coaching conversations in their own way. Communicative activities related to the realisations of questions, feedback, and advice were identified as prototypical interventions not only in coaching discourse, but also in other advisory contexts. The literature review made clear that these intervention types do not only realise central transactional goals, but that their design is also highly consequential for the relational level of talk. This was described, for example, in relation to resistance-avoiding strategies of advice-giving. Also, the review of literature on feedback demonstrated that mirroring activities, along with other feedback types, are considered to be a major strategy for the co-creation of positive coaching relationships. In light of the predominance of these intervention types in coaching discourse, it became apparent that an analysis of relational patterns in coaching must be substantiated by an exploration of these (and potentially further) communicative elements.

Moreover, Sections 5.7 and 5.8 reviewed concrete approaches to the analysis of self- and other-presentation and face work, and introduced the core concepts and frameworks with regard to the exploration of identity construction and the relational level of talk. In a synthesised approach, tools that refer, for instance, to the analysis of agency, explicitness of self-presentation, metaphorical use, or confirmative sequences were collected from research disciplines and schools as different as discursive psychology and linguistic identity theory,

cognitive linguistics, and sociology in order to facilitate an encompassing analytical framework. Clearly, the kaleidoscopic image of this synthesis reflects the complexity of the research subject itself. Yet, the practical analyses will demonstrate that the framework is, in fact, most illuminating with respect to the relational dynamics in my coaching corpus.

In the last section of the literature review, several approaches to the analysis of relational dynamics were introduced. These approaches shared a common focus on the level of interactive systems as a whole, rather than focusing on the contributions made by individual interactants. It was argued that the systemic level of communication represents an analytical issue of a higher order, because interactive systems can only be understood in terms of the interrelation between all of their components. Nevertheless, it follows from the origin of concepts such as interactive systems, interactive structures, personality styles, or psychological games in non-linguistic contexts that the linguistic bases of interactive systems are only marginally explored. Therefore, one of the aims of this paper will be to build a bridge between two highly mature centres of academic research, i.e. the linguistically substantiated exploration of relational work and identity construction and the approaches to the analysis of interactive systems, as received in current coaching practice.

## **Part II: Analysis of questions, feedback, and advice**

## 7. Introduction to Part II

Part II of this thesis examines the linguistic realisation of prototypical coaching interventions, i.e. questions, feedback, and

. The crucial role of questions in advisory settings was established in Section 5.4. As will become apparent, questions can have multiple functions in coaching conversations, ranging from the elicitation of information to an empathetic exploration of the other interactant's views to open challenges (cf. Section 5.4). In order to grasp the role of questions in my data, Chapter 8 will provide a thorough characterisation of the use of questions in my corpus. The analyses will consider the perspectives of form and function of questions, but they will also focus on the different use of questions by coaches and coachees as well as on individual patterns by the interactants.

Moreover, the importance of feedback to the success of advisory talk, and coaching conversations in particular, was discussed in Section 5.4. In Chapter 9, an overview of the patterns of use of feedback will be explored with regard to the different roles of the coaches and the coachees. Furthermore, the feedback patterns by individual interactants will be considered. The same approach will be employed in relation to advice (cf. Chapter 10): Both the activities by the coaches (such as giving advice, or managing resistance) and the activities by the coachees (such as soliciting advice, confirming it, or displaying resistance against it) will be examined. Again, the individual patterns produced by the interactants will be of significant interest.

Ultimately, it will be explored how the prototypical coaching interventions concerning questions, feedback, and advice are interrelated with each other in the individual coachings. In other words, the analyses in Part II will facilitate individual profiles of the interactants' use of coaching intervention types, and it will also provide explanations as to the purposes for which the interactants display those very patterns. Also, a main focus will be on the question of how these interventions tie in with the coaching issues under discussion; the specific positionings the interactants co-construct; the development of the relational aspect of the interactions; and, above all, the interactive patterns of relational dynamics emerging in the individual conversations.

Methodologically, a mixed-method approach will be employed in order to gain a full picture of questions, feedback, and advice in my corpus: On the one hand, quantitative analyses offer a substantiated overview of the frequencies of patterns in the interactions. On the other hand, qualitative discourse analytical close readings make the contexts accessible in which the patterns occurred.



## 8. Questions

### 8.1 Introduction and methodology of the analysis of questions

#### 8.1.1 Introduction

In this section I will introduce my approach to the analysis of questions. As the literature review in Section 5.4 has demonstrated, the category of questions is potentially ambiguous and has to be carefully defined before it can be applied to empirical data. Thus I will first delineate the category of analysis by means of a set of guidelines. Second, I will introduce my framework for the analysis of questions according to form, and third, I will focus on the categorisation according to function. In the last section I will summarise the research questions which were addressed in the analysis.

#### 8.1.2 Definition of the category ‘questions’

Methodologically, my first step was to isolate all those sequences in my corpus that might contain questions. In order to further delineate the object of analysis, I defined it as follows: A question is a speech act employed in the prototypical sense of eliciting information from the other interactant (cf. Tsui 1992; Section 5.4). Thus, I do not necessarily equate questions with the interrogative sentence type. The following set of guidelines will define the scope of my analysis:

1. **Indirect speech acts** based on interrogative sentences are excluded from my analysis. While they make use of the interrogative sentence structure, which is prototypically associated with questions, the actual force of the speech acts serves other functions such as in the case of Excerpt 8.1 (coaching 4), a polite request:

##### Excerpt 8.1

1           C: *would you share something,*

2. Questions functioning as **backchanneling signals** are not included in the analysis, when they do not represent questions in the prototypical sense defined above. This may include tag questions like *do you* and discourse marker questions like *you know* (cf. Excerpt 8.2,

coaching 4):

**Excerpt 8.2**

- 1 *P: cause it was a completely-*
- 2 *C: yeah,*
- 3 *P: computer-run business you know,*
- 4 *C: (nodding) yea::h,*

**3. Rhetorical questions** are not treated as questions in my analysis because they do not serve the function of eliciting information either. Instead, they amplify statements (cf. Excerpt 8.3, coaching 5):

**Excerpt 8.3**

- 1 *O: the right person can open (-) the most amazing doors. and how did I end up getting to do the (-) A:LL of the (-) 'h interpreting and the B. (NAME) Congress? international congress? (-) I knew somebody.*

**4. Embedded questions** are not included in my framework because they are not directed to the other interactants in the conversation. They may, for instance, contain reports about questions and issues discussed in different conversations. Thus, embedded questions often contain quotations (cf. Excerpt 8.4, coaching 4):

**Excerpt 8.4**

- 1 *P: because one of the questions in the (-) in the ahm questionnaire we had*
- 2 *C: (nodding)*
- 3 *P: was (-) where do you see yourself in five years.*

**5. Elliptical questions** are treated as questions, if they can still be recognised as such (cf. Excerpt 8.5, coaching 2):

**Excerpt 8.5**

- 1 *C: (arranging the rocks) is the::re, is the:re ah well, someone in GERMANY, or uh a FRIEND, or ah-*
- 2 *B: no.*
- 3 *C: (arranging the rocks) [or yeah. you have no-]*
- 4 *B: [no.so I'd-] you know,*

The coach's question in line 1 is comparatively complete in grammatical terms. When the coachee Bobbie responds with a negation (line 2), the coach asks a question of confirmation:

*you have no-* (line 3). Due to an overlap with Bobbie, the coach does not finish his contribution. Nevertheless, it is evident from the word order, as well as from the context, that he asks another question. Both instances of questioning are treated as full questions in my framework of analysis.

6. A **repetition of a question** does not count as a full question in its own right if it occurs in one and the same turn (cf. Excerpt 8.6, coaching 3):

#### Excerpt 8.6

1        C: *what do you think, need the other guys now. T. (FIRST NAME) for example. (-)*  
           *what does [she need.]*

In Excerpt 8.6, Coach II asks a question, followed by a shorter specification of his initial question. In the first case he refers to the coachee's entire team, whereas in the second case he mentions a specific team member. As the specification of the question occurs in the same turn as the initial question, the two items are treated as unified.

Having delineated the broader category of questions in my data, I further distinguished between questions asked by the coaches and questions asked by the coachees, and by categorisations according to form and function respectively. The quantitative findings were complemented with qualitative findings derived from discourse analytical close readings of the individual coaching conversations in my corpus. The ultimate goal of the analysis was to acquire an overview of the patterns of use of questions both in my corpus at large and in the individual interactions.

### 8.1.3 Categorisation according to form

The first part of my quantitative framework for the analysis of questions is concerned with the forms questions take in my corpus. The literature review demonstrated that questions may be formally categorised according to different degrees of thoroughness (cf. Ungerer et al. 1994). In my analysis I am predominantly interested in the simple formal distinction that is relevant in coaching theory, i.e. the categorisation of instantiations of *wh*-questions, *yes/no*-questions, and alternative questions (cf. Table 8.1).

No.	Subcategory
1	<i>Wh</i> -questions
2	<i>Yes/no</i> -questions
3	Alternative questions

Table 8.1: Forms of questions

As was established in Section 5.4, *wh*-questions are questions that begin with an interrogative word (e.g. *who*, *whom*, *which*, *what*, *whose*, *where*, *how*; Cowan 2008:74). Excerpt 8.7 (coaching 1) represents a realisation of a *wh*-question initiated with the interrogative particle *what*:

#### Excerpt 8.7

1 C: *and so what's your goal for our meeting here.*

It was also highlighted in Section 5.4 that *wh*-questions are referred to as 'open questions' in the coaching literature (cf. Zumkeller 2010), because they allow a responding interactant to produce a more independent and elaborate answer than *yes/no*-questions. Therefore, *wh*-questions are associated with non-directive communication, and they are often promoted as a more suitable form of questions (cf. Fischer-Epe 2006).

In contrast, *yes/no*-questions are defined as polar questions which "may be answered with a simple *yes* or *no*". (Cowan 2008:61; cf. Excerpt 8.8, coaching 1):

#### Excerpt 8.8

- 1 C: *there is the: ah expertise in translating,*  
 2 K: *mhm,*  
 3 C: *uh I think German English,*  
 4 K: *yeah. yeah.*  
 5 C: *or other languages?*

The coach's question in line 1 represents an elliptical utterance. Evidently, it can be roughly paraphrased as *or do you speak any other languages?* In essence, the coachee will be prompted to answer the question with a *yes* or a *no*, although she may, of course, add an elaboration to her answer. In the coaching literature, *yes/no*-questions are also referred to as 'closed questions' (cf. Zumkeller 2010). Closed questions are claimed to steer the other interactant in a certain direction (to respond with either a *yes* or a *no*), which is the reason why they tend to be deemed less appropriate among proponents of non-directive communication. It will be shown how the coaches in my corpus realise the use of open and closed questions in practice.

The last formal category is concerned with alternative questions. As was argued in Section 5.4, alternative questions "offer a choice between at least two alternative answers. Each of the alternatives in the question is stressed." (Cowan 2008:75; cf. Section 5.4; cf. Excerpt 8.9, coaching 1).

**Excerpt 8.9**

1 K: *ok is it business coaching, personal coaching*

It was established in Section 5.4 that this question type introduces different scenarios which the other interactant must process in order to make a decision. In this way, alternative questions fulfil activating functions (cf. Schreyögg 2012). In my study I aim to learn more about the frequencies of alternative questions in coaching conversations, in particular, in comparison to *wh*-questions and *yes/no*-questions. In this context I am especially interested in the differences of the use of questions by the coaches and the coachees and in the links between the patterns of advice-giving and the general relational patterns in the individual conversations.

### 8.1.4 Categorisation according to function

The literature review demonstrated that it is imperative to analyse the functions of questions (cf. Tsui 1992; Stenström 1999; Section 5.4). In my analysis I have assembled a set of subcategories which include all the functions of questions that occur in my data (cf. Table 8.2). In the following I will explain them by means of examples from my corpus.

No.	Subcategory
1	Doing small talk/discussing practical issues
2	Negotiating setting
3	Negotiating goals of coaching
4	Exploring coachee's work situation
5	Exploring coachee's likes and wishes
6	Exploring coachee's resources
7	Exploring coachee's current state
8	Exploring potential scenario
9	Question of confirmation realising mirroring: interpreting activity
10	Question of elaboration
11	Question eliciting feedback
12	Question eliciting advice
13	Question realising challenge
14	Question about the coach
15	Others

Table 8.2: Functions of questions

#### 1. Doing small talk/discussing practical issues

This category contains questions realising small talk (e.g. about the weather, about the journey to and away from the session, etc.; cf. Holmes 2005). Also, it may deal with practical

issues, such as the technical equipment in the room, food and beverages, or the business cards the interactants hand out to each other (cf. Excerpt 8.10, coaching 4):

**Excerpt 8.10**

- 1        *P: (leaning to the side so as to disappear from the picture) [am I still on the camera?] from over here?*

## **2. Negotiating setting**

When the interactants intend to clarify the organisational setting of the coaching session, they often employ questions to do so (cf. Excerpt 8.11, coaching 1):

**Excerpt 8.11**

- 1        *K: how much time do we have left?*

## **3. Negotiating goals of coaching**

Discussions of the goal of the coaching session are typically initiated by means of questions (cf. Excerpt 8.12, coaching 1):

**Excerpt 8.12**

- 1        *C: and so what's your goal for our meeting here.*

## **4. Exploring work situation**

This category comprises all the questions that are designed to elicit information about the general work situation of the conversational partner (cf. Excerpt 8.13, coaching 5):

**Excerpt 8.13**

- 1        *C: [okay. so what] are you doing right (putting her hand up and down on the table several times) NOW, and what are you looking for.*

## **5. Exploring coachee's likes and wishes**

In the course of solution-finding processes, the coaches often employ questions to explore the coachees' job-related interests (cf. Excerpt 8.14, coaching 2):

**Excerpt 8.14**

- 1        *C: which job do you prefer?*

## **6. Exploring coachee's resources**

This category is concerned with questions directed at the other interactants' skills, their networks, their previous successes and other possible resources they can draw on (cf. Excerpt 8.15, coaching 1):

**Excerpt 8.15**

1 C: *mhm. (2s) what are you good in?*

**8. Exploring coachee's current state**

At times coaches switch the topic under discussion to the coachee's state by means of questions. Aspects of interest are the coachees' thoughts, their feelings, and their stances toward the coaching process (cf. Excerpt 8.16, coaching 3):

**Excerpt 8.16**

1 C: *[and] how do you feel at the moment about this.*

**8. Exploring potential scenario**

After having established the coachee's construction of her coaching issue, the interactants go on to look for suitable solutions. In this respect, questions may be used to explore potential scenarios (cf. Excerpt 8.17, coaching 2):

**Excerpt 8.17**

1 C: *the idea the m- m- (putting index finger and thumb together) LITTLE idea I have, what's (-) what will happen when you'll be the assistant?*

**9. Question of confirmation realising mirroring: interpreting activity**

Mirroring is a strategy that will be analysed at length in Chapter 9. Amongst others, mirroring may occur in the form of questions of confirmation. Questions in this subcategory may extend from paraphrases to free summaries of the contents of the coachee's contributions (cf. Section 8.1; Excerpt 8.18, coaching 4):

**Excerpt 8.18**

1 C: *yeah. you a:re (-) you were HIRED by the company right? you were not a freelancer in the past. you were hired by companies right?*

**10. Question of elaboration**

When an interactant wants more, or more specific, information about a particular subject, he/she may employ a question of elaboration (cf. Excerpt 8.19, coaching 4):

**Excerpt 8.19**

1 P: *there's the NGOs, the GOs, and then (-) industry.*  
2 C: *what kind of industry.*

### 11. Question eliciting feedback

Questions eliciting feedback are employed when interactants want to elicit information about the other interactants' reactions to their contributions (Excerpt 8.20, coaching 4):

#### Excerpt 8.20

1 C: *does that make sense to you?*

### 12. Question eliciting advice

Questions may also be used to ask for advice explicitly (cf. Excerpt 8.21, coaching 1):

#### Excerpt 8.21

1 K: *and 'h what if I switch 'em over (switching the first and the second), and this turns out to be a flop.*

### 13. Question realising challenge

Another way in which questions may be used in coaching conversations is to challenge an argument by another interactant (cf. Excerpt 8.22, coaching 5):

#### Excerpt 8.22

1 C: *okay. so why don't you do it, you can do it.*

### 14. Question about the coach

In some situations, questions may be concerned with the coach's person (cf. Excerpt 8.23, coaching 1):

#### Excerpt 8.23

1 K: *perfect. what do you get out of (-) out of this.*

### 15. Others

The category 'others' comprises a range of different question types, i.e: 'Ensuring common understanding': These questions are concerned with the clarification of language problems or acoustic problems. 'General questions (as preparation for advice)' are similar to quiz questions designed to elicit knowledge about a subject. 'Offering information on him/herself' refers to cases in which an interactant clears up whether the other interactant wants more information about him/herself.

Before I conducted the main study, I tested the categories by means of a pilot study.



## 8.1.5 Conclusion and research questions

To summarise, in my study of the use of questions in my corpus I addressed the following research questions:

- Which forms and which functions of questions are the most frequent with respect to the coaches and the coachees?
- Are there any significant differences between the number and the kind of questions the coaches and the coachees ask?
- Which patterns specific to the coaching genre emerge in the analysis?
- Is the number and the kind of questions the coaches ask tied to their personal styles or to the respective interactions in which they participate?
- In what way are the specific patterns of the use of questions in the individual conversations tied to their interactive dynamics?

## 8.2 Results of the analysis of questions

### 8.2.1 Quantitative analysis of questions according to form

This section will provide an overview of the quantitative analysis of questions according to form in my corpus. Table 8.3 below lists the number of the different types of questions produced by the coaches and coachees. The scores rendered are normalised to occurrences per thousand words, hence items ptw. The right-most column of the table provides the arithmetic means of the normalised frequencies. The data of the individual speakers subsuming all questions are compared to the mean using the chi-square test. Chi-square scores and p-values are also given in the table (degrees of freedom = 1 in all cases).

The first and most obvious finding illustrated by Table 8.3 below is that the coaches (3.08 items ptw) ask far more questions than the coachees (1.12 items ptw). The numbers suggest that, on average, the coaches ask one question every two minutes, whereas the coachees ask one question every five minutes. This seems to be in line with two role-related aspects (cf. Section 4.4): First, it is the communicative task of the coach that he/she guide the conversation. Second, in order to work on the coachee's issues, the coaches need to gather information about the coachees' respective situations. Moreover, as discussed in Section 5.6, Vehviläinen (2012) highlights the fact that questions may also topicalise issues for advice, they may design advice, and they help make advice relevant to the advisee's perspective, thus preventing resistance against advice from occurring. These functions likely

account for the higher number of questions employed by the coaches.

Another important result of the analysis is that the numbers of questions employed in the individual coaching conversations vary significantly. This is true with regard to both the questions asked by the coaches and the questions asked by the coachees.

	Coaching 1 Coach I (15,352 words)		Coaching 2 Coach I (9,927 words)		Coaching 3 Coach II (15,979 words)		Coaching 4 Coach II (13,714 words)		Coaching 5 Coach III (11,008 words)		Ø
	Items	Items ptw	Items	Items ptw	Items	Items ptw	Items	Items ptw	Items	Items ptw	Average items per word count
Questions by coach in total	66	4.30 $\chi^2=8.312$ $p=0.004$	18	1.81 $\chi^2=6.634$ $p=0.01$	34	2.13 $\chi^2=7.006$ $p=0.008$	58	4.23 $\chi^2=6.342$ $p=0.012$	32	2.91 $\chi^2=0.252$ $p=0.616$	3.08
Wh- questions	39	2.54	7	0.71	21	1.31	28	2.04	20	1.82	1.68
Yes/no- questions	25	1.63	11	1.11	12	0.75	22	1.60	11	0.10	1.04
Alternative questions	2	0.13	0	0	1	0.06	8	0.58	1	0.09	0.17
Questions by coachee in total	32	2.08 $\chi^2=18.05$ $p<0.0001$	9	0.91 $\chi^2=0.365$ $p=0.546$	2	0.13 $\chi^2=18.026$ $p<0.0001$	8	0.58 $\chi^2=4.09$ $p=0.043$	21	1.91 $\chi^2=8.057$ $p=0.005$	1.12
Wh- questions	9	0.58	2	0.20	1	0.06	5	0.36	6	0.55	0.35
Yes/no- questions	22	1.43	6	0.60	1	0.06	3	0.22	13	1.18	0.70
Alternative questions	1	0.07	1	0.10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.03

Table 8.3: Quantitative analysis of questions according to form

In this context, it is remarkable that in coaching 1, Coach I holds the record for asking the most questions within a coaching conversation (4.30 items ptw), whereas in coaching 2 he produces the fewest questions within a coaching conversation (1.81 items ptw). Likewise, the question-related data by Coach II vary as well: In coaching 4 (4.23 items ptw) he asks about twice as many questions as in coaching 3 (2.13 items ptw). Accordingly, my data suggest that the number of questions a coach asks is not necessarily linked to his/her personal style, but to the respective interaction in which he/she participates.

The coachee who produces the highest rate of questions to a significant degree is Kate in coaching 1 (2.08 items ptw), followed by Olivia in coaching 5 (1.91 items ptw). As will be revealed, these high amplitudes are typical of both coaching 1 and of coaching 5. Both Kate and Olivia use and receive a high number of coaching-related interventions, although

Olivia's interventions are typically much less cooperative than Kate's. On the other hand, the coachee Rachel in coaching 3 asks by far the least amount of questions (0.13 items ptw; and two items in total), followed by the coachee Pauline in coaching 4 (0.58 items ptw; and eight items in total). Again, these results are typical of the respective conversational dynamics in the individual sessions, but the analyses in Section 8.2.3 will demonstrate that the low numbers in both conversations are linked to completely different interactive patterns.

Furthermore, one of the research questions introduced in Section 8.1 was the issue of whether *wh*-questions, or 'open questions' in coaching terminology, are as dominant in the coaching practice as the literature on coaching communication suggests. In fact, in four of the five coachings, the coaches produce more *wh*-questions (on average 1.68 items ptw) than *yes/no*-questions (on average 1.04 items ptw). This finding suggests that the recommendations from coaching theory are in fact realised by the coaches. However, the frequent use of *yes/no*-questions seems to indicate that closed questions play an important part as well. Further research and comparison with data from other genres of spoken interactions would be necessary to provide more evidence regarding this issue. Interestingly, the coachees use twice as many *yes/no*-questions (0.70 items ptw) than *wh*-questions (0.35 items ptw). This could be a result of the fact that the coachees are not influenced by the ideology that contends that open questions are preferable to closed questions. Alternatively, the finding could be linked to the different roles the coachees fulfil in the interaction.

The third formal category in Table 8.3, alternative questions, is comparatively rare in my corpus. A notable exception is coaching 4, in which Coach II employs a total of eight alternative questions (0.58 items ptw). In this session the coach makes a multitude of suggestions of solutions for the coachee Pauline. In eight instances he offers Pauline choices between different ideas by means of alternative questions. As the coachee is rather reluctant when it comes to the creative designing of potential scenarios, Coach II demonstrates to her how many options she has ahead of her. Thus, in accordance with claims in the coaching literature, the eight alternative questions in coaching 4 have an activating function, steering a rather passive coachee toward possible solutions (cf. Fischer-Epe 2006; Section 5.4).

## 8.2.2 Quantitative analysis of questions according to function

In part, the functions of questions employed by the coaches differ from those of the questions employed by the coachees. To account for this fact, I will present the results in two separate tables. Table 8.4 provides an overview of the functions of the questions asked by the coaches.

	Coaching 1 Coach I (15,352 words)		Coaching 2 Coach I (9,927 words)		Coaching 3 Coach II (15,979 words)		Coaching 4 Coach II (13,714 words)		Coaching 5 Coach III (11,008 words)		Ø
	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Average items per word count
Questions by coach in total	66	4.30  $\chi^2=$ 8.312 p=0.004	18	1.81  $\chi^2=$ 6.634 p=0.01	34	2.13  $\chi^2=$ 7.006 p=0.008	58	4.23  $\chi^2=$ 6.342 p=0.012	32	2.91  $\chi^2=$ 0.252 p=0.616	3.08
Doing small talk / discussing practical issues	2	0.13	1	0.10	2	0.13	0	0	0	0	0.07
Negotiating goals of coaching	1	0.07	0	0	0	0	2	0.15	2	0.18	0.08
Exploring coachee's work situation	14	0.91	2	0.20	1	0.06	5	0.36	2	0.18	0.34
Exploring coachee's likes and wishes	6	0.39	3	0.30	0	0	11	0.80	2	0.18	0.33
Exploring coachee's resources	3	0.20	3	0.30	2	0.13	3	0.22	4	0.36	0.24
Exploring coachee's current state	1	0.07	0	0	5	0.31	6	0.44	0	0	0.16
Exploring potential scenario	12	0.78	2	0.20	16	1.00	4	0.29	6	0.55	0.56
Question of confirmation	9	0.59	3	0.30	1	0.06	11	0.80	7	0.64	0.48
Question of elaboration	13	0.85	0	0	5	0.31	11	0.80	0	0	0.39
Question eliciting feedback	2	0.13	0	0	2	0.13	2	0.15	0	0	0.08
Question realising challenge	1	0.07	1	0.10	0	0	2	0.15	9	0.82	0.23
Others	2	0.13	3	0.30	0	0	1	0.07	0	0	0.1

Table 8.4: Quantitative overview of questions according to function: coaches

On average, the most frequent types are 'exploring potential scenario' (0.56 items ptw), 'question of confirmation' (0.48 items ptw), 'question of elaboration' (0.39 items ptw), 'exploring coachee's work situation (0.34 items ptw)', and 'exploring coachee's likes and wishes' (0.33 items ptw). These activities particularly serve to encourage the coachees to

open up, to tell their stories, and to develop their own ideas about potential solutions to their issues.

However, it is evident from the overview that the average numbers per se can be misleading, as most of the results in the categories of functions of questions are low in statistical terms. Moreover, there are strong differences not only between the numbers of questions employed by the coaches, but also between the functions that these questions fulfil. Some of the categories with the lowest average numbers are significant in one or two coaching conversations only, whereas they are marginal in others. For instance, 'exploring coachee's current state' is a question-related activity that is produced almost exclusively by Coach II (five items, or 0.31 items ptw, in coaching 3 and six items, or 0.44 items ptw in coaching 4). On the other hand, the category 'negotiating goals of coaching' occurs twice each in coaching 4 (0.15 items ptw) and coaching 5 (0.18 items ptw) and once in coaching 1 (0.07 items ptw), but it does not play any role in coaching 2 or coaching 3.

Yet, the analysis certainly provides insight into the types of questions that emerge in the coaching corpus, some of which appear to be genre-specific, whereas others are clearly pervasive in other genres of spoken interaction as well. For instance, the categories 'doing small talk/discussing practical issues', 'question of confirmation', 'question of elaboration', 'question eliciting feedback', and 'question realising challenge' are general categories that could emerge in many other contexts. They all fulfil functions related to the process level of conversations, except for the first category, which is defined by the content of talk.

Likewise, those categories that are characteristic of the genre of coaching conversations function to elicit relevant information on the content level: Questions serving the functions of 'negotiating goals of coaching', 'exploring coachee's work situation', 'exploring coachee's likes and wishes', 'exploring coachee's resources', 'exploring coachee's current state', and 'exploring potential scenario' all prepare the ground for solution finding processes.

On the part of the coachees, the quantitative analysis of questions according to function looks rather different (cf. Table 8.5): First of all, many question types are not employed by the coachees at all. In accordance with their specific roles, the coachees do not generally explore the coaches' work situation, their likes and wishes, their resources, or their current states. Neither do the coachees ask questions in order to explore potential scenarios on the part of the coaches' careers (with the exception of Olivia in coaching 5; cf. Sections 8.1.3; 14.3). A less self-evident aspect is the fact that the coachees never use questions to negotiate the goals of the coaching sessions. However, they ask questions in order to negotiate the setting, and to elicit advice.

Remarkably, the most common function of questions by the coachees is 'question eliciting advice' (0.28 items ptw). Further, sometimes the coachees safeguard mutual understanding by the function 'question eliciting feedback' (0.17 items ptw). Thus, while feedback and relational work seem to be mostly the coaches' domain, the coachees take responsibility in part for these areas as well. The category 'question about the coach' also corresponds with a high average number (0.20 items ptw), but it is apparent that these occurrences can solely be observed in coaching 1 and, above all, in coaching 5 (cf. Section 8.2.3).

	Coaching 1 Coachee Kate (15,352 words)		Coaching 2 Coachee Bobbie (9,927 words)		Coaching 3 Coachee Rachel (15,979 words)		Coaching 4 Coachee Pauline (13,714 words)		Coaching 5 Coachee Olivia (11,008 words)		Ø
	Items	Items per word count	Items	Items per word count	Items	Items per word count	Items	Items per word count	Items	Items per word count	Average items per word count
<b>Questions by coachee in total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2.08</b> $\chi^2=18.05$ $p<0.0001$	<b>9</b>	<b>0.91</b> $\chi^2=0.365$ $p=0.546$	<b>2</b>	<b>0.13</b> $\chi^2=18.026$ $p<0.0001$	<b>8</b>	<b>0.58</b> $\chi^2=4.09$ $p=0.043$	<b>21</b>	<b>1.91</b> $\chi^2=8.057$ $p=0.005$	<b>1.12</b>
Doing small talk / discussing practical issues	2	0.13	1	0.10	0	0	2	0.15	2	0.18	0.11
Negotiating setting	6	0.39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.08
Question of confirmation	8	0.52	1	0.10	0	0	3	0.22	0	0	0.17
Question of elaboration	1	0.07	0	0	1	0.06	2	0.15	0	0	0.06
Question eliciting feedback	3	0.20	2	0.20	0	0	0	0	5	0.45	0.17
Question eliciting advice	9	0.59	4	0.40	1	0.06	0	0	4	0.36	0.28
Question realising challenge	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.09	0.02
Question about the coach	3	0.20	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0.82	0.20
Others	0	0	1	0.10	0	0	1	0.07	0	0	0.03

Table 8.5: Quantitative overview of questions according to function: coachees

Categories that are employed both by the coaches and the coachees are 'doing small talk/discussing practical issues', 'question of confirmation', 'question of elaboration', 'question

eliciting feedback', and 'question realising challenge'.

As Chapters 9 and 10 will further highlight, the role of the advisees as facilitators of feedback and advice may be even more important than generally acknowledged in the linguistic literature on advisory talk (cf. Heritage and Sefi 1992; Vehviläinen 2012). Nevertheless, overall the coaches consistently ask more questions than the coachees, thus confirming their roles as leading the sessions.

While it is revealing to compare the quantitative data of the coaches and the coachees as well as the different coaching sessions, the numbers are even more enlightening in the contexts of the respective coaching sessions. Therefore, in the next section I will consider the individual coachings, interpreting their quantitative data within a background of their wider contexts and combining them with the results of the qualitative analyses.

### 8.2.3 The use of questions in the individual coachings

#### Coaching 1

Coaching 1 displays an unusually high number of questions (66 items = 4.30 items ptw). Coach I especially uses many questions to explore Kate's work situation (14 items = 0.91 items ptw), as illustrated in the following example:

#### Excerpt 8.24:

1        C: *(laughing) okay. so a::hm (-) how much uh (-) of spare time in the week do you normally have for working.*

Also, he uses 13 questions of elaboration (0.85 items ptw) in order to further encourage Kate's narration (e.g. *when are they good?* (00:17:33); *why?* (00:19:10); *[no why is it weird?]* (00:19:12)). Many of the questions used by Coach I in coaching 1 primarily serve to elicit information from the coachee. In 12 instances (0.78 items ptw) the coach explores potential scenarios; and in six instances (0.39 items ptw) he explores the coachee's likes and wishes. Three questions are directed at the coachee's resources (0.20 items ptw). These numbers reflect the topic of the coaching, which revolves around the coachee's ambivalent attitude toward the question of whether she should change her line of work or not. Not only does the coach prepare the ground for solutions by thoroughly exploring the current work situation, but he also employs plenty of questions to reflect on change scenarios.

The numbers in Table 8.5 demonstrate that Kate strongly contributes to these

interactive dynamics: With 32 items (2.08 items ptw) she employs by a significant degree the most questions of all the coachees in my corpus. In actuality, she uses far more questions than Coach I in coaching 2 (1.81 items ptw). In nine instances (0.59 items ptw) Kate asks questions eliciting advice, therefore prompting the coach to find solutions for her. Moreover, Kate employs eight questions of confirmation (0.52 items ptw), and six questions about the setting of the session (0.39 items ptw). Also, Kate asks three questions about the coach (0.20 items ptw; in particular, she wants to learn more about his company, and she wants to know why he does free coachings). This underlines the impression that she shows an interest in the mutual coaching relationship.

In sum, the patterns of questions in coaching 1 illustrate that Coach I presents himself as an active moderator in this session: He gathers a wealth of information, and he uses questions to steer the conversation toward the topic of change. The coachee Kate presents herself as a very receptive and responsive coachee, who further encourages the coach in his directive style by means of questions. However, the analyses concerning advice will show that despite her eagerness to cooperate, Kate also produces many resistance activities.

## Coaching 2

In coaching 2 the number of questions is comparatively low. Although the session is led by the same coach as in coaching 1, the interactive dynamics in coaching 2 are completely different. One obvious reason why the coach does not use a lot of questions is that the coachee Bobbie is forthcoming and keen to talk. Much in line with her self-presentation as an outgoing, sociable singer, she initiates her introduction of herself with a question to the coach: *well. uh (-) do you know anything (pointing towards her own chest) about me?* (00:01:38). When the coach denies this, Bobbie begins with her self-introduction. This example is quite characteristic of large portions of the session (cf. Table 8.5): Bobbie asks the coach questions eliciting advice in four instances; and she employs questions eliciting feedback twice. Her cooperativeness is ostensible, and it is the coach who points out several times that she is not really in need of much advice. In his opinion, Bobbie has done everything she needs to fulfil her task, i.e. to manage the application process for her dream job.

With a total number of 18 questions on the part of the coach (1.81 items ptw), this coaching does not feature questions prominently as a form of intervention. Instead, it will be demonstrated later that there is considerably stronger amplitude in the areas of feedback and advice (cf. Sections 9.2; 9.2).



## Coaching 3

Similarly to coaching 2, questions play a less prominent role in coaching 3 than in the other conversations in my corpus. The coachee Rachel asks merely two questions throughout the entire conversation (0.13 items ptw), and Coach II is second last in the ranking of questions with this session (2.13 items ptw). This may be due to the fact that like Bobbie in coaching 2, Rachel communicates eloquently, forthrightly explaining her issues in great detail. Thus, there does not appear to be much need for the coach to prompt her narrations by means of questions.

However, there are important exceptions to the coach's use of questions: He often employs questions of the category 'exploring potential scenario' (16 questions = 1.00 items ptw). This category is tied to the process of solution finding. In other words, Rachel is able to describe her problematic situation very articulately, but when it comes to potential solutions, the coach often challenges her to come up with different strategies from the ones she has used before. For example, in a long sequence Coach II keeps repeating and paraphrasing a question to the coachee (cf. Excerpts 8.25; 8.26):

### Excerpt 8.25

- 1 C: *what will you say about. (-) so you have three first sentences about the meeting.*

### Excerpt 8.26

- 1 C: *(nodding) mhm, but maybe some of these guys (-) u:hm, (-) feel insecure right NOW. (-) while observing, how J. (FIRST NAME) left the company.*

Prior to these questions, Rachel described her problems to the coach: As one of her team members resigned from her job, Rachel must replace this position as quickly as possible. Also, she feels the need to rebuild her own self-confidence as a leader. Rachel is now thinking about solutions for these problems, focusing on the question of how she should best replace the missing member in her team. To these statements, Coach II responds with questions exploring the scenario of the ensuing team meeting. After each repetition of the question, Rachel keeps struggling for answers, reflecting on the situation from different perspectives. She constructs potential scenarios of how she could communicate with her employees, but the coach keeps challenging her by shifting away from the task-oriented search for a new team member as well as from the issue of Rachel's shattered self-confidence. She gradually comes to accept that she should find a solution for a different issue first, i.e. she should concentrate on rebuilding the interpersonal relations in her team. Apparently, this development occurs without any agitation on the coachee's part – despite the fact that repetition of the same question could undoubtedly come across as imposing to

an experienced manager such as Rachel. The sinking intonation of the coach's questions seems to add to the accepting, non-threatening mode of the sequence as well as his careful backchanneling work (cf. Section 14.2). In a final step the coach makes a suggestion of his own, which the coachee appears amenable to receiving. Thus, the thoughtful use of questions about potential solutions appears to have prepared the ground for advice. This process is crucial to the course of coaching 3. The success of the coach's advice hinges on the repeated use of one and the same question. The coachee is brought into a process of reflection, during which she gradually opens up for embracing a new perspective on her issue (cf. Heritage and Sefi 1992; Section 5.6).

## Coaching 4

Coaching 4 displays the second highest rate of questions asked by a coach in my corpus. A simple explanation for this finding could be that coachee Pauline does not present herself as overly talkative by nature. Typically, she responds to the coach's questions precisely, and while she certainly displays strong opinions on many subjects, she does not necessarily express them without being prompted to do so. In consequence, her use of questions is low (eight questions = 0.58 items ptw).

One of the most common functions of questions by Coach II in this coaching is 'exploring coachee's likes and wishes', totaling 11 items (0.80 items ptw). This finding is plausible, because the coachee's preferred topic for the session is concerned with the direction of her career. Also, the coach employs 11 questions of elaboration (0.80 items ptw) and 11 questions of confirmation (0.80 items ptw). Thus, many of the coach's questions are designed to encourage Pauline's communication about herself as well as her creative solution-oriented resources (cf. Fischer-Epe 2006; cf. Section 5.4).

Furthermore, it was established in Section 8.2.1 that the use of questions focusing on the coachee's current state is characteristic of Coach II. The setting in coaching 4 is completely different from that in coaching 3 – Rachel positions herself as a communicative, successful manager, whereas Pauline positions herself as an independent-minded, task-oriented IT specialist (cf. Sections 13.4; 13.5). As it turns out, the coach's emphasis on the coachee's respective current state is useful in both cases. In coaching 4 in particular, the coach might have missed several aspects of resistance on Pauline's part, if not for his questions. In one instance the coach suggests that Pauline might go into accounting. She reacts by nodding and listening, and it is only when the coach asks her about her current state that she tells him that she is, in fact, firmly opposed to the idea of working in the area of accounting. The coach immediately gives up on his suggestion, and he manages to break Pauline's indignation by explaining his trains of thought and by laughing (00:57:20). Pauline

responds with a smile (00:57:23). The coach's next question is designed to correct the direction of his suggestion: He invites the coachee to discuss what she does want to do for a living, if accounting is not an option for her. By asking about Pauline's current state the coach has successfully recognised and circumnavigated a cause of friction between the interactants. This is but one of numerous examples of the flexibility and sensitivity with which Coach II tends to place questions as well as other coaching interventions.

## Coaching 5

Coaching 5 is a conversation that produces a range of regular patterns with respect to questions. Coach III employs an average number of questions (32 instances = 2.90 items ptw), she uses seven questions of confirmation (0.64 items ptw) and six questions exploring potential scenarios (0.55 items ptw). However, the qualitative analysis revealed that several other findings deviate from those of the other sessions in my corpus as well. For example, one of the two items in the category 'negotiating goals of coaching' (0.18 items ptw) is connected with a growing tension between the interactants: The coach repeats her question after some time because the coachee keeps digressing from the coaching topic (00:33:08). Even more strikingly, there are nine instances in which questions clearly fulfil the function of challenging the coachee – this number is certainly significant in comparison to the low frequencies of challenges realised by means of questions in the other coachings. The following examples show how Coach III uses questions in this sense (cf. Excerpts 8.27; 8.28):

### Excerpt 8.27

1 C: so didn't you right now answer your own question? whether you [would like to be xx]

### Excerpt 8.28

1 C: mhm, (4s) do you realise that you (writing a circle into the air with her left index finger) ALWAYS come back to the same question, to the same story, and it's like a hamster wheel,

These two excerpts illustrate the fact that coaching 5 is dominated by a very distinct dynamic. On the one hand, the coachee Olivia produces the second highest rate of questions by coachees in my corpus (21 instances = 1.91 items ptw). She produces five questions eliciting feedback (0.45 items ptw) and four questions eliciting advice (0.36 items ptw). In an initial examination, she communicates most cooperatively, asking for the coach's interventions and confirming her role as the advice-giver. Yet, upon closer scrutiny, she undermines each and every one of the coach's attempts to deal with the coaching issue in a

serious way. Olivia asks nine questions about the coach (0.82 items ptw). Of these nine questions, at least three items must clearly be read as diversions from her own issue and thus, as resistance against the coach's advice (cf. Section 10.2). At least three more of her questions about the coach must be regarded as face-threatening on the relational level (cf. Section 14.3). Overall, the use of questions in coaching 5 clearly reflects the specific interactive patterns between Coach III and the coachee Olivia.

## 8.2.4 Conclusion

To summarise, the analysis of questions in my corpus has produced the following answers to my research questions:

1. In my corpus the **coaches** generally ask **more questions** than the coachees. This result appears to be in line with their specific roles in the coaching process. However, the coachees do employ questions with a wide variety of functions as well.
2. There are significant **differences** between the numbers and the kinds of questions that are used in the **five conversations**. Genre-related, overarching patterns emerge from the data: Almost all of the coachings display correlating ratios with respect to the forms of questions; and all of the coachings contain similar functional categories of questions.
3. The number and the kind of questions the coaches ask seem to be **tied to the specific interactions** in which they participate. As the quantitative overview has shown, in my corpus there are significant differences between the use of questions of both Coach I and Coach II in their two conversations respectively. The analysis of coaching 2, coaching 3, and coaching 4 suggests that coaches might employ fewer questions when faced with eloquent coachees. On the other hand, coaches might employ a higher number of questions when dealing with coachees who are reluctant to express themselves openly.
4. In four of the five conversations, the **coaches ask more *wh*-questions than *yes/no*-questions**. The frequency of the latter indicates, however, that *yes/no*-questions seem to play a significant role in coachings as well. The coachees use more *yes/no*-questions than *wh*-questions. Alternative questions are rare in my corpus, with the exception of coaching 4. Here, Coach II uses eight instances of them – as is obvious from the discussion, he does so in order to activate the coachee Pauline and to open up solution scenarios to her.

**5.** Concerning the **functions of questions** in my corpus, I have assembled a wide range of categories. Some of these categories appear to be inherently coaching-related (such as, e.g., 'exploring work situation', 'exploring resources', or 'exploring potential scenario'). Other categories are more likely to appear in other genres of spoken interaction as well (for instance, 'question of confirmation', 'question of elaboration', or 'question realising a challenge'). The underlying goal of many of the functions is to elicit information about the coachee's issues (this is true for all the coaching-related categories mentioned above). Other functions serve to secure mutual understanding and to build and reconfirm the coaching relationship (see the mirroring categories). Also, in the subsection on coaching 5, I have shown that coaches may use questions to challenge the coachees.

**6.** Three of the **coachees** tend to exercise an economical use of questions, with the exception of Kate in coaching 1 and, in part, Olivia in coaching 5. The following chapters on feedback and advice will show that these high numbers are characteristic of the interactive structures of these conversations as a whole. In some interactions the amplitudes of interventions are consistently higher than in others.

**7.** In sum, the quantitative overview has been very telling, but the explanations for the patterns were made more evident when considered in relation to their respective **contexts**. The qualitative analyses have highlighted the fact that the quantitative data reflect specific interactive patterns between the coaches and the coachees.

## 9. Feedback

### 9.1 Introduction and methodology of the analysis of feedback

#### 9.1.1 Introduction

In Section 5.5 feedback was defined as return information provided in response to communicative contributions. Moreover, a variety of approaches and frameworks was introduced in relation to feedback. It was established that feedback is a powerful tool in coaching conversations, as it serves to secure the flow of the conversation, to create attunement between the interactants, and to negotiate evaluations and stances (cf. Section 5.5). In this section I will introduce my own approach to the analysis of feedback.

Subcategory	Explanation	Place of analysis in this thesis
<b>Backchanneling</b>	Communicative activities signalling the hearers' attention, while not conveying any other factual information	Section 14.2 (face work, confirmative sequences)
<b>Mirroring</b>	Communicative activities reflecting to the other interactants which parts of their communication have been received, and how they have been interpreted	Section 9.2 (feedback)
Mirroring (repeating)	Mirroring activity realised by the repetition of parts of the other interactants' utterances	Section 9.2 (feedback)
Mirroring: interpreting	Mirroring activity realised by the interpretation of a selection of the other interactants' utterances	Section 9.2 (feedback)
<b>Evaluating</b>	Positive or negative assessment of the other interactants	Section 9.2 (feedback)

*Table 9.1: Forms of feedback and place of analysis in this thesis*

Table 9.1 provides an outline of the four types of feedback in my corpus, i.e. backchanneling, mirroring: repeating, mirroring: interpreting, and evaluating. Also, it includes an overview of the place where the subcategories are discussed in this thesis.

First, I will cover the subcategory 'backchanneling'. Backchanneling is not suited for quantitative analysis, despite the fact that it holds a central role in confirmative sequences. For this reason I will relegate the analysis of this phenomenon to the context of face work (cf. Chapter 14). Nevertheless, backchanneling represents an important subcategory of feedback, and will be introduced along with the other subcategories in this section. Following this, the subcategories of mirroring: repeating, mirroring: interpreting, and evaluating will be presented. These activities constitute the main focus of the quantitative and qualitative

analyses of feedback in Section 9.2. In the last section I will summarise the approach to feedback and present a set of research questions.

### 9.1.2 Backchanneling

I define backchanneling as comprising all of those communicative activities, verbal and para-verbal, which signal that the hearer is paying attention to what the speaker has to say, while not conveying any factual information other than the fact that he/she is listening. Thus, backchanneling in my terms corresponds to the notions of ‘passive listening’ (cf. Schreyögg 2012), ‘active listening’ (cf. Weisbach 2012), ‘acknowledgment’ (cf. Stenström 1994), and ‘backchannel cues or continuers’ (cf. Goodwin 1986; cf. Section 5.5). The following excerpt from coaching 3 provides several examples of backchanneling on the part of the coach:

**Excerpt 9.1:**

- 1        *P: (nodding) at uh (-) my company was B. (COMPANY). out in E. (NEIGHBOURHOOD)?*
- 2        *C: (nodding) mhm,*
- 3        *P: that used to be B. (COMPANY). before that it was W. (COMPANY), and before that it was X. (COMPANY).*
- 4        *C: (laughing)*

Coach II displays his attention in three different ways: He nods, he utters para-verbal backchanneling signals (*mhm; hmm.*), and he produces laughter. Other common backchanneling signals in my corpus include para-verbal expressions such as *aha*, *ah*, or *uhu*, as well as verbal discourse markers like *yeah*, *okay*, *right*, or *I see*. All of these signals reassure the mutual connection between the interactants, as they confirm the coachee Pauline’s role as the narrator of her professional biography, as well as conveying an air of acceptance concerning Pauline’s problematic situation (cf. Weisbach 2012; Section 5.5).

Moreover, both the coaches and the coachees use backchanneling signals to request feedback from each other. Most prominently, they do so by means of tag questions like *do you*, or *don’t you*, and *is it*, or *isn’t it*. Also, they frequently make requests for feedback by using the discourse markers presented above in question form. In Excerpt 9.2 (coaching 2), Coach I asks for feedback, which is provided by the coachee Bobbie:

**Excerpt 9.2:**

- 1        *C: to look, (-) to search for opportunities. you know?*
- 2        *(2s)*

3      B: *right*.

Both the request for feedback (*you know*) and the feedback (*right*) represent instances of backchanneling realised by means of backchanneling signals. As established in Section 9.1.1, these relational aspects of backchanneling will be further discussed in Section 13.2 in the context of confirmative sequences. The significance of backchanneling can be briefly acknowledged here as an element of feedback in that it is such a widespread form used both by coaches and by coachees in my corpus that it permeates all five conversations from the beginning to the end.

### 9.1.3 Mirroring: repeating, mirroring: interpreting, and evaluating

The literature review has revealed a variety of terms which are employed to provide feedback that comprises content on the factual level. In my approach, the umbrella term ‘mirroring’ will be used to denote this phenomenon, tying in with aspects of ‘active listening’ (cf. Schreyögg 2012; Weisbach 2012); ‘repeating’; ‘completing’; ‘supplementing’; and ‘paraphrasing’ (cf. Bublitz 1988; 2009); ‘formulations’ (cf. Heritage and Watson 1979); ‘reinterpretive statements’; ‘extensions’; ‘formulations’ (cf. Antaki 2008); and ‘reformulations’ (cf. Muntigl 2004). As the term itself suggests, mirroring activities are used by interactants to reflect to the other interactants that their communicative activities have been perceived, and potentially also how these activities have been interpreted. In this way, mirroring loops serve to ensure mutual understanding and mutual rapport in coaching interactions (cf. Schreyögg 2012). In the following discussion, I will introduce two types of mirroring.

#### Mirroring: repeating

A simple but effective form of mirroring consists in the repetition of parts of the conversational partner’s utterance (cf. Bublitz 1988; 2009). In Excerpt 9.3 (coaching 1) Coach I repeats the last phrase of the coachee Kate’s response (*in school*), thus signalling his understanding:

#### Excerpt 9.3:

- 1      C: *and these children are still staying [with you]?*
- 2      K: *[no they're] in school. yeah.*
- 3      C: *in school. [alright].*



Similarly to backchanneling, repeating also fulfils the function of confirming the narrating activities of the other interactant. Thus, it supports the atmosphere of naturalness and acceptance (cf. Weisbach 2012) that is desired in coaching conversations.

### **Mirroring: interpreting**

I define interpreting as an activity which provides paraphrases or summaries of parts of the other interactant's contributions. Thus, an interpreting action gives an account of the essence the speaker has grasped while listening to his/her conversational partner, offering an opportunity to test whether the interactants are still on the same side. In Excerpt 9.4 (coaching 4), Coach II employs a simple act of interpreting:

#### **Excerpt 9.4:**

- 1        *P: it's to have a job where I AM taken seriously. where somebody DOES listen to me.*
- 2        *C: (nodding slowly) so this is something important to you. (nodding)*

In this instance, the scope of the interpretation is rather narrow: The coach merely concludes that what Pauline has mentioned as her professional wishes is important to her (line 2). While this statement may not bear much new information, it signals to the coachee that the coach has been listening and that he has understood her point. In Excerpt 9.5 (coaching 5) the scope of interpretation is wider. The coach's act of interpretation refers to an entire sequence (which I will not display at this point in full detail for reasons of brevity), in which the coachee Olivia has referred to her age as a problematic issue several times:

#### **Excerpt 9.5:**

- 1        *O: so (-) maybe I want to (rubbing her index finger on the table) reframe that as well.*
- 2        *(2s)*
- 3        *C: mm. when I listen to you uhm, I just get the feeling that (-) maybe (-) you have a problem with being over fifty. because you are mentioning it now for the fifth or sixth time.*

This case is evidence of the fact that interpreting actions can never be full accounts, but they select and highlight parts of the previous conversation (cf. Antaki 2008; Section 5.5). In this case, Coach III could have interpreted a range of aspects from what Olivia has told her. Yet she concentrates on Olivia's discussion of her age. Thus, while interpreting may seem like a basic intervention type at first glance, it is really a powerful instrument enabling an interactant to implicitly steer a conversation (cf. Vehviläinen 1999).

## Evaluating

The third type of mirroring in my framework of analysis is the subcategory 'evaluating'. As the term suggests, evaluating actions are assessments of other interactants in relation to a polar dimension of positive and negative judgements. Thus, the subcategory 'evaluating' bears resemblance to Weisbach's concept of 'feedback' (cf. Weisbach 2012) and to Bublitz' (2009) notion of evaluating (cf. Section 5.5). Excerpt 9.6 (coaching 4) represents an instantiation of an evaluating action:

### Excerpt 9.6:

- 1      *P: u:::h. (2s) u::h. (2s) technically I suppose that's (-) possible. (-) that kind of (-) I don't have a degree in programming. I'm (-) I'm a Quereinsteiger (= career changer). I have a degree in Germanistik (= German language and literature studies).*
- 2      *C: oh cool. (laughing)*

The coach's positive comment on Pauline's professional biography (*oh cool. (laughing)*) may seem trivial. However, tokens of appreciation like this are central means for the establishment of a positive atmosphere (cf. Section 13.2 on confirmative sequences). The coach signals his respect for the coachee's resources, and he maintains a positive atmosphere. Excerpt 9.7 (coaching 2) contains a more elaborate evaluation:

### Excerpt 9.7:

- 1      *C: yeah but (-) uh all the things you told me, is a very (-) professional style to get this job.*
- 2      *B: mhm.*
- 3      *C: to get in (knocking on the table) contact with several people, (-) la la la la la.*
- 4      *B: yeah.*
- 5      *C: and uh well, THAT'S it.*
- 6      *B: (nodding)*
- 7      *C: so (-) (2s) if it (-) no:w it's not under your control to get this job. at the moment.*

As is apparent, the coach's assessment of the coachee Bobbie's application strategies is positive as well. By praising her activities, Coach I communicates to her that he agrees with her strategy, thus encouraging her to keep it up. Feedback like this is crucial in coaching conversations, because coaching sessions fundamentally revolve around the wish of the coachees to get professional feedback (cf. Sections 5.3). Also, coaches need constant information about the degree of attunement they share with their coachees. In this respect, the self-assessment motif plays an important role. At the same time, if evaluating actions are

positive, they also comply with the self-enhancement motif of the interactants.

Excerpt 9.8 (coaching 3) shows that evaluating actions may also occur in non-verbal forms:

**Excerpt 9.8:**

- 1        *R: (smiling) a::nd, (regular facial expression) this person (pointing to the document) here, uhm O. P. (FULL NAME), 'h she's (3s) she's uhm (-) probably a lady in her fifties, she's very neurotic, (...) 'h she screams at people all day,*
- 2        *C: (making a whistling sound)*

By producing a whistling sound, Coach II communicates his recognition of the validity of the example as well as his surprise. As is apparent from this example, the evaluation of other interactants represents the counterpart to self-evaluation (cf. Section 13.1). Moreover, evaluations also exist at the core of all face-related activities (cf. Section 14.1).

Again, before conducting the main study, I tested the categories by means of a pilot study.

## 9.1.4 Conclusion and research questions

In essence, the subcategories of feedback employed in this approach tend to be more clear-cut than those originating in coaching theory, but less fine-grained than the analytic frameworks of conversation analytical studies of therapeutic discourse. Considering the range of different analytical frameworks applied in this thesis, this appears to be an appropriate methodological decision. However, as I am interested in relational patterns, I examine not merely the feedback activities by the coaches, but also those of the coachees. Overall, I address the following research questions:

- Which feedback activities are employed by the coaches and which by the coachees? Which feedback types are used most frequently by the coaches and the coachees?
- Are there any significant variations between the use of feedback in the individual conversations?
- Which functions do feedback activities fulfil in the conversations in my corpus?
- Which general patterns of feedback emerge in the individual conversations, and how are they related to the general interactive dynamics?
- Are there any correlations between the feedback-related patterns and the question-related patterns in my corpus?
- What is the ratio between positive and negative evaluating activities?

How meaningful is the quantitative analysis of feedback in coaching conversations, and to which extent does it have to be backed up by qualitative analysis?

## 9.2 Results of the analysis of feedback

### 9.2.1 Quantitative overview of the use of feedback

Table 9.2 shows the results of the quantitative overview of feedback in my corpus. The rows are divided into two parts: While the numbers in the upper section refer to feedback given by the coaches, the numbers in the lower section are concerned with feedback produced by the coachees. The table incorporates all of the forms of feedback that I have defined (except backchanneling), i.e. repeating, interpreting, and evaluating. Furthermore, in order to retain a comparable data basis, the numbers of items are provided in relation to the word counts of the individual coaching sessions. As was the case in the tables in Section 8.2, the column on the far right represents average values concerning feedback and its varieties in my corpus.

	Coaching 1 Coach I (15,352 words)		Coaching 2 Coach I (9,927 words)		Coaching 3 Coach II (15,979 words)		Coaching 4 Coach II (13,714 words)		Coaching 5 Coach III (11,008 words)		Ø
	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Average items per word count
<b>Feedback by coach in total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>3.13</b> $\chi^2=0.98$ $p=0.322$	<b>33</b>	<b>3.32</b> $\chi^2=1.35$ $p=0.245$	<b>38</b>	<b>2.38</b> $\chi^2=1.103$ $p=0.294$	<b>22</b>	<b>1.60</b> $\chi^2=8.345$ $p=0.004$	<b>41</b>	<b>3.72</b> $\chi^2=4.455$ $p=0.035$	<b>2.83</b>
Repeating	15	0.98	2	0.20	4	0.25	0	0	4	0.36	0.36
Interpreting	19	1.24	19	1.91	17	1.06	19	1.39	26	2.36	1.59
Evaluating	14	0.91	12	1.21	17	1.06	3	0.22	11	0.10	0.70
<b>Feedback by coachee in total</b>	<b>30</b>	$\chi^2=31.481$ $p=2e-8$	<b>11</b>	$\chi^2=1.197$ $p=0.274$	<b>6</b>	$\chi^2=5.052$ $p=0.025$	<b>5</b>	$\chi^2=4.355$ $p=0.037$	<b>2</b>	$\chi^2=6.543$ $p=0.011$	<b>0.80</b>
Repeating	4	0.26	0	0	0	0	3	0.22	0	0	0.10
Interpreting	5	0.33	3	0.30	0	0	1	0.07	0	0	0.14
Evaluating	21	1.37	8	0.81	6	0.38	1	0.07	2	0.18	0.56

Table 9.2: Quantitative overview of feedback by the coaches and the coachees

The most obvious finding of the quantitative overview is that there is a remarkable difference between the use of feedback by the coaches and the coachees. This parallels the results in the area of questions. On average, the coaches produce considerably more acts of feedback per thousand words, i.e. 2.83, whereas the coachees only utter 0.80 items ptw. Thus, it is

mainly the coaches who take care of the feedback loops ensuring mutual understanding and mutual rapport in the interactions. Moreover, by far the most common form of feedback on the part of the coaches is interpreting (1.59 items ptw), followed by evaluating (0.70 items ptw), and repeating (0.36 items ptw), while the coachees tend to favour evaluating (0.56 items ptw) over repeating (0.10 items ptw) and interpreting (0.14 items ptw).

A further finding arises from the comparison of the coaching conversations: Clearly, there are strong differences between the uses of feedback in the individual sessions. Coach III in coaching 5 holds the record for highest amount of feedback acts (3.72 items ptw), closely followed by Coach I in coaching 2 (3.32 items ptw), and then by Coach I in coaching 1 (3.13 items ptw). In the remaining two sessions the coaches produce significantly fewer acts of feedback. Also, the numbers of feedback by the coachees provide a diverse account that ranges from 1.95 items ptw in coaching 1 to 0.18 items ptw in coaching 5.

The numbers also demonstrate that the coaches may show different communicative patterns in different coaching sessions. For instance, in coaching 1, Coach I employs a high number of repetitions (0.98 items ptw, as opposed to 0.20 items per word count in coaching 2), while he produces a comparatively high number of interpreting acts in coaching 2 (1.91 items ptw, as opposed to 1.24 items per word count in coaching 1). Likewise, Coach III uses a fair amount of feedback activities in coaching 3 (2.38 items ptw). In coaching 4, on the other hand, his number of acts of feedback is much lower (1.60 items ptw). In sum, in my corpus the use of feedback does not only vary from session to session, but it does so even when the coaches remain the same. As mentioned before, a small qualitative corpus like mine offers only limited space to make general conclusions. However, the numbers presented above indicate a correlation with the results of the analysis of questions in my corpus in Section 8.2: The use of feedback is not necessarily only tied to the coaching style of the respective coaches; it also seems to be related to the interactive patterns emerging in the conversations. For this reason, the discussion of the individual sessions in the following sections will be complemented with the findings from the qualitative analysis.

## **9.2.2 The use of feedback in the individual coachings**

### **Coaching 1**

As stated in the previous section, coaching 1 features high numbers of feedback by Coach I. Coach I employs relatively numerous instances of interpreting, as well as of evaluating. However, it is the category 'repeating' that reaches the highest numbers that are rather unusual in comparison to the other conversations: The coach employs it 15 times (0.98 items ptw) – the next highest number in this area is four items (0.25 items ptw in coaching 3 and

0.36 items ptw in coaching 5). The following sequence exemplifies the coach's use of mirroring in the form of repeating:

**Excerpt 9.9:**

- 1        *K: [so I would have] to talk to the ahm (-) [to the ah Arbeitsamt (= Federal Employment Office)]*
- 2        *C: [uhm to the uh Arbeitsamt.. (= Federal Employment Office)]*

In Excerpt 9.9 it is only a phrase that the coach takes up: *to the ah Arbeitsamt*. Yet, by repeating parts of the coachee's utterances, the coach signals that he has been listening to the coachee and that he has grasped the meaning of her statements (Section 5.5). Also, he confirms the legitimacy of her choice of contributions (cf. Sections 5.5; 8.1). It is not clear why Coach I uses so many repetitions in the first coaching, whereas he only employs two items in his second session with the coachee Bobbie. One possible reason for this could be language-related: It is likely simpler to practise mirroring by means of repeating than by interpreting because the constructive linguistic accomplishment is less demanding. It is perhaps the case that by the time the coach leads the second session, i.e. after 90 minutes of practice, he feels more at ease with his use of the English language and switches to interpreting activities, rather than repeating activities. However, since the size of my corpus does not warrant a well-founded conclusion concerning this issue, this question must remain open for future research.

It is certainly evident that the coach generally produces feedback in high quantities. By employing mirroring, he bonds with the coachee Kate, constantly signalling his attention to her, ruling out misunderstandings, and communicating his level of comprehension about her issues. As the qualitative analyses revealed, all of the explicit evaluating actions regarding other interactants are positive throughout the entire corpus, except for one instance in coaching 5. Therefore, all of the evaluating activities by Coach I must also be regarded as confirmative return information. Interestingly, Kate is also the coachee who is the most responsive to these activities within my corpus. She has by far the highest results in all three of the categories. Thus, she mirrors what she has understood about the coach's utterances by repeating in four instances and by interpreting in five instances. Most notably, she produces 21 evaluations of the coach's input, all of which are positive. For example, in the subsequent sequence she delivers three positive evaluations:

**Excerpt 9.10:**

- 1        *C: the thing is uh (-) to get a little bit (-) a little bit more energy in the process.*
- 2        *K: yeah I really like that managing energy thing.*
- 3        *C: yeah [so yeah.]*

- 4        K: *[that makes sense.]*
- 5        C: *[that's that's my my my] (-) my (2s) (writing quotation marks in the air) bread, you know?*
- 6        K: *yeah well I like that. that makes so much more sense.*
- 7        C: *yeah,*

After the coach's advice-giving, Kate first expresses a positive opinion towards his idea (line 2). In line 4 she paraphrases her evaluation with the comment *that makes sense*. In her next turn, she repeats her positive assessments once more (line 6). Praise for the coach's intervention is characteristic of Kate's communicative self-presentation as a cooperative coachee who is eager to solve her problem. Also, the high numbers in the quantitative overview are in line with her high results in the analysis of questions in Section 8.1. However, as will become apparent in Section 10.2, Kate's responsive and appreciative actions are part of a communicative picture which reflects her ambiguity toward her problem: The coachee's appreciation of the coach's interventions is counterbalanced by numerous acts of resistance toward his ideas.

## Coaching 2

Like coaching 1, coaching 2 displays high numbers of feedback by the coach. Yet as demonstrated in the previous section, in this conversation Coach I employs much fewer instances of repeating than in coaching 1. On the other hand, his use of the strategy 'interpreting' is much higher in coaching 2 (1.91 items ptw, as opposed to 1.24 items ptw in coaching 1). The same is true for his use of the category 'evaluating' (1.21 items ptw, in contrast to 0.91 items ptw in coaching 1). The high number of positive evaluations shows the appreciative, resource-oriented approach that Coach I favours: By giving confirmative feedback to the coachee he reconfirms her strengths and skills, thus fostering her positive self-image. At the same time, he invests in the coaching relationship, creating an atmosphere of warmth and mutual respect.

The coachee Bobbie contributes to this appreciative dynamic, too: She delivers the second highest number of feedback activities (1.11 items ptw) of all the coachees in the corpus. Three interpretations (0.30 items ptw) and eight positive evaluations of advice (0.81 items ptw) reflect the confirmative communicative style Bobbie displays in this session. In the discussion of self-presentation and positioning (cf. Chapter 13) and in the analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics (cf. Chapter 16) it will be revealed that Bobbie's patterns of feedback activities are crucially linked to her problem construction, her self-presentation, and the interactive dynamics emerging in the conversation.

## Coaching 3

Coaching 3 holds an intermediate position in the quantitative analysis of feedback. Coach II employs a low number of repetitions (0.25 items ptw), but a higher number of interpretations (1.06 items ptw). The data in the area of his evaluations are more striking: Coach II holds the record for evaluations in absolute terms (17 items). In relation to the word count, Coach II ranks second in coaching 3 (1.06 items ptw).

From a qualitative point of view, several relevant additions can be added to these findings. Not only does Coach II use a great deal of evaluations in coaching 3, but he also employs the strategy of interpreting in a way that implies positive evaluations. For instance, he comments on the list of people Rachel has developed in her role as a leader: *so that means then people working in "your" team, (-) 'h love the way (-) they are treated (-) in your team.* (00:32:36). This act of interpreting by Coach II captures the essence of what Rachel tried to communicate mostly implicitly with the help of many examples: She is a good leader; and the conflict with her employee J. is merely an exception. The coach mirrors this underlying assumption in Rachel's preferred sense; and in doing so, he confirms her face (cf. Section 14.2) – after all, Rachel had stated early in the conversation that her confidence as a leader was shattered.

The next example illuminates a tendency of Coach II that is paralleled in his use of questions (cf. Section 8.2): He often concentrates on the current emotional states of his coachees:

### Excerpt 9.11:

- 1 C: 'hh uh but I think uhm, or at LEAST. (putting his right hand to his heart) if I were YOU. uhm, I would have a lot of tension on my mind.
- 2 R: (nodding) mhm.
- 3 C: (expressive) WHOOA. (laughing) all these ideas.
- 4 R: yes.

While the coach uses an if-construction so as to render his act of mirroring more indirect, he does paraphrase a state that the coachee Rachel has mentioned before. In this way he makes the coachee's emotions explicit, while at the same time forging solidarity with her: If he was in her place, he would feel the same – or so he claims. Again, the act of mirroring accomplishes two functions at the same time: The coach signals his attention and his comprehension of Rachel's situation. Also, he keeps offering her a safe place where it is accepted to feel temporarily tense and confused in the face of a huge challenge. Thus, the coach's mirroring activities are crucial to the relational level of the conversation (cf. Section 14.2).



Another interesting function of feedback becomes evident in coaching 3: Sometimes evaluations prepare the ground for advice (cf. Section 14.3). For example, Rachel describes herself as a maternalistic leader (00:20:15). To this, the coach responds with a challenging piece of advice: He argues that this type of leadership concept may bring about complementary roles, i.e. her subordinates might behave like children to her. Before he launches this challenge, however, he produces a positive evaluation: *this is an interesting topic*. Afterwards, he uses yet another confirmative bridge by stating that a maternalistic leadership style has advantages as well as disadvantages (00:20:26). Thus, he expresses benevolence and neutrality in order to prepare the ground for a challenging idea. After all, at the beginning of the session, Rachel presents herself as critical of the coaching setting and of the coach's role. Yet, it is only after a short period of time that she seems to gain confidence in the coach's trustworthiness. The qualitative analysis of the conversation shows that, to a tremendous degree, this success is accomplished by means of feedback activities.

In comparison to the feedback data in coaching 1, the coachee Rachel produces only about half as many instances of feedback. Nevertheless, these low numbers should not be interpreted as evidence that coaching 3 is somewhat deficient in comparison to other sessions. In actuality, Rachel might be a more likely candidate for change than the coachee Kate in coaching 1. This is suggested by the fact that Rachel tends to communicate her appreciation of the coach's ideas implicitly, often signalling attunement by leaving aspects uncommented which she accepts right away. Moreover, Section 10.2 will demonstrate that Kate's resistance actions are not only much more frequent than Rachel's, but they are also derived from a principal reluctance to foster change. Rachel, on the other hand, demonstrates goal-orientation in that she moves on with a focus on solutions. In sum, the analysis of feedback in coaching 3 shows that while explicit feedback does function to create a confirmative atmosphere, there are other, more implicit and very effective ways to achieve the same purpose. Thus, the quantitative analysis of feedback must be regarded in the context of qualitative studies in order to make conclusive interpretations.

## Coaching 4

Coaching 4 is the conversation with the lowest feedback numbers on the part of the coach in my corpus (1.60 items ptw): In this session Coach II employs 19 interpreting activities (1.39 items ptw) and three acts of evaluating (0.22 items ptw). The reason for these low numbers could be that the coach intuitively adjusts his communicative behaviour to the matter-of-fact style that the coachee displays: Pauline gives little feedback herself – she uses only three instances of repeating (0.22 items ptw), one instance of interpreting (0.07 items ptw), and one instance of evaluating (0.07 items ptw). There is evidently a link between Pauline's low

frequency of feedback activities, her patterns of self-presentation and positioning (cf. Section 13.5), and her initial request of the coach to advise her in matters of emotional intelligence. It appears that, while Pauline generally produces interpersonally adequate contributions to the conversation (cf. Sections 14.2; 14.3), she does not engage in empathetic circles of return communication in the same way as the other interactants in the corpus tend to do.

However, the low results described above do not mean that feedback is of little importance in coaching 4. In several crucial situations the coach steers the course of the session by means of feedback activities. In particular, Coach II starts to mirror Pauline's emotions to her right from the beginning of the session: In his opinion, she is still very angry as a result of the conflict with her boss (00:15:16). In consequence, the coach advises the coachee to release her anger. At the beginning, Pauline appears to register these suggestions, but she does not address them in any way. When Coach II attempts to take up the issue of her feelings by use of a playful method, Pauline cannot come up with an adequate answer. As she seems to be blocked regarding the prospect of reflecting on her emotions, the coach discards the issue and takes up the other coaching issue Pauline has introduced, i.e. the question of how and where to apply for a job. The interactants then discuss Pauline's career options for a considerable period of time. It is only by the end of the session that the coachee returns to the coach's message of her own volition; and it is only at this point that she expresses her surprise about the degree to which she is still affected by the conflict with her boss (cf. Section 8.2), in hindsight confirming the coach's mirroring activities.

## Coaching 5

In coaching 5, Coach III produces 41 instances of feedback in total, or 3.72 items ptw. This is by far the highest number in my corpus. As was the case in most of the conversations, there is a correlation with the results from the quantitative analysis of questions. A closer review of the results in Table 9.1 shows that the activity of interpreting is particularly predominant (2.36 items ptw). Yet, the ways in which Coach III employs this category are in fact similar to the ones described in relation to the other coaches in the sections above: She signals her attention and her comprehension as well as her willingness to establish a positive relationship with the coachee.

In contrast, what distinguishes many feedback sequences in coaching 5 from those in the other coachings is the antagonistic mode that increasingly dominates the conversation. This becomes especially clear in the instances of evaluation. The coach systematically compliments Olivia on her various skills and resources. Apparently, she does so because she attempts to direct the coachee toward a resource-oriented view of her situation. Olivia, in

turn, produces ambivalent patterns of self-presentation (cf. Section 13.6): While she does conceive of herself in positive ways and partly even in grand terms, she also insists on a negative interpretation of her situation, highlighting the problematic aspects of her life and fantasising about an even darker future. For this reason the coach's positive evaluations provoke resistance on her part:

**Excerpt 9.12:**

- 1        *O: I translate for him, but-*
- 2        *C: so you came [very xxx life.]*
- 3        *O: [I'm just doing] my own thing now.*
- 4        *C: WOW.*
- 5        *O: which is-*
- 6        *C: that's great,*
- 7        *O: very xxx, no partner, no help, no best friend, no team, no secretary, no xxxxxx that I consult, I mean, I'm really alone except for some of my colleagues,*

As is evident, in Excerpt 9.12 Olivia rejects Coach III's positive assessment of her achievements by enumerating the negative aspects of her situation. Thus, overall, there is a striking difference between the use of positive evaluating activities by the coach in coaching 5 and in the other coachings: Some of the coachees' responses sound self-confident (in particular Bobbie in coaching 2), while others appear more self-critical (in particular Kate and Rachel in coaching 1 and coaching 3, respectively). Sometimes the responses may come across neutrally (this is characteristic of Pauline in coaching 4). Olivia, however, reacts with resistance whenever she is complimented because agreeing with the coach on her positive evaluations would defy her main line of argument.

As far as her own feedback activities are concerned, Olivia holds the lowest score of all the coachees in my corpus: She employs only two instances of evaluating (0.18 items ptw), one of which is not a clear-cut compliment, but more of a face-threatening act (cf. Section 14.3) because it sounds slightly patronising. This evidence highlights the fact that asymmetric roles may constrain the confirmative function of positive evaluations, because the right to evaluate others may not be granted to the coachees in the same way as it is to the coaches. Moreover, the result is in line with the analysis of face work in coaching 5: As Olivia's patterns of face work are at least ambiguous, if not hostile in many instances, it makes sense that she does not employ a large number of confirmative feedback activities.

### 9.2.3 Conclusion

The analysis of feedback in my corpus led to the following results:

1. All of the coaches use **feedback activities as a crucial strategy** to influence the course of the conversations. In particular, the coaches use feedback to achieve functions such as signalling attention, steering the conversation, encouraging the coachees to talk, obtaining valid information on the coachees' situations and issues, confirming the content of the coachees' statements, confirming the coachees' faces, building rapport, or preparing the ground for advice.
2. The most common type of feedback given by the **coaches** is **interpreting**, followed by evaluating and repeating (which is only prominent in coaching 1).
3. The **numbers of feedback activities** produced by the coaches vary considerably. In concurrence with the results from Section 8.1, these variations are not tied to the personal styles of the coaches, but to the individual coaching interactions in which they occur.
4. All of the **coachees** use forms of feedback as well, but much less so than the coaches. In effect, the analysis of my corpus suggests that feedback activities are predominantly linked to the role of the coach.
5. Similarly to the coaches, the **coachees differ** strongly in the degree to which they make use of feedback strategies. However, there are correlations between high numbers in the analysis of the use of questions and the analysis of the use of feedback.
6. The coachees' **preferred type of feedback** is **evaluating**: They employ it mainly to make positive comments towards advice by the coach. Also, they evaluate the success of the coaching sessions. The second most important feedback type of the coachees is interpreting. Repeating occurs only in few cases.
7. In practice, the category '**evaluating**' is **restricted to positive feedback** only. In my corpus there is only one example of an explicit negative evaluation either by a coach or a coachee. However, there is one instance in which a positive evaluation by a coachee can be read as face-threatening because it sounds patronising. This is evidence of the fact that there are differences between the roles of the coaches and the coachees as to the rights

regarding positive evaluations. However, in my data resistance is not expressed by means of explicitly negative feedback, but it is negotiated more subtly (cf. Sections 10.2; 14.3).

**8.** In some cases, coaches use **interpreting activities** which, at the same time, imply **indirect positive evaluations**.

**9.** The data revealed that **high numbers of feedback may indicate a strongly confirmative atmosphere** in terms of face work. On the other hand, a low number of feedback activities may indicate a less confirmative dynamic, but it may also be linked to a high degree of implicitness with regard to confirmative face work.

**10.** The analysis of feedback in **coaching 1** has illuminated consistently high numbers both by Coach I and by the coachee Kate. In accordance with her frequent use of questions, Kate's frequent feedback activities reflect her eagerness to contribute to the coaching.

**11.** Likewise, in **coaching 2**, both Coach I and the coachee Bobbie produce high numbers of feedback, a finding which is in accordance with the generally harmonious overtone of the conversation

**12.** In **coaching 3**, Coach II and the coachee Rachel use a rather low amount of feedback acts. Yet, there is a high degree of implicitness in the conversation. Thus, the quantitative analysis of feedback alone fails to account for the confirmative character of the interactive patterns in this session.

**13.** In contrast, there in fact appears to be a link between low numbers of feedback in **coaching 4** and a low degree of expressed empathy on the part of the coachee Pauline. In this session, the flow of return information is less successful than it is in the other conversations, and Coach II might accommodate to the coachee's style. Nevertheless, the coach's careful mirroring actions are crucial to the process in several instances.

**14.** In **coaching 5**, Coach III produces the highest amount of feedback activities of all the coaches, while the coachee Olivia mainly discards this form of confirmative work. This reflects the relational profile of the interaction: The coachee tends to reject the coach's interventions, even those that imply positive evaluations of her. As has been revealed, Olivia responds with resistance to compliments, and in turn, she does not give any positive feedback to the coach. Thus, in this conversation the use of feedback can be directly linked with the interactive patterns emerging in the conversation (cf. Section 16.6).

## 10. Advice

### 10.1 Introduction and methodology of the analysis of advice

#### 10.1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce my approach to the analysis of advice, relating back to the literature review on advice in Section 5.6. First, I will provide a definition of advice, as well as an overview of the categories of analysis that are employed. Second, I will discuss those categories that are related to the acts of advice-giving on the part of the coaches. Third, I will introduce those categories that are concerned with the activities the coachees display prior to or in response to advice. Fourth, I will focus on a special type of response to advice, i.e. resistance. In this section I will also cover reactions to resistance against advice, thus completing the series of potential moves that may accompany advice-giving. Last, I will summarise the approach.

#### 10.1.2 Definition of advice and overview of categories

As has been established in Section 5.6, advice-giving is a complex phenomenon which is achieved interactively (cf. Locher and Limberg 2012; Angouri 2012). Therefore, in this approach advice-giving will be viewed as a co-constructed process of negotiation. According to my data, the setting of coaching interactions attributes so much salience to the coach's role as advice-giver that even apparently neutral comments are treated as advice by the interactants.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, I will employ a comparatively broad definition of advice: I define it as comprising those contributions which are treated as suggestions that the other interactant should think or act in a particular way. According to this definition, some cases that would be categorised as instances of assessing or giving information in other approaches are categorised as advice in this framework. The fact that coaching theory is dominated by the ideal of nondirectiveness, while on the other hand coaches are paid to guide their coachees toward solutions, might contribute to the propensity of even subtle expressions of opinion to be treated as advice in this practice (cf. Section 5.6; He 1994; Vehviläinen 1999; Locher 2006).

Moreover, following Heritage and Sefi (1992), Silverman et al. (1992), or Vehviläinen

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<sup>39</sup> In the literature discussed in Section 5.6 advice tends to be distinguished from related phenomena, such as assessing or giving information (cf. Locher 2006, 104), which are described as less directive than advice-giving.

(1999, 2001, 2012), my analysis will focus on moves of advice-giving by all of the participants. Table 10.1 gives an overview of the categories of my framework of analysis. The categories can be broadly grouped into three areas: advice-related actions by the coaches, advice-related actions by the coachees, and resistance actions (as a specific part of advice-related actions which contains both actions by the coaches and the coachees). In the following chapters I will describe the individual categories in more detail.

<b>Categories for the analysis of advice</b>
<b>1. Advice-related actions by the coaches</b>
<b>Coach giving advice</b>
Repeating advice
Unsolicited advice
Advice following direct request
<b>2. Advice-related actions by the coachees</b>
<b>Request for advice</b>
<b>Agreeing with advice</b>
<b>Positive evaluation of advice</b>
<b>Complementing advice</b>
<b>Taking up advice</b>
<b>Asking questions about advice</b>
<b>Giving advice to oneself</b>
<b>3. Resistance actions</b>
<b>Resistance actions by the coachee in total</b>
Counter-argument
Signalling lack of relevance/redundancy
Humour
Others
<b>Coachee overcoming resistance herself</b>
<b>Coach overcoming resistance</b>
<b>Coach overlooking resistance</b>

*Table 10.1: Overview on the analytical categories concerning advice*

### 10.1.3 Advice-related activities by the coaches

First, I will discuss those advice-related actions that are produced by the coaches. Table 10.2 contains a summary of the subcategories used in this context. Also, it comprises the definitions of the subcategories. In the following, I will describe each of the individual terms by means of examples.

1. Advice-related actions by the coaches	Definition of action type
<b>Coach giving advice</b>	Contribution which directly or indirectly contains a recommendation to the coachee concerning a certain line of thinking or acting
Repeating advice	Coach giving a piece of advice which has been introduced before
Unsolicited advice	Coach giving a piece of advice without an immediately preceding request for advice by the coachee
Advice following direct request	Coach giving a piece of advice immediately following a request for advice by the coachee

Table 10.2: Advice-related actions by the coaches

### Coach giving advice: delineating instances of advice-giving

It has been discussed in Section 5.6 that the analysis of advice engenders the problem of delineation. Not only is it difficult to draw a line between pieces of advice and general statements (cf. Section 10.1.2), it is also potentially problematic to distinguish between individual pieces of advice – the question as to where one argument ends and where the next one begins raises much potential for debate. However, in order to create a consistent framework of analysis, a set of guidelines has been determined for this approach:

First, instances of advice are not equated with speech acts. Instead, if an argument spreads over several speech acts, or if an interactant gives examples to highlight his/her point, the contribution is treated as one single instance of advice, as long as the main point (for instance: *the coachee should improve her energy management*) remains the same. Second, if the other interactant (usually the coachee) unfolds a new thought in response to the advice, or if he/she reacts with resistance, for example, by means of a counter-argument, this represents a closure of the instance of advice by the coach. Third, backchanneling activities (such as, e.g., nods, or para-verbal signals like *hmm*; cf. Sections 5.5; 9.1 and 9.2) are not considered as turns in their own right. Thus, backchanneling contributions do not delineate the end of an instance of advice. Fourth, agreements with the coach's advice (*yeah, you're right*), and positive evaluations of advice (*that's a very good idea*) do not constitute interruptions of an argument (cf. Excerpt 10.1, coaching 3):

#### Excerpt 10.1:

- 1 C: so as long as you do not (-) (pointing to his sketch) hit this trust topic,
- 2 R: (nodding)
- 3 C: they won't listen to the task finally. you first have to get connected like THAT,
- (...)
- 4 R: that's a really good way to do it then. (nodding, low volume) I like that.
- 5 C: and they will like it too, because you show up as a PERSON.



- 6        *R: mhm,*
- 7        *C: because they (-) they can iMAGine that it wasn't easy for you. and they wanna HEAR it, because, (-) in a certain way even if it's a professional relationship, 'h they like you as (-) a human being too, and (-) you're NOT only their boss,*
- 8        *R: well, it's quite difficult because, during working hours I AM their boss.*

In Excerpt 10.1, Coach II provides a piece of advice, i.e. that the coachee Rachel should try to consider the relational level of communication when talking to her team members. While the coach is making his point, Rachel produces backchanneling signals (e.g. *nodding* in line 2). In line 4 she also evaluates the advice in a positive way. The coach's contribution in line 5 represents a further complement to his instance of advice. Rachel's statement in line 8 represents an instance of resistance, as she presents an objection to an aspect of the coach's view. At the same time, her contribution delineates and closes the instance of advice-giving by the coach.

### Repeating advice

The second row in Table 10.1 contains a subcategory of advice-giving. It is concerned with repetitions of pieces of advice. As stated above, the boundaries between repetitions of advice and novel pieces of advice may be fluid. The main reason for this is that repetitions of advice are generally not executed in the form of literal repetitions. Rather, they tend to be paraphrases of earlier statements, and, therefore, it can be difficult to decide whether a piece of advice is more of a specification of an old thought or whether it constitutes a completely new thought. However, by reducing pieces of advice to an essential core, it is possible to make a distinction between new advice and old advice. For instance, in Excerpt 10.2 (coaching 5) the coach's main argument is, in brief, that the coachee Olivia should do self-marketing. The same general direction of advice applies to Excerpt 10.3 (coaching 5):

#### Excerpt 10.2:

- 1        *C: so when I (supporting her points with small hand movements) LISTEN to you, (-) you have a LOT of abilities, (-) you have to (-) do some marketing, for your (pointing to the chart) different uh (3s) (moving her hand towards O)*

#### Excerpt 10.3:

- 1        *C: AND, you have the network, AND you have the ability (-) to market yourself. On your (-) and your products.*

As the two instances of advice are intercepted by statements by the coachee, they must be regarded as two different pieces of advice, with the latter instance repeating the former.

### Unsolicited advice

Unsolicited advice is advice given on the basis of self-selection (cf. Limberg and Locher 2012; Excerpt 10.4):

#### Excerpt 10.4:

- 1        *K: (touching another rock) this is this is gonna be a challenge this (-) this will be*
- 2        *C: another idea may these clients (touching the first rock) (-) have also project work.*

In Excerpt 10.4 (coaching 1) Coach I offers advice without a direct request by the coachee.

### Advice following direct requests

This subcategory represents the counterpart to unsolicited advice. Advice may follow a direct request by the coachees, as exemplified in Excerpt 10.5 (coaching 2):

#### Excerpt 10.5:

- 1        *B: do you have any tips as far as (-) how I can, I don't know, (2s) distinguish myself from other people whether it be: s-, how I have my resume::, o::r (...) cover letter, (3s) cause I (-) I have a feeling if you DON'T have a personal contact, nowadays, most of the time it's like (grimacing) u::h (gesture as though she was throwing something away) chhk-*
- 2        *C: yes. this is wh- (-) this is my tip. (...) just to g- (-) ah to get the tips ah to get the job, 'hh or another job, 'hh a::h, via (-) networking, a:nd not via uhm (-) well offered jobs. [somewhere.]*

As established by Heritage and Sefi (1992; cf. Section 5.6), a request for advice legitimises the ensuing advice to a high degree by establishing its relevance.

## 10.1.4 Advice-related activities by the coachees

On the side of the coachees there are two kinds of advice-related actions: Requests for advice that precede and prompt the advice; and different types of responses to advice that follow the advice-giving action (cf. Table 10.3):

2. Advice-related actions by the coachees	Definition of action type
Request for advice	Coachee asking the coach for his/her opinion or for advice
Agreeing with advice	Coachee expressing agreement with a piece of advice
Positive evaluation of advice	Coachee giving an explicit positive evaluation of a piece of advice
Complementing advice	Coachee processing a piece of advice by the coach in such a way that he/she continues the line of thought with a complementary idea
Taking up advice	Coachee taking up a piece of advice by the coach at a later point
Asking questions about advice	Coachee asking questions of clarification about a piece of advice
Giving advice to oneself	Coachee giving advice to herself

Table 10.3: Advice-related actions by the coachees

### Request for advice

As has been established, participation in a coaching session implies that a coachee is principally willing to receive advice by the coach (cf. Section 4.2). Nevertheless, in some situations the coachees may ask the coaches for their opinions on particular issues and questions directly, thus prompting solicited advice (cf. Section 10.1.3; Excerpt 10.6).

#### Excerpt 10.6:

- 1 O: 'hh but I, (-) do you think I'm wrong to think, (-) that's Germans ahm expect (-) uhhh (-) a high level of credentials?

In Excerpt 10.6 (coaching 5) the coachee directly asks Coach III for her opinion.

### Agreeing with advice

Most of the subcategories in Table 10.3 typically function to appreciate advice. The simplest way to produce such a reaction is by agreeing with advice. In Excerpt 10.7 (coaching 2) the coachee Bobbie uses two agreement tokens (*right*; *yeah*) and a gestural act (*nodding*) to express her agreement with the coach's advice:

#### Excerpt 10.7:

- 1 C: because, personal contact is always the best  
2 B: right. (nodding) (3s) [yeah.]

In contrast to agreement tokens, mere backchanneling signals, or continuers are not interpreted as signalling agreement with advice in my framework (cf. Sections 5.5; 9.1 and 9.2). It can be difficult to draw the line between backchanneling and agreement – many cases are inherently ambiguous with respect to this issue. Yet as a rule, the context must be taken into consideration when determining instances of agreement with advice. For example,

if the coachee Pauline in coaching 4 only employs nodding as a backchanneling signal over long stretches of time, the use of the discourse marker *yeah* at the end of an argument by the coach must be regarded as marked. Also, when backchanneling signals are repeated, they can be read as agreement with advice.

### Positive evaluation of advice

This subcategory contains explicit praise of instances of advice (cf. Sections 5.5; 9.1 and 9.2). In Excerpt 10.8 (coaching 1) Kate assesses a piece of advice by Coach I:

#### Excerpt 10.8:

- 1        *C: yes but ahm well (-) my (-) experience in life is ahm that it's not the subject  
manage the time, but to manage your energy*  
(...)
- 2        *K: [I like] that phrase. I like that phrase energy management.*

Slightly more implicit compliments like *you're right*, or *that make sense* are further examples of positive evaluations.

### Complementing advice

A powerful means of co-constructing solutions is through the use of complementing advice. In this case the coachee relates back to the coach's advice, immediately processing it and perpetuating it. In Excerpt 10.9 (coaching 2) the interactants take turns unfolding the advice:

#### Excerpt 10.9:

- 1        *C: and if she (-) don't u:h make your decision depending on he:r [opinion.]*
- 2        *B: [what] she says. yeah.*
- 3        *C: yeah, [there's another opinion?]*
- 4        *B: [especially if there's drama.] (laughing)*

Complementing advice is an action type that indicates cooperation and attunement between the interactants. With regard to the empathetic effort that is required to realise complements of advice, this phenomenon is related to mirroring activities. However, complements may also be used to fight for a turn, or to steer the conversation towards a different topic.

### Taking up advice

Another type of reaction to advice is realised when coachees take advice up once again at a later point in the conversation. Excerpt 10.10 (coaching 1) contains a piece of advice by Coach I, who encourages Kate to take action with respect to her career. In Excerpt 10.11 (coaching 1) the coachee takes up the advice:

**Excerpt 10.10:**

- 1 C: *just check it out, (2s) which possibilities are there.*

**Excerpt 10.11:**

- 1 K: *so I suppose (-) I'm actually (-) that kind of the gate's set. I just need to start through them.*

**Asking questions about advice**

At times coachees ask questions of clarification about advice. This activity may signal appreciation, but it can also be interpreted as challenging (cf. Excerpt 10.12, coaching 3):

**Excerpt 10.12:**

- 1 C: *(nodding) (-) hmm yeah. a::nd, (-) 'h I could observe many many leaders, during my coaching practice and even before, when I was uh an HR (= Human Resources) consultant in a bank uh international bank, 'hh (-) and some of them struggled with their emotion. in the sense of they weren't able to bring them (opening his right hand) IN (-) the discussion.*
- 2 R: *so you think I SHOULD bring them into [discussion].*
- 3 C: *(nodding) [yes,]*
- 4 R: *and why do you think that.*

In the context of Excerpt 10.12 the coachee Rachel is eager to understand what the coach advises her to do. For this reason, she does not only mirror his idea (line 2), but she also asks a question of clarification (line 4). However, in a different context her question of clarification might be read as critical of the coach's advice.

**Giving advice to oneself**

Not all of the advice provided in coaching conversations must necessarily come from the coaches, although in my corpus the *addressees* of advice are always the coachees. Yet coachees may also give advice to themselves, which means that they come up with novel suggestions as to how they should proceed concerning their issues (cf. Excerpt 10.13, coaching 5):

**Excerpt 10.13:**

- 1 O: *so I need to be actually with decision-makers,*
- 2 C: *mhm,*
- 3 O: *to be more with managers, and HR (= Human Resources) people, 'h or I need to (-) be like, (-) (moving her head from left to right in a circle) what is that thing ugh, (2s) (expressive) D.E.F. (PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION),*

As is apparent, in Excerpt 10.13 the coachee Olivia develops solutions to her problem on her own, thus giving advice to herself.

### 10.1.5 Resistance against advice

It is well established in research on advice (cf. Section 5.6; Heritage and Sefi 1992; Silverman et al. 1992) that resistance may emerge as a reaction to advice activities. I define resistance as a direct or indirect refusal to embrace advice. Table 10.4 provides an overview of the categories of analysis that will be employed in my approach.

3. Resistance against advice	Definition of action type
<b>Resistance actions by coachee in total</b>	Coachee refusing to embrace a piece of advice
Counter-argument	Coachee arguing against a piece of advice
Signalling lack of relevance/redundancy	Coachee indicating that she is already aware of a piece of advice, that she is already following it, or that it is not relevant for her
Humour	Coachee using humour to divert from a piece of advice
Others	Coachee using other means to show resistance against a piece of advice
<b>Coachee overcoming resistance herself</b>	Coachee refuting her own resistance action
<b>Coach overcoming resistance</b>	Coach refuting the coachee's resistance action
<b>Coach overlooking resistance</b>	Coach not commenting on the resistance action, letting it go, and potentially waiting to address the issue once more at a later point

Table 10.4: Resistance against advice

#### Counter-argument

Resistance can be expressed as a refusal to comply with advice on the level of arguments. Thus, counter-arguments are based on rational objections against advice (cf. Excerpt 10.14, coaching 1):

#### Excerpt 10.14:

- 1 C: and (-) these two here (-) this uh your home base, will always be your home base.
- 2 K: well to a degree. because if I say, (moving a rock) I'm not translating anymore.
- 3 C: mhm,
- 4 K: a:hm (-) then one client, the one I used to work for, my xxxx will go find somebody else. a:nd (-) (moving another rock) this one might go we might find somebody else.

In Excerpt 10.14 Coach I concludes a piece of advice. The coachee Kate reacts by relativising the validity of his argument by means of a counter-argument.

### Signalling lack of relevance/redundancy

Another way that coachees express resistance is by pointing out that the piece of advice in question does not apply to them – either because it is not relevant per se, or because they already know about it or have already put it into practice (cf. Heritage and Sefi 1992; Section 5.7; Excerpt 10.15, coaching 1):

#### Excerpt 10.15:

- 1        *C: just doing them, get fresh air into your head, uh get (-) when you get fresh air in your head, you'll get new ideas.*
- 2        *K: that's true I used to actually when I was working seven days a week, 'h I used to (-) sometimes turn off the computer and go someplace else and WORK.*

This phenomenon is also discussed under the label of assertions of knowledge and/or competence in Heritage and Sefi (1992: 402ff), who highlight the fact that this type of resistance is often related to power struggles.

### Humour

Humour is another means of realising resistance. It is used to subvert an instance of advice by distracting the interactants and by undermining the serious modality of the advice (cf. Excerpt 10.16, coaching 5):

#### Excerpt 10.16:

- 1        *C: but you have your network, ah USE your network, what you already have,*
- 2        *O: (nodding quickly)*
- 3        *C: do some self-marketing,*
- 4        *O: (touching her face with both hands) get a face-lift, (touching her breasts with both hands) and breast-lift, no (laughing, reaching for the milk), I'm just kidding, (pouring milk into her coffee)*

In the example above, the coachee Olivia challenges the force of the coach's serious piece of advice by switching to a humorous, self-ironic mode.

### Others

The category 'others' represents a mixed category of resistance strategies that are rare in my corpus, for instance the strategies of **changing the topic**, **interrupting** the advice-giver, or using gestures to express disagreement.

### Coachee overcoming resistance herself

Having introduced the spectrum of ways in which resistance against advice may be expressed, the possible outcomes of resistance situations can now be discussed. One option

is for the coachee to address the resistance herself, for example by raising counter-arguments against her own objections or by reframing them (cf. Excerpt 10.17, coaching 1):

**Excerpt 10.17:**

- 1 C: *to brainstorm, (-) yeah to well (-) uh also concrete idea is uhm- (...) the people I know. (...) which people do they know that could help me.*
- 2 (2s)
- 3 K: *'hh I've had a hard time connecting with people in that regard? (2s) (...)because, (3s) uh (-) especially with the people I know uhm it seems that (3s) they all think they know they all speak German and English so they don't need more talents. you know there's a lot of that attitude, especially amongst the expats community, but that's 'hh (-) ahm (-) I suppose (writing) (3s) (ceasing to write) I hate my own fear of asking them. (writing) yeah I should I can ask around.*

In the example above, Coach I advises the coachee Kate to commence with networking activities. In the following move, a short monologue by Kate ensues: First, she produces a resistance activity against the advice, arguing that she has *a hard time connecting with people in that regard*. Then she complains about the expat community, and following that, she criticises herself for this very averseness (*I hate my own fear of asking them*). In the end, Kate shifts to a different perspective, embracing the coach's advice: *yeah I should I can ask around*.

**Coach overcoming resistance**

The second possibility of managing resistance against advice is for the coach to address it forthright. In order to achieve this, the coach can, for instance, use a counter-argument against the coachee's counter-argument. In Excerpt 10.18 (coaching 3), Coach II advises Rachel to communicate her subjective feelings to her team members. The coachee, however, argues that she has been given the opposite instruction by her HR department:

**Excerpt 10.18:**

- 1 C: *(moving backwards and forwards alternately) so you have this kind of loop, without any,*
- 2 R: *(nodding)*
- 3 C: *exit.*
- 4 R: *mhm, (-) and I went to a feedback training session, a couple of weeks ago,*
- 5 C: *yes, (nodding)*
- 6 R: *(low volume) which was (-) xx by our HR team. because they "brought in" a new competency level in the appraisal system.*
- 7 C: *(nodding)*



- 8 R: *a:nd the idea was that it should always be (-) very (-) impersonate. it shouldn't be (expressive) YOU did that, but (-) it's (-) somebody in your position I would expect this type of xx from this person. (-) 'h uhm,*
- 9 C: *(nodding)*
- 10 R: *the sort of the indirect,*
- 11 C: *yeah, [but uhm-]*
- 12 R: *[approach.] (-) and then YOU made me feel this. but you (-) you talk about this is, (2s) you talk about the situation in a more abstract manner. I can't quite remember I need to go back over my notes. but 'hh it's it's avoiding direct confrontations. [xx.]*
- 13 C: *[u::h,] yes, but there's a risk in it. so I don't know finally, (-) what you did in this [training,]*

In response to Rachel's argument, the coach presents another argument, thus addressing and overcoming the resistance against his advice.

### Coach overlooking resistance

The third possibility of managing advice is for the coach to overlook resistance:

#### Excerpt 10.19:

- 1 O: *and I always think it's my age, (3s) when I don't get something, (2s) cause I know the people who are also applying are twenty years younger,*
- 2 C: *(nodding) hmm, (2s) hmm,*
- 3 O: *and uh-*
- 4 C: *you could ask them right?*
- 5 O: *I have asked,*
- 6 C: *[to understand, xx]*
- 7 O: *[but uh] my friends who are my age or two or three years OLDER,*
- 8 C: *(nodding) mhm,*
- 9 O: *they're AMAZED how much work I have my freelance friends,*
- 10 C: *mhm,*
- 11 O: *'h cause they know for a FACT, (low volume) people won't even LOOK at them xxxxx seen their birth date.*
- 12 C: *(long nod) REALLY.*

In Excerpt 10.19 (coaching 5) the coachee Olivia contradicts herself: At the outset of the sequence she complains that she is too old to get work. Coach III suggests that she might ask her potential employers whether her age is actually a problem, thus giving advice. In response the coachee states that she has already done so, thus displaying resistance by indicating that the coach's advice is redundant. However, Olivia then goes on to tell the coach that her friends are *AMAZED* at how much work she gets in comparison to them. The

coach's answer ((*long nod*) *REALLY*.) might contain a trace of irony, but she does not explicitly comment on Olivia's resistance action and instead overlooks it. Overlooking resistance may serve to postpone a discussion to a later point. Also, it may reflect the coach's impression that there is no benefit in pursuing a piece of advice any longer. Moreover, it may occur when the coachee has actually convinced the coach that an instance of advice is not suitable for her.

Again, before conducting the main study, I tested the categories by means of a pilot study.

### 10.1.6 Conclusion and research questions

To summarise, my framework for the analysis of advice actions focuses on three main areas. First, I will analyse the frequency of advice given by the coaches. Second, I will consider the advice-related actions by the coachees. Third, I will discuss resistance-related activities both by the coaches and the coachees. Altogether, these categories will provide an interesting overview on the topic. The quantitative findings will be complemented by qualitative studies of the categories in the context of the individual coachings. In the end, this combination of methods will provide answers to the following research questions:

#### **Advice-related actions by the coaches:**

- How many instances of advice do the coaches use in the individual coaching sessions?
- Are there any significant differences between the advice activities by the coaches?
- How many repetitions do the coaches use?
- To which degree is the advice solicited?

#### **Advice-related actions by the coachees:**

- How often do the coachees make requests for advice?
- How often do the coachees react to advice by the coaches, in particular by agreeing with it, by evaluating it positively, by complementing it, by taking it up, and by asking questions about it?
- How often do the coachees give advice to themselves?
- Which further findings emerge from the qualitative analysis of advice-related actions by the coachees?
- Which common characteristics and which differences can be observed in relation to the advice-related actions by the coachees?

**Resistance:**

- How many and which of the resistance actions do the coachees produce?
- How are the resistance issues resolved?
- What specific patterns of resistance actions emerge in the individual interactions?

**Overall picture:**

- Which specific patterns of advice-giving occur in the individual sessions?
- What role do advice activities play in the constitution of individual interactive patterns?
- Are there any correlations between the quantitative analysis of questions, feedback, and advice?

## 10.2 Results of the analysis of advice

### 10.2.1 Quantitative overview of the use of advice

All of the coaches in my corpus provide a multitude of suggestions regarding the way in which the coachees should resolve their problems (whereas, expectably, the coachees do not give advice to the coaches). Thus, each of the coaches conveys expert knowledge in all five coaching sessions in my corpus. This points to the fact that the coaches themselves enact advice-giving as a vital part of their roles, despite the ideal of nondirectiveness that is prevalent in coaching theory (cf. Chapter 4; Table 10.5). However, there are considerable variations concerning the frequencies of advice in the individual sessions.

As Table 10.5 shows, Coach III in coaching 5 produces the lowest number of advice actions (1.54 items ptw), followed by Coach II in coaching 3 (1.81 items ptw) and by Coach II in coaching 4 (2.04 items ptw) (the absolute numbers are 17, 28, and 29 instances of advice respectively). Coach I, on the other hand, produces 2.52 items ptw in coaching 2 (25 instantiations). The coaching session that deviates the most from the other conversations is coaching 1: This conversation features more than twice as many advice activities than coaching 5 (52 items = 3.39 items ptw). Concerning the contents of advice, it is interesting to note that about 30% of the instantiations of advice tend to be repetitions, except for coaching 4, which features only 20% of repetitions of advice.

Table 10.5 also illuminates that most of the advice is unsolicited (on average, solicited advice features 2.09 items ptw, as opposed to 0.17 items ptw of advice following a direct

request). Yet, as the qualitative analyses revealed, the overwhelming majority of advice activities emerge naturally in the course of the conversation.

	Coaching 1 Coach I (15,352 words)		Coaching 2 Coach I (9,927 words)		Coaching 3 Coach II (15,979 words)		Coaching 4 Coach II (13,714 words)		Coaching 5 Coach III (11,008 words)		Ø
	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Average items per word count
Coach giving advice	52	3.39 $\chi^2 = 10.519$ $p=0.001$	25	2.52 $\chi^2 = 0.269$ $p=0.604$	29	1.81 $\chi^2 = 2.063$ $p=0.151$	28	2.04 $\chi^2 = 0.46$ $p=0.498$	17	1.54 $\chi^2 = 3.192$ $p=0.074$	2.26
Repeating advice	16	1.04 = 29%	7	0.71 = 28%	9	0.56 = 33%	5	0.36 = 20%	4	0.36 = 27%	0.61 = 27%
(Requests for advice by coachee in total)	(7)	(0.46)	(3)	(0.30)	(1)	(0.06)	(2)	(0.15)	(2)	(0.18)	(0.23)
Unsolicited advice	47	3.06	22	2.22	28	1.75	28	2.04	15	1.36	2.09
Advice following direct request	5	0.33	3	0.30	1	0.06	0	0	2	0.18	0.17

Table 10.5: Advice-related action types by the coaches

Advice is occasioned by the setting, by the roles of the coach and the coachee, and by the context of the interaction. While there is no observable fixed step-wise entry pattern, such as there was, for instance, in the data of Heritage and Sefi (1992) and Silverman et al. (1992), advice in my data is always foreshadowed by questions, by narratives (usually on the part of the coachees), and by feedback activities. This characteristic of advice-giving in coachings is likely genre-typical; and it is shared by related oral advising genres, such as therapeutic discourse (cf. Pawelczyk 2011). Thus, the strong context-occasioned nature of advice in my coaching corpus differs from advice in written interaction, such as the online advice columns analysed in Locher (2006).

The results of advice-related activities by the coachees in my corpus are comprised in Table 10.6. As the table illuminates, in my corpus there are occasions in which the coachees ask for the coaches' opinions, and the coaches make an effort to, above all, respond to advice respectfully. A brief review of the overall results in the table leads to the familiar finding that, once again, the coachee Kate (coaching 1) holds the quantitative record for almost all of the advice-related activities. The coachee Olivia (coaching 5), on the other hand, is the most reluctant when explicitly processing advice by the coach. Clearly, the

overview in Table 10.5 confirms the finding that the coachees in my corpus display a very wide range of different communicative patterns.

	Coaching 1 Coachee K (15,352 words)		Coaching 2 Coachee B (9,927 words)		Coaching 3 Coachee R (15,979 words)		Coaching 4 Coachee P (13,714 words)		Coaching 5 Coachee O (11,008 words)		Ø
	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Average items per word count
Request for advice	7	0.46	3	0.30	1	0.06	2	0.15	2	0.18	0.23
Number of confirmative reactions to advice	87	5.67 $\chi^2 = 81.088$ p=0	51	5.14 $\chi^2 = 32.907$ p=1e-8	16	1.00 $\chi^2 = 18.663$ p<0.001	7	0.51 $\chi^2 = 27.145$ p=1.9e-7	3	0.27 $\chi^2 = 26.015$ p=3.4e-7	2.52
Agreeing with advice	39	2.54	31	3.12	7	0.44	5	0.36	2	0.18	1.33
Complementing advice	22	1.43	12	1.21	4	0.25	1	0.07	1	0.09	0.61
Taking up advice	7	0.46	3	0.30	1	0.06	0	0	0	0	0.16
Positive evaluation of advice	19	1.24	5	0.50	4	0.25	1	0.07	0	0	0.41
Asking questions about advice	1	0	0	0	1	0.06	0	0	1	0.09	0.03
Giving advice to oneself	11	0.72	1	0.10	1	0.06	0	0	2	0.18	0.21

Table 10.6: Advice-related action types by the coachees

I will further interpret Table 10.5 in the context of the individual analyses, but before I move into the overview of resistance actions, I will briefly consider the average numbers in the column on the far right. The furthest right column shows that by far the most frequent activity that the coachees use to welcome advice is agreeing (1.33 items ptw), followed by complementing advice (0.61 items ptw), and then by giving positive evaluations of advice (0.41 items ptw). Taking up advice is less common (0.16 items ptw), and questions about advice do not emerge in significant numbers at all (0.03 items ptw). In some instances the coachees give advice to themselves (0.21 items ptw).

As stated above, there are significant differences between the coachees in terms of frequencies. For instance, Kate (coaching 1) produces 2.54 agreeing activities per thousand words with respect to advice (39 items in total). In the case of the coachee Olivia (coaching 5) we count only two instances of agreement with advice throughout the entire coaching session (0.18 items ptw). Also, while Kate produces 19 positive evaluations of advice (1.24 items ptw), Olivia does not employ a single item. Of course, the reactions to advice also

depend on the frequency of advice itself – if the coach uses a low number of advice activities, the number of reactions on the side of the coachee will also be lower. However, more importantly, the data reflect the specific interactive patterns emerging in the conversations; the qualitative analyses will highlight this fact.

Table 10.7 illuminates the frequency and the forms of resistance against advice in my corpus. Moreover, it also attempts to capture how the episodes of resistance are resolved, and by whom. To an even larger degree than in the other areas of analysis, there are striking variations between the individual coachings. The average number of resistance actions is 0.75 items ptw – this number comprises high frequencies such as 1.69 items ptw (26 items in total) by Kate (coaching 1) and 1.27 items per word count (14 items in total) by Olivia (coaching 5).

	Coaching 1 Coach I Coachee Kate (15,352 words)		Coaching 2 Coach I Coachee Bobbie (9,927 words)		Coaching 3 Coach II Coachee Rachel (15,979 words)		Coaching 4 Coach II Coachee Pauline (13,714 words)		Coaching 5 Coach III Coachee Olivia (11,008 words)		Ø
	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p	Items	Items per word count/ p min	Average items per word count
Resistance actions by coachee in total	26	1.69 $\chi^2 = 21.907$ $p < 0.001$	2	0.20 $\chi^2 = 4.936$ $p = 0.026$	5	0.31 $\chi^2 = 5.771$ $p = 0.016$	4	0.29 $\chi^2 = 5.186$ $p = 0.023$	14	1.27 $\chi^2 = 4.249$ $p = 0.039$	0.75
Counter-argument	19	1.24	2	0.20	4	0.25	1	0.07	6	0.55	0.46
Signalling lack of relevance / redundancy	3	0.20	0	0	1	0	2	0.15	1	0.09	0.09
Humour	4	0.26	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.18	0.09
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.07	5	0.45	0.10
Coachee overcoming resistance herself	4	0.26	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.09	0.07
Coach overcoming resistance	10	0.65	0	0	3	0.19	1	0.07	3	0.27	0.24
Coach overlooking resistance	12	0.78	1	0.10	2	0.13	3	0.22	10	0.91	0.43

Table 10.7: Resistance actions by the coaches and the coachees

In coaching 2, on the other hand, there are only two instances of resistance by the coachee Bobbie (0.20 items ptw). Coachings 3 and 4 also display comparatively low numbers (5 items or 0.31 items ptw in coaching 3 and four items, or 0.29 items ptw in coaching 4).

The qualitative analyses have shown that the reasons behind resistance activities may strongly differ: Resistance actions may express careful consideration and an authentic desire to learn and develop on the side of the coachee. In this case, resistance against advice is concerned with the factual level of the interaction. At the same time, resistance can emerge from interpersonal friction, fostered, for instance, by a general scepticism against or by antipathy toward the coach. Moreover, resistance against advice may stem from intrapersonal blockage: Coachees may oppose the coaches' ideas because these challenge their familiar lines of thinking and patterns of behaviour. Table 10.7 makes evident that the average numbers of resistance can be misleading due to the large deviation between the frequencies of resistance actions by the different coachees. Therefore, in this context I place an even stronger emphasis on the analyses of the individual coachings. However, a general tendency that applies to the largest part of my corpus is that resistance is most commonly exercised by means of counter-arguments against advice. Also, the situations in which the coaches merely overlook resistance are consistently frequent in all of the conversations. Apart from these two findings, most of the results in this overview do not lend themselves to generalisation. The individual interactive patterns emerging in the conversation seem to become the most apparent in the analysis of resistance.

## **10.2.2 The use of advice in the individual coachings**

### **Coaching 1**

In the following, the use of advice in the individual coachings will be examined. The advice-related patterns in coaching 1 are entirely distinct from those of the other coachings in my corpus. Recall that the coachee Kate is faced with a dilemma (i.e. whether she should start a new line of work or not). The analyses of Kate's question activities and of her use of feedback demonstrated that she is an eager participant in the conversation (cf. Chapters 8 and 9): She actively confirms the coach's role as an authoritative advice-giver, and she constantly proves her willingness to work on her problems. Coach I takes on a position in favour of change early on, suggesting to Kate that she should assess the possibilities of building up the new project management business in which she has shown interest. As Table 10.4 shows, with 52 advice activities (3.39 items ptw), Coach I expends a great deal of energy on the task of convincing Kate that she should change her work life. Sixteen of these pieces of advice are repetitions (1.04 items ptw); some even repeat themselves several times – such as, for instance, the idea that the coachee should just get active and pursue the next steps.

In accordance with her use of questions and feedback, Kate's general advice-related actions are highly frequent: She asks the coach for direct advice seven times (0.46 items

ptw); she expresses her agreement with the coach's advice significantly more often than the other coachees, i.e. 39 times (2.54 items ptw); she gives explicit positive evaluations of the coach's advice 19 times (1.24 items ptw); and she takes up instances of the coach's advice seven times (0.46 items ptw). Further, Kate complements advice in 22 cases (1.43 items ptw), directly tying in with the coach's thoughts and co-constructing change-promoting ideas. In all of these categories, she reaches by far the highest numbers in the corpus. Thus, advice activities in coaching 1 often look like the following sequence: Excerpt 10.20 contains the original data (shown in the column on the left) as well as the analysis of the advice-related actions (in the middle column) and of other central communicative actions (in the right column).

#### Excerpt 10.20:

No.	Data	Advice activities	Other communicative aspects
1	C: <i>mhm, mhm, (2s) my idea for you. is (-) at this time (-) well (-) if you xxxx to stop working in the morning, well you (-) get checked (-) (tapping on the table with his fingers) all the things that have to be done. like checking emails, doing the translation job and so on,</i>	C: giving advice (starting with creative work in the morning)	
2	K: <i>mhm,</i>		K: backchanneling
3	C: <i>ahm, I have (-) when you did (-) all this. you have no time no energy for doing the other thing. (-) for doing (touching one of the rocks) this.</i>		C: continuing
4	K: <i>yeah. what yeah exactly because it's yeah. kind of-</i>	K: agreeing with advice	
5	C: <i>so (-) (moving the shell towards K) start with this.)</i>		C: continuing
6	K: <i>[that would make a lot more sense.]</i>	K: positive evaluation of advice	
7	C: <i>[just for (-) not for four hours,] (-) just for one hour a day.</i>		C: continuing
8	K: <i>mhm,</i>		K: backchanneling
9	C: <i>afterwards you can do the other stuff.</i>		C: continuing
10	K: <i>'h yeah. that would make more sense, (3s) that would make more sense, (-) 'h because (lifting the shell up and putting it down again) that IS such a different way of thinking and I'm not used to it. I can always fall into (lifting up a rock and putting it down again) this.</i>	K: agreeing with advice, positive evaluation of advice, complementing advice	
11	C: <i>yeah. and when you've finished the hour, change uh let's just change gears (lifting a rock up and putting it down again),</i>		C: continuing
12	K: <i>yeah,</i>		K: backchanneling
13	C: <i>and do the others.</i>		C: continuing
14	K: <i>'h that's a good idea. (taking the folder and opening it)</i>	K: positive evaluation of advice	

It is evident from the excerpt that the coach fulfils one of the prototypical expectations tied to his role, i.e. he gives advice to the coachee.



In this case, he recommends that she should do the creative thinking associated with her new line of work before her routine tasks. The coachee Kate displays two examples of agreeing, expressed by the agreement token *yeah* (lines 4 and 10). Also, she provides an explicit, positive evaluation of the coach's advice: *that would make a lot more sense* (line 6). Later, she repeats this evaluation twice (line 10).<sup>40</sup> She uses a grounder, i.e. an explanative argument, to boost her evaluation (line 10). Also, Kate presents another positive evaluation: *'h that's a good idea* (line 10).

This can be related back to the overview of the analysis of resistance in the coaching corpus (cf. Table 9.5). Characteristically, Kate represents the most active conversational partner in my corpus in this more antagonistic category as well as in the confirmative ones. In sum, she fends off the coach's advice 26 times (1.69 items ptw). In 19 instances she faces the coach's pro-change arguments with counter-arguments (1.24 items ptw). In four situations she subtly undermines advice by means of humour (0.26 items ptw), and in three instances she signals that the coach's advice is redundant or not relevant to her (0.20 items ptw). A related observation, which is not included in the overview, is the fact that Kate is the only coachee who gives explanations of default five times: In these cases she defends herself for not having succeeded before in resolving her problems. By apologising for her deficits she ostensibly focuses on her insight in the necessity of change, but at the same time she shifts the focus toward her underlying problem, i.e. the fact that she sees herself as her *own worst enemy* (00:29:12). This focus may also be seen as a form of resistance against change, with the coach as a promoter of change.

Clearly, the extraordinarily high numbers both in confirmative and in antagonistic categories are strongly contradictory in themselves. The background to Kate's communicative behaviour becomes more comprehensible through the additional qualitative analysis (cf. Excerpt 10.21): In the context of this situation Kate reiterates the accusation she has made toward herself that she procrastinates over important things. Ultimately, she wants to promote the self-critical point that she is *her own worst enemy* (line 15). She tells the coach that she has been postponing getting in touch with an organisation that means a great deal to her. In a characteristic argument, she makes an explanation of default (line 5 and 7). Having criticised herself and having defended herself, she then renews the assessment that she would be strongly interested in a job with said organisation (line 9), only to raise doubts again (line 11). Thus, she has undermined her own advice to herself to initiate change, as according to her, change is probably impossible anyway.

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<sup>40</sup> It was established in Chapter 10.1 that repetitions like this are treated as one argument producing one positive evaluation, because they are not interrupted by a turn on the side of the coach.

**Excerpt 10.21:**

No.	Data	Advice activities	Other communicative aspects
1	<i>K: I'm I'm in in other clubs and associations. I just haven't (frowning, starting to write) managed that one for some reason. (-) I should probably just sign the paper. (laughing)</i>	K: giving pro-change advice to herself (just signing the paper)	
2	<i>C: I [think so.]</i>	C: agreeing with K's advice to herself	
3	<i>K: [well it's] just one of these things that-</i>	K: giving reasons why she has not followed her own advice up to now: explanation of default	
4	<i>C: I think so.</i>	C: repeating agreement	
5	<i>K: yeah it's like you've got (measuring imaginary stack) things that build up in life [like this-]</i>		K: continuing
6	<i>C: [yeah.] yeah.</i>		C: backchanneling
7	<i>K: they just don't get done.</i>		K: continuing
8	<i>C: yeah. yeah.</i>		C: backchanneling
9	<i>K: (taking up pen) but that would be a great job,</i>	K: pointing out positive aspects of change, thus taking up advice to herself	
10	<i>C: yeah,</i>		C: backchanneling
11	<i>K: but (putting pen down) but I just can't see that happening. but okay. [so that's-]</i>	K: resistance: counter-argument	
12	<i>C: [but if] you don't uh (-) make it (-) possible to get a chance-</i>	C: promoting K's initial advice to herself/coach overcoming resistance: counter-argument	
13	<i>K: 'hhh</i>		K: breathing loudly
14	<i>C: (smiling, shrugging shoulders) you don't get in.</i>		C: continuing
15	<i>K: my own worst enemy. yeah. (laughing)</i>	K: criticising herself, alluding to underlying theme (her own worst enemy), keeping up resistance	
16	<i>C: yeah well okay you know but uhm</i>		C: continuing
17	<i>K: (taking a sip of water)</i>		K: gestural act
18	<i>C: not to have this goal I have to uh well (playing around with one of the rocks) get this job in W. (NAME OF SWISS CITY), or for this organisation in W.?</i>		C: continuing
19	<i>K: mhm,</i>		K: backchanneling
20	<i>C: but well just get in contact-</i>	C: giving advice: repeating advice (just getting in contact)	
21	<i>K: yeah.</i>		K: backchanneling
22	<i>C: and (-) see if something happens.</i>		C: continuing
23	<i>K: (writing) I should just [get in] touch.</i>	K: agreeing with advice	

In other words, Kate is showing resistance toward the coach's general and specific advice concerning change. This, in turn, mobilises the coach. He overcomes the resistance by means of a counter-argument and supports the part of Kate that wants change (lines 12 and 14). The coachee laughingly accepts his statement as more proof that she is fighting a war against herself (line 15). The coach ignores this self-critical piece of humour and sets out to repeat a piece of advice he has used before (lines 20 and 22), to which the coachee reacts with agreement (turn 23).

In essence, Excerpt 10.21 shows the high degree of ambivalence that Kate enacts in the conversation: On the one hand, she empowers the coach to fully exercise his role as an advice-giver, but on the other hand she keeps raising problems that will stand in the way of change. In this manner, Kate invites the coach to act out her inner dilemma by representing one of her inner parts. As long as the coach is an advocate for change, K is free to take the conservative anti-change side. Thus, she offers the coach one problem followed by another, accepting most of his advice, but instantly raising new problems. This pattern will be taken up again in the analysis of Kate's patterns of self-presentation (cf. Section 13.2). Moreover, in Section 16.2 it will be shown that this interactive pattern can be conceived of as a psychological 'game' that is very commonplace in advice situations.

As to the question of how the resistance is taken up (cf. Table 10.5), the coach overcomes Kate's resistance 10 times (0.65 items ptw); in 12 instances the coach passes over Kate's resistance (0.78 items ptw); and in four further instances the coachee overcomes the resistance herself by talking herself out of it (0.26 items ptw). The frequency of these resistance-related activities can only be explained on the grounds of the interactive patterns between the coach and the coachee.

Lastly, there is an alternative advice pattern which often emerges in coaching 1: It occurs whenever the interactants talk about the official coaching issue, i.e. Kate's request for advice on public speaking. In the end the coach spends a great deal of time on this topic, giving the coachee several tips. Kate displays a different type of reaction to the pieces of advice in these cases: She activates a more resourceful expert identity, indicating that she already knows most of the things that the coach has suggested. In sum, the advice sequences occurring with respect to the two different coaching issues follow different patterns.

## Coaching 2

Despite the coach's assessment of the coachee Bobbie as unproblematic, he does, in fact, produce many advice activities in coaching 2, which the coachee appears to appreciate. It is possible that both interactants in part continue with the conversation so as to deliver enough

material for the research project – in particular, because Bobbie is the only participant who has a remote personal connection to the researcher (cf. Section 3.3). At the same time, both interactants appear to genuinely enjoy the conversation, which might be a further trigger for them to continue the advice sequences despite their supposed irrelevance.

Consider Excerpt 10.22. In this characteristic sequence of advice, Bobbie is reflecting on alternative ways to find permanent work with her preferred employer (a festival organisation), in case she should only get offered a short-term job. She starts by giving advice to herself (lines 1, 3, and 5). The coach supports her argument, employing another instance of advice (line 6). In the following two turns, both the coachee and the coach complement the advice. Thus, they co-construct the solution in a joint effort. These activities imply a cooperative interpersonal mode, as well as a confident attitude on Bobbie's part.

#### Excerpt 10.22:

No.	Data	Advice activities	Other communicative aspects
1	<i>B: ahm (2s) 'hh but I think looking at (3s) the: (-) other departments in the company,</i>	B: giving advice to herself (looking at other departments in the company)	
2	<i>C: yeah,</i>		C: backchanneling
3	<i>B: in the in the festival [that's-]</i>		B: continuing
4	<i>C: [yeah,]</i>		C: backchanneling
5	<i>B: a great plan.</i>	B: positive evaluation of advice	
6	<i>C: just t- ch- (-) to check, what (-) which other jobs do they HAVE, what-</i>	C: giving advice	
7	<i>B: or even not if they HAVE jobs, but just to [meet (-) the heads of the departments-]</i>	B: complementing advice	
8	<i>C: [to or (-) maybe there] uh there are well uh pff some (-) people who can create a new job?</i>	C: complementing advice	
9	<i>B: right.</i>	B: agreeing with advice	
10	<i>C: knowing you,</i>		C: continuing
11	<i>B: (nodding)</i>		B: backchanneling
12	<i>C: saying hey, (clapping hands together) I know B now, 'h I don't know, (-) which job she will (2s) let's create one.</i>		C: continuing
13	<i>B: yeah. (2s) possible. (-) yeah I think that's a very good plan.</i>	B: agreeing with advice, positive evaluation of advice	
14	<i>C: yeah,</i>		C: backchanneling
15	<i>B: a::nd-</i>		B: continuing
16	<i>C: to look, (-) to search for opportunities. you know?</i>	C: continuing	
17	<i>B: right.</i>	B: agreeing with advice	B: backchanneling
18	<i>C: well (-) when you're ah there's a fancy dinner in the evening with the sponsors, yeah?</i>	C: giving advice (from contact to contract)	
19	<i>B: (nodding)</i>		B: backchanneling

20	C: to sit (tapping on table twice) RIGHT, BESIDE the (-) best person.		C: continuing
21	B: mhm, (nodding)		B: backchanneling
22	C: to talk about (tapping on the table) (-) just having conversation, yeah uh having contact,		C: continuing
23	B: 'h h h h (nodding)		B: backchanneling
24	C: b- uh building up a (writing quotation marks in the air with his fingers) relationship, a profe- uh yeah, and then well, (-) I always say in German, from a contact to contract, you know?		C: continuing

As the excerpt demonstrates, both the coach and the coachee are open-minded about the ideas given by their respective conversational partner – and both interactants show positive assurance that there are great opportunities and smart strategies at hand for the coachee. The cooperative mode highlighted by this sequence is also reflected in the quantitative analysis of coaching 2. With this session, Coach I achieves the second highest rate of advice-giving (25 items = 2.52 items ptw) in the corpus. This number is only surpassed by his own results in coaching 1, as has been established in the previous section. These data are flanked by other quantitative results: For instance, Bobbie scores the highest number with respect to agreeing with advice (31 items = 3.12 items ptw), and the second highest numbers in complementing advice (12 items = 1.21 items ptw), taking up advice (3 items = 0.30 items ptw), and the positive evaluation of advice (5 items = 0.50 items ptw). By contrast, Bobbie only produces two instances of resistance (0.20 items ptw) – this is the lowest number in the corpus. Also, her resistance actions are mitigated with respect to face-threatening acts, so that they do not disrupt the cooperative friendliness in any way (cf. Chapter 14). Both instances of resistance are overlooked by the coach. The overall picture of the quantitative and the qualitative evidence is clear: The advice-related activities in coaching 2 seem to be as harmonious as they can be without relegating the coaching pointless.

## Coaching 3

In Section 9.2 it has been established that coaching 3 does not contribute well to quantitative analyses with respect to feedback. The quantitative overview on the use of advice reinforces this finding. Coaching 3 is one of the three coachings that features a lower number of advice interventions (more precisely, the coach produces 29 items, or 1.81 items ptw). With only one request for advice (0.06 items ptw), the coachee's interest in what the coach has to say remains implicit for most of the session.

Moreover, the coachee Rachel responds comparatively sparingly to Coach II's advice: She employs seven instances of agreeing with advice (0.44 items ptw), four instances of complementing advice (0.25 items ptw), four positive evaluations of advice (0.25

items ptw), and one instance of taking up advice (0.06 items ptw). Rachel does not constantly intersperse her contributions with tokens of appreciation in the way that Kate and Bobbie do in coachings 1 and 2. However, the discussion on feedback in Section 8.2 has established the strong force of Rachel's positive evaluations. In order to understand the subtle dynamics of advice actions in this coaching session, the qualitative analyses must be considered.

Excerpt 10.23 will illustrate a few central aspects of advice sequences in coaching 3 – first and foremost it will highlight the fact that advice is occasioned in long processes overextensive stretches of time. In this situation Rachel is discussing her problems with one of her team members:

**Excerpt 10.23:**

No.	Data	Advice activities	Other communicative aspects
1	<i>R: but that's how he was treating them.</i>		R: giving background information about a team member
2	<i>C: hm. (2s) 'h so I think uhm,</i>	C: giving advice: repeating advice (communicating emotions)	C: backchanneling
3	<i>R: (taking a sip of tea)</i>		R: gestural act
4	<i>C: you can increase your impact on how the people, (-) uhm, (-) if you, (-) ask yourself to bring out your emotions, not in a way (-) to act rude,</i>		C: continuing
5	<i>R: mhm,</i>		R: backchanneling
6	<i>C: or anything like that, but just to (-) mention them? 'h and on the other hand, if you, 'h uhm, distinguish between beHAVIOUR? (-) and PERSON.</i>	C: specifying advice (distinguishing between behaviour and person)	C: continuing,
7	<i>R: (nodding)</i>		R: backchanneling
8	<i>C: for example if you say, something like uhm 'h you want to be a senior manager but you do not behave like a senior manager, most of the reaction will be like (holding up his right hand) (-) resist.</i>	C: giving an example to support advice	
9	<i>R: (nodding) mhm,</i>		R: backchanneling
10	<i>C: (holding both hands in front of his face, expressive) O::H, I did I did I did. 'h (regular mode) but uhm there's a great feedback model. especially for development discussions with uhm, (-) 'h employees, in the sense of (-) what's the task of (-) uh what's the vision of our (-) uh company.</i>		C: continuing
11	<i>R: [mhm,] (nodding)</i>		R: backchanneling
12	<i>C: [what's] the task of our department, to.,</i>		C: continuing
13	<i>R: (nodding)</i>		R: backchanneling
14	<i>C: support this vision, (-) what xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx,</i>		C: continuing
15	<i>R: (nodding)</i>		R: backchanneling
16	<i>C: how did I feel about this behaviour, (2s) and what I want you (-) to do in future. the good thing is, it's not about B. (FIRST NAME), it's about the behaviour.</i>		C: continuing
17	<i>R: (nodding) [mhm,]</i>		R: backchanneling
18	<i>C: [you saw.] you could observe. 'h and then (-) very often it's easier</i>		C: continuing

	<i>for people to take the feedback,</i>		
19	<i>R: (nodding)</i>		R: backchanneling
20	<i>C: because they understand. (2s) 'h you wanna support him in growing,</i>		C: continuing
21	<i>R: (nodding)</i>		R: backchanneling
22	<i>C: and in development, 'h that's why you (-) talk about this behaviour.</i>		C: continuing
23	<i>R: (nodding) mm. (-) I mean it IS quite difficult because (-) he is (-) effectively an ally,</i>	R: resistance: counter-argument	R: backchanneling
24	<i>C: (laughing) hhh'</i>		C: backchanneling
25	<i>R: uhm, (3s) and (-) somebody who I have lunch with,</i>		R: continuing
26	<i>C: (nodding)</i>		C: backchanneling
27	<i>R: or (-) whatever.</i>		R: continuing
28	<i>C: well then it's getting even easier. (-) in terms of uhm, 'h (expressive) especially given the fact I want to support you in the best way.</i>	C: overcoming resistance: counter-argument	
29	<i>R: he knows I want to. but he's losing (-) faith in me. because 'h he knows that (-) he's in a position, where he cannot be promoted within the company. 'h unless he wants to become a brand manager. 'h and I'm looking at ways in which I can get him to manage other people. 'h but even (-) if that happens. I don't think that my boss would con[sider,]</i>	R: resistance: counter-argument	

Coach II repeats a piece of advice that he has introduced before: Rachel should communicate her emotions to her subordinates. He elaborates this point in depth, giving an example to support his advice and depicting the situation from the point of view of an employee. In this context, he also uses an acting element to reinforce his argument. Throughout his turn Rachel listens patiently and politely, expressing her attention by means of backchanneling signals (for this purpose, she uses para-verbal expressions like *mhmm*, as well as nodding gestures). Thus, she provides the coach time to unfold his thoughts before she responds. In line 23 Rachel produces a counter-argument: As the employee in question is *effectively an ally* and *somebody* she has *lunch* with, she is reluctant to confront him with an unpleasant truth. To this the coach answers with another counter-argument (line 28), followed by a further counter-argument by Rachel (line 29). After this last turn the sequence continues in the same manner for an extended period of time. In the end, the coach lets the issue rest for the moment and overlooks the resistance, but at a later point he returns to his advice.

Excerpt 10.23 has presented a long stretch typical to this conversation in which the coach and the coachee exchange their thoughts on the issue in question. In this coaching session Rachel tends to spend much time reflecting on different aspects of the situation, intricately describing people and her relationship to them. The coach listens sympathetically; he expresses his appreciation of the coachee; and he does not give advice right away. Instead, he asks questions and employs backchanneling activities. From time to time, however, he offers some pieces of advice. The coachee immediately starts to process the advice, bringing forward all of her doubts, but taking it very seriously and seemingly also

looking for ways in which she can apply the coach's ideas to her situation. Thus, she produces several instances of resistance, but in many cases she integrates the coach's thoughts immediately without making this explicit. In sum, coaching 3 is based on argumentative rounds of cooperative solutions, finding and testing the viability of different solutions.

In quantitative terms, these activities combine to form the following picture: Rachel employs five instances of resistance (0.31 items ptw), four of which are counter-arguments and one of which is an indication of redundancy. This also demonstrates that Rachel's resistance is predominantly task-oriented: She does not deviate from the topic or divert from her problems, a strategy that will be prominent in relation to the relationship-oriented kind of resistance that appears in coaching 5. As far as Coach II is concerned, in three cases he faces resistance with counter-arguments (0.19 items ptw); in two cases he overlooks the resistance, waiting for better moments to reinforce his advice (0.13 items ptw). Overall, the coach manages to establish his main ideas in the course of a long discursive process. As the coach patiently goes through the process with Rachel step by step, he can manage to rebut doubts and counter-arguments. In the end, the coachee fully embraces the coach's idea that she should communicate openly with her team members. Rachel seems to reach new perspectives on her problems. Moreover, by finding viable solutions for her leadership issues, she indirectly also repairs her shattered self-image as a leader (cf. Section 13.4).

## Coaching 4

Coaching 4 displays the lowest number of instances of advice by the coach (28 items = 2.04 items ptw). Remarkably, this finding is in line with the results of the analysis of feedback, but not in accordance with the results of the analysis of questions in coaching 4: While Coach II employs many questions to activate the coachee Pauline, he uses comparatively little feedback and few advice activities. In contrast, the frequency of the three different coaching interventions by the coaches tends to correlate in the other four coaching conversations. On the other hand, he uses a comparatively small amount of feedback actions and a smaller amount of advice actions.

The coachee Pauline is rather passive with respect to advice: She uses two requests for advice (0.15 items ptw), five instances of agreeing with advice (0.36 items ptw), and one instance of complementing advice (0.07 items ptw). She does not employ any instances of taking up advice, and she produces only one positive evaluation of advice (0.07 items ptw). The same is true for resistance: Pauline only produces four acts of resistance (0.29 items ptw). Of these resistance acts, one is a counter-argument (0.07 items ptw), two signal a lack of relevance (0.15 items ptw), and one belongs to the category 'others' (0.07 items ptw).



Coach II overlooks resistance three times (0.22 items ptw), whereas he overcomes it in one instance (0.07 items ptw).

In fact, Coach II often discards prototypical opportunities to give advice to the coachee Pauline. For instance, when Pauline insists on the view that her conflict with her former boss was not her fault, Coach II does not contradict her, though he clearly disagrees with her (cf. Section 13.5). Instead, he moves on to the second coaching issue, i.e. Pauline's career options without offering any piece of advice on the issue. This strategy turns out to be very effective in coaching 4. After more than 80 minutes of talk, when he asks the coachee about her current state, she returns to the topic of her own volition (01:19:55).

It is at this point that Coach II begins to give advice on the first coaching issue. He unfolds his thoughts in a very long stretch of talk, arguing that Pauline can change it if she works on her communication habits: *so:, (-) yes you CAN change this pattern (...) if you (-) pronounce it in the right way.* (01:22:50). To this suggestion Pauline first reacts with a sceptical mimic expression, i.e. with raised eyebrows (01:22:48), but then she indicates that she is willing to go along with the argument by means of a long nod (01:22:52) and the para-verbal signal *hmm*, uttered with falling intonation (01:22:53).

In the following, Coach II develops the idea that Pauline could ask her colleagues and her boss for feedback early on in order to prevent them from accumulating criticism. Also, he argues that she would be able to work on her patterns at an initial stage, and that she would get a feeling for the informal rules of the respective company culture. Pauline expresses her continued interest by means of a mirroring action: *so you think that a::hm, putting it that way and making, (-) well, saying I need feedback, (-) rather than asking, is something wrong, (...) is going to be:, (2s) is going to get more results.* (01:24:48). The coach confirms this interpretation and goes on to launch a challenging piece of feedback, tied to a piece of advice (cf. Excerpt 10.24):

#### Excerpt 10.24:

No.	Data	Advice activities	Other communicative aspects
1	C: <i>and when I ask you, (-) sharing with me the example, (-) how (-) you said to these guys that they disturb you,</i>		C: giving critical feedback (cynical tone)
2	P: <i>(nodding)</i>		P: backchanneling
3	C: <i>it was a LITTLE bit cynical.</i>		C: continuing
4	P: <i>(nodding) mhm,</i>		P: backchanneling
5	C: <i>in terms of uh, (expressive) do you think I should listen to your conversation,</i>		C: continuing
6	P: <i>(nodding) mhm,</i>		P: backchanneling
7	C: <i>or why don't you want me to focus on my task.</i>		C: continuing
8	P: <i>(nodding)</i>		P: backchanneling
9	C: <i>it's a kind of (2s) suppressed aggression for me.</i>		C: continuing

10	P: (nodding) mhm,		P: backchanneling
11	C: the aggression is (putting his right hand on his heart) I, feel, disturbed,		C: continuing
12	P: (nodding) mhm,		P: backchanneling
13	C: I cannot concentrate,		C: continuing
14	P: (nodding)		P: backchanneling
15	C: the way: you brought it out, was a little bit like, (-) I'm (-) I'm not able to bring in my emotions in a way,		C: continuing
16	P: (nodding)		P: backchanneling
17	C: which might be helpful,		C: continuing
18	P: (nodding)		P: backchanneling
19	C: so it's like a I- (-) slight aggression in that.		C: continuing
20	P: (nodding) mhm,		P: backchanneling
21	C: 'hh a::nd uhm, (-) if you do a different I-statement,	C: giving advice (using different I-statement)	
22	P: (nodding)		P: backchanneling
23	C: in terms of here I got, uhm (-) "excuse me", yeah, (2s) I really want to focus on this topic.		C: continuing
24	P: (nodding)		P: backchanneling
25	C: to do a good job. (-) and I realise I feel really disturbed. DO YOU MIND to (-) have the conversation anywhere else.		C: continuing
26	P: (nodding)		P: backchanneling
27	C: they would always say like (expressive) a::h, if we can support you, (-) then we might go-		C: continuing
28	P: (frowning)		P: backchanneling
29	C: it depends on the person.		C: continuing
30	P: (nodding) hmm.		P: backchanneling
31	C: but it's (-) the other way is more with with (-) with more pressure.		C: continuing
32	P: (nodding)		P: backchanneling
33	C: a::nd (-) pressure normally (putting his hands against each other) creates pressure again.	C: giving advice (pressure creates more pressure)	

As established in Section 10.1, the focus of my study is on overarching sequences, rather than on the speech act level. However, it is apparent that Coach II mitigates his criticism in multiple ways. For instance, he uses bushes (*a little bit; kind of; slight*) so as to reduce the commitment to the propositional content of the utterance. Also, he employs a hedge (*for me*) in order to reduce the illocutionary force of the speech act (Caffi 1999). Further, he explains the background of his piece of criticism in great length, again inserting dramatic elements to highlight his point (01:25:31; 01:25:42). The coachee Pauline listens carefully, giving backchanneling signals after each of the coach's thoughts. Then he goes on to give two pieces of advice (01:25:57; 01:26:24). Considering the defensive manner in which Pauline presents herself at the beginning of the conversation (cf. Section 13.5), it is rather remarkable how open she becomes to the coach's challenging advice by the end of the session. In essence, he has managed to guide the process over a long stretch of time in a way that prepares the floor for new perspectives.

## Coaching 5

Coaching 5 certainly delivers the most striking advice patterns of the coachings in my corpus. It contains the lowest number of instances of advice given by the coach (17 items = 1.54 items ptw); and the numbers concerning appreciation of advice by the coachee are also remarkable: There are only two instances of agreeing with advice (0.18 items ptw), one instance of complementing advice (0.09 items ptw), no taking up of advice, and no positive evaluation of advice. Further, the few agreements that the coachee Olivia produces are outweighed by her ensuing objections, and the only case of complementing advice is ironic (see Excerpt 10.25 below). In sum, positive reactions by the coachee to advice by the coach are more than scarce.

Olivia, who gives advice to herself in two instances (0.18 items ptw), also scores the highest number of resistance actions (14 items = 1.27 items ptw) – but she does not balance her resistance with affirmative actions in the way that Kate does in coaching 1 (cf. Section 10.2.2). Of the 14 instances of resistance, six are counter-arguments (0.55 items ptw), one signals a lack of relevance (0.09 items ptw), and two use humour to divert from the advice (0.18 items ptw). Moreover, five instances fall into the category ‘others’ (0.45 items ptw). These comprise two situations in which Olivia switches the topic, one in which she corrects the coach’s language, thus bringing the conversation to a halt, and one in which she simply interrupts the coach’s advice-giving. This relates to a finding which has been revealed in Section 9.2: Whenever Coach III tries to evaluate Olivia and her situation in a positive way, she reacts with resistance.

In effect, Coach II overcomes Olivia’s resistance in only three situations (0.27 items ptw). In one instance the coachee overcomes her resistance herself (0.09 items ptw), but the overwhelming majority of resistance actions (i.e. 10 instances) are simply overlooked (0.91 items ptw). In many situations Olivia produces forceful monologues, and in some ways, she presents herself as very uncooperative with respect to the coach’s moderating function in the conversation. One reason that the coach passes over the coachee’s resistance in so many cases might be that it seems to be difficult to intercept her turns. Excerpt 10.25 demonstrates this dynamic. Officially, the interactants are still looking into potential career options for the coachee, but in practice, Olivia bemoans her private situation.

The dynamics are well captured in the table and provide enough insight to not necessitate a great deal of explanation of the analysis, so this discussion will be brief. In short, example (14) suitably shows how forceful Olivia’s rhetoric becomes when she explains her own miserable situation.

**Excerpt 10.25:**

No.	Data	Advice activities	Other communicative aspects
1	O: I'm (-) thinking maybe (-) h' (turning her head towards the sky, low volume) break from the city life and doing some xx where everything's green and quiet, (2s) having a pet again, (-) if I can't have a boyfriend I could have a cat maybe, (laughing)		O: reflecting on her situation
2	C: mhm, mhm,		C: backchanneling
3	O: (smiling) or have a do::g, (2s) (sighing) (4s) (regular, but low volume) if I had some place, (-) 'h even if it's a temporary home, "love to have something like a bird" and my xx is flapping and flapping, I'm so tired. I just wish to find a branch just to land and xx. (taking a sip of coffee)		O: continuing
4	C: mhm, (4s) do you realise that you (writing a circle into the air with her left index finger) ALWAYS come back to the same question, to the same story, and it's like a hamster wheel,		C: giving situational feedback (always coming back to the same question)
5	O: (very low volume) xxxxx		O: continuing
6	C: for (pointing to her chest with both hands) ME, I have the impression that you: (-) you look back on something you had, and you want to have it back, but it's not really POSSIBLE.	C: giving advice (what O wants is not available)	
7	O: (taking a sip of coffee)		O: gestural act
8	C: to have it back.		C: continuing
9	O: xxxx at some point, I'll probably catch up and settle xx "good". (2s) but (-) obviously I can't have my kids back in the same way I can't xxxxxxx my garden, my roses, my 'hh-	O: partially agreeing with advice, going on to talk about the things she has lost, resistance: others	
10	C: hm.		C: backchanneling
11	O: lavender, all of my ahm herbs that I planted,		O: continuing
12	C: hmhm,		C: backchanneling
13	O: all of that's definitely cut-		O: continuing
14	C: "maybe" xxxx this question xx for (pointing to her chest with both hands) ME. ahm (3s) for me, if (-) the most important thing for you is,	C: coach overcoming resistance: counter-argument, giving advice (accepting the situation, accepting change)	
15	O: (taking a sip of coffee)		O: gestural act
16	C: accept that the situation is different. (3s) that you are not as (-) that you are not in the same position as your relatives are. you're not (-) you no longer have the (-) the huge company, the reputation, that you build up your OWN life.		C: continuing
17	O: (leaning forward, low volume) xxx what, when you see (pointing to the chart) [this],	O: resistance: counter-argument (no foundation)	
18	C: (pointing to the chart) [HERE.]		C: overlap
19	O: I see okay, these are stepping stones.		O: continuing
20	C: mhm,		C: backchanneling
21	O: these are milestones. these are tools.		O: continuing
22	C: (nodding) mhm,		C: backchanneling
23	O: but it's not the big picture, it's not the whole thing, it's not my life, it's not my foundation, 'h I feel like IF (-) I had a foundation.		O: continuing
24	C: mhm,		C: backchanneling
25	O: IF I knew where I belong and (counting on her fingers) WHO my partner is and have a STABLE place, with that once I've got a foundation, I can build from that.		O: continuing
26	C: mhm,		C: backchanneling
27	O: but I'm always building (waving her hands around in the air) (-) all of these things (-) on top of something that has no basement,		O: continuing

	<i>no foundation, and I feel like ALL of these cards and balls at the xx, it's just gonna ALL collapse, it's just (-) I don't know where I beLONG. you know, nicht aufgeräumt (= not in order), I'm not (-) I'm not-</i>		
--	--	--	--

From the sequence it is also apparent that she does not really want the coach's advice in the first place. Neither does she show much interest in the job-related coaching issue that she has raised at the beginning. Olivia mourns her past, and Coach III's unappealing role in this session is to serve as an audience for the coachee's lament. This is a disposition that the coaching literature calls a 'pseudo-mandate' because the official coaching issue designated by the coachee is apparently just pretence. The strategies of self-presentation and positioning underlying Olivia's communicative patterns as well as those of Coach III will be discussed in more detail in Sections 13.6 and 13.9. Moreover, the interactive dynamics of relational patterns between the interactants will be interpreted in Chapter 16.6.

### 10.2.3 Conclusion

The research questions raised with respect to the analysis of advice in my corpus can be answered as follows:

1. As became apparent, **advice** activities are a **central type of coaching intervention** in my corpus. All of the coaches employ it in all five conversations in my corpus.
2. The quantitative overview also shows that there are considerable **differences** in the way the coaches employ advice. The numbers differ a great deal: For instance, Coach I produces about 50% more instances of advice in coaching 1 and 30% more in coaching 2 than do Coach II in coachings 3 and 4 and Coach III in coaching 5. Clearly, there are links between the individual coaching styles and the frequency of advice instances in my corpus.
3. An average of approximately 27% of the advice actions in my corpus are **repetitions** of earlier pieces of advice. Thus, the vast majority of the instances of advice contain novel ideas.
4. Some of the instances of advice are responses to direct requests for advice by the coachees, but most of the advice actions are **occasioned within the context**: The role expectations, the coaching setting, and the interactional process bring about opportunities for the coaches to give advice. Thus, the ideal of nondirectiveness tends to be overruled by the advice-generating character of the coaching setting (cf. Chapter 4; Section 5.6).

5. From an interactive point of view, advice actions by the coaches mostly bring about **appreciative moves** by the coachees. The most frequent reaction is agreeing with advice, followed by complementing advice, and by giving positive evaluations of advice. Sometimes the coachees' appreciation is reflected in the fact that they take up advice or ask questions about it. Again, there are huge differences between the frequencies of these actions by the different coachees in my corpus.

6. In a few rare cases the coachees **give advice to themselves**. These actions must be seen as efforts to actively process the issues under discussion. However, they may also manifest independence from the coach's interventions.

7. Apart from appreciative reactions, the coachees also produce **resistance actions**. Resistance is mostly realised by means of counter-arguments, followed by signalling a lack of relevance, and then by humour. In this category the variations between the individual coachings are the most striking.

8. The most common **reaction to resistance** by the coachees is for the coaches to overlook it for the moment. Often the coaches bring up the issues again at a later point, or they set out to present their argument from a different angle. In other cases, they actively overcome the resistance by means of counter-arguments.

9. The qualitative analyses highlight the fact that **advice often occurs in long sequences**. Typically, this is the case after the coachee has presented an elaborate construction of her issue. The interactants negotiate advice in the context of discursive processes. In this respect, resistance is not necessarily a form of aversion, although implicit antagonism does occur in my corpus. However, when it comes to counter-arguments, they can also be an effective means by which advice may be negotiated. In the end, solutions may be customised to the needs of the respective coachee step by step.

In the case of Coach II (coachings 3 and 4) in particular, it has been revealed that he tends to prepare the ground for advice by means of questions and feedback. Once he enters the phase of advice-giving, he unfolds complex arguments illustrating his point. In this phase especially, he uses backchanneling to ensure that the coachees are still with the coaches. These patterns can also be identified partly in the coachings held by Coach I. Coach III, on the other hand, is preoccupied with her coachee's uncooperative behaviour – whenever the coach enters a longer sequence of advice-giving, Olivia is quick to undermine the effort in one way or another (cf. Sections 13.6, 13.9, and 14.3).

**10.** Concerning the overview of appreciative reactions and resistance, I have found that a great deal of these phenomena cannot easily be made countable because they are managed on an **implicit level**. This is especially true for the appreciative reactions: The qualitative analyses prove that in many cases positive reactions remain unsaid. They may, for instance, be signalled by the way in which a coachee listens and goes along with an elaborate advice argument by the coach (as is often the case in all of the coachings except coaching 5). Also, the example of the coachee Rachel in coaching 3 illuminates the fact that a coachee may absorb advice so readily that she goes on to apply the contents to her context without explicitly commenting on it. Further, it has been demonstrated that Rachel's positive evaluations are powerful, despite being less frequent than Kate's evaluations in coaching 1. In effect, the quantitative overviews provide illuminating cues about the nature of advice patterns in the conversations, but they must be complemented by qualitative analyses in order to gain full pictures.

**11.** As argued above, once more, **coaching 1** has proven to be the conversation with the highest frequency of interventions. Coach I uses a very high amount of advice interactions, and the coachee Kate employs a multitude of appreciative reactions. However, she also leads the field in the number of resistance actions. We have seen that this ambivalent picture reflects the coachee's ambiguity with respect to her professional situation: Her inner dilemma is acted out on the stage of the coaching conversation by the two interactants. In this arrangement, it is the coach's part to advertise change by means of advice, whereas Kate raises doubts by means of resistance actions. In this pattern, she gives in to the coach's change-promoting arguments after some time, criticising herself for not having taken action long before. At this point, she ends up supporting her belief that she is her *own worst enemy*.

**12.** In **coaching 2** a completely different pattern of advice-giving is underway. The participants interact most cooperatively and harmoniously. Thus, they co-construct advice jointly, and their advice actions reflect their mutual respect and appreciation. In the two instances of resistance, the coachee Bobbie makes a strong effort to mitigate her utterances on the interpersonal level. Although the coach claims that Bobbie is not in need of any advice at the beginning of the coaching, the interactants produce a high number of advice sequences. All these sequences express optimism towards the coachee's future and readiness to exchange ideas. Also, the advice actions ultimately affirm the interactants' respective roles. By the end of the session, both interactants seem energised and in very good spirits.

**13.** The analysis of **coaching 3** has shown that this conversation contains an especially high degree of implicit action. Thus, it is a fine example for considering the limits of the quantitative analysis of advice. Rachel expresses her appreciation of the coach's advice mainly by listening intently and by using backchanneling signals. However, she employs few explicit appreciative actions concerning the coach's advice. A very important characteristic of coaching 3 is that the interactants negotiate advice discursively over long stretches of time. Coach II goes through the process with Rachel step by step, and by the end of the conversation, the coachee fully embraces his ideas. Also, the positive result of the solution finding process brings relief to Rachel's self-confidence in relation to her leadership qualities.

**14.** Like coaching 3, **coaching 4** shows low amplitudes concerning advice actions. Even more remarkable than the advice sequences launched by Coach II in this coaching are the situations in which he dispenses with advice. Most of the interventions he uses are, in fact, questions; and even though the coach seems to have a clear opinion on the source of Pauline's problem, it is not until the end of the session that he addresses it explicitly. Thus, the low numbers concerning resistance reveal much about the coach's ability to circumvent it before it is even activated. His activities to prepare the ground for advice are highly successful (cf. Section 14.3).

**15.** As the analysis has shown, the advice actions in **coaching 5** are conducted in an implicitly antagonistic mode. The coachee, in particular, is extremely thrifty with appreciative reactions to advice. Instead, she produces a high number of resistance actions against advice by the coach. She uses counter-arguments, but often she also diverts from the issue, for instance by using humour, by switching the topic, by correcting the coach's language, or by interrupting her. All of these actions are negatively marked with respect to face work, as they undermine the coach's authority tremendously (cf. Section 14.3).



## 11. Conclusion to Part II

From a large scale perspective, the studies conducted in Part II of my thesis led to several relevant findings, both on the level of analysis of my corpus and on the level of a methodological advancement of analytical approaches in this field. First, it was demonstrated that most of the coaching conversations showed correlations between the frequencies of questions, feedback, and advice: Coaching 1 was the conversation with the highest numbers of interventions both by the coach and the coachee. While these results indicated a high degree of activity and cooperativeness on both sides, the frequencies of resistance activities by the coachee Kate revealed the underlying ambivalence of her communicative patterns (cf. Sections 14.2; 16.2).

Both coaching 3 and coaching 4 displayed low frequencies with regard to the categories of analysis. Yet, it was established that these results originated in completely different conversational dynamics: The coachee Pauline in coaching 4 did, in fact, produce rather passive communicative patterns, a finding which could be linked to the fact that her coaching session partially centred on issues with interpersonal communication. On the other hand, the coachee Rachel in coaching 3 displayed a high degree of involvement, but she did so in exceptionally implicit and subtle ways, thus rendering a quantitative comparison of her patterns with those of the other coachees rather misleading.

In coaching 2, a clear correlation could be observed as well: Almost all of the results were numerically high, except for the numbers of resistance, which were low. Thus, the overwhelmingly harmonious mode of the interaction was clearly reflected in the use of prototypical coaching interventions, all of which were employed in confirmative ways by both interactants. Coaching 5, on the other hand, revealed high numbers of questions and feedback by the coach, but low numbers of feedback by the coachee, as well as of advice by the coach. Moreover, the coachee produced an extremely high resistance rate. These results reflected the fact that the coachee Olivia pretended to be interested in the coach's advice whilst undermining her role by means of resistance. Also, the coachee's lack of confirmative activities by means of feedback was consistent with her scarce appreciation for the coach's role as an advice-giver.

Methodologically, several things became apparent. First, in the course of the analyses it was made clear how central the role of the intervention types of questions, feedback, and advice is to the structure of the coaching conversations in my corpus. It is most likely that this finding can be generalised with regard to the genre of coaching conversations as a whole. Second, it was evident that the level of intervention types is intertwined with the other levels of communication on which this thesis concentrates: The activities tied to questions, feedback, and advice are fundamentally linked to identity

construction and the relational level of talk (cf. Chapters 13; 14). Moreover, they realise and constitute the wider interactive dynamics emerging in the conversations, just as their use is influenced by this dynamic (cf. Chapter 16). In essence, it was demonstrated that overarching interactive patterns can be made explicit by means of more fine-grained linguistic categories. This result will become even clearer in the course of the complementary analyses of Parts III and IV of this thesis.

A third methodological finding relates to the fact that a quantitative analysis of prototypical coaching interventions, such as questions, feedback, and advice, must necessarily be complemented by qualitative discourse analytical analyses. Even in my comparatively small corpus of five conversations, it was the case in several instances that corresponding numbers of activities in coaching conversations had to be linked to completely different functions and interactive dynamics. Therefore, it must be concluded that a qualitative approach is indispensable for reaching appropriate interpretations of the data at hand.

## **Part III: Analysis of identity construction and relational work**

## 12. Introduction to Part III

The third part of this thesis will be concerned with identity construction and relational work in the coaching conversations in my corpus. Drawing on the literature reviews in Sections 5.3 and 5.7, I will examine the ways in which coaches and coachees position themselves and the other interactants in their respective conversations. As the discussion of the relevant literature has brought to light, a multi-faceted approach is required to capture the intricacies of the negotiation of selves in talk. Thus, in Section 13.1, I will present the methodology and the framework for the analysis of self-presentation and positioning in this study. My approach will orient to crucial aspects both with regard to the different domains of self-presentation (i.e. personal, professional, and social self-aspects), but also to the central issue of self-evaluation and metaphorical expressions of self-concepts. Moreover, a special focus will be placed on the initial phases of self-presentation because a particular density of explicit acts of positioning can be detected at this stage of the interactions. A diverse set of methods from discourse analytic approaches, in particular from the study of identity and positioning, will be applied. In Sections 13.2-13.9, the results of the analyses will be presented with a focus on the individual interactants. In Section 13.10, a summary and evaluation of the results will be provided.

In Chapter 14, face work as a special aspect of relational work will be explored with regard to the corpus of coaching conversations. As outlined in Sections 5.3 and 5.8, selected elements of Goffman's work on ritual interchanges and of Holly's linguistic advancement of the analysis of supportive sequences will be synthesised into a unique framework. In Section 14.1, I will give an introduction to these methodological foundations of the analysis. A focus on confirmative relational work in Section 14.2 will bring to light to which degree the interactants create rapport and harmony by attending to their own and each other's face needs. In this context I will address the question of whether confirmative face work can be further categorised into face-maintaining and face-enhancing face work according to my data. Moreover, the degree to which face-related activities are linked to or realised by prototypical coaching interventions will be examined, as discussed in the previous chapters.

Section 14.3 will be dedicated to the analysis of face-saving as well as face-aggravating and face-remediating relational work on the discourse level of communication. In this respect, I am interested in the face-saving strategies and the patterns of face-threat and face-remediation emerging between coaches and coachees. In particular, I will focus on the patterns displayed by the individual interactants. As with confirmative behaviour, I will also answer the question of whether face-aggravating behaviour in my data can be further categorised according to the severity of face attacks.

Both the results of the analysis of confirmative sequences and the results of the

analysis of face-saving, face-aggravating, and face-remediating activities will be analysed in relation to the strategies of self-presentation displayed by the interactants. Furthermore, in line with the overarching goal of this thesis, the link between both identity construction and relational work on the one hand and the interactive dynamics of relational patterns on the other hand will be highlighted.

## **13. Self-presentation and positioning**

### **13.1 Introduction and methodology of the analysis of self-presentation and positioning**

#### **13.1.1. Introduction**

In this section I will introduce my approach to the analysis of self-presentation and positioning, drawing a relation back to the review of relevant concepts and tools in Section 5.7. My methodology relies overall on qualitative discourse analysis in the form of close readings. My primary focus is on self-presentations, but as demonstrated in Section 5.7, self-positionings must be ratified by the other interactants in order to succeed; and these simultaneously represent other-presentations.

In the following sections I will define the analytical categories I have applied to my corpus, i.e. initial self-presentations, professional self-presentations, agency and problem construction, social self-presentations, metaphors, self-evaluation, and personal self-presentations. In the last section I will summarise my approach and present my research questions.

#### **13.1.2. Initial self-presentations**

All of the participants in my study have just entered a new setting when the coaching sessions begin: They have never before met one another, and as such, they start the conversations by introducing themselves. This is the reason why the opening phases of the conversations feature a high density of explicit self-presentations. In order to capture this crucial phase, I examine initial self-presentations in a category of their own. In order to delineate comparable databases, I examine the opening sections of the five coaching conversations from the beginning up to the point when the coachees have introduced themselves for at least five minutes.

Moreover, the conversations in my corpus unfold at different paces and with varying dynamics. Therefore, I first analyse the opening phases of the coachings in light of thematic episodes and with regard to who introduces him/herself based on whose initiative. Table 13.1 provides a model for the presentation of the context analysis regarding initial self-presentations:

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Initial self-presentations by... initiated by...

*Table 13.1: Model for the presentation of the context analysis of initial self-presentations*

Essentially, my aim is to grasp the constitutive characteristics and salient aspects of the initial positionings of the eight interactants in my corpus.

### **13.1.3. Presenting the professional self**

In Section 5.7 I established that acts of self-presentations touch on different self-aspects, or domains of identity construction. In the third part of my analysis of self-presentation I examine the co-construction of professional identities in the individual conversations. The reason for this exploration is that business coaching conversations essentially revolve around the professional domain. In close readings I therefore identify those positionings of the interactants that centre on professional self-aspects. Then I explore characteristic patterns, storylines, and typical aspects of the interactive processes of negotiation, and evaluate them within the wider context of the particular coachings.

### **13.1.4. Presenting the self with regard to agency and problem construal**

Presentations and negotiations of problem constructions are vital elements of coaching conversations (cf. Fischer-Epe 2006). In the process of describing their problems, the coachees must design their own roles as agentive or non-agentive (cf. Section 5.7). These construals have strong implications for the coachees' self-presentations: For instance, interactants can take responsibility for their problems, or they can attribute responsibility to other sources; they can present themselves as persons who make conscious choices or as victims of other people's decisions. My methodological approach is based on the same combination of close readings, identification of patterns, and context-oriented evaluations as described in the previous section.

### **13.1.5. Presenting the social self**

In Section 5.7 I demonstrated that social interactants fundamentally position themselves with respect to the criterion of sameness and difference: By aligning themselves with some

groups and individuals and by distancing themselves from others, interlocutors create images of their social selves in relation to other self-aspects (cf. Holmes 2006; Bamberg, De Fina, and Schiffrin 2011). As was highlighted in the discussion, these positionings may occur explicitly, or they may be realised in more indirect ways. The methodology of this part of my analysis also follows the approach described in Section 13.1.3.

### **13.1.6 Presenting the personal self**

Personal self-presentations are characterisations of the self that refer to individual (as opposed to social) and private (as opposed to professional) aspects of identities. By definition, business coaching interactions serve to resolve issues from professional settings. In my analysis I will shed light on the role that personal self-presentations play in the conversations of my corpus. As was the case with the previous categories, I analyse presentations of the personal self according to the methodology introduced in Section 13.1.3.

### **13.1.7 Presenting the self by means of metaphors**

In Section 5.7 I introduced the cognitive view of metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon that can be expressed through linguistic instantiations. My approach to the analysis of metaphorical self-presentation draws on the methodology by Schrauf and Schmid (2011: 228; translation mine):

1. Identify the lexical units in the text.
2.
  - (a) Identify the meaning of each lexical unit in the text.
  - (b) Identify the basic meaning for each lexical unit.<sup>41</sup>
  - (c) If the lexical unit has a stronger basic meaning in other contexts, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning, but can be understood in relation to the basic meaning.
3. If 2c is positive, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.

However, as established in Section 5.7, metaphorical speech is extremely pervasive in everyday language, and it generally permeates human thinking. Also, metaphorical expressions undergo entrenchment processes in which they become more and more conventional in particular speech communities and in which the original meanings of the source concepts may vanish (cf. Ungerer and Schmid 2006). Yet the “question how the

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<sup>41</sup> According to Schrauf and Schmid (2011: 228), basic meanings are more concrete, more physical, more precise, and historically older than metaphorical meanings.



conventionality of linguistic expressions and conceptual mappings can be established” has yet to be studied in more detail (Handl and Schmid 2011: 8).

In a pragmatic approach, I therefore confine my analysis to those metaphorical expressions that appear to stand out from other conventionalised metaphors by their explanatory power. Thus, I take into account revealing expressions such as *being on an assembly line*, *being a high-flyer in the relationship market*, or *having a stack of things to do*. On the other hand, I neglect more conventionalised metaphorical expressions such as *having ideas* (which is an expression of the underlying conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE OBJECTS [Ungerer and Schmid 2006: 124]), or *supporting an argument* (which is an expression of the underlying conceptual metaphor AN ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING [Ungerer and Schmid 2006: 123]). The resulting database is therefore selective and may contain expressions with differing degrees of explanatory power. Yet this selectivity is characteristic of the qualitative analysis of self-presentation and positioning in general. In point of fact, acts of identity are not clear-cut units of analysis, and the second-order approach to analysis necessarily highlights some aspects at the expense of others.

Nevertheless, my analysis will show that for those conversations that feature much metaphorical speech, the analysis is highly meaningful with regard to self-presentation. Moreover, the frequency of metaphorical use itself is an indexical feature for the analysis of communicative positioning.

### 13.1.8 Presenting self-evaluations

In Section 5.5 I established that in this thesis I employ the term ‘evaluation’ in the simple sense of an assessment. Moreover, in Section 5.2 I introduced the psychological term of ‘self-evaluation’, which describes situational assessments of the self geared by the self-assessment motif, the self-enhancement motif, and the self-verification motif (cf. Crocker and Park 2005; Tesser 2005). Also, in Section 5.5 I introduced the feedback type ‘evaluating action’ as realising assessments of other interactants. The natural counterpart to this category is the assessment of the self: self-evaluation. Furthermore, I discussed the modulating function of reinforcement and mitigation (cf. Section 5.7).

I explained in Section 5.5. that, in contrast to the linguistic proponents of evaluation theory, I explore self-evaluation in strictly unidimensional terms. In brief, I am interested in the issue of whether interactants present themselves in predominantly positive or negative terms. In order to arrive at an etic assessment as to whether an instance of self-presentation should be evaluated positively or negatively, I first identify the general direction of evaluation of a cluster of acts of self-presentations. Second, I take into account the modulating effects that influence the evaluative directions of acts of positioning. For instance, in Excerpt 13.1

below the coachee Olivia (coaching 5) responds to the coach's question calling for what her strengths are:

**Excerpt 13.1:**

1 O: I'm actually procreate bright and (-) HAPPY and uhm (2s) 'h I'm usually infectuously  
ahm (2s) (expressive) JOYFULLY (waving her hands around in circles) luminous.

This turn contains three explicit self-assessments by means of adjectives: Olivia describes herself as *bright*, *HAPPY*, and *luminous*. These characterisations must be interpreted as positive in this context, and they are reinforced by means of the boosting adverbials *infectuously* and *JOYFULLY*, by the stress on the items *HAPPY* and *JOYFULLY* (as indicated by capitals in the transcript), by the expressive voice, and by expressive gesturing. Moreover, the verb *procreate*, which is apparently part of an unrepaired false start, must be considered as implying a positive evaluation as well. On the other hand, the adverbials *actually* and *usually* could be interpreted as mitigating devices, because they reduce the force of the utterance. Thus, the principal direction of the self-evaluative elements must be considered along with the modulating effects in order to arrive at the conclusion that Excerpt 13.1 features a positive self-evaluative cluster that is partly reinforced and partly mitigated.

Ultimately, I examine the overall self-evaluative profiles emerging in the conversations in the form of self-evaluative clusters. It is noteworthy in this respect that I do not necessarily consider self-evaluative acts, mitigating devices, or self-evaluative clusters as quantifiable categories of analysis. This is especially evident in those aspects of self-presentation that are located at the implicit end of the scale (e.g. when an interactant tentatively implies success, rather than stating it), and it is also apparent with respect to self-evaluations that stretch across larger sequences of talk. More importantly, self-presentations may be regarded as ambiguous or even neutral and therefore avoid being categorised into positive or negative assessments of the self. Lastly, the general issue arises that the perspectives of the speaker, the hearer, and the analyst may diverge. Nevertheless, my results will show that the analysis of self-evaluative clusters is a viable method to capture the overall profiles of self-evaluation that interactants present in coaching conversations. In this context I also examine the different types of self-evaluative clusters that typically emerge in the conversations of my corpus.

It is the case that self-evaluation has strong face-related implications, but it is designed to serve the requirements of all three self-motives: self-assessment (the desire to evaluate the self accurately), self-enhancement (the desire to evaluate the self positively), and self-verification (the desire to evaluate the self in concordance with the underlying self-concept) (cf. Section 5.2). On the other hand, while face work is also concerned with evaluations of the self, it is dominated by the self-enhancement motif. It is for this reason that

I analyse self-evaluative clusters in the context of general self-presentation and positioning, rather than in the context of face work.

As was the case with regard to the previous supercategories of analysis, before conducting the main study, I tested the categories by means of a pilot study.

### 13.1.9 Conclusion and research questions

My analysis of self-presentation and positioning relies on discourse analytical close readings on the basis of seven categories of analysis: To account for the particularly revealing character of the opening phases of the conversations, I examine initial self-presentations in a separate category. Further, I explore the interactants' presentation of professional self-aspects, of agency and problem construction, of social self-aspects, and of personal self-aspects. Furthermore, I take into account metaphorical self-presentations and self-evaluations. The latter category will be analysed by means of a concept to which I refer as 'self-evaluative clusters'.

In accordance with their roles, the coaches produce considerably fewer self-presentations than the coachees. Therefore, I will structure Sections 13.7-13.9, which concentrate on the coaches, on the basis of two categories only: 'initial self-presentations' and 'self-presentations occurring after the initial introduction'. Also, due to the extensiveness of this chapter, I will provide a final summary of the points covered in Section 13.10. To summarise, in my analysis of self-presentation and positioning, I will address the following research questions:

- Which general patterns of self-presentation emerge in the conversations?
- In what way do the individual patterns of the interactants vary?
- In what way do the patterns of self-presentation by the coachees vary from those of the coaches?
- Which general patterns of negotiation of self-presentation emerge between the interactants?
- Do Coach I and Coach II, who moderate two sessions respectively, produce consistent patterns of self-presentation across the conversations?
- Which patterns of positioning emerge in the initial self-presentations?
- Are the patterns of positioning in the initial self-presentations consistent with the patterns of positioning occurring at later stages?
- Which patterns of positioning do the interactants produce with regard to ... their professional identities?

... agency and problem construction?

... their social identities?

... their personal identities?

... metaphorical self-presentations?

... self-evaluation?

- Which types of self-evaluative clusters emerge in the coaching corpus?

## 13.2 The coachee Kate

### 13.2.1 Initial self-presentations

The opening phase in coaching 1 is structured rather simply: It begins with an episode in which the interactants discuss the setting of the coaching conversation. Following that, the coachee Kate introduces herself (cf. Table 13.2).

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Initial self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:00:42	Interactants discussing setting of coaching session	-
2	00:00:42 – 00:05:00	Interactants discussing Kate's background and her coaching issue	Coachee Kate (other-initiated)

Table 13.2: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 1

To gain an impression of Kate's initial self-presentations, consider her first explicit self-positionings in Excerpt 13.2:

#### Excerpt 13.2:

- 1 C: *feel comfortable and ah well my always my first question is ah, so what's going on what are the things that a:re move (-) moving your mind at the moment. uhm well*
- 2 K: *none actually. (-) I was I'm a freelance uhm I was-*
- 3 C: *aha,*
- 4 K: *working for a German company-*
- 5 C: *yeah,*
- 6 K: *for about fifteen years before I quit,*
- 7 C: *aha,*
- 8 K: *and I didn't take Überbrückungsgeld (= transition money) or any of [that,]*
- 9 C: *aha,*

- 10 K: *I just walked into freelancing but kind of like (-) not doing what I wanna do.*
- 11 C: *aha,*
- 12 K: *I'm still doing I've been doing the same thing for twenty years.*
- 13 C: *okay okay,*
- 14 K: *so now it's uh how do I manage to switch out of it, or do I bother switching out of it.*
- 15 C: *(nodding)*
- 16 K: *or not.*
- 17 C: *mhm,*
- 18 K: *so kind of that midlife crisis, (smiling)*
- 19 C: *mhm mhm, (-) okay,*
- 20 K: *(laughing)*

This excerpt contains numerous acts of explicit self-presentation, which are mainly located in the professional domain. Kate gives a brief account of her professional biography, explaining her previous professional status and depicting her current professional status. Also, she indicates that she is dissatisfied with her work situation (line 10) and that she is now facing the question of whether she should switch out of her line of work.

Remarkably, Kate begins with a negation and two self-repairs. When the coach asks Kate *what is moving her mind at the moment*, she first produces a negative response: *none actually*. After a short pause, however, she goes on to explain what is, in fact, on her mind. This small contradiction is not moderated by the coachee in any way. Then, Kate begins to describe her previous position, but corrects herself and starts with a line explaining her current position, only to go back to her first construction: *I was I'm a freelance uhm I was- (...) working for a German company*. Both slips represent minor incidents (cf. Section 13.3), but the fact that they are positioned at the very beginning of Kate's initial self-presentation amplifies their impact. Overall, the two small lapses convey an impression along the lines of indecisiveness, insecurity, and non-assertiveness.

With respect to the early problem construction incorporated in the sequence, an interesting observation can be made: Kate construes her professional biography in an agentive manner, in that she states that she *quit* her job on her own volition (line 6) and that she *just walked into freelancing*. Both statements are active syntactic constructions marking Kate as the agent of her biography. At the same time, the coachee states that she *kind of like (-) not doing what [she wants to] do*. This is an early outline of the problem construction that dominates the discourse of this entire session: Kate construes a discrepancy between what she wants and what she does. Figuratively speaking, she splits herself into two parts, i.e. an active agent and an undergoer. Unfortunately, she conceives these two parts of her self as antagonistic, a fact that she captures in the theme that she is her *own worst enemy*

(00:29:12; 01:11:55).

Another foreshadowing of issues to follow is the move in which Kate states that she *didn't take Überbrückungsgeld (= transition money)*. As she will explain later, she identifies with Western American cultural values; and, in her opinion, these values forbid her to accept money from the state. The selection of transition money as a topical focus at such an early point in the conversation clearly marks the aspect as important. Also, Kate's remark may be read as prevention against a potential allegation by the coach – although the coaching is set in Germany and the coach is not Western American himself and may not be aware of the values to which she is referring. Overall, Kate's line of argument is evidence of her tendency to defensiveness displayed in the conversation.

Another aspect worth highlighting in Excerpt 13.2 is the modality Kate chooses when presenting her problem construction. After having described her central issue, she rephrases it in self-ironic terms: *so kind of that midlife crisis, (smiling)*. By referring to her dilemma with the term *midlife crisis*, Kate distances herself from the problem, making use of cultural associations which function to belittle the problem and indicate that it should not be taken overly seriously. Her smile further emphasises that she is communicating in a humorous mode. When the coach does not take up the irony (*mhm mhm, (-) okay,*), Kate further marks her comment as humorous by laughing. Kate's problem construction is partly serious and partly humorous – a characteristic that will offer her a loophole in case she cannot find a solution or does not want to put the solution into practice.

In the subsequent sequence Kate raises an alternative issue: She will give a presentation in the country F. in May; and she states that *it's a it's a subject that [she is] very knowledgeable on*, although she wonders how well she structures her presentation. Thus, the coachee creates ambiguity as to which issue she would like to address. Also, the presentation of the second topic itself contains ambivalent self-presentations: Kate states that she gives *speeches every once in a while*. This act of presentation implies professional experience and competency, but she also employs a disclaimer stating that *it doesn't seem like* she would give speeches. Moreover, she presents herself as *very knowledgeable*, but at the same time she displays insecurity concerning her structuring competencies (00:02:02).

It is certainly noteworthy that Kate's ensuing statements gradually shift the discussion back to the first issue of the session: *and and I've got a lot of skills in this certain area but I never (-) follow through on them? (...) 'h and I end up sticking with what I can do, which is like the drudge work*, (00:02:13). In the end, Kate declares that she should *probably (...) figure out how to go about that better* (00:02:27). Thus, although she has just marked her first coaching issue as somehow inappropriate, she is now picking it up as a pressing topic once again.

To summarise, an ambivalent self-presentational picture emerges: On the explicit

level the coachee presents herself as agentive and competent, but she also inserts elements of discontentedness, insecurity, and inconclusiveness. On the implicit level, Kate downgrades the force of her statements by means of self-irony, humour, and a high number of incomplete utterances. Further, she raises two different subjects for discussion. In the following sections, it will be demonstrated that the initial self-presentations of the first two and a half minutes is strikingly revealing with respect to Kate's positioning in the main part of the conversation.

### 13.2.2 Presenting the professional self

As far as her professional self-presentation is concerned, Kate introduces three different identities:

#### Excerpt 13.3:

- 1      *K: well I don't know. (taking up one of the rocks and moving it) this is what I always do? (taking up another rock and putting it next to the first one) this is what I talk about doing, (taking up another rock and putting it next to the other ones) and that's what I dream about doing.*

As Excerpt 13.3 shows, Kate distinguishes between her current professional self, the potential professional self she would like to develop in the near future, and an ideal professional self that she deems utopian. I will begin with a discussion of the coachee's construal of her current professional self. Kate states that she began her career as a *translator*, and a *terminology person (...)* *as a substitute for somebody. and [ended] up staying in the same position.* (00:02:52). As is apparent, neither the noun phrase *substitute for somebody* nor the verb phrase *ended up staying* make her account sound overly strategic or deliberate (cf. Section 13.2.3). Also, she construes her line of work as something of which she *never got out* (00:03:00), which implies a negative assessment. Kate then compares translation to marketing and sales, making clear that she values these functions higher than her own translating job. She tells the coach that it has been her professional goal to get into a function like that, but that she *never trusted [her]self to see if [she] could* do it (00:03:00). Once more, her construal presupposes two parts of her self that are at war with each other.

In the second part of the sequence, Kate states that she is *very specialised in [her] field*, (00:03:10), which appears to be a good thing. However, she concludes: *so I don't (-) you know I don't do anything general* (00:03:24), thus making her specialisation sound like a shortcoming. Then she mentions the topic of her presentation, humorously referring to it as *pretty boring* (00:03:26). She repeats this negative assessment at a later point: *being a terminology person is boring. (...) that's boring work. (laughing)* (00:15:54). However, Kate

argues that her translation work pays the bills and is a safe source of income (00:26:02).

Quite the contrary is true, in the coachee's opinion, for her potential new line of work. She has a range of ideas as to what kinds of services she could offer in addition to translation, for example project management, terminology management, implementing new data bases (00:14:36), reporting, and writing and selling instructions for specific types of project management (00:29:50). The obstacle preventing her from realising these ideas is a myriad of worries. Throughout the session Kate displays self-doubt and fear concerning the potential new line of work.

The third professional identity the coachee mentions is concerned with an ideal version of her professional self. In this scenario Kate's work is both creative and meaningful: she would be *working, (4s) in a creative department (2s) for PR for a (-) non-governmental agency (2s) helping Third World countries. (laughing)* (00:27:42). Yet, Kate downplays her ideal professional self as part of a utopian wish to *save the world* (00:31:50). Nevertheless, Kate introduces an ideal employer, i.e. the women's rights organisation S. (00:28:09). According to her account, she has already had two opportunities to get in touch with this organisation. Yet she states that she has not put these opportunities into action, because she continues to postpone important plans into *a stack of things to do* (00:28:27). In fact, the coachee's narrative conveys the impression that she does not regard the realisation of her third and most attractive professional identity as such an unrealistic option. However, she depicts her agentic part as sabotaging this scenario.

Beyond the threefold distinction between the current professional self, the potential professional self of the near future, and the idealised utopian professional self, another aspect should be highlighted. The conversation revolves around the alternative coaching issue, i.e. public speaking, for quite some time. As I have indicated in Section 13.2.1, this issue does not seem to be overly pressing for Kate, but she uses it as a safe alternative topic to her actual problem. In consequence, the coachee's self-presentation is less consistently self-critical with respect to this area of her professional life. Kate creates a differentiated picture with respect to her presenting skills: *sometimes they are (-) really (-) good (...) and sometimes they're not.* (00:17:33). Thus, when discussing the alternative topic, Kate positions herself in a different way than in the sequences revolving around her main problem.

### 13.2.3 Presenting the self with regard to agency and problem construal

The particularities of Kate's problem construal have already become quite clear in the previous sections: By figuratively splitting her self into two parts, she may attribute agency and non-agency to herself at the same time. Her recurring theme is that she does not do the



things that she wants to do. For example, Kate describes how she has been procrastinating in contacting the organisation S., constructing her narrative in a way that brings the incredibility of her problem to light. She gives evidence of the clubs of which she is a member (00:28:44) in order to point out that the act of joining organisations per se is not a difficult task for her. She describes how close she has already been to becoming a member of the organisation S.: *ahm (-) an I printed out the membership form* (00:28:37). Also, she emphasises how attractive the goal would be: *but that would be a great job* (00:29:03). These arguments serve to establish how easy as well as how rewarding it would be for her to follow through with her plans. However, she contrasts these descriptions with an image of a *stack of things* that she has yet to get done. While it is in actuality Kate who has compiled this stack, the metaphor conveys the meaning that she was prevented from achieving her goals by outer forces. In essence, Kate oscillates between two stances toward her problem: On the one hand she accuses herself of making the wrong decisions. In this case, she takes the perspective of the undergoing self. On the other hand, when taking the side of the agentive self, she justifies her 'doing the wrong things' by the help of outer forces.

It has been established in Chapters 9 and 10 that Coach I tends to react to Kate's dilemma by taking sides in favour of her change-promoting part. Also, he follows a resource-oriented approach in the coaching session, which is why he often points to the positive aspects of the coachee's situation, attempting to steer her toward change. For instance, with respect to Kate's repeated claim that she is *her own worst enemy* he responds: *we are all our (-) selves enemies* (01:12:02). Thus, he undermines her narrative construal because he argues that her behaviour lies within the range of normal behaviour, and instead he focuses on the concrete next steps Kate could take (*the good news is that you just have to send an email*. (01:12:09).

The emerging dynamic has already been exhibited in the analysis of advice (cf. Section 10.2) – while the interactants participate in advice sequences about potential change, at the same time they negotiate the coachee's working selves (cf. Section 5.2). In this respect, the coach's challenge of Kate's self-descriptions must also be read in terms of a positive reframing. In the characteristic instance described above, Kate agrees with the coach immediately (01:12:04), thus seemingly giving up her first-order positioning for the moment and embracing the coach's second-order positioning along with his advice. However, in her next move, she verbalises resistance by following her initial problem construction: *and I just (-) totally (-) pushed it aside, I keep doing that*, (01:12:16). From the perspective of self-presentation Kate's ambiguous behaviour can now be explained: She enacts her conflicting self-conceptualisation in the coaching interaction.

### 13.2.4 Presenting the social self

Kate's self-presentational acts in the social domain raise a wealth of interesting issues. For instance, she raises the topics of her ethnicity, her memberships in organisations, her family status, her friends, her attitude to networking, and many other topics. From this collection of social aspects I will focus on two points in particular. First, I will analyse Kate's positioning of herself as an American in Germany. Second, I will look at the coachee's construal of her self-image in relation to the membership category 'translator'.

As an expatriate who has lived in a foreign country for many years and who is talking to a home country national, the coachee Kate mentions her ethnicity several times. Mainly, she does so when she points out differences between her background and the context in which she is now operating. For instance, she mentions the different educational systems in America and in Germany: *we finish school, when we're twenty-one, twenty-two. (...) here, people are starting school when they're twenty-two. (laughing)* (01:16:00). She then concludes that it might be easier for her to develop fresh perspectives due to her intercultural experience. Also, she claims that her American degree is *obviously looked at differently*, (00:03:53) in Germany. In this context she construes her social image as being downgraded in Germany due to her American education. Overall, Kate critically evaluates elements of the different cultures, and she employs her cultural background as a source of meaning-making.

As indicated in Section 13.2.1, Kate draws on her regional identity as a Western American when she reflects on whether or not it is appropriate to accept money from the state. The coachee brings this issue up early in her initial self-presentation; and she expands on it in further detail when the coach states that he himself is receiving transition money (cf. Excerpt 13.4):

#### Excerpt 13.4:

- 1 C: and ahm (-) be uh working as a banker and uh (-) in the evenings and weekends as a coach and a trainer, and I'm getting now (-) it. the Überbrückungsgeld (= transition money).
- 2 K: mhm,
- 3 C: but (-) I ah know that there are possibilities for people who didn't take it? didn't (-) take it yeah? ah to get some other money.
- 4 K: really.
- 5 C: ah yeah. uh (-) I'm not the expert in which programme-
- 6 K: aha.
- 7 C: you uh you [have to sign in,]
- 8 K: [so I would have] to talk to the ahm (-) [to the ah Arbeitsamt (= Federal Employment Office)]

- 9 C: [*uhm to the uh Arbeitsamt.. [= Federal Employment Office]*]
- 10 K: (*writing*) (2s) *I should probably call the guy.*
- 11 C: [*yeah.*]
- 12 K: (*writing*) [*I just*] *felt you know, this is the American in me or (-) the uh Western I'm from the Western part.*
- 13 C: *yeah.*
- 14 K: *you know if I didn't need it I shouldn't have taken it and (-) my parents would have shot me if basically (laughing) if I had taken money from the government. you don't do that.*
- 15 C: [*yeah (-) may (-) okay (-) yeah.*]
- 16 K: [*but you know it's right it's*] *true because (-) because I paid (knocking on the table with her pen) I paid and I worked hard. 'hh*
- 17 C: *and uh you're paying taxes all the time?*
- 18 K: *yeah.*
- 19 C: *and ahm [if you are-]*
- 20 K: (*taking up the glass of water and having a sip*) [*I just paid a lot.*]
- 21 C: *if you ear- if you earn money uhm (-) if you earn money (-) more-*
- 22 K: (*putting the glass down*) *mhm,*
- 23 C: *or more money afterwards, (-) you can pay it back to the state.*
- 24 K: *yeah.*

As is apparent, Kate appears to feel that accepting transition money would breach the values of her home culture. However, she provides a counter-argument by declaring that she has 'earned' the financial support by hard work. The coach supports this positioning as someone who is entitled to receive money from the state (*and uh you're paying taxes all the time?*). While Coach I might have spoken like a 'true German' in Kate's terms, she accepts his support and agrees with him. He further reinforces her act of self-positioning by suggesting that the coachee will be able to *pay the money back to the state* in the form of higher taxes later in her career. This suggestion makes the financial aid sound less like welfare and more like a reasonable business investment on the part of the government. Thus, the coach's contribution aligns Kate's working self with the Western American culture with which she identifies. Kate appears to be content with the co-constructed reconciliation of her different self-aspects and embraces Coach I's point.

In general, it is interesting that Kate's social self-presentations tend to emphasise difference from others much more than sameness with others. Even with respect to her own ethnic identity, the coachee distances herself in one sequence: She claims that her fellow country people *all think they know they all speak German and English so they don't need more talents* (00:54:45). Yet one of the most striking examples of Kate's affiliation with difference from others is her positioning concerning the membership category 'translator'. In

one sequence she explains why she gets *self-conscious about (-) messing up* (01:14:20) when she is with fellow translators: She tells the coach that she did not study to become a translator in her youth, but that she *majored in Political Science* (01:14:40). This act of positioning represents an instantiation of counter-self-stereotyping, in which an interactant distances him/herself from a group (cf. Section 5.2). Coach I reacts with very positive evaluating acts (*wow, (...) [that's another] resource you have*. 01:14:43). He grasps Kate's construction of difference with respect to the membership group 'translators', but he reframes it as an asset. By referring to her difference as a *gift* and by arguing that she has a more open mind than the other translators, he follows along with her counter-self-stereotyping action (01:15:01).

In another sequence Kate construes a narrative featuring a character who confirms the point that she is *not a translator* (cf. Excerpt 13.5):

**Excerpt 13.5:**

- 1        *K: I was actually-*
- 2        *C: yeah.*
- 3        *K: talking to somebody else (-) in this (tapping on rock) (-) situation.*
- 4        *C: mhm,*
- 5        *K: ahm (-) two weeks ago. (2s) and she (-) wants to do something very similar. and she wants to work together. and I sh- sent her my resume and she said that it (-) you're not a translator.*
- 6        *(2s)*
- 7        *C: (nodding)*

By designing a story with a quoted witness account, Kate provides evidence from a supposedly neutral source: A woman who is characterised as a representative of the potential new line of work (*she (-) wants to do something very similar* (00:50:40)) assesses the coachee's resume. She then concludes that Kate does not belong to the membership category 'translator'. Thus, the coachee has managed another positioning of her social self. She has established that, while she may do translation work, she is not really *a translator*. Furthermore, she has strengthened the argument that change to a different line of work (away from the membership group 'translators') would be reasonable.

### 13.2.5 Presenting the self by means of metaphors

In actuality, the coachee Kate employs a highly metaphorical style. On the whole, the semantic content of her metaphorical expressions is very enlightening with respect to the issues of the coaching, with respect to her self-presentations, and with respect to the

interactive patterns emerging in the conversation. For instance, one of the most frequent images used throughout the session is the metaphor of *bread and butter* (00:26:02) versus *jam and marmalade* (00:26:07). These images, which are based on the conceptual metaphor WORK IS FOOD, capture Kate's basic dilemma: While she longs for a more stimulating work environment (*jam and marmalade*), she is afraid that she might endanger the safe economic basis her translator job (*bread and butter*) provides to her and her children. The coach takes up the image, arguing that Kate can actually have both – a point that is all the more powerful because it fits the scope of the metaphor, as jam or marmalade are rarely enjoyed without bread and butter.

Other metaphors that further illustrate Kate's dilemmatic situation are the terms *double-edged sword* (00:26:47) and *Catch twenty-two* (00:26:58). Her weariness with respect to her current job is expressed even more drastically in the metaphors *drudge work* (00:02:11), *treadmill* (00:41:14), and *being on an assembly line* (00:36:34). Also, her speech suggests that she is prevented from agentic behaviour by outer forces (*I get caught in the rut (-) of translating* (00:24:25)); *I've got a stack of things to do-* (00:28:37)). At several points, however, Kate blames her paralysis on herself. The metaphor *I am my own worst enemy* (00:29:12; 01:11:55), which Kate uses twice, expresses both her frustration and her profound ambivalence regarding herself. Altogether, the metaphorical style employed by the coachee is mostly dominated by negativity and a lack of agency. She describes a state of conflict, paralysis, scepticism, and self-doubt.

A metaphor that is first introduced by the coach, but which Kate embraces in the course of the session, is the image of *taking steps*. This is an image tied to a change-promoting attitude. Clearly, Kate tends to focus on the problematic aspects of her situation; she keeps returning to the main dilemma, doubting whether change is possible, or even advisable. Also, she attributes the root of the problem to her agentic self, implicitly suggesting that it is related to her own fixed personality traits. Typically, the characteristic utterance *I am my own worst enemy* refers to a state, rather than to a pattern of behaviour.

Yet in line with the constructionist thinking that underlies most coaching approaches, the coach works against Kate's negative focus on her 'essence' (cf. von Schlippe and Schweitzer 2003). At several points he emphasises the importance of *doing* things: *you know the things are simple in life. [uh just-] just doing them*, (01:01:04). Thus, he reframes her essentialist self-presentations as instances of behaviour, and not as expressions of Kate's personality. It is in this context that the metaphor of the *next step* must be viewed: The coach shifts Kate's focus toward concrete and realistic goals, and away from the partly negative self-concept she appears to have constructed over time. In brief, he opens up the possibility of being someone else by doing something new. In sum, Kate's use of metaphors clearly puts the nuances of her self-presentations into effect. Moreover, the use of metaphors

reflects the interactive dynamics between the coach and the coachee.

### 13.2.6 Presenting self-evaluations

The previous sections have established the fact that Kate tends to present herself extremely critically. Many of the self-aspects that she introduces might be evaluated positively: for instance, her professional experience, her identity as a mother, or her successful work as a freelancer in a culture to which she is not a native. At times, Kate does consider the positive aspects of her self, but very often, she either devalues herself or focuses on problems. Thus, in many situations she construes a moderately negative self-image. For instance, when Coach I asks Kate to list her resources, she provides several examples, but at the same time she also lists all the weaknesses that come to her mind (cf. Excerpt 13.6):

**Excerpt 13.6:**

- 1        *C: mhm. (2s) what are you good in?*
- 2        *K: (laughing) u:hm yeah. well I know how to run these systems? I know how to run  
ahm (-) well that's (-) I did it for almost f- twenty years.*
- 3        *C: mhm,*
- 4        *K: fifteen years in the company and the last five years out. ahm (-) I know I'm creative  
when it comes to certain [things].*
- 5        *C: [mhm,]*
- 6        *K: ahm coming up with ideas to (-) to organise something, I'm not very organised  
though.*
- 7        *C: mhm, mhm,*
- 8        *K: ahm (-) but coming up with like (-) advertising slogans and stuff like that when I  
work with other people.*
- 9        *C: mhm,*
- 10       *K: you know. I can work with people that way, ahm (-) what else am I good at? (4s)  
(laughing)*
- 11       *C: (slightly laughing) hmhm.*
- 12       *K: don't have time to find out what else am I good at. (laughing)*
- 13       *C: (laughing) yeah.*

In Excerpt 13.6 Kate first presents evidence of her professional competency: She has twenty years of experience in her area of work. The next strength she mentions is that she is creative. However, she mitigates her positive self-evaluation with a hedge, relativising the scope of the speech act (*when it comes to certain [things]*). Also, Kate claims that she is good at *coming up with ideas to (-) to organise something*, but she evens this evaluation out

by conceding that she is *not very organised though*. When trying to reflect on further resources, Kate hesitates and excuses herself: *don't have time to find out what else am I good at. (laughing)*. Thus, she indirectly marks the fact that her focus is on her problems, rather than on her resources. In the following sequence, she brings up two more weaknesses: She has difficulties with *being somewhere the same time every day*. Further, she states that teaching English is not for her, evaluating her capacities in this area as bad.

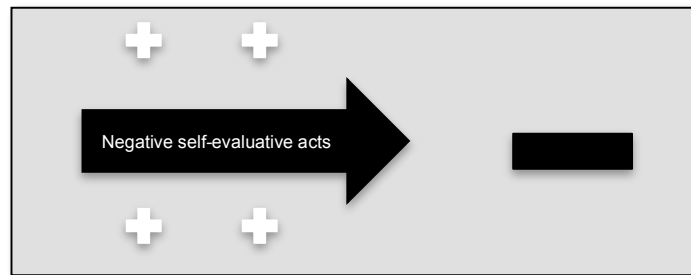
With regard to the self-evaluative aspects of Kate's self-presentations in coaching 1, a pattern can be observed. Typically, Kate presents herself in rather negative terms, but her self-evaluations are mostly mitigated. Therefore, I refer to this pattern as a 'mitigated negative cluster of self-evaluation'. For the second cluster type characteristically employed by Kate, consider Excerpt 13.7. Here Kate explains that she finds it difficult to market herself to German companies because she is not a native speaker.

**Excerpt 13.7:**

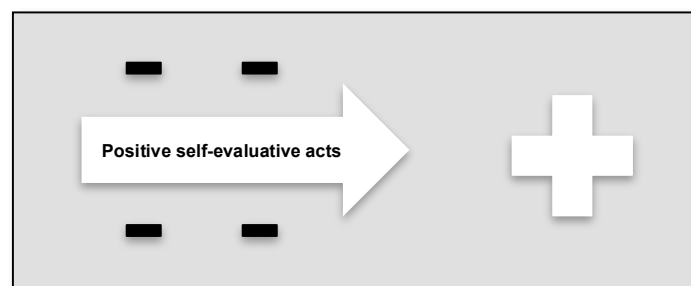
- 1        *K: let's say I could I could tell any company (-) you could save a lot of money doing things a certain way the way I did it with the other company for example. (-) uh (-) but I'm not very good at selling that or (-) I'm not very good at trying to sell that.*
- 2        *(3s)*
- 3        *C: (expressive tone) MHM?*
- 4        *K: and (-) to walk up to them and say (-) you know ahm (-) SO. you know. (-) my German is obviously not a hundred percent perfect I was (-) I was too old when learned German-*
- 5        *C: mhm,*
- 6        *K: to be (-) pass as a native. (...)*

Kate's negative self-evaluations are apparent: She claims to be bad at selling her services, she complains that her German is not as good as she would like it to be, and she states that for those reasons she cannot make a convincing argument concerning translation management. Overall, this sequence contains a high degree of self-criticism. As has been established, this tendency toward an overly negative self-evaluation can be explained as viable on the grounds of the self-verification motif. It is likely that the coachee holds negative attitudes about herself in general, so that negative self-assessment provides a sense of consistency (cf. Sections 5.2 and 13.1). On the other hand, Kate consistently mitigates her statements: Instead of saying that she is bad at marketing herself, she construes her ability as *not very good* (00:24:49). Likewise, she states that her German is *obviously not a hundred percent perfect*, thus providing a grounder for her weakness by arguing that she had to learn it from the beginning as an adult (00:25:00). Further, she once again uses laughter to downtone the face-threatening force of her self-criticism (00:25:06). By downtoning her negative self-evaluations, the coachee complies with the self-enhancement motif and with

the conventions of face work (cf. Chapter 14).



*Figure 13.1: Idealised sketch of a mitigated negative cluster of self-evaluation*



*Figure 13.2: Idealised sketch of a mitigated positive cluster of self-evaluation*

In result, the second cluster of self-evaluative acts emerges: While the basic direction of Kate's argument points to negative self-presentation, she complements her points with mitigating elements. Figures 13.1 and 13.2 provide comprised and idealised sketches of negative and positive clusters of self-evaluation. The large arrows pointing to a large minus and a large plus respectively symbolise the main evaluative directions of the self-evaluative acts occurring in the clusters. The small plus signs and the small minus signs represent the modulating actions employed along with the overall self-evaluations.

### 13.2.7 Conclusion

In sum, the analysis of self-presentation has given the following answers to the research questions raised in Section 13.1:

1. The **initial self-presentations** of the coachee Kate have provided a representative picture of her self-presentations in the entire session. In brief, most of the central traits of her self-image displayed in the session are already traceable in the first few sequences: most importantly, her inherent ambivalence, the elements of self-doubt, discontentedness and inconclusiveness, the presentation of a self split into an agentive and an undergoing part, and the diversion from the main problem by means of an alternative coaching issue.



2. With respect to her **professional self-presentation**, the coachee Kate construes three different versions, i.e. her current professional identity, her potential professional identity, and her ideal professional identity. Fundamentally, she blames her agentive part for the decision to stay with her current professional identity and for sabotaging all plans to transition to her potential professional identity, or even to her ideal professional identity.

3. As far as **agency** and **problem construal** in Kate's self-presentations is concerned, she draws on a recurring theme: She complains that she never does the things that she wants to do. In this respect, she uses narratives, which she designs to highlight how easy it would be for her to put her plans into practice, and how imprudent it is that she does not do so. The coach consistently challenges her problem construction by reframing it in more positive ways. Thus, the interactants are involved in negotiations about construal. Whenever Kate embraces the coach's pieces of advice, she appears to activate the undergoing part of her self.

4. Kate produces complex presentations of her **social self**. In particular, she highlights her identity as an American in Germany, pointing out the differences between her and adherents of the German culture. Also, she draws on her regional identity as a Western American as a source of meaning-making. Regarding the membership category 'translator', Kate explicitly distances herself despite the fact that she does translation work for a living. Overall, the coachee Kate highlights difference, rather than sameness, when positioning her social self.

5. The use of **metaphors** has proven an intriguing source for the analysis of self-presentation in Kate's case. The metaphors she employs reflect the full picture of her complex self-presentations. Above all, they capture Kate's stance toward her current professional identity, her war against herself, and her construal of her problems in essentialist terms.

6. As is apparent, Kate's **self-evaluations** are often fundamentally negative, but she generally mitigates the force of her self-criticism (for example by means of indirect construals, hedges, or grounders). In turn, when the coach prompts her to discuss her strengths, Kate usually produces self-presentations with positive evaluations, but she mitigates their force as well. The coachee's preferred self-evaluative cluster is the mitigated negative self-evaluative cluster. As she appears to have a partially negative self-concept, the production of this type of cluster likely is a way to achieve self-verification.

## 13.3 The coachee Bobbie

### 13.3.1 Initial self-presentations

Coaching 2 begins with an other-initiated introduction by the coach. Following from this, the interactants address several questions about the setting and the roles in the coaching session. In the third episode, Bobbie starts her own initial self-presentation (cf. Table 13.2).

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Initial self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:00:59	Coach I introducing himself	Coach I (other-initiated)
2	00:00:59 – 00:01:37	Interactants discussing the setting and the roles in the coaching session	-
	00:01:37 – 00:05:05	Bobbie introducing herself	Coachee Bobbie (self-initiated)

Table 13.3: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 2

Consider the first episode (cf. Excerpt 13.8), in which Bobbie initiates Coach I's introduction:

#### Excerpt 13.8:

- 1      *C and B are looking at each other, both smiling, waiting for the technical assistant to leave the room. When the door is almost shut, C begins.*
- 2      *C: (smiling) yeah!*
- 3      *B: (smiling) okay!*
- 4      *C: (smiling) now we're here!*
- 5      *B: (smiling) yeah.*
- 6      *C: (smiling) yeah!*
- 7      *B: ahm (...) I - I - I just kind of uhm talked with Angie (= researcher) in the hall.*
- 8      *C: uhu,*
- 9      *B: I don't have much background about what is gonna be happening today,*
- 10     *C: okay. okay.*
- 11     *B: so I don't really know what you do either.*
- 12     *C: okay. so [just uh sh-]*
- 13     *B: [laughing]*

- 14 C: short introduction of myself, ahm. I'm (telling her his first name) C, ahm thirteen year (...) t-h-i-r-t-y (...) nine years old and I'm living here with my wife R. (telling first name) and my daughter P. (telling first name) here right in D. (CITY),

This scene represents a characteristic opening of a conversation (cf. Tsui 1994): Before an actual exchange of information starts, the interactants take up relations by means of eye contact, smiling, and the use of discourse markers (*yeah; okay*). The coach makes another phatic statement (*now we're here!*) before the next round of discourse marker statements ensues (lines 5 and 6).

As the short phase of making contact is over, it is the coachee Bobbie who indirectly initiates the discussion of the process by disclosing her level of information: *ahm (...) I - I - I just kind of uhm talked with Angie (= researcher) in the hall. (...) I don't have much background about what is gonna be happening today*. The coach signals that he is following Bobbie's explanations by means of backchanneling signals (*uhu; okay*). In her next line the coachee indirectly prompts the coach to introduce himself: *so I don't really know what you do either*, a request with which the coach complies immediately.

This short sequence is characteristic of Bobbie's overall self-presentation in coaching 2 in many respects. First, she displays a high degree of openness, and of eloquence. Typically, she does not require pressing to reveal information about herself, and she presents herself as sociable and chatty. Clearly, she is eager to establish a pleasant frame of communication and a confirmative interactive style. Thus, her friendly mode also includes polite interest in her conversational partner's background.

Another feature that will occur in many situations throughout the session is Bobbie's high degree of involvement in the coaching process. In the opening sequence she takes responsibility for the process by steering the interaction into the verbal phase and by initiating the coach's self-presentation. Although this responsibility is more prototypically tied to the role of the coach, her indirectness and her friendliness seem to prevent her communicative behaviour from being face-threatening to the coach (cf. Section 13.3). Later on, she will participate in the solution-finding process eagerly, co-constructing advice and frequently giving positive feedback to the coach. Overall, her style is characterised by a high degree of cooperativeness, by a confident demeanour, and by appreciative communication toward her conversational partner.

After the coach has introduced himself in Episode 1 and after the interactants have negotiated the coaching process in Episode 2, Bobbie's own introduction follows in the third episode (cf. Table 13.2; Excerpt 13.9):

**Excerpt 13.9:**

- 1 B: well. uh (-) do you know anything (pointing towards her own chest) about me?

- 2 C: *no,*
- 3 B: *you're not.*
- 4 C: *no,*
- 5 B: *okay. ahm (-) I (-) know Angie (= analyst) from O. (CITY),*
- 6 C: *(raising eyebrows, nodding) aha,*
- 7 B: *she's (-) good friends with a good friend of mine.*
- 8 C: *(nodding) okay.*
- 9 B: *also an American. ahm (-) and I (-) have been in Germany almost four years,*
- 10 C: *(nodding) aha,*
- 11 B: *I came originally (-) to study music,*
- 12 C: *(raising eyebrows, nodding expressively) mhmmmm,*
- 13 B: *I'm a singer,*
- 14 C: *(nodding) mhmm,*
- 15 B: *and ahm (waving her index finger towards door) our mutual friend is also a singer.*
- 16 C: *(smiling, nodding) okay,*
- 17 B: *(slightly smiling) who I happened to (-) study with at graduate school.*
- 18 C: *(smiling, nodding) yeah.*
- 19 B: *(opening her hands) coincidentally enough. so uhm (-) I came to Germany to study music, I had a grant (-) a:nd I was only supposed to stay one year,*
- 20 C: *(nodding) mhm,*
- 21 B: *but (-) I liked it so much that I: uh (-) enrolled in the Musikhochschule (= music academy) and then-*
- 22 C: *(nodding) mhm,*
- 23 B: *(slightly nodding simultaneously with C) stayed and finished-*
- 24 C: *(nodding)*
- 25 B: *ahm (-) the Meisterklasse (= master class) (-) degree-*
- 26 C: *(nodding several times) mhm mhm,*
- 27 B: *in music.*
- 28 C: *mhm,*

Once again it is Bobbie who initiates this episode of the interaction. Characteristically, she does not begin with information about her professional self, but activates the social domain first. Thus, she explains how she knows the researcher and their mutual friend. Then she mentions her American origin before turning to the professional domain: *I came originally (-) to study music, (...) I'm a singer*. It is notable that Bobbie introduces her professional identity as a singer so early in the coaching session. It will be demonstrated in the course of the

analysis that she strongly identifies with this membership category, depicting its members in very positive terms.

In the following lines, Bobbie expands on her professional biography: She explains that she came to Germany to study music and that she has completed a master class degree. All of her positionings imply positive self-assessments. For instance, Bobbie tells the coach that she *had a grant*, a fact that represents an achievement in itself. Her decision to stay in Germany is construed in a positive light as well, as Bobbie gives the reason being that she *liked it so much*. Further, she describes her singing training in Germany, outlining it in three steps: she *enrolled*, *stayed*, and *finished*. The active syntactic construction and the anaphoric effect imply determinedness as well as success.

Later on, the coachee states that *in the meantime [she has] been singing (...) concerts, and trying to do auditions*. It is merely the use of the verb *try* that provides a hint of the fact that Bobbie has had difficulties with respect to her singing career (she explains this at a later point in the conversation (00:31:29)). The overall impression emerging in the course of her introduction is that she is a happy, committed, and determined person.

### 13.3.2 Presenting the professional self

The coachee Bobbie presents her professional self in consistent terms. Early on in the conversation, she introduces the fact that she has a twofold professional background, i.e. a degree in music and in International Business (00:03:45). Thus, Bobbie presents herself as competent both in the business area and in the artistic realm. Her use of the metaphor *I caught a performing bug* (00:03:57) is evidence of her generally enthusiastic stance toward singing: She depicts her passionate attitude toward this art whenever she mentions it.

Moreover, Bobbie states that she also teaches English as a foreign language. She refers to this occupation as something she enjoys, but that she does not *really wanna be doing full time* (00:04:33). It is enlightening to compare Bobbie's account with the corresponding statements of the coachee Kate in coaching 1: Both coachees argue that they have taught English before, but that they do not want to pursue it as a career. However, the reason Kate offers is that she does not meet the requirements of an English teaching job (*(laughing) I'm not good at that*. (00:17:09)), whereas Bobbie argues that the teaching job does not meet *her* requirements. Regardless of the actual teaching qualities of the two coachees, the remarkable fact remains that Kate construes the issue with a focus on a weakness of her own, whereas Bobbie designs the matter in terms of likings.

The optimistic stance of Bobbie's professional self-presentations persists through the entire conversation. When asked about her strengths by the coach, Bobbie is quick to name them and to highlight them by means of elaborations. In sum, she lists four of her strengths :

she has a lot of international experience (00:17:04), she can speak German (00:17:38), she is an alumna of X. (FESTIVAL) (00:17:52), and she is *young* and *energetic* (00:18:05). Again, in comparison to Kate in coaching 1 (*my German is obviously not a hundred percent perfect* (00:25:00)), Bobbie presents her language skills in a positive light (*I can speak German, I can get by*, (00:17:38)). The coach does not intervene much during Bobbie's positive self-descriptions, but he produces confirmative backchanneling activities and, at times, positive evaluations of her professional self. The two interactants appear to be much in tune with respect to their professional values, as Coach I expresses a similarly optimistic attitude (cf. Section 13.7).

### 13.2.3 Presenting the self with regard to agency and problem construal

The most interesting detail about Bobbie's problem construal is that she tends to avoid it altogether. By the end of the session, she condenses her self-concept into one short phrase: When the researcher expresses her surprise about the brevity of the coaching session, she replies: *oh I'm (-) I'm not very problematic, (laughing)* (01:04:05). A superficial glimpse at the second conversation in my corpus would likely confirm the idea that Bobbie is just a person who is not confronted with any difficult issues: As has been established in the previous sections, she displays a very friendly and open personality, highlighting positive aspects about her life and showing confidence and optimism concerning her future.

However, in taking a closer look it becomes apparent that this self-image is the result of careful construction. This is not to say that Bobbie is 'in reality' something else than she claims to be, for such a claim would not fit within a constructionist framework of analysis (cf. Sections 5.2 and 5.3). Rather, I am interested in the perspectives Bobbie takes and the strategies she uses to construe her self as *unproblematic* in the course of the interaction, and to achieve self-verification in the face of challenges. In fact, Bobbie presents a large amount of information that could be designed as *problematic* by a less optimistic person. For instance, she tells the coach that she has applied for *over seventy positions*, (00:05:11) but that she only *got (-) ONE (-) INTERVIEW, out of those* (00:05:15). The fact that the coach recognises the face-sensitivity of Bobbie's problem presentation is reflected in his use of a markedly soft tone, nodding signals (00:05:11), and an audible exhalation of breath (00:05:17).

Interestingly, Bobbie does not comment on the issue any further. Rather, she goes on to introduce the X. Festival – an organisation that she will characterise as her ideal employer in the course of the following narrative. Thus, the coachee discards the opportunity to construe the rejections of over 70 applications as a problem. Instead, she shifts the topic to

the one employer who has taken a strong interest in her. Considering the manner in which the coachee Kate in coaching 1 tends to interpret the events in her professional biography, it is likely that she would not have passed over the opportunity to criticise herself in the same situation. Bobbie, however, appears to focus on the positive aspects of her situation, mostly abstaining from marking anything about it as problematic. Yet after about half an hour (00:31:53), Bobbie actually does make a remark in which she characterises her job hunting phase as *really hard*, explaining that she had to *[close] the book o:n (-) [her] performing career* (00:31:29). This metaphorical expression is based on the conceptual metaphor WORK IS A STORY. The imagery aptly captures the disappointment Bobbie experiences in light of parting with her singing career, but it also implies that its end is something natural: After all, every book has to end at some point. Thus, Bobbie construes the event in a reconciliatory manner.

The explicit grounder Bobbie offers for the ending of her performing phase follows the same logic: *the performing stuff was not going well here (...) in Germany. (...) there's just not enough work. (...) not enough work, too much competition. (smiling) like any (-) industry now.* (00:31:36). The subject position of the noun phrase *the performing stuff* takes the agency away from the speaker and puts the entire line of business into focus. The same is true for Bobbie's argument concerning the lack of work and the excess competition: In this market-economic perspective, success is impeded by external factors, rather than by the actor in the market. The comparison with other industries underlines the normalcy of the event, aligning Bobbie with numerous other people and making her choice to change her career seem prudent. At the same time, Bobbie's line of arguing appears very objective and rational; it highlights her professional attitude; and it brings her business background to light.

While the problem construction itself has already seemed harmless, the coachee then goes on to demonstrate her excellent coping abilities: She characterises herself as *pretty easy-going* (00:31:52) and argues that, for this reason, she is only bothered *for a couple of days* (00:31:53) before she gets *back to work* and her *computer* (00:31:57). In essence, Bobbie describes a resource that constantly appears throughout the entire conversation. The self-aspect of being *easy-going*, *relaxed*, or *unproblematic* appears to be deeply entrenched in her self-concept. According to the evidence in the coaching session, this self-aspect seems to correspond with a firmly established positive perspective on life and on her self in particular, as reflected in the way Bobbie construes, or refrains from construing, problems in talk.

On several occasions during the session, Coach I picks up on Bobbie's self-presentations and confirms them, e.g. by giving positive feedback: *I perceive you as very (-) relaxed, (...) structured, (...) goal-orientated* (00:30:55). Throughout the conversation, the

interactants mutually agree on Bobbie's first-order positioning as an unproblematic person.

### 13.3.4 Presenting the social self

Bobbie frequently provides self-presentations located in the social domain of identity construction. In particular, she often raises her adherence to the membership category 'singer'. Also, in accordance with her portrayal of singers, she positions herself as well-connected and sociable both in the professional and in the private realm. In the following discussion, I will further examine these two aspects of Bobbie's social self.

As the analysis of the initial self-presentation has shown, Bobbie positions herself as *a singer* (00:02:00) from the beginning. Notably, she never calls herself a 'teacher' or a 'business person', although she states that she teaches and that she has a business degree. The nominalised form of the term 'singer' can be interpreted in a more essentialist sense, implying that the coachee inherently belongs to this membership category. Further, Bobbie aligns herself with particularly outstanding members of the group. For instance, she establishes the importance of the X. Festival (i.e. her potential new employer). She states that *many famous guest stars* (00:05:57) as well as the pop star K. (00:06:08) perform at the X. Festival, and a *world class faculty* (00:06:34) teaches at the X. Institute. Having made the high status of the festival clear, she then turns to her own participation in the programme, positioning herself in proximity to the musicians she has just characterised as particularly successful. By stating the fact that she was *a singer there in 2005* (00:06:40), she gives verifiable evidence of her affiliation with prominent members of her in-group. It is apparent that the concrete fact that underlies her act of positioning achieves for her a high degree of credibility. At the same time, her claim to status is conducted in an indirect manner. Thus, Bobbie displays modesty by calling her performance at the festival a *great experience* (00:06:49), as opposed to, for instance, 'a great success' (which her talk indicates it clearly was).

In the course of the interaction, Bobbie establishes the stereotype that singers are sociable, a claim to which she returns in the following sequence:

**Excerpt 13.10:**

- 1        *B: I I don't have a boyfriend or anything here,*
- 2        *C: yeah,*
- 3        *B: so I don't have (-) like a relationship,*
- 4        *C: yeah,*
- 5        *B: holding me here? I have many good FRIENDS.*



- 6 C: *yeah.*
- 7 B: *but (-) you know- (shrugging shoulders)*
- 8 C: *yeah,*
- 9 B: *I have friends all over the world.*
- 10 C: *[yeah,]*
- 11 B: *[cause] I'm a singer. (laughing)*
- 12 C: *yeah. yeah.*

Line 1 is a response to the coach's question of whether there is anything keeping Bobbie from moving back to America. In her reply Bobbie achieves several tasks at the same time. First, she reconfirms her identity as *a singer* (00:26:38). Second, she specifies the trait of sociability that comes along with the membership in this group: *I have friends all over the world.* (00:26:37). Thirdly, her positioning as a popular personality counterbalances the fact that she does not *have a boyfriend or anything* (00:26:27), as this information alone might have counteracted her projected identity.

The second salient aspect of Bobbie's social identity is her construal of her professional and personal relationships. For instance, Bobbie presents an impressive list of three highly influential people who have all been *calling [the festival president] on [her] behalf* (00:10:50) to recommend her for a job interview. The coachee depicts these three people as ardent supporters: *and [they] said (-) she's you know (bending her head, expressive, exaggerated tone) great, (laughing) and fabulous,* (00:10:40). Thus, she manages to produce a very positive self-evaluation through the voices of high-status protagonists, while at the same time keeping a modest stance for herself. Bobbie's exaggerated tone, as well as her laughter, signal distance to the statement. In this way, she slightly mitigates the force of the utterance, while maintaining its self-enhancing message.

In a similar manner, she elaborates on her relationship with the former programme manager. Again, Bobbie mentions an important contact and goes on to portray her as someone *who has als- always been (-) kind of [her] (writing quotation marks into the air, smiling, expressive, exaggerating tone and moves) cheerleader, (laughing)* (00:15:51). Again, she uses an expressive, slightly ironic modality as well as laughter to downtone the statement. On the other hand, she boosts the force of the utterance by adding that the former programme manager is her *cheerleader* not just in the area of *singing*, but concerning *everything that she does* (00:15:54). The information that the former programme manager has given Bobbie *lots of advice* (00:15:55) suggests a close mentoring relationship. In this way, the coachee positions herself in immediate proximity to a high-status representative of her most important membership group.

In the realm of private relationships, Bobbie creates an image of sociability and

popularity. She explains that she made friends quickly when she attended classes at the Q. (CULTURAL INSTITUTION) in D. (CITY). Also, she met *tons of people* (00:28:06) when she participated in an opera in O. (CITY) and met lots of friends *that [she] went to graduate school with, living in O. (CITY)*. (00:28:29). Although she concedes that making a new start outside of a school atmosphere in M. (U.S. CITY) will be much harder, she states that she conceives of herself as embedded in two circles: one is a *great CLOSE circle of friends* (00:28:47), and the other consists of a great circle of *acquaintances* (00:28:49). By the end of the coaching session, Bobbie draws on this theme again when she tells the coach that she is meeting a friend immediately afterwards: *you know I (-) since I told everyone I'm leaving, (...) I've never been so popular in my entire life. (laughing) ) yeah like, (raising arms into the air) SOCIAL CALENDER. (laughing, packing up her bag)* (01:03:41). This positioning supports her social self-presentation as a likeable, popular personality with many high-quality relationships.

Coach I reacts to Bobbie's social self-presentations in overwhelmingly positive terms. He is completely in tune with her social self-presentations, and he confirms her positioning activities in many situations. He refers to her as a *singer* (00:33:45) and as a *musician* (00:33:47), thus supporting her group membership. Moreover, when he discusses the matter of job interviews, he picks up on Bobbie's auditioning experience: He compares the preparations to those for *a big concert* (00:51:53) and acknowledges that Bobbie is *used to this* (00:51:55).

### 13.3.5 Presenting the self by means of metaphors

In comparison to the coachee Kate in coaching 1, the coachee Bobbie talks in a far less metaphorical style. Among the few salient metaphorical expressions are the two instances discussed in Sections 13.2.2 and 13.2.3, i.e. *I caught a performing bug*, which is based on the conceptualisation of her love of performing as a parasite (00:03:57), and *closing the book on (-) my performing career*, which conceptualises her career in terms of a story (00:31:29).

Further, it is noteworthy that, just like Kate, Bobbie takes up Coach I's energy metaphor after some time. This is evidence of the interactive dynamics of advice-giving: Bobbie absorbs the coach's advice to do energy management, she processes it, and she reflects on the question how she can put it into practice. In the end, she gives a positive evaluation of the coach's input: *but (-) the energy level is (-) VERY important*. (00:44:56). Altogether, while the two metaphors discussed in this analysis are concerned with crucial topics, metaphorical self-presentation is less dominant in Bobbie's repertoire of positioning strategies than in that of the coachee Kate in coaching 1 (cf. Section 13.2.6).

### 13.3.6 Presenting self-evaluations

From the previous section it has become clear that the coachee Bobbie evaluates herself in very positive terms. For instance, she provides several explicit self-characterisations by means of adjectives: *I'm a pretty laid-back person* (00:30:35), *I'm pretty easy-going* (00:31:52), and *I'm not very problematic* (01:04:05). These statements contain central elements of Bobbie's line of self-presentation. Yet, the coachee mainly draws on indirect self-evaluations. It has been demonstrated in Section 13.3.4 how Bobbie gives factual evidence of her achievements, leaving the positive evaluation to the hearer. Also, it has been shown that the coachee employs narratives in which she positions herself close to protagonists who are evaluated positively. Moreover, I have established the fact that Bobbie is careful not to come across as grand or immodest. For this reason, she usually complements her positive self-presentations with a minimum of mitigation action, though she also tends to employ boosters. Furthermore, Bobbie's positioning as a likeable person is supported by confirmative face work in relation to the coach (cf. Section 13.2).

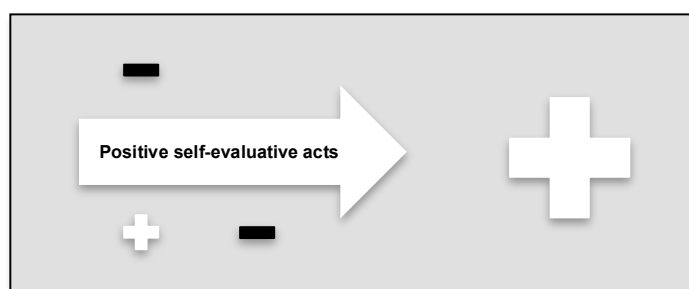


Figure 13.3: Idealised sketch of a mitigated and reinforced positive cluster of self-evaluation

Figure 13.3 provides an idealised sketch of the characteristic clusters of self-evaluation produced by the coachee Bobbie in coaching 1. As explained in Section 13.2.6, the large arrow pointing to a large plus sign indicates the generally positive orientation of Bobbie's self-presentations. The small minus signs stand for the mitigating activities Bobbie employs to reduce the force of her self-assessments. However, in contrast to the sketch depicting Kate's positive complementary clusters in coaching 1, Figure 13.3 also features a small plus sign. This symbol accounts for the reinforcement activities that Bobbie typically employs along with her mitigating devices. In sum, Bobbie's self-evaluative patterns suggest that she operates from the basis of a positive self-concept. Thus, her complementary positive self-evaluative clusters appear to fulfil the needs of self-assessment, self-verification, and self-enhancement, while at the same time conveying an appropriate amount of modesty.

### 13.3.7 Conclusion

In review, the analysis of self-presentation by the coachee Bobbie has led to the following results:

1. The **initial self-presentations** of the coachee reflect her overall self-presentations as a friendly, sociable, and confident interactant and as a singer. She displays a high degree of involvement in the process when she initiates several phases of the process. Further, she emphasises agency when discussing successful actions, while she reduces agency and responsibility when mentioning failures.
2. Regarding her **professional self-presentation**, Bobbie stresses her identity as a singer. This self-aspect is a crucial part of her professional identity, whereas her business background is construed as less essential to her self-concept. Thus, she discusses her job as an English teacher, arguing that this is not an occupation that defines her in professional terms. Bobbie's professional self-presentations reflect her optimism and her confidence in her skills. Coach I is in accordance with Bobbie's positionings, confirming them in many instances.
3. Like all the other coachees (with the exception of the coachee Olivia in coaching 5), Bobbie does not present any strictly **personal aspects** of her self, but she only provides personal information if it is relevant to the coaching issue at hand.
4. With respect to **agency** and **construal**, it has been demonstrated that Bobbie makes strong efforts in order to construe herself as *unproblematic*. Thus, she often chooses not to design events as problems in the first place. Instead, she focuses on the positive aspects at hand. In this respect, she differs remarkably from the coachee Kate in coaching 1. It has been made evident that Bobbie tends to attribute success to herself, whereas she attributes failure to outer forces. Moreover, Bobbie maintains a rational and neutral mode, displaying professionalism and maturity when talking about setbacks. Coach I accepts and reinforces her construction of herself as an unproblematic person.
5. Bobbie presents her **social self** with a clear focus on two aspects: First, she establishes herself as a member of the category 'singer'. Also, she manages to make clear that she is close to very prototypical and esteemed representatives of this category. Bobbie draws on the strategy of group-stereotyping, aligning herself with the positive characteristics of the group of singers. All in all, her identity as a singer is an important resource of meaning-

making for the coachee. Furthermore, with regard to relationships Bobbie establishes her connection with high-status protagonists, who she depicts as maintaining supportive relationships with her. In the private area, Bobbie pictures herself as sociable and likeable. To emphasise this claim, she provides an image of two circles of friends and acquaintances that surround her.

6. In comparison to the coachee Kate in coaching 1, Bobbie uses only little **metaphorical language**. However, two metaphorical expressions are revealing with respect to her self-presentations, i.e. the image *catching a performing bug* and the image *closing the book on my performing career*. Further, Bobbie embraces the energy metaphor introduced by the coach. In this way, she complies with his advice, signalling that she is processing his ideas.

8. Concerning her **self-evaluations**, Bobbie typically produces positive complementary evaluative clusters. She employs mitigative elements by means of narrative strategies, by hedging devices, and especially by means of indirectness. Thus, she fulfils the requirements of modesty. However, she also employs reinforcement strategies, and on the whole her self-assessments are strongly oriented toward a positive direction.

## 13.4 The coachee Rachel

### 13.4.1 Initial self-presentations

The third coaching conversation begins with a more complex introductory phase than the coachings that have been previously discussed (cf. Table 13.4; Episode 1).

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Explicit self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:00:22	Practical talk with research assistant	
2	00:00:22 – 00:00:59	Introductory talk by the coach	
3	00:00:59 – 00:03:32	Coach II introducing himself	Coach II (self-initiated)
4	00:03:32 – 00:04:03	Interactants negotiating the process	
5	00:04:03 – 00:05:41	Interactants negotiating coaching expertise	
6	00:05:41 – 00:18:41	Rachel introducing herself, introducing her team and her problem construal	Coachee Rachel (self-initiated)

Table 13.4: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 3

At first, the interactants engage in some small talk with the research assistant. Then Coach II starts out with introductory talk about the research setting and the camera (Episode 2). In the third episode Coach II gives a comparatively long introduction of himself, which lasts until 00:03:32. It is already in the course of this initial self-presentation by Coach II that the coachee Rachel intervenes with a positioning of her own:

**Excerpt 13.11:**

- 1        *C: taking some decisions, (2s) 'h a::hm, (2s) I used to work a lot about emotional intelligence projects, and how to bring emotional intelligence to your leadership development, I used to work a lot of (-) with 360° topics (= standard feedback method in Human Resources),*
- 2        *R: (nodding) yeah,*  
           *C: that means uh with feedback,*
- 4        *R: yes,*
- 5        *C: from anyone of your colleagues,*
- 6        *R: yes exactly, (nodding) mhm,*
- 7        *C: (nodding) exactly, so obviously you know it too, (laughing)*
- 8        *R: (smiling) I haven't actually done one, but I know all about them.*
- 9        *C: ah okay. (-) (nodding) so::, (2s) a:::nd uhm,*

In this sequence the coach gives evidence of his expertise in leadership matters. He mentions the Human Resources term *360° topics* and gives an explanation of its meaning to Rachel: *that means uh with feedback, (...) from anyone of your colleagues*. Rachel signals that she is familiar with the issue twice: (*yes; yes exactly, (nodding) mhm*). Thus, she claims that she has expertise in leadership issues herself, refusing to be positioned as a layperson by Coach II's explanation. The coach comments on the coachee's reaction: (*nodding exactly, so obviously you know it too, (laughing)*). To this, Rachel reacts with a disclaimer, stating that she has not participated in a 360° feedback, but that she knows *all about them*. By nodding and by employing a token of agreement (*ah okay*), the coach accepts her second-order positioning. In terms of positioning theory, this exchange must be regarded as a negotiation of 'territories of knowledge' (cf. Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain 2007).

In Episode 4 the interactants discuss details of the coaching process, but in doing so they lead into a further implicit struggle over authority issues (Episode 5): The coach asks whether the coachee wants to know anything else about him in the context of his introduction. Rachel agrees, but shifts the topic to her expertise in coaching topics: She tells the coach that she has bought *a textbook about coaching* (00:04:39), which she has brought to the session. Also, she explains that she has *sort of skimmed through it* (00:04:53) and that

the contents seem more than familiar to her: *that's (-) basically the approach that I use to managing people anyway, I just didn't realise it was called coaching. (smiling, laughing)* (00:05:02). This account represents a clear role challenge with respect to the coach. First, Rachel is questioning the asymmetrical balance of the coaching roles by ostentatiously displaying her own expertise on the subject. Second, her description of coaching concepts as something she has intuitively put into practice in her daily work devalues the coach's status as a trained full-time professional in his area.

The coach immediately sets out to reject this construction of his profession, although he mitigates his statement carefully: *(nodding) sometimes [it depends-] (...) what's (pointing to the book) in, so you never know. (laughing)* (00:05:06). In this way, Coach II questions the authority of Rachel's book. The coachee responds by maintaining her claim to the territory of knowledge *(I know of many many different issues. so yes. 00:05:09)*. To this, the coach replies with a more open attack on unsolicited authorities in the area of coaching: *the problem about it is, you can go out and print a business card, and write coach on it.* (00:05:12). Rachel's answer conveys reservation: *(grabbing her cup of tea) yes. I know. (taking a sip)* (00:05:14).

At this point, the coach starts to verify his own authority on the grounds of his continuing education: *because uhm, (-) it's not a (-) job title or something like that, so that's the lis- that's why I'm (-) spending a lot of money and time and time and eduCAtion. cause [otherwise,]* (00:05:19). In turn, Rachel defends the credibility of the book, pointing out that it has been edited by a renowned publishing house. Therefore, she argues, it should have *some (-) (putting her cup away) credibility behind it.* (00:05:25). In response, Coach II provides an example of his participation in excellent educational programmes. In this way, he is laying claim to the expertise on coaching that his role in the interaction implies. The coachee finally lets the matter rest, signalling her temporary acceptance of the coach's positioning by means of a nodding action (00:05:38).

Overall, the introductory sequence has revealed a series of pronounced positionings on Rachel's part. By critically challenging the coach's role she establishes herself as a serious professional with high standards for the quality of the coaching conversation. Also, she makes clear that she does not want to be treated as a layperson with respect to leadership issues, but she expects to be treated as on par with the coach. On the interactive level, Rachel has initiated an unusually antagonistic start: While the participants abide by the principles of general politeness and while they use a lot of smiles and laughing actions to downtone their arguments, large parts of their opening conversation clearly follow the logic of a communicative duel.

Shortly after this scene, the coachee Rachel initiates her own introduction:

**Excerpt 13.12:**

- 1        *R: so.. I would imagine that you would like to know a little bit about me.*
- 2        *C: (nodding) ye::s. (smiling) for sure. (grabbing his cup of tea)*
- 3        *R: (putting the book away) okay, (-) R.T. (FULL NAME), my n- well I've been in S. (CITY) for two years.*
- 4        *C: [I see.] (taking a sip of tea)*
- 5        *R: [as I said,] I:: have a background i::n consulting, uhm business analysis (-) consulting, market research,*
- 6        *C: (nodding) hmm.*
- 7        *R: uhm in the A. (INDUSTRY SECTOR) industry,*
- 8        *C: (nodding) mhm,*
- 9        *R: for the last fifteen years. and I've developed some very specialist areas of knowledge,*
- 10       *C: (nodding slowly)*
- 11       *R: A. (INDUSTRY SECTOR) areas of knowledge, 'hh*
- 12       *C: (nodding) hmm.*
- 13       *R: a::nd, uhm I was working previously for consulting company U. (COMPANY). and I spent a lot of my time on projects for Q. (COMPANY).*
- 14       *C: (nodding)*
- 15       *R: a::nd eventually they said we're spending so much money on consulting-*
- 16       *C: (laughing)*
- 17       *R: with you, why don't you come and JOIN us.*
- 18       *C: "yeah", (laughing)*

In this sequence the coachee presents aspects of herself mainly located in the professional domain. She establishes her *background i::n consulting, uhm business analysis (-) consulting, market research*. Also, she furnishes evidence of her professional experience: She mentions that she has been in her line of work for *fifteen years* and that she has *developed some very specialist areas of knowledge*. A short narrative provides even more confirmation of her expert status: Rachel introduces the company Q. as a neutral source for her competence: *a::nd eventually they said we're spending so much money on consulting (...)* *with you, why don't you come and JOIN us*. This story establishes Rachel's professional value from the perspective of a third party: Not only did her customers spend a lot of money on her services, but they even offered her a position. As the statement is delivered in the form of a direct quote, it gains a comparatively high degree of credibility.

In contrast to his client, the coach accepts Rachel's confident self-positionings immediately. He follows along with her story, producing affirming backchanneling signals (cf. Section 9.2). Then, in a sudden change of tone, Rachel switches the focus away from her



professional expertise to a more fragile and personal side of her self: She states that moving to *a strange city* (00:06:26) in a foreign country for a *strange job* (00:06:28) *was a very brave thing* for her to do (00:06:22). In this context, she appears to imply vulnerability by characterising herself as *[a single] woman in her early forties* (00:06:24). In the course of the coaching session, Rachel explains that she does, in fact, conceive of her self as consisting of two parts: In her opinion, she comes across as a tough businesswoman to many people, but she feels soft on the inside (00:37:39).

In the second part of her introduction, Rachel delivers an elaborate and eloquent description of her work situation. In particular, she produces detailed accounts of her team members by means of organisational charts. Rachel first positions herself with respect to her status in the organisation. Then, she claims to have a reputation for *bringing in new talents and developing people* (00:07:43). Having stated this crucial aspect of her professional self explicitly, she sets out to provide numerous examples for this trait. For instance, she tells the story of *two rising young stars* (00:07:50), whom she promoted and *developed* (00:07:59) actively. The use of the transitive verbs *promote* and *develop* signals a very high degree of involvement and agency. The next line contains her professional self-presentation in brief: *for me::, it's not about (putting her left hand to her chest) me::, it's about how my team xx help and support them to do a good job* (00:08:11).

In sum, the opening phase of coaching 3 is most eventful on the interactive level. Also, it is representative of Rachel's self-presentations throughout the coaching conversation: All of the vital self-presentational elements identified in this section will be paramount in the overall analysis.

### 13.4.2 Presenting the professional self

The previous section has provided a substantial impression of Rachel's professional self-presentations. Like the coachee Kate in coaching 1, Rachel switches between two perspectives of her self, both of which influence her professional identity. At the beginning of the session she demonstrates her high status, her competency, and her competitive attitude (cf. Section 14.4.1). Later, she presents herself as *soft*, or *weak* on the inside. In contrast to Kate, Rachel does not produce ambiguous self-presentations by switching back and forth between the two parts of her self. Rather, she opens up to the coach after some time, allowing him access to *the inside*: In his first explicit feedback the coach characterises Rachel as a *brave woman (...)* *with a lot of (-) power, intelligence, ENERGY*, concluding that he is *impressed* (00:18:51). Rachel accepts his praise and explains that she has come a long way, as she used to suffer from *severe eating disorders* (00:19:09) as a teenager. Also, she tells the coach that she has *always been a perfectionist*, (00:19:12). Following this, Rachel

describes her motivation for her caring attitude toward her team members: *I feel this great responsibility to other people. (...) to help them. uhm overcome the (-) the challenges and problems I've had* (00:19:51). According to this narrative, Rachel has managed a great achievement in her life, i.e. she has overcome a potentially life-threatening illness, and in light of this experience she now wishes to support other people.

Despite this claim, the reliability of Rachel's strong part of her self appears to be constantly on trial: She talks about *cracks underneath the surface* (00:20:00), and she states that other people consider her as *tough* (00:37:24), but that she really is *weak* (00:37:27). Rachel offers an explanation for this paradox: *[but I] had to become hard, because 'h I'm (-) surviving on my own in this city, (...) and I can't be easy to be vulnerable* (00:37:49). This line of reasoning resembles her initial self-presentation as *a single woman in a strange city* (00:06:26). Thus, she construes her surroundings as threatening and dangerous, activating strong images of the need for self-protection and survival management.

Typically, Coach II does not support this perspective of his coachee, but he encourages Rachel to continue to express her feelings. In one situation, he refutes Rachel's discourse about her weakness: *'hh mmm as long as you say, uhm I'm feeling weak uhm, (-) the weakness will grow* (00:50:36). Instead, he advises her to change the way in which she talks to herself. Later on, he reframes her 'weakness' as emotional interest, suggesting that she will gain the trust of her team members if she stands by her feelings (00:40:58).

As a further central issue of her professional identity, Rachel constantly reiterates her shattered confidence as a leader, indicating many times how important this self-aspect is to her. However, by the end of the coaching her confidence in her professional self seems to be restored. The coach gives her very positive feedback on her leadership skills:

**Excerpt 13.13:**

- 1 C: (low volume) *thank you very much, (regular volume) and I could (2s) FEEL from the beginning a lot of energy in you and uh, "confidence" regarding leadership, how to solve a task, what things to do:, 'h where to put your focus on, and this is a really (-) powerful "floor".that's how I (-) I would name this. uh, I think you can even build a (-) HUGE house on that. a kind of, (-) leadership house, on a very powerful floor, and this (-) next building part could be something like, (-) frame setting, bringing in emotions without thinking it's soft or weak,*

Thus, Coach II refutes the strong-weak dichotomy introduced by the coachee, and he replaces it with the metaphor of the floor, on which she can build her leadership house. According to him, Rachel has displayed great strength as a leader. The coachee embraces his view and states that she would be interested in getting more leadership training.

### 13.4.3 Presenting the self with respect to agency and problem construal

Two aspects are particularly worthy of discussion with respect to agency and problem construal in Rachel's self-presentation. First, Rachel prepares the ground for the introduction of her problem over long sequences of talk. Second, focusing on her problem construal itself, she primarily blames her subordinate J for the conflict arising in her team, but she accuses herself very fiercely as well.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, Rachel is careful to give evidence of her leadership qualities before presenting her problem with the employee J. Rachel presents herself as well-informed about the professional background of her employee W. (00:08:32). She provides positive evaluations of W.'s professional development, thereby achieving four different tasks on the self-presentational level: Rachel claims a position in which she can assess other people by means of her status. Also, she discusses the contents of W.'s learning process (*she's learned forecasting, she's learned how to put the situation analyses together, she's done some xx intelligence*), thus providing further proof of her own competence in this area of work. Further, Rachel's positive tone affirms her positioning as a benevolent leader. Moreover, from a discourse analytical perspective, this sequence is part of a long series of accounts establishing Rachel's overall success and her popularity as a leader. This face-saving strategy will be taken up once more in Section 14.3.

Having established her overall success as a leader, the coachee introduces the problem construction, i.e. the exceptional case of an unhappy employee. Rachel's problem construction unfolds like a skilfully told catastrophe narrative. She introduces signs of doom (stating that she *probably overpromised the job role* (00:09:31)), she characterises her employee J. as *difficult* and *challenging* (00:10:12), she narrates a fight between J. and herself (00:10:12), and she mentions J.'s jealousy of her *superb* co-worker (00:11:12). Rachel tells the coach how she had recognised the signs and had been *trying to come up with solutions*, (00:11:12). However, the storm breaks loose despite her efforts when J. quits: *she very suddenly (-) handed in her resignation* (00:11:02).

Thus, Rachel depicts herself as highly agentic, but powerless in the face of a rising catastrophe. It is this weakness for which she criticises herself so harshly – in her view, she should have somehow prevented the catastrophe from happening. Therefore, she always takes a very active position when she reflects on different solutions, presenting emergency measures to the coach and comparing different candidates who might replace the outgoing employee. Accordingly, her initial idea of the goal of the coaching session is concerned with active solution-finding measures (*I think it would be: to explore the options, and firm up my mind*. (00:23:32)). However, in the course of the session Coach II shifts Rachel's focus away

from task-oriented solutions. Instead, he prompts her to attend to her own emotional needs first and to those of her team second. Thus, he appears to contribute to a tremendous release of pressure on the coachee.

As stated above, at the heart of the catastrophe narrative is an evil antagonist, i.e. the employee J. This woman is characterised as *manipulative* (00:13:55), as impatient (00:10:12), as a liar (00:11:53), and as someone who *uses her sexuality to get what she wants* (00:14:00). Rachel expresses her fear that J might *infect* another colleague (00:13:47) – this metaphor activates the scenario of a malicious disease. Therefore, while the coachee always makes sure that she acknowledges J.'s professional contribution to her team, her assessment of J.'s personality is scathing. A major source of Rachel's anger appears to be that she feels *betrayed* by her (00:32:57). This phenomenon is closely tied to her depiction of her company as a dangerous place in which loyalty is key (cf. Section 13.4.4): Rachel depicts a large amount of relationships which she frames as loyal alliances. In one instance, she describes the explicit gratitude of a new team member who used to suffer from a horrible boss. Clearly, Rachel is accustomed to receiving appreciation in return for her efforts to develop people. J, however, is *not playing the game properly* (01:02:39). Not only does she quit, but she leaves on bad terms, sabotaging Rachel's attempts to bring the issue to a reconciliatory close. What seems to hurt the coachee the most is the fact that J. undermines Rachel's professional identity as a successful leader by complaining about her outside of her presence. Thus, Rachel feels that J. is *just (-) stabbing her in the back* (00:33:43). Yet by the end of the coaching, the coachee achieves an impressively different stance toward this issue. In fact, she makes a daring proposal for a positive reframing herself (01:23:22). Thus, she manages to leave the problem frame of 'betrayal' altogether, narrating the entire event with a focus on J.'s valuable professional contribution and on the learning experience Rachel has had as a leader.

### 13.4.4 Presenting the social self

In this section I will discuss two aspects of the social self presented by Rachel, i.e. her concept of herself as a mother to her team members, and her other relationships in the company. With respect to the mother metaphor, the coachee provides the following explanation:

#### Excerpt 13.14:

- 1 C: (nodding) *hmm. hmm. (2s) hmm. and sometimes the question is, (-) where are YOU. in this game.*
- 2 R: *exactly. and it's like, (-) I (-) I guess uhm, I don't have children, but my maternal instincts come out, in managing my team.*

The fact that Rachel construes her relationship to her subordinates in terms of the relationship of a mother to her children becomes apparent in many ways. In particular, the level of attention and care that she displays with respect to the happiness of her team members appears to be exceptionally high. All of her examples of good leadership are pervaded by the idea that she is responsible for the development of her people. In return, Rachel seems to expect gratitude and loyalty. The coach points out early on that the mother metaphor has a potential for conflict at the workplace:

**Excerpt 13.15:**

- 1        C: *(nodding) yea:h. (2s) 'hh this is an interesting topic uhm, a source (-) for a lot of (-) good development, and for a lot of (laughing) conflicts.*
- 2        R: *(taking up her cup) mhm, (taking a sip of tea)*
- 3        C: *uh if uhm, (-) 'h you have this idea and the other way ROUND. uh if your followers sometimes, they have the SAME ideas. uh, she's my mother.*
- 4        R: *(laughing)*
- 5        C: *(laughing) and I behave like a child. (laughing)*
- 6        R: *(nodding)*
- 7        C: *because mother is HERE. so::, (-) this kind of idea creates a certain dynamic in a team.*
- 8        R: *(nodding)*
- 9        C: *'h u::hm,*

The coach suggests that Rachel's team members might embrace the mother metaphor and behave like children, a statement to which Rachel agrees immediately. Thus, in this instantiation of metaphorical use the coach accounts for the powerful influence of the underlying conceptual metaphor A LEADER IS A MOTHER (cf. Section 5.7).

In the case of Rachel's conflict with one of her employees, the coach and the coachee come to negotiate a reframing: He suggests that Rachel remind herself that she does, in fact, hold the role of the boss: *you ARE (-) NOT (-) his mother, (laughing)* (00:59:19). Likewise, the interactants come to understand Rachel's problem with her antagonist J. along the lines of the mother metaphor. In the coach's view, Rachel conceives of J. as an ungrateful *teenager* who rejects her motherly love (01:24:17). Coach II argues that the coachee's belief system may clash with the belief systems of other people, who may *feel pressed or pushed* by Rachel (01:25:05). Remarkably, she is very open to the coach's suggestions: The reframing seems to disburden her a great deal. By the end of the coaching she states that she has *to get away from that* concept (01:24:05). Moreover, she claims that she would like to learn more about her own interactive patterns. Clearly, Rachel has a strong interest in self-

assessment and self-improvement.

The second salient feature of Rachel's social self is the fact that she describes the people in her company along the lines of two criteria. On the one hand, she tends to produce very complex and sharp-witted overall accounts of the personalities of other people. In this way, she presents herself as perceptive, intelligent, and eloquent by presenting absent people. On the other hand, Rachel is interested in the stance people take towards her. Thus, in each account she implicitly answers the question of whether the respective person is her ally or her opponent. For example, she introduces one *dear friend* in the firm, who she can trust completely (00:38:54); the head of marketing is described as Rachel's *biggest adversary within the company* (00:27:57); and two of her fellow managers are presented as virtually insane. The coachee always furnishes her narratives with very skilful evidence. For instance, she mentions that she has to keep her *door closed* because a colleague of hers *screams at people all day, and he::r staff are continually shouting back at her* (00:29:32). Rachel's concrete examples lend additional credibility to her depiction of her working environment as hostile (cf. Section 13.4.5). Rachel's personal feeling of hidden vulnerability is therefore complemented by the image of a workspace that may bring about existential threats to a high-ranking manager. In brief, the coachee presents her social self as entangled in an abundance of workplace relationships, which she then categorises and evaluates in very elaborate terms.

One of Rachel's narratives is especially revealing of her view: She talks about a struggle over authority with her subordinate. According to Rachel's construction, she had to *gain his respects* (00:21:57) first and *show him that she had the experience*, (00:21:59) before they could work together constructively. Having achieved this task, Rachel now depicts him as an ally, who she wants to develop systematically. Interestingly, the interactive dynamics between Rachel and her team member are reflected in the dynamics between her and the coach in the course of the coaching session. Thus, the opening of the coaching session can be interpreted as a situation in which Rachel has prompted a typical interactive pattern from her repertoire (cf. Section 16.4). It appears that the coachee classifies the coach as an ally only after having launched a sequence that may have functioned as an initial test.

In the process of describing people, Rachel often makes use of cultural stereotypes, although I will not explore this area deeper due to space limitations of this thesis. In short, the coachee produces group-stereotyping actions for Germans, Bavarians, for the French, and for her own in-group, i.e. the British. Altogether, Rachel's presentations of her social self are very complex and differentiated, as well as carefully phrased.

### 13.4.5 Presenting the self by means of metaphors

Rachel is an avid producer of metaphorical expressions, and her metaphorical self-presentations tend to be highly enlightening. It is already in her initial self-presentation that she sums up her situation by means of a metaphorical proverb: *and I've had a great team, (nodding) uhm (-) bu::t, (...) not everything in the garden is rosy*, (00:06:50). This construction captures an important aspect of her problem narrative, i.e. that she designs it as an exception to an otherwise very successful leadership job.

In three instances, the problem itself is characterised as a dynamic object forcing itself into Rachel's sphere like a projectile: *so: (-) I have (-) a situation which has really hit me* (00:13:14); *the risk has (-) spectacularly backfired*, (00:14:20); *it's just thrown "this" bomb into my team* (01:07:19). As has been demonstrated in Section 13.4.3, in the coachee's problem construction the antagonist J. is described in terms of a virus that might *infect* other people (00:13:47). Also, J. is compared to *a rotten apple*. (00:15:04) in another drastic simile. Rachel's idea that J. has betrayed her is captured in the phrase *and it's just (-) stabbing me in the back* (00:33:43). J's incompatibility with Rachel's underlying values is expressed in the phrase *she's not playing the game properly* (01:02:39).

A frequent topos the coachee employs is the building metaphor: First, she portrays her *stable lovely team* (00:14:50); then, she claims: *it's falling apart, it's becoming really unstable* (00:14:55). In several instances she explains to the coach that she needs to *rebuild* her team (00:18:12). The coach picks up the image, but emphasises that it is more *important to REbuild the trust-* (01:18:16) of her team members first. The concept of a damaged object is also prevalent in Rachel's self-presentational suggestion that *there are lots of cracks underneath her surface* (00:20:00).

Finally, Rachel's distinction between friends and enemies is reflected in her utterance that she is *used to managing people, (-) who: a:re, on [her] side* (00:35:54). Finally, she produces a humorous self-positioning by stating that she is *such a colour police xx person-* (01:10:28). Overall, metaphors aptly capture the most salient aspects for the analysis of the coachee's self-presentation in coaching 3.

### 13.4.6 Presenting self-evaluations

The picture of Rachel's self-evaluations is very complex. In the opening phase she presents herself in mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters (cf. Figure 13.4): While she chooses indirect forms of self-presentation, thus mitigating the force of her utterances, she clearly emphasises the positive aspects of her self. For instance, she tells the coach that she has *a background i::n consulting, uhm business analysis (-) consulting, market research,*

(00:05:57). The choice of the word *background* implies a neutral connotation, but, clearly, it also stands for a positive self-presentation of her expertise.

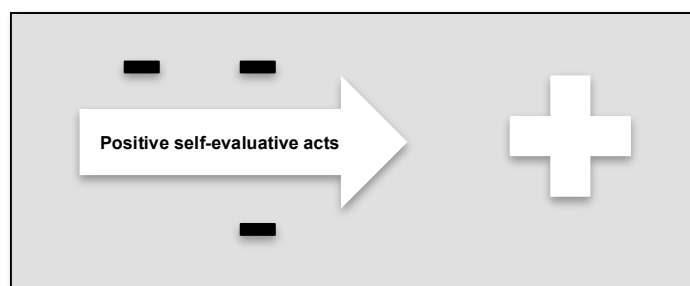


Figure 13.4: Idealised sketch of a mitigated positive self-evaluative cluster

It is noteworthy that the use of mitigated positive evaluative clusters appears to be tied to the tough and combative part of Rachel's self (cf. Section 13.4.2). However, when she speaks with the voice of her sensitive part, the coachee tends to seek accurate self-assessments. In point of fact, Rachel demonstrates that she is conscious of her strengths, but often she appears as overly self-critical. Thus, Rachel considers overpromising a *big weakness* of hers (01:23:53); she states that she feels *guilty* and *ashamed* (01:05:40) for not being as fluent in German as she would like to be; she constantly accuses herself of being weak (00:33:47); and she claims her promotion to the vice director grade was premature (00:40:32). All of these pieces of criticism contain negative self-evaluations which are not usually mitigated. In these cases, Rachel tends to produce negative self-evaluative clusters with few or without no mitigating elements at all (cf. Figure 13.5). To account for this type of self-evaluative cluster, the graph is depicted without any symbols of mitigation.

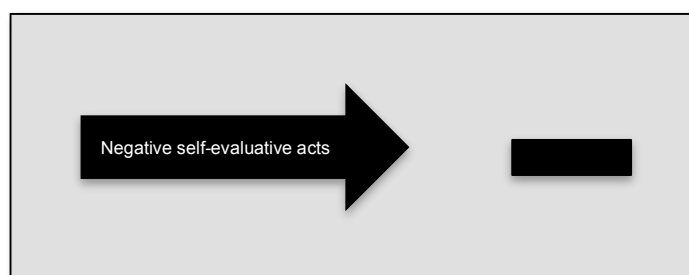


Figure 13.5: Idealised sketch of an unmitigated negative self-evaluative cluster

Despite her tendency toward relentless self-evaluation, in the course of the session the coachee reframes her conflict with J. in more favourable terms. She concedes that her employee has done a *good job* (01:21:49) and that J. has helped her to *define what her role SHOULD have been in the first place* (01:23:01). Thus, Rachel concludes: *so, (-) it (-) it's not*



*been a TOTALLY bad experience. it's been a complete knock to my confidence. (...) BU:T, it was better to have had her than not had her (01:23:26).* This evaluation of her time with J. implies a much better evaluation of herself as a leader than was apparent in her initial problem construction. By reframing the work relationship with J. as somewhere in the realm of the commonplace, Rachel lifts the pressure from her shoulders. According to her second construction, J. has brought advantages as well as disadvantages, but the evaluation of Rachel's important professional identity as a leader is no longer tied to the fact that J. has left the company. Thus, one of the solutions the coaching appears to have brought about consists in the fact that Rachel's assessment of a salient self-aspect has improved considerably.

While she is very self-critical at the beginning, she is quick to renew her judgement under the influence of the coach's arguments. Overall, Rachel appears rather unique in that she prioritises self-assessment very prominently. Moreover, she has proven to be adaptive in terms of the management of identity construction

### 13.4.7 Conclusion

The analysis of self-presentation by the coachee Rachel has led to the following results:

**1. The initial self-presentations** by the coachee are very complex and diverse. First, she emphasises her expertise with respect to leadership matters and coaching issues. In this context, she challenges the coach and provokes a struggle over authority between the interactants. Later on, she employs the strategy of preparing the ground: She establishes her successful leadership identity by means of narratives before she introduces an exceptional problematic conflict with one of her subordinates.

**2. Concerning her professional self-presentation**, Rachel introduces two parts of her identity, i.e. a tough outer self and a soft inner self. In relation to the coach, after some time she opens up and shows him her vulnerable and self-critical side as well. Rachel's constructions of her workplace contain an element of danger and threat, which is the reason why she highlights her need for self-protection. Also, she discusses her shattered confidence as a leader. By the end of the coaching, she reaches a positive reframing in this regard. Moreover, she accepts and embraces the coach's authority on leadership issues. The coach, in turn, affirms her confidence as a leader, so that her professional identity is restored.

**3. Like all the other coachees** (with the exception of the coachee Olivia in coaching 5), Rachel does not present any strictly **personal aspects** of her self, but she only provides

personal information in so far as it is relevant to the coaching issue at hand.

**4.** In the area of **agency** and **construal**, Rachel uses the strategy of preparing the ground. Also, she designs the problem in terms of a catastrophe narrative. Her degree of agency is construed as high, but as insufficient in the face of catastrophe. Nevertheless, Rachel blames herself for the problem. Furthermore, she introduces the antagonist J., whom she characterises as evil and as a traitor. The idea of betrayal is at the heart of Rachel's anger, but by the end of the coaching she comes up with an alternative narrative that replaces the frame of betrayal with a more reconciliatory overtone.

**5.** With respect to the **social self**, Rachel conceives of herself as a mother when talking about her employees. The interactants conclude, however, that this concept is a potential source of conflict – among others, it seems to play a vital role in her conflict with J. Therefore, the coachee decides to discard this idea. Also, Rachel describes a lot of workplace relationships. Here she provides complex analyses of the personalities of different people, thus presenting her self as intelligent, perceptive, and eloquent by depicting absent people. Remarkably, she assesses all the people in terms of a friend-or-foe dichotomy. At one point, Rachel discusses a struggle over authority and an ensuing alliance with a subordinate. This narrative resembles the way in which she takes up relations with Coach II at the beginning of the session. It is another result of the coaching that Rachel questions her own belief systems as well as her interactive patterns. As she tells the coach, she thinks that she should do more work in this area.

**6.** Rachel uses much **metaphorical language** in her self-presentations. In particular, she makes use of the building metaphor when referring to her team. She also uses metaphors to pinpoint her problem construction, to characterise her antagonist, and to describe the perceived discrepancy between the 'inner' and the 'outer' part of her self. Altogether, metaphors provide much explanatory power with regard to the analysis of Rachel's self-presentations.

**7.** The **self-evaluations** by the coachee are as complex as her self-presentations as a whole. At the beginning, she draws on mitigated positive evaluative clusters in order to establish her competency and her standing as a leader. When talking through her vulnerable, self-critical voice, she prefers to produce negative evaluative clusters with little or no mitigation. However, in the course of the coaching session, she achieves a much more positive overall evaluation of her self. Among the five coachees in my corpus Rachel is the one who works on the adjustment of her working self during the session in the most adaptive

and creative manner.

## 13.5 The coachee Pauline

### 13.5.1 Initial self-presentations

The opening phase of coaching 4 consists of 5 episodes (cf. Table 13.5). First, the interactants engage in some small talk (Episode 1), and then the coach gives a short introduction (Episode 2) before he introduces himself in Episode 3. As a consequence of his introduction, the interactants realise that they have worked for the same bank in the past. Thus, they discuss this organisation for quite some time (Episode 4) before the coach initiates the coachee's introduction of herself and of her problem construction (Episode 5).

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Explicit self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:00:30	Small talk, practical issues (camera)	
2	00:00:30 – 00:01:07	Introductory talk by the coach	
3	00:01:07 – 00:04:09	Coach introducing himself	Coach II (self-initiated)
4	00:04:09 – 00:07:15	Interactants discussing bank	
5	00:07:15 – 00:11:17	Pauline introducing herself and her problem construal	Coachee Pauline (other-initiated)

Table 13.5: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 4

Episode 4 represents an important factor for the interactive dynamics of the conversation because the interactants exchange their experiences with this organisation. In this context, they discuss cultural differences between Bavarians and Prussians. The common reference to group stereotypes (i.e. to the bank in question, as well as to the regional identities discussed) emphasises common views between the interactants. In this way, the coach and the coachee appear to bond immediately.

Thus, when the coach prompts Pauline to start her initial self-presentation, the atmosphere already appears to be quite relaxed and familiar. The coachee begins by describing her current work situation:

#### Excerpt 13.16:

1 C: (smiling) "so what about you".

- 2 P: *I have just been (-) betriebsbedingt gekündigt (= laid off for operational reasons), (-) downsized.*
- 3 C: *oh I see oh (-) where,*
- 4 P: *(nodding) at uh (-) my company was B. (COMPANY). out in E. (NEIGHBOURHOOD)?*
- 5 C: *(nodding) mhm,*
- 6 P: *that used to be B. (COMPANY). before that it was W. (COMPANY), and before that it was X. (COMPANY).*
- 7 C: *(laughing)*
- 8 P: *(smiling) I wasn't there that long though. it's just a bit over (-) two and a half years. two years and eight months.*
- 9 C: *hmm.*
- 10 P: *'hh a::nd uhm (-) so:, (-) since (-) while I was there, I was having some problems, I already decided a year ago that I didn't want to (-) stay, but I was (-) (moving her body back and forth several times) I was sticking it out because my husband, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx,*
- 11 C: *(nodding)*
- 12 P: *and I would ah put my job in for something else. (low volume) but we won't have one of us be in a stable position (-) already.*
- 13 C: *(nodding)*
- 14 P: *a:hm, (-) so that hasn't worked out, so: betriebsbedingte Kündigung (= layoff for operational reasons),*

Pauline's self-presentation starts in a very matter-of-fact way: She begins with a negative topic, i.e. her recent release. In contrast to Bobbie in coaching 2 or Rachel in coaching 3, Pauline does not mitigate or prepare the launch of this information in any way. Instead, she goes on to characterise her former employer and to tersely enumerate the different changes of name it has undergone in the last few years (00:07:35). The coach's laughter (00:07:38) indicates that he likely reads Pauline's untouched account as an ironic comment on corporate volatility. At the same time, this construction of her former employer as undergoing many changes also takes away agency and responsibility from herself with respect to the end of the employment contract.

In what follows, Pauline mentions that during her time at this organisation, she was *having some problems* (00:08:01) and considered leaving, but was *sticking it out because* her *husband* was in an unstable work situation (00:08:09). In the ensuing sequences she tells the coach that she is *in IT development* (00:08:39) programming websites (00:08:47). Moreover, she states that she is *looking fo:r (-) some (-) orientation as to what [she wants to] do next* (00:08:58). This issue is discussed as the first of two coaching topics later on.

In relation to the second topic, Pauline appeals to the coach's expertise in the area of emotional intelligence (00:09:38). Her problem description starts with a general question about *tips how to deal with somebody who, (looking away) (2s) (looking back to C) doesn't*

*tell you when something's wrong. (3s) a:nd only (-) when (smiling) (-) a lot of things have been wrong for a long time does he explode and tell you everything at once (00:09:38).* In the course of formulating her generalised request for a tip, Pauline gradually shifts into a narrative about her personal experiences (cf. Excerpt 13.17):

**Excerpt 13.17:**

- 1        *P: 'hh a:hm (-) and in this conversation last November, that was (3s) that was rea::lly:, (2s) re- (laughing) really a bad day. (smiling) ahm because I suddenly felt that (-) a lot of things had been going on, (-) behind my back,*
- 2        *C: yes.*
- 3        *P: (smiling) and people had been (regular facial expression) discussing me, and I had no idea.*
- 4        *C: (slightly nodding)*
- 5        *P: (2s) a:nd, (3s) yeah. and he said that these things happened long ago::, (-) and (-) yeah if they happened long ago why are you bringing them up now, if they weren't important to mention at the time,*
- 6        *C: (slightly nodding)*
- 7        *P: why are you saying anything now. (-) it obviously WAS important enough to STORE up,*
- 8        *(3s)*
- 9        *C: (slightly nodding)*
- 10       *P: and u::h, (-) and (-) use it against me once the (-) time has come.*

The coachee's description of the conflict displays high emotional involvement on her part. This is evident from the structure of her arguments, but also, for instance, from the use of expressive intonation (*WAS*; *STORE*) as well as amplifying boosters (*rea::lly:*). Further, Pauline employs laughter and smiling actions to convey consternation (00:10:25; 00:10:30).

In her ensuing problem construction Pauline makes sure to establish that the responsibility lies with the other interactants (*nobody had said a word to me, I had no idea, 00:10:00; nobody SHOWED it. (00:10:07); people had been discussing me, and I had no idea. (00:10:30)*). In this series of self-presentations, Pauline positions herself as the victim of an unfair plot. She does not question her own role in the conflict, but she presents herself in terms of a rationally thinking and acting person confronted with discomfort from outer sources. However, in comparison to the presentational strategies of Kate, Bobbie, and Rachel in the previous sections, Pauline's positioning seems much more straightforward and likely less refined: By naturally presupposing that everyone else in the narrative but her is in the wrong, Pauline must prompt the hearer to suspect that there might be more to the story. However, the coachee's initial self-presentations do not appear overly calculating in this respect. This might be evidence for low self-monitoring on Pauline's behalf (cf. Section 5.2).

The coach carefully avoids any comment on the issue or on Pauline's positionings at

this point. Rather, he sets out to negotiate the goal of the coaching. As has been established in the discussions of the use of questions, feedback, and advice in coaching 4, he then works toward a reframing of the problem. Thus, he points toward communicative topics, and encourages his coachee to get feedback early on in a work relationship.

### 13.5.2 Presenting the professional self

As is typical of her overall style, Pauline does not present her professional self in overly explicit or reflective terms. The information she gives is predominantly concerned with concrete information, for instance about her status, her colleagues, or her ideas for a potential new job. In one of the few passages in which the coachee makes a more comprehensive assessment of her professional status, Pauline gives the coach information about her professional training. She points out that she has a degree in German language and literature studies (00:58:35) and that, as such, she is a *career changer*. Also, she explains that in her profession, everyone used to be a career changer (00:58:47), but she is now surpassed by people with computer science degrees (00:59:15). The coachee concludes: *I do the kind of stuff that you can do without having a computer science degree* (00:59:33).

What is most striking about Pauline's self-presentations is their exceptional degree of detachedness. Although she assesses her own value to employers in comparison with her colleagues, it is difficult to detect Pauline's opinion or her feelings about the outcome. She does not express any frustration about the fact that younger people take her jobs away, and she certainly does not blame herself in the way commonly employed by the coachees Kate and Rachel. She merely states the facts to the coach.

Thus, Pauline's presentation of her professional self remains highly neutral throughout the conversation. She does talk about her professional goals and wishes, in particular about the importance of meaning in her work life. She tells the coach that she has considered changing her line of work, but that she has come to the decision that she likes what she does (00:35:38). However, she would rather work for an organisation she finds interesting and meaningful. In this context, she states that she would like to design websites, e.g. for a municipality (00:38:35), for a renowned newspaper (00:38:42), or for an NGO (00:42:41).

In essence, Pauline's ideal workplace would be a company that does *something environmental* (00:43:06), for instance by *developing new ways of (...) saving energy* (00:42:53). Remarkably, when reflecting about potential work scenarios, Pauline employs several pauses of unusually long duration: In 00:42:13 she hesitates for 29 seconds before she answers the coach; in 00:43:06 she pauses for another twelve seconds. Also, she uses

shorter pauses and hesitation signals like *uh* (00:42:13) and *uhm* (00:42:30), as well as bushes reducing the precision of the utterances (*sort of* (00:42:41); *like* (00:42:42); cf. Caffi 2007). All of these elements signal vagueness and indecision with respect to Pauline's scenario. The coachee appears to have a desire to experience her work life in more meaningful terms, but her involvement in alternative work areas is not (yet) part of her professional identity. However, in contrast to Kate in coaching 1, Pauline does not distance herself from her idealistic wishes. While Kate ironically marks her wish to *save the world* (00:31:50) by means of laughter, Pauline keeps a straight face whilst using almost the same phrase (*save the planet* (00:45:39)).

In another passage, Pauline claims that it is important for her to feel that she is contributing to whatever the company is doing (00:50:45). She explains that she does not just want to be a (-) *small co::g* (-) *in a machine*, but she wants to feel that it *does matter if* she is *there* (00:51:05). At the same time, she has high standards for a number of other factors: While she wants her job to comprise *the opportunity to 'h learn new things*, (00:48:09), she also claims: *I on weekends, don't (-) wanna be on the computer (...) I wanna be outside doing stuff* (00:48:51). She further highlights how serious she is about these criteria later: *I'm not gonna do it in my free time. it's my free time is my free time. so that's (-) and that's still (-) important to me as well. that I can do new things (opening her right hand) withIN the framework of the job* (00:49:46).

In brief, Pauline's professional positioning is much more individualistic than, for example, that of Rachel in coaching 3. While Rachel conceives of herself as entangled in an organisational system and while she stresses her involvement with and her responsibility for other people, Pauline demonstrates a much more straightforward stance to her work life. She does display high standards concerning the nature of her employment, but her involvement is temporally and emotionally limited. Pauline describes the corporate world with a profound sense of distrust. Her affinity to more purposeful organisations is further evidence of that stance.

### 13.5.3 Presenting the self with regard to agency and problem construal

As I have explained in Section 13.5.1, Pauline introduces two problems to the coaching session: her unemployment and her conflict at her former place of work. As far as the first issue is concerned, the previous sections have already shown the broad layout of Pauline's problem construction. She does not acknowledge any agency on her side, implying that her organisation has undergone many changes. The absence of any excuses, mitigations, or strategies that would prepare the ground for the problem construction is more than revealing

in this respect.

Also, the coachee does not show any insecurity or fear with respect to her joblessness. For instance, when the coach asks her about her application strategies, she responds: *there there are lots of jobs. (-) there. so also I don't feel any time pressure xx, (...) a:hmm (-) so I do, (-) (nodding) I do feel very much that I can (-) I can look around and see if there is anything that I particularly like, and then- (...) if there's something that I really like, then I'll apply for it.* (01:15:40). Curiously, Pauline's unemployment does not seem to touch her professional self-concept in any deeper way.

Matters stand differently with the second issue on the agenda. In this case, Pauline's strong emotional involvement is obvious: As has been demonstrated in the previous section, the coachee is very annoyed about all of the characters in her narrative; and she constructs her own role with a low degree of agency. In Excerpt 13.18 she gives an example of one of the reproaches by her boss:

**Excerpt 13.18:**

- 1      *P: yeah. and another one was that ahm, (2s) an an (-) and THIS was something that (-) DID happen, a lot, (2s) u:hmm (-) we (-) we sat in it was the (pointing on the table) boss, and then one two three of us, who were his (-) a:hmm (-) subordinates. (-) and then there's a guy from another department who needed a lot of stuff from US, and we needed a lot of stuff from him. he was the google guy. research engine (-) results. and we were always optimising stuff for google, so we dealt a lot with him. 'h and he (-) would always come in, and he (-) would he had to (-) he would stand behind ME, (-) a:nd talk to my boss, who sat (pointing to the table) HERE, cause we sat we sat (moving her hands around on the table) here, and my boss would TURN (-) this way, and I was (pointing to another point on the table) here, but the guy was (-) s- standing behind ME, and talking to the boss.*
- 2      *C: mhm,*
- 3      *P: and (-) he was talking to him about projects that (pointing to her belly with both hands) I was working on. (-) a:nd (-) so, (2s) at at the very beginning o:f (-) of (-) my time working there, (-) a:hmm, (3s) ah I think after a couple of days, I asked about ho:w my boss always seemed to be having meetings, in the office with the rest of us (pointing to the table) there.*
- 4      *C: (nodding)*
- 5      *(2s)*
- 6      *P: and (-) ah I asked (-) is that (3s) hm. (-) I don't remember how I put (-) but is is that okay if for (-) for me to be listening in on your meetings. because it was extremely distracting. and (-) I basically couldn't (-) couldn't (-) DO [anything.]*
- 7      *C: [how many times,]*
- 8      *P: I couldn't concentrate on anything while he was standing there talking to somebody. (-) so:*
- 9      *C: xxxxxx.*
- 10     *P: xx,*
- 11     *C: so: what did you say. in German.*
- 12     *(6s)*
- 13     *P: ist das gemeint dass ich dann die ganze Zeit zuhöre oder soll ich hie:r mich konzentrieren auf meine eigenen Sachen (= is the idea that I'm supposed to listen to you all the time, or should I concentrate on my own stuff)-*



- 14 C: (nodding)
- 15 P: und versuchen euch zu ignorieren (= and try to ignore you),
- 16 C: (nodding) uhu,
- 17 (3s)
- 18 P: that's how I imagine it. (-) anyway. (-) I don't remember, what I actually said. (2s) but part of what I was trying to get across was also, (-) you're annoying me. and (-) I don't think it's (-) I don't think (-) that you can reasonably expect anybody to: do their work while you're sitting here having a meeting. (...)
- 19 C: and what did he say about this topic during this (-) strange conversation.
- 20 P: 'h he said (-) a::hm, (2s) you're just gonna have to get used to that. (-) that's just how it is.
- 21 C: (nodding)
- 22 P: you're going to have to learn to let out, and I'll (-) I'll tell you afterwards, (-) what was important.
- 23 C: (nodding)
- 24 (7s)
- 25 P: and (shrugging her shoulders) that's just (3s) that's just uh not a satisfactory ANSWER.

This sequence provides more evidence of the fact that Pauline presents herself as a person with a relatively low affinity to self-monitoring. Her narrative, which contains a critical incident with her boss and another colleague, does not support her case as unambiguously as she seems to assume. Even though she makes the reason for her annoyance transparent (she *couldn't concentrate* due to the conversation going on behind her back), the remark she claims to have made toward her boss seems rather brusque (*is the idea that I'm supposed to listen to you all the time, or should I concentrate on my own stuff*). This is even more remarkable because Pauline likely designs the account with an intention to win the coach over to her side.

Coach II, however, appears to draw the conclusion that Pauline might have had a part in the genesis of the conflict. As has been discussed in Chapters 8, 9, and 10, he carefully introduces the concept of a certain pattern of behaviour on the coachee's side. At first, Pauline rejects this idea, arguing that the entire issue is her boss's fault. She states that she has never had a similar experience before; and that, therefore, it is unlikely that she acts according to a problematic pattern. A few minutes later, she repeats her assessment, making another point concerning the responsibility for the problem: By giving an account of the arguments her former boss produced, she 'proves' that it is not she who has a problem, but him (00:27:59). Thus, she emphatically calls him an *IDIOT* (00:27:47). Although she makes a mitigating metacomment (*to put it harshly*), her conclusion that he is *just a weird boss* (00:28:05) reinforces her positioning actions: The coachee's presentation of the absent others must be regarded as rather biased, radical, and blunt.

### 13.5.4 Presenting the social self

Pauline's social self-presentation is influenced by one topic in particular: She discusses her relationships with her former boss and her former colleagues at length. Moreover, she provides negative assessments of several other groups of people. However, she does so on the grounds that her relationships in previous workplaces had been satisfactory and that she is, in principle, a sociable person. Consider Excerpt 13.18, in which Pauline provides reasons as to why she stopped going to lunch with her former colleagues:

**Excerpt 13.18:**

- 1        *P: every sing- every single week we had the same conversation,*
- 2        *C: about,*
- 3        *P: about a:hm, (-) who had been programming the longest on what kind of computer.*
- 4        *C: hm. (tearing off the edge of the paper)*
- 5        *P: and I started when I was twelve on Commodore 64,*
- 6        *C: hmm.*
- 7        *P: and the guy started when he was eleven on an Atari.*
- 8        *C: oh I see. that's kind of- (folding the paper)*
- 9        *P: and this was-*
- 10       *C: nerds. (laughing)*
- 11       *P: literally, (-) once a week.*
- 12       *C: (smiling)*
- 13       *P: the same conversation. the same people.*
- 14       *C: (smiling, folding his paper)*
- 15       *P: so a:::nd, and aside from that, if the conversation ever got to politics, it turned out they had VERY STRANGE political views. just things that I think are (-) really quite absurd, and they believed in (grimacing) esoteric medicine,*
- 16       *C: (nodding, folding his paper)*
- 17       *P: and (-) that was just- (holding her hands in front of her chest as though pushing something away) [hmmm,]*
- 18       *C: [could] xxxx interested in xx what's meant by esoteric medicine. (laughing) but that's another 'hh-*
- 19       *P: (smiling)*
- 20       *C: topic.*
- 21       *P: yeah.*

In the first part of the sequence, Pauline exemplifies how boring her former colleagues were:

She recounts the conversation they had *literally*, (-) *once a week*. Coach II interprets the story as humorous, summing up its essence by employing the label *nerds* and laughing. Notably, the coachee does not respond to this humorous mode, neither by laughing, nor by smiling. Pauline differs from all of the other interactants in my corpus in this respect because she does not seem to pick up on small non-verbal and para-verbal signs in the way the other interactants do. Thus, she does not enter face-confirming feedback circles in the same manner as the other coachees (cf. Section 14.3). Rather, most of the communicative content she takes up is verbal in nature.

In line 15 Pauline complains about her former colleagues, whom she accuses of having *VERY STRANGE political views* (00:45:04). Later in the conversation she gives more information about these particular political views. She tells the coach that her former colleagues do not believe in voting (00:47:34) and that they think (*expressive*) *Muslims make us stupid* (00:46:51). The most interesting aspect about these self-presentations is not the political positioning itself. Rather, it is Pauline's core assumption that her own attitude is the only one any reasonable person could have and that, for this reason, it should suffice for her to merely state the facts. It is, indeed, rather likely that the coach shares her political views and that he agrees with her rejection of the political views of the protagonists in her story. However, the coachee does not use any strategies to ensure this common ground and to make preparations for the launch of her main arguments in any way. Again, Pauline displays a low degree of self-monitoring and a low degree of monitoring activities and feedback activities concerning the interpersonal level of the conversation. This is evident both on the level of narration and on the level of interaction with the coach.

Consider another example to further illustrate this point. In several instances the coachee expresses her dislike of *esoteric people*. Thus, Pauline argues that there is a causal connection between the esoteric beliefs her former colleagues held and the fact that they did not have academic degrees (00:46:12). In essence, she assesses both the proponents of esoteric ideologies and the members of the category of non-academics negatively. At a later point, she makes fun of esoteric people by parodying them sarcastically (01:12:40). Notably, while Pauline is aware of the fact that the coach is an academic, she has not stopped to check whether he is a member of the category 'esoteric people' himself. For this reason, she cannot know whether her statement is face-threatening to his social self. This is further evidence of a low degree of interpersonal monitoring. The coach laughs about Pauline's remarks about esoteric people in some instances, but he does not respond to her irony in others. It appears that he is focused on other issues. However, it is likely that he interprets Pauline's lack of monitoring along the same lines as I have argued in this thesis because his advice-giving activities are directed toward Pauline's relational work. This is evidence of the fact that linguistic analysis can make explicit those relational phenomena which trained

coaches perceive and process tacitly.

In this section on the social self-presentation of Pauline, I have selected a range of examples in which she distances herself fiercely from others. Before closing this topic, it is important to recall the fact that she does so on the grounds that she generally gets along with people well. She mentions several friends and business contacts (01:01:46; 01:09:52; 01:16:57), she talks about her husband (00:08:01), and she states that she likes to work in teams where she can *bounce (...) ideas off people*, concluding that she is *better off, (-) having colleagues* (01:13:44). In brief, although Pauline spends much time complaining about other people in this coaching conversation, and although her self-presentation is strongly individualistic in many respects, she does position herself as a person with a successful social life.

### 13.5.5 Presenting the self by means of metaphors

In accordance with her unembellished way of communicating, Pauline does not employ many metaphors. The only significant case in which she positions herself by means of a metaphorical expression occurs in (00:51:05), when she states that she does not want to be *a (-) small cog (-) in a machine*. In this context, she discusses her longing for a meaningful work context. However, this instantiation is more of an exception from the rule: Overall, Pauline abstains from the use of salient metaphors in her contributions to the conversation.

### 13.5.6 Presenting self-evaluations

It has now been made clear at this point that Pauline does not highlight her own character as a central theme of her reflections. There is not a single instance in the conversation in which she would describe her own personality in terms of traits and characteristics. In this context, the sequence on her professional status analysed in Section 13.5.2 has been most informative. It is difficult to infer evaluations from her account about career changers in the IT area. Instead, Pauline sustains a focus on the facts, giving her perspective on the issue in an objective and detached way.

Nevertheless, all of Pauline's self-presentations are based on the unquestioned assumption that her personal perspective is naturally valuable and reasonable. Therefore, I would argue that the coachee's positionings contain fundamentally positive self-evaluations. These positive evaluations are in accordance with the self-enhancement motif, although they are stated in weak terms, and although they do not comprise any modulation activities. Figure 13.6 provides an idealised sketch of this self-evaluative cluster type. The small plus sign on the right indicates the fact that the orientation toward positive self-evaluation is often

inconspicuous. To account for the lack of modulation activities, the arrow is not complemented by any other signs.

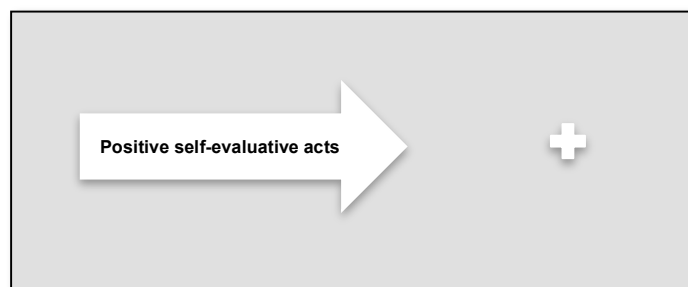


Figure 13.6: Idealised sketch of a weak, but unmitigated positive cluster of self-evaluation

Despite the fact that Pauline's self-evaluations are in essence positive, her rational orientation extends to the explicit discussion of her self. When the coach sets out to challenge the coachee's problem construction by the end of the coaching, she listens patiently, signalling her agreement by means of nodding activities. In Excerpt 13.19 Coach II carefully criticises Pauline's communicative style:

**Excerpt 13.19:**

- 1        *C: the way: you brought it out, was a little bit like, (-) I'm (-) I'm not able to bring in my emotions in a way,*
- 2        *P: (nodding)*
- 3        *C: which might be helpful,*
- 4        *P: (nodding)*
- 5        *C: so it's like a I- (-) slight aggression in that.*
- 6        *P: (nodding) mhm,*

Pauline pays attention to the coach's advice, signalling by means of nodding gestures that she is processing it. In this situation resistance activities could be expected, but Pauline sustains her rational and detached approach even when she discusses herself. This is evidence of the fact that she does have an interest in self-assessment – however, the evidence suggests that she finds it much easier to process explicit verbal feedback, rather than implicit non-verbal or para-verbal assessments of her self.

### 13.5.7 Conclusion

The analysis of self-presentation by the coachee Pauline has led to the following results:

1. In the opening phase, the interactants manage to bond over a common experience with an

employer. Pauline's **initial self-presentations** are delivered in a matter-of-fact way. She starts out with a negative topic, but does not employ any strategies to mitigate the effect of the information. Overall, her initial positionings are very consistent with her self-presentations throughout the coaching session.

2. The coachee's **professional self-presentation** revolves around concrete facts, i.e. her status, her arguments with her former colleagues, or her ideas for a potential new job. While she gives some information about her training and her status, she does not present these facts in an evaluative way. With respect to her unemployment, Pauline does not show much emotional involvement; her professional identity does not seem to be hurt by her release. Concerning her professional ideals, she tells the coach that she is looking for meaningful work in an organisation that serves the purpose of sustainability. In sum, Pauline presents herself in rather individualistic terms; and she distances herself from the corporate logic, insisting on a clear boundary between work and leisure time.

3. Like all the other coachees (with the exception of the coachee Olivia in coaching 5), Pauline does not present any strictly **personal aspects** of her self, but she only provides personal information in so far it is relevant to the coaching issue at hand.

4. With respect to **agency** and **construal**, Pauline selects low agency perspectives, attributing responsibility for conflicts and problems to the other protagonists in her stories. Her straightforward designs and her lack of strategic refinement concerning her problem construction suggest a low degree of self-monitoring. Thus, she tends to present herself as rather biased and blunt when she presents absent people.

5. In the area of the **social self**, Pauline distances herself from her former colleagues. Also, she spends a good deal of time complaining about the membership category of 'esoteric people'. In these sequences she presupposes that the coach share her attitudes, without checking the common ground first. In this context, it has been established that she does not respond to non-verbal and para-verbal signals in the way found with the other interactants in the coaching corpus. Instead, she concentrates on the explicit elements of the verbal level of talk.

6. In line with her unembellished style, Pauline uses almost no **metaphorical language** at all. Her style is sober and objective, and she emphasises her affinity to logical reasoning.

7. Likewise, Pauline does not produce any explicit **self-evaluations** in coaching 4. Neither

does she imply self-evaluative aspects by means of verbal modulation. Thus, she abstains from making a point of evaluating herself positively. However, she is clearly biased in favour of her own perspective, presenting it as the default view. The self-evaluative clusters that emerge must be categorised as weak, but unmitigated positive clusters of self-evaluation. When confronted with criticism by the coach, Pauline listens diligently and processes his arguments without showing resistance. In this respect, she presents herself as very objective and rational. The likely reason is that she has a much higher affinity to (or capacity of) processing explicit verbal communication, as opposed to more implicit and para-verbal or non-verbal communication.

## 13.6 The coachee Olivia

### 13.6.1 Initial self-presentations

The initial self-presentations in coaching 5 occur in the context of four different episodes (cf. Table 13.6). In the first episode, Olivia begins to introduce herself. This opening is interspersed with a humorous remark by the coach and with the discussion of the goal of the coaching (Episode 2). In the third episode the coach leaves the room to look after the coffee. Meanwhile, the interactants engage in some small talk; and when the coach is back in the room, Olivia questions her about her company.

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Explicit self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:01:45	Olivia introducing herself	Coachee Olivia
2	00:01:45 – 00:02:25	Humorous remark coach; negotiation goal of coaching	Coachee Olivia
3	00:02:25 – 00:03:34	Coach III looking after coffee; Olivia questioning her about her company	Coach III (other-initiated)
4	00:03:34 – 00:07:56	Olivia going on to give background information about herself	Coachee Olivia

*Table 13.6: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 5*

In Episode 4 Olivia continues her introduction by giving additional background information about herself and her problems. Excerpt 13.20 contains the first episode of the coaching. Olivia starts to introduce her professional background to the coach:

**Excerpt 13.20:**

*(O has arrived late. The video tape only starts to record the conversation after a few minutes.)*

- 1        O: *(talks at a very high speed, which she keeps up throughout the entire coaching conversation.) xxxxxxxx also-*
- 2        C: *yeah,*
- 3        O: *freelance, conflict management, (-) mmm coaching sessions uhm uhm various leadership-*
- 4        C: *yeah,*
- 5        O: *issues, sometimes I do (-) train the trainer,*
- 6        C: *(nodding)*
- 7        O: *I do xxxxx the professors are teaching their classes in English,*
- 8        *(2s)*
- 9        C: *wow,*
- 10       O: *so xxxx how do you, how do you xxxxxx in English. they know technical terms,*
- 11       C: *mhm,*
- 12       O: *they know how to teach their very subject in engineering, but they don't know have to teach in English necessarily.*
- 13       C: *okay.*
- 14       O: *and they tend to be rather wooden, and uh (-) insecure speaking English,*
- 15       C: *sure,*
- 16       O: *their charm and their sense of grace and ease their poise, (-) doesn't come across.*
- 17       C: *(nodding) hmm.*
- 18       O: *so we work on that,*
- 19       C: *hmm.*
- 20       O: *and I just got back from a didactics uh seminar, where we (-) learned how to (-) do case studies,*
- 21       C: *(long slow nod)*
- 22       O: *and a Planstudie (= case study),*
- 23       C: *yeah.*
- 24       O: *and xxx it's called, they call it POL, problemorientiertes Lernen (= problem-based learning),*
- 25       C: *mhm,*
- 26       O: *it's called problem-based learning.*
- 27       C: *okay,*
- 28       O: *and it's VERY VERY popular, in all of the big English xx European universities, it's being used with TREMENDOUS success,*
- 29       C: *(long, slow nod)*



31 O: it's actually been (-) uh the K. (UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL), ALL of the medical students, do ALL of their (-) learning now using this (-) POL.

Olivia's initial self-presentations are concerned with the professional domain of her self. She states that she is involved in *freelance, conflict management, (-) mmm coaching sessions uhm uhm various leadership- (...) issues*. Further, she tells Coach III that she trains trainers, and teaches English to university professors. Thus, she positions herself as a professional partly working in similar fields as the coach. Then Olivia begins to explain one of her lines of work in more detail. She talks about the university professors she teaches: *and they tend to be rather wooden, and uh (-) insecure speaking English, (...) their charm and their sense of grace and ease their poise, (-) doesn't come across*. This short passage is characteristic of Olivia's overall style in coaching 5. She displays eloquence, as well as a fondness for rhetoric techniques. In this case, she uses an embellishing enumeration of nouns (*charme; sense of grace; ease; poise*) in order to depict the protagonists in her narrative. In the following section, Olivia wanders slightly off the topic, discussing the didactic method of problem-oriented learning. It is also characteristic of Olivia's style in coaching 5 to use reinforcing boosters (*VERY VERY; tremendous*) to make her point.

The second episode is initiated by the coach, who makes a humorous, but appreciative remark about Olivia's professional expertise: *[so that's really] great, maybe we should change roles*. This suggestion serves as an acknowledgement of Olivia's professional competence. Also, it forecasts the constant role conflicts that will take place in this coaching conversation. Olivia rejects the coach's idea immediately, and in order to show her willingness to be coached, she presents her problem construction. The coach has gotten up from her chair and is standing next to it – as becomes evident later, she intends to close the door. Yet on a symbolic level, she is actually leaving her place when she suggests the role switch.

Olivia's problem construction itself contains a career-related dilemma. She states that she wants to discuss two options, i.e. *to keep track of this academic track* or to stay in the *private sector*. The coachee describes her issue as linked to *some simple coaching questions*. Following that, she depicts the implications of an academic career in rather dark terms, claiming that she will *never be a professor and she'll never have advancement, and always just be a Lehrbeauftragte (= associate lecturer) and (...) only xx (holding her left hand up) need[s] to do FIVE classes per university, and has to teach at PRIVATE universities (...) because you're not allowed to have more than a certain amount of hours, (-) work load, and so she can't get the money together*.

As is marked at the beginning of the transcription sheet, Olivia produces all of her contributions at a very high speed. This feature is combined with a paratactic construction mode and with the reinforcing rhetorical means of repetition (*and...and; never...never*).

These elements add a rather dramatic and overwhelming element to Olivia's monologue. It is a recurring theme in the conversation as a whole that Olivia depicts her situation very pessimistically with a strong tendency to hyperbole. In the face of Olivia's stupendous rhetoric flows, Coach III often shows difficulty in gaining the floor, and thus in making herself heard by the coachee.

In Episode 3 the interactants briefly talk about the coach's company. Here they become entangled in the first role conflict because Olivia's questions sound increasingly more like those of a coach. First, she asks Coach III whether her company will have stands at the training trade fair (00:02:55). When the coach replies that she has just founded the company and does not attend any fairs at the moment (00:03:07), Olivia first complements the coach's language and then goes on to ask about her marketing strategies: *(smiling) will you do publishing, or mo:re, (neutral facial expression) (-) how (-) what will you do to become more uh better known* (00:03:21). This question can be seen as an overstepping of role expectations. Olivia could be interpreted as challenging the professionalism of the coach's company. Also, her question could be read as a coaching intervention. In any case, the coach gives only a brief answer *(we just uh (-) do it all with networking. (00:03:26))*, before she marks the situation as inappropriate: *but, (raising her hands) (-) it's not about (touching her cleavage twice with both hands) me, it's about (pointing towards O with both hands) you* (00:03:34)). Thus, she takes the focus away from her own work situation and back to that of the coachee.

In the ensuing sequence the coachee talks about her interest in becoming a professional coach. However, she states that she fears the profession might not be appropriate for her for lack of a high status: *when you say you::'re (-) a freelance coach they all look at you OH, well you couldn't get a real job* (00:04:17). As she tells the coach, she thinks that most coaches are just *little wannabes* (00:04:33). I will comment on the face-aggravating implications of the unfolding relational dynamic in more detail in Sections 14.3 and 16.6. At this point I will turn attention to Excerpt 13.21, in which Olivia gives insight into some delicate details of her situation:

**Excerpt 13.21:**

- 1 O: a::hm (-) and given my (-) financial background, which is I just got through a very 'h a::hm, (-) t- YEAH I would say painful, ahm divorce,
- 2 C: divorce,
- 3 O: painful, because my ex-husband and I we were together twenty-five years,
- 4 C: (nodding)
- 5 O: we were business partners,
- 6 C: hmmm.

- 7 O: *and we were in financial services, and we had start-up companies, and we did real estate investment trust funds of America,*
- 8 C: *hmhm,*
- 9 O: *and that was my LIFE, that was my IDENTITY, and that was my INCOME,*
- 10 C: *(nodding) hmhm,*
- 11 O: *and he ended up going to jail because of frau::d,*
- 12 C: *HE?*
- 13 O: *yeah,*
- 14 C: *ha,*
- 15 O: *and he'll come out of jail in two months,*
- 16 C: *oKAY,*
- 17 O: *only on probation, and the kids will see him again for the first time in a long time it's xxx he has a new (-) 'hh PARTNER, an xxx in xxx who is guess he he he (-) we he got put xxxxx Insolvenzverschleppung (= delayed filing of insolvency) for fraud xxx and bankruptcy. but also for embazzlement, and Untreue (= infidelity) for malfeasance and-*
- 18 C: *but you're not involved.*
- 19 O: *uhm yes I was Managing Director of the company, and-*
- 20 C: *(nodding) hmhm. hmhm.*
- 21 O: *I also had to go before (-) ah court,*
- 22 C: *mhm,*
- 23 O: *and defend myself, and I-*
- 24 C: *hmhm.*
- 25 O: *was (-) released, my case was dismissed,*
- 26 C: *mhm,*
- 27 O: *ahm due to ahm (-) they call it geringe Schuld (= minor guilt),*
- 28 C: *hmm.*
- 29 O: *basically they didn't want to leave a mother with three children, (-) they didn't wanna do that to me.*
- 30 C: *(nodding)*
- 31 O: *I was JUST as involved as my husband,*
- 32 C: *(nodding) mhm.*
- 33 O: *I had a different role,*
- 34 C: *mhm,*
- 35 O: *in some respects I was the (writing quotation marks in the air with her fingers) strong man,*
- 36 C: *okay,*
- 37 O: *but I went through a VERY very difficult time, a very it took me five years to (-) even (-) you know to go from millionaire to ahm Hartz IV-Empfänger (= recipient of unemployment pay),*
- 38 C: *hmm.*

- 39 O: to:: (-) I was never on welfare, but I felt like it.
- 40 C: yeah.
- 41 O: and I (-) I didn't know I mean af- that was a HU::GE change in identity, social status,
- 42 C: (nodding)
- 43 O: opportunities, we had four hundred employees, I had a different life. I had a house here in W. (CITY) with eighteen rooms, (-) I [mean,]
- 44 C: [wow.]
- 45 O: I was very privileged, always had au-pairs and cleaning ladies and, (-) I mean if I needed something (clicking her fingers) it went like that, called somebody and somebody CAME.
- 46 C: mhm.
- 47 O: and I just start over, and little by little reestablish myself as an academic,
- 48 C: (long nod) hmm.
- 49 O: after having had money, power, (-) ahm the ability to make IMPORTANT decisions,

The first part of Olivia's account sounds harmless: She tells the coach about her children and her divorce. Moreover, she talks about the fact that she and her husband were business partners: *and we were in financial services, and we had start-up companies, and we did real estate investment trust funds of America*. Olivia explains the meaning of these professional self-aspects for her identity as a whole: *and that was my LIFE, that was my IDENTITY, and that was my INCOME*.

Olivia's narrative then takes a sudden dramatic turn: *and he ended up going to jail because of frau::d*. The coach displays a sign of surprise (*HE?*), and the coachee goes on to list an entire bulk of criminal offences her husband has committed. At this point, it is still unclear how the coachee positions herself with respect to these severe issues. The manner in which Olivia has designed her story seems to suggest to the coach that she is innocent. Thus, the coach requests confirmation as to her responsibility (*but you're not involved.*). Surprisingly, Olivia declares full responsibility for the offences. She points out that she was *Managing Director of the company*, that she *also had to go before (-) ah court*, and that she was *JUST as involved as [her] husband*. Olivia even concludes: *in some respects I was the (writing quotation marks in the air with her fingers) strong man*.

Clearly, there are some unusual aspects about Olivia's problem construal. On the one hand, she is eager to describe the committed crimes in full detail. In this manner, she builds up a heavy load of blame for the responsible agents in her narrative. It is apparently for this reason that the coach first assumes Olivia has no part in the events described. However, Olivia attributes full agency to herself. In fact, her reference to the cultural stereotype of the *strong man* sounds as though she takes delight in being even more responsible than her husband. She does not make any attempts to excuse her doing, to distance herself from it, or

to employ any other strategies to position herself in a more favourable way with respect to the crimes.

Instead, Olivia switches to a victim position concerning the outcome of her wrongdoing: *but I went through a VERY very difficult time, a very it took me five years to (-) even (-) you know to go from millionaire to ahm Hartz IV-Empfänger (= recipient of unemployment pay)*. She talks about her changes in status, power, and wealth, giving examples of the privileges she has lost. Throughout the coaching, Olivia exhibits a deploring of the loss of her old life, but her problem construal does not include any regrets about the reason for the changes in her life. Neither does she display any awareness of the damages she might have caused to those people she has defrauded. From a face-related perspective, Olivia positions herself in ways that threaten her own face, but she does not employ any repair strategies in order to restore her face (cf. Section 14.3). From the perspective of positioning theory, Olivia construes two contradicting lines of positioning, which cannot be reconciled.

Typically for Olivia's self-presentation in coaching 5, the sequence above contains switches between different parts of her self-concept. For instance, before she depicts herself as the *strong man* in the business partnership, she explains why she did not have to go to jail: *basically they didn't want to leave a mother with three children, (-) they didn't wanna do that to me*. In this image, Olivia sounds fragile and vulnerable because she has to bring up three kids on her own. Thus, the metaphor of the *strong man* and the image of the vulnerable *mother* stand in strong contrast to each other.

This manner of switching between contradictive parts of the self is similar to Kate's and Rachel's self-positionings in coachings 1 and 3 respectively. However, there seem to be clear differences between the interactions. Rachel introduces the concept of the 'outer' and the 'inner' part herself, and she seems eager to make sense of her disparate personality parts. Moreover, she only switches her self modes once. Kate constantly switches between different modes, thus creating ambiguity. However, as demonstrated above, Olivia's self-presentations are conducted in a highly expressive and dramatic mode which reinforces the inherent contradictions of her positionings considerably. Furthermore, Olivia's frequent face-threats to the coach add to the markedness of her positioning activities as well (cf. Section 14.3). She does not make any efforts to explain her contradictive self-presentations to the coach. It is doubtful whether she realises that some of her arguments are highly inconsistent with one another. Whenever the coach indicates that Olivia contradicts herself, she completely evades the topic. In sum, the analyses in this section have shown a wealth of interesting linguistic and communicative aspects in relation to Olivia's self-presentations.

### 13.6.2 Presenting the professional self

As she bemoans many times, Olivia does not see any consistency in her professional biography. Thus, she presents her professional self by means of a multitude of single narratives. With respect to her training, she gives two contradictive pieces of information: in (00:11:05), she states: *I studied psychology*. When the coach takes up this claim, Olivia corrects her: *[no I have a degree in philosophy.] I have a degree in philosophy, (...) and in comparative religious studies* (00:29:46). Concerning her business in the financial industry, she says that she *NEVER EVER EVER [wants to] go there again and do that*. She concludes that *there was a HUGE disconnect* (00:11:10).

With regard to her current occupation, Olivia mentions an impressively large number of different services she offers in the area of communication and training, i.e. leadership coaching, conflict management (00:00:41), team buildings (00:35:00), train the trainer (00:00:44), sales training with NLP (=neuro-linguistic programming) (00:11:22), simultaneous interpreting (00:28:19), translating, telephone training (00:32:47), writing training, and presentation training (00:00:44). Further, she mentions that she teaches technical English (00:34:49), intercultural competence, (00:34:54), and business communication (00:34:58). As the coach puts it: *[so whatever (-) is there,] connecting to communication, you're gonna [do it.]* (00:32:53).

However, Olivia feels that there is *no real (-) FOCUS* (00:35:36) in her profile. Moreover, the coachee points out early in her initial problem presentation that her work in the academic world cannot lead anywhere. At a later point, she picks up this issue once more, arguing that she is too old to become a scholar: *[I couldn't] get a chair. it's too late* (00:10:37). Also, while she mourns her old life, she excludes the possibility of returning to the financial sector. Olivia presents her current professional status as fragmentary and provisional. What she describes is perplexity with respect to her professional identity: Her old construction of her professional self does not work anymore, but neither could she come up with a satisfactory new construction up to the point of the conversation.

Over large parts of the conversation, Olivia deliberates on which areas she should lead her focus in her future career. In this context, she produces a long list of options. When the coach asks her about her ideal workspace, Olivia responds with a surprisingly precise answer: She states that she would like to work *in an office set up WITH other coaches* (00:24:50); she wants to do some non-profit work (00:25:11); and she *would like to do some (-) a:hm travel and work inhouse in companies*, (00:25:25). However, the coachee is constantly quick to dismiss her own suggestions as deficient. For instance, she often construes her age (00:14:32); her supposed lack of experience (00:22:37); her supposed lack of specialised expertise (00:32:38); her lack of official certification (00:29:21); and her

lack of marketing assets, such as a website or a business card (00:26:29), as major stumbling blocks on the way to professional success.

The second problem Olivia presents is concerned with her status. In several instances she describes the low professional status she attributes to herself in comparison to her social frame of reference. For instance, she claims that, while *all of [her] relatives are millionaires*, she is *the little loser* (00:36:56). As she explains, her personal *benchmarks* are *very high* (00:37:07): In a short narrative she constructs *some of [her] friends* as admirers of her achievements. However, Olivia positions herself in contrast with these friends: To her, what she does for a living (and, therefore also a part of what Coach III does for a living) is *NOTHING: that's what the people who can't get REAL jobs do* (00:37:29).

In this scenario both the absent others presented as characters in her story and the present other in the conversation (i.e. the coach) are implicitly included in the group of *people who can't get REAL jobs*. Olivia, on the other hand, aligns herself with people working *in politics or 'h managing entire (-) you know two thousand five hundred people under them and and big HR companies or something* (00:37:32). Therefore, she accuses herself of failing to fulfil her own expectations. Clearly, this positioning implies that Olivia places herself on top of the overwhelming majority of people in terms of professional status. In doing so, she also positions the coach in this supposed army of *little losers*. At the same time, paradoxically, Olivia appears to count on the coach's sympathy regarding her own social downfall.

Olivia's longing for her prior status is also apparent when she complains that she is not even *a member of (shrugging her shoulders, looking to the ceiling) ANY board. (shrugging her shoulders) ANYwhere* (00:37:48). Moreover, the coachee argues that the thought of working for anyone is terrifying to her (00:14:47). As her father and all of her boyfriends have been self-employed, she concludes that her own dependence on an agent is unacceptable. She appears to suggest that, if anything, she should employ people herself in the way that her father had *twenty-six lawyers working for him* (00:14:53). Her opinion about life as an employee is then captured in a remarkable line: *(putting her left hand to her heart) it feels like prostitution, to me, working FOR somebody, but (-) I'm trying to look at it more positively* (00:17:02). As she usually does, Coach III merely responds with a thoughtful feedback signal: *mhm, (nodding)* (00:17:02).

### 13.6.3 Presenting the personal self

Olivia is the only coachee in my corpus who reveals a considerable amount of information concerning her personal self. In particular, she foregrounds her worry over her age. For instance, she states: *a:hm, I look at older women on trains o:r, uh (-) yeah in public in restaurants and I say THAT'S what you're heading toward*. Following this, Olivia produces a

long monologue, in which she discusses the disadvantages of ageing, including the consequences of menopause. She claims that *poverty is female* (00:19:10), and that *old ugly women are socially irrelevant* (00:19:17) because they lose their *market value* (00:19:18). In this context, it is important to note that the interactants are around the same age. Thus, when Olivia discusses the physical consequences of the changes women her age undergo, she is, at the same time, positioning her conversational partner. As becomes evident, this is a rather daring enterprise in terms of face work (cf. Section 14.3).

Besides construing herself as an old person, Olivia also talks about her feelings of loneliness and tiredness. In one situation she produces an alternative scenario for herself: She imagines *moving to the country, (...) just to rebuild financially and spiritually and physically* (00:53:24). Here she positions herself as someone who needs rest and restoration. She imagines sharing a tranquil residence with a cat or a dog, and she compares herself to a homeless bird (*and my xx is flapping and flapping, I'm so tired. I just wish to find a branch just to land* (00:53:53)). In line with her polite but sceptical stance displayed in the conversation, Coach III challenges Olivia's contribution: *do you realise that you (...) ALWAYS come back to the same question* (00:54:06). As she does many times, the coach attempts to steer the conversation back to the official coaching issue. Whenever Olivia reveals personal information of this sort, the coach implicitly marks it as off topic.

### 13.6.4 Presenting the self with regard to agency and problem construal

The analysis of initial self-presentations has already laid bare the most important aspects regarding agency and problem construal in coaching 5. On the one hand, Olivia attributes a high degree of agency to herself in relation to the cause of her problems (i.e. the criminal offences, due to which she has lost her profession, her income, and her upper class lifestyle). On the other hand, she portrays herself as a victim. Thus, Olivia juxtaposes culpable aspects (*I mean we have three children to support, with (-) (leaning forward) fünfzehn Millionen Schulden gell (= fifteen million of debt, right)?* (00:11:27) and aspects tied to the image of a struggling underdog (*it's been a hard life uh- (...) Frau Dr. T. (COACH'S LAST NAME), it hasn't been easy* (00:11:40).

In another sequence Olivia tells the coach about a job offer. She states that she has turned it down because she does not want to teach plant workers (00:47:11). In this context, she provides a re-narration of an inner monologue:



## Excerpt 13.22:

- 1 O: and I said no, because I said to myself Olivia, you can do better. and this BA:D job, where you're not paid what you deserve, in FAR away places, that FRAGments your time, ahm, and you DON'T feel good about it, you DON'T like the "agency" xx, you DON'T like the company, ALL of those things are gonna (-) ahm take energy away from things that you could be developing. so Mut zur Lücke, (= [idiom] courage to accept the gap), have the courage to say (-) NO, to a thing that's there, that's real, that you can't believe in, (...) I don't know right, (looking up to the ceiling) the Bible it says (looking down again) by faith we live. (laughing) (...) you know it's just this [faith,] (...) that other things will come, [a:hm,]

By explicitly filling herself with confidence, Olivia implies that she is in need of support. Thus, she affirms her inherently high status (*you can do better*). Also, by choice of lexis and para-verbal features she makes her monologue sound as though the voice is directed at a frightened child (*this BA:D job; far away places; that FRAGments your time; you DON'T feel good about it*). Moreover, Olivia draws on a biblical saying, positioning herself as an abiding believer who has *just this [faith,] that other things will come* (00:46:56). In this manner, she creates a low-agency perspective, in which she positions herself in very innocent terms by means of her religious attitude.

### 13.6.5 Presenting the social self

One of the most predominant aspects of Olivia's social self-presentation is her discussion of relationships. She tells the coach that she is in a relationship with someone who *fits the demographic*: (...) *he has his own law firm, [he] is successful, (waving aside) [he]'s (-) educated PhD, blabla, parents come from xxx, he will get inheritances* (00:09:25). However, she also states that she merely feels like a *small add-on* to him (00:09:05). Later in the conversation, Olivia says: *I happen to live with my boyfriend, I'm THINKING of moving out* (00:26:51). In several instances she describes herself as longing for a mature and stable relationship. In her view, the concept of a relationship includes both emotional and financial stability. As a person with a longstanding background in the financial industry, Olivia construes relationship matters by means of economic language. For instance, she claims that she is not a *high-flyer in the relationship market* (00:20:03). Thus, she assesses her own market value as low. In this view, her children are construed as a liability, as the labels *baggage* and *handicap* indicate.

Partially, Olivia presents herself as self-reflective and self-critical concerning her view of relationships. For instance, the coachee provides an intelligent analysis of her motives for entering relationships. She presents herself rather critically, and her account sounds as though she is distancing herself from her decisions in the past: *I went to do immediately what I had done before. find a businessman, work with him, marry him, live in his world, support*

*him, do the back office, do marketing, that's what I knew, that's what I was good at* (00:08:36). However, her own analysis notwithstanding, Olivia's ensuing contributions suggest that she does not seem to consider altering her patterns of decision-making. In countless instances she expresses her belief that a relationship would be key to solving her problems. Yet she doubts her chances of finding a new relationship in the first place: *you know I have to start building for the future of course MAYBE I'll (-) I'll meet some wonderful rich man with a huge pension plan "who dies" before me and I'll get MAYbe. (leaning forward) maybe NOT.* (00:24:15). Thus, Olivia's personal self-presentation as a lonely and vulnerable person without a home is closely connected to her social self-presentation.

The second aspect of social self-presentation in this section is concerned with Olivia's positioning toward the membership category of coaches. As has been discussed in detail in Section 13.6.2, Olivia distances herself from the group of coaches because she considers them *wannabes* that could not secure real jobs. In doing so, she also positions the coach below herself in terms of status. At the same time, Olivia argues that she cannot become a full-time coach herself, because she is not qualified enough: *I mean I'm not (-) for example a member of the (-) 'hh association of coaches of any (-) of coaching associations, I don't have any coaching certificates* (00:29:21). In this case, Olivia seems to construe a scenario in which she is not worthy of becoming a coach herself. In another instance, in turn, she argues that *coaches also especially executive coaches (...) they earn a lot of money* (00:52:32). Therefore, she reconsiders choosing the coaching track after all. In sum, her positionings with respect to the membership category of coaches are rather ambiguous: Sometimes she refers to herself as a coach, and sometimes she argues that this career path is blocked for her. In some situations, she expresses her contempt of the profession, whereas in others she states that it is her dream to work in an office together with other coaches. In brief, her social self-presentation with respect to this group remains inconsistent.

The third element of social self-presentation is Olivia's depiction of ethnic group memberships. Like all of the other coachees in my corpus, she is an English native speaker living in Germany. Sometimes, she refers to intercultural differences as a source of meaning-making. In one example, she first describes her difficult situation. Then she switches to an optimistic mood: *'h but I uh as an (expressive) American, (...) I like to think positively, (...) and I like to think uhm (2s) all kinds of marvelous (-) uh xxxx things can happen anytime* (00:40:16). Thus, she does self-stereotyping on the basis of group-stereotyping. In great contrast to her mostly pessimistic statements, but in line with her own depiction of Americans, Olivia presents herself as an optimist. This is evidence of the fact that individual traits may be backgrounded when interactants portray themselves in terms of their group membership.

In a further instance of group-stereotyping, Olivia claims: *Germans LOVE titles, they*

*love all these little, (-) ahm acronyms, these letters, behind the name* (00:42:55).

Furthermore, in a sequence that I will analyse in more depth in Section 14.3, Olivia suggests that the coach does not have a problem with her age because, as a German woman, she is not forced to look attractive: *it was the first thing that I noticed when I moved here, (...) (expressive) GOSH, they don't wear make-up, they don't SHA::VE*, (00:50:16). To summarise, Olivia presents herself as an American in opposition to the coach, who she positions as a member of the category 'German women'.

### 13.6.6 Presenting the self by means of metaphors

Olivia's speech is rich with respect to metaphorical expressions. Many of the metaphors have already been highlighted in the last few sections because they convey central aspects of the coachee's self-presentation. For instance, the image of the *strong man* has been interpreted in relation to Olivia's business partnership with her husband (cf. Section 13.6.2).

Furthermore, the expressions *not a high-flyer in the relationship market* and *losing one's market value* have been discussed. Also, I have considered Olivia's comparison of employed work with prostitution (00:17:02), as well as the reference to her children as *baggage* (00:20:07) and as a *handicap* (00:20:25). A large portion of metaphors is used to express the coachee's feelings of incoherence, incompleteness, and damage. For example, she conceptualises her life with a common building metaphor (*I have so many Baustellen (= building sites), (...) so many different places that I need to work on* (00:23:15); *have a STABLE place, with that once I've got a foundation, I can build from that* (00:55:30); *but I'm always building (waving her hands around in the air) (-) all of these things (-) on top of something that has no basement, no foundation, and I feel like ALL of these cards and balls at the xx, it's just gonna ALL collapse* (00:55:45)).

Furthermore, Olivia is looking for an *anchor* (00:27:49) and a *real focus* in her life (00:27:52), and claims that she is hanging in the balance (00:40:37). At one point she asks herself: *where's the (2s) narrative, coherence now* (00:56:16). In a mix of metaphors the coachee states that she feels like she is *drifting* (-) *FRAGMENTED* (00:55:57). These images culminate in the metaphor of the bird that *is flapping and flapping, (...) and just wish[es] to find a branch just to land* (00:53:53). Only rarely is Olivia's tone of mourning interspersed with a more optimistic outlook – for instance, when she recounts the Bible with the saying *by faith we live* (00:46:52). Again, it is apparent how revealing metaphors can be with respect to the self-presentations of interactants.

### 13.6.7 Presenting self-evaluations

Along the lines of her general positioning style in coaching 5, Olivia evaluates her self in contradictive terms. On one hand, she provides some very positive characterisations of herself, as Excerpt 13.23 illustrates:

**Excerpt 13.23:**

- 1 O: I don't know, what else do I have. (2s) well I'm not tired and overworked, I'm actually procreative bright and (-) HAPPY and uhm (2s) 'h I'm usually infectiously ahm (2s) (expressive) JOYFULLY (waving her hands around in circles) luminous (regular mode) and whatever I ahm (2s) I'm a so-called Kümmerer (= caring person) [also,]

This sequence has been discussed in Section 13.1. In brief, it contains a reinforced positive self-evaluative cluster (cf. Figure 13.7). This cluster type occurs several times in coaching 5, and it is notable that Olivia is the only coachee in my corpus who employs it. However, the opposite cluster type is also part of her self-presentations: In a few instances, the coachee presents herself exclusively in negative terms, producing reinforced negative self-evaluative clusters (cf. Figure 13.8).

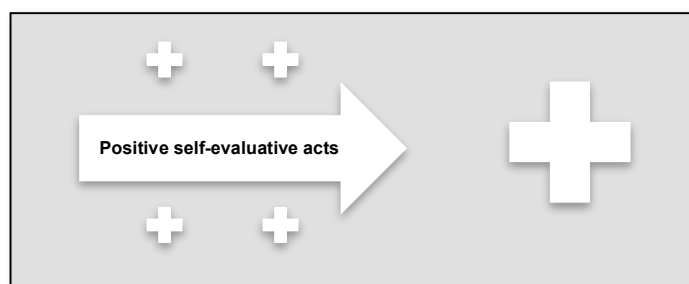


Figure 13.7: Idealised sketch of a reinforced positive self-evaluative cluster

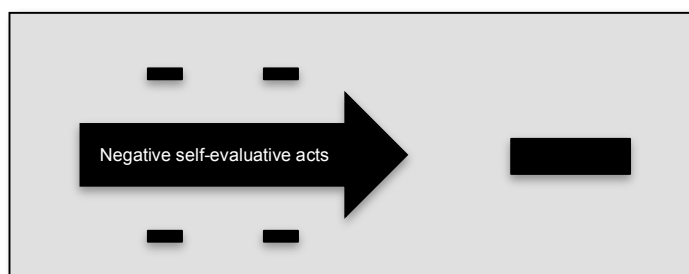


Figure 13.8: Idealised sketch of a reinforced negative self-evaluative cluster

Some of the most representative examples of reinforced negative evaluative clusters occur in the sequences in which Olivia compares herself to her relatives. One of these monologues,

which was initially presented in Section 13.6.2, culminates in the statement: *you know all of these people were so (spreading out her arms) (-) all of my relatives are millionaires I'm the (-) you know the little loser* (00:36:56). Here the coachee evaluates herself extremely negatively (*loser*), using a boosting adjective (*little*) and a reinforcing comparison (*millionaires*) without mitigating the force of the utterance in any way.

However, more often Olivia phrases her negative self-evaluations in a way that portrays her as a victim of the situation. While these self-presentations are very negative, Olivia seems to sympathise with herself in the face of the dramatic changes she has experienced. Thus, she reduces agency and responsibility for the negative evaluations:

**Excerpt 13.24:**

- 1 C: (...) so (2s) if you consider all those ahm (-) advantages, (3s) why are you still looking for something which you think is necessary on the CV. (-) to you.
- 2 O: (low volume) I think it's a [lack of-]
- 3 C: [(seen).]
- 4 O: (very low volume) self-confidence, I feel (-) very broken and xx by my past experiences,
- 5 C: mhm,
- 6 O: I'm telling myself that my extre::mely wealthy relatives,
- 7 C: (nodding) mhm,
- 8 O: will pity me,
- 9 C: (nodding) mhm,

Olivia's claim to *lack (...) self-confidence* and to *feel (-) very broken* contains negative self-evaluations. From a semantic perspective, however, if a person has a lack of self-confidence, this often implies that the person underestimates him/herself. Likewise, Olivia states that she feels broken, but she construes her *past experiences* as the agents who broke her self metaphorically. The negative evaluation is thus mitigated by the fact that Olivia is not responsible for the damage herself. In brief, it can be contended that the coachee's construal of herself as a victim serves as a mitigating element.

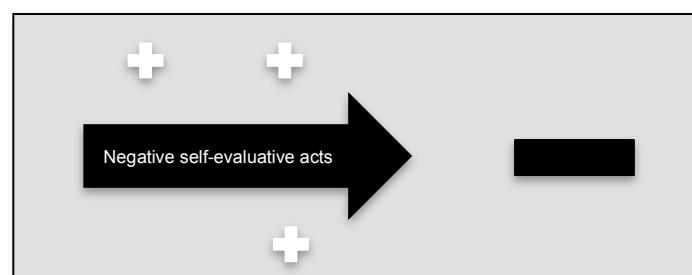


Figure 13.9: Idealised sketch of a mitigated negative self-evaluative cluster

Thus, Excerpt 13.24 may be interpreted as containing a mitigated negative self-evaluative cluster: While the basic direction of the self-evaluation is negative, Olivia construes the statement in an inherently mitigating way (cf. Figure 13.9).

Lastly, Olivia also employs mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters (cf. Figure 13.10). Much like Bobbie and Rachel in coaching 2 and coaching 3, Olivia often phrases positive self-evaluations in an indirect way.

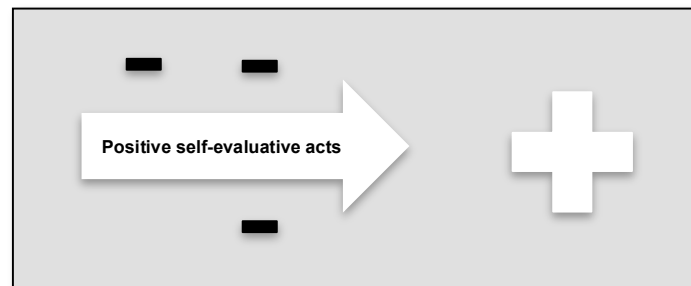


Figure 13.10: Idealised sketch of a mitigated positive self-evaluative cluster

For example, in one instance the coachee mentions some of her activities in her former life as Managing Director, giving concrete evidence of more abstract traits: By telling the coach that she used to invite people and introduce them to each other (00:32:10), she displays sociability, as well as interpersonal competence, high status, and selflessness. By talking about her church work with asylum seekers, she presents herself as altruistic (00:32:20). By mentioning *another thing [she does]* (i.e. teach intercultural competence), she implies, at the same time, that this is another of her skills. Thus, Olivia employs the common strategy of doing modest self-evaluation by means of indirectness.

In sum, coaching 5 features a wide variety of self-evaluative clusters. Adding to a sense of inconsistency is the fact that positive and negative self-evaluations often stand side by side without connection. However, the dominating evaluative direction is negative and low-agentive.

### 13.6.8 Conclusion

The analysis of self-presentation by the coachee Olivia has led to the following results:

1. In the opening phase the coachee questions the coach in a way that challenges the asymmetry of roles in the conversations. Olivia's explicit **initial self-presentations** start out on the professional domain. At first, she positions herself in a similar professional area to the coach. Soon she shares background information about the dramatic decline of her financial

company due to criminal offences. While the coachee declares full responsibility for the crimes, she does not employ any strategies to reconcile her account for it. Instead, she bemoans the life she has lost.

**2.** The coachee's **professional self-presentation** is dominated by the theme of incoherence and disorientation. Olivia talks about a range of services she offers in the area of communication. However, she details that in her opinion, she lacks a focus and a strategy. Although the coach constantly argues that Olivia could develop a focus and a strategy quite easily, the coachee maintains the claim that this is almost impossible. Furthermore, Olivia makes it clear that she does not take coaches and trainers seriously in the first place. Instead, she would like to see herself in the company of important politicians and top managers. Thus, even if Olivia should manage to establish herself as a coach and trainer, she would still disappoint her own expectations.

**3.** Olivia is the only coachee who provides information about her **personal self**. In particular, she discusses her problem with ageing. However, the coach consistently attempts to steer the conversation back to issues that are more related to Olivia's professional questions. This indicates that the coachee's contributions in this context may be regarded as digressions from the coaching issue by the coach.

**4.** Concerning **agency** and **construal**, Olivia presents her role in the criminal actions as highly agentic. However, as far as the outcome of her deeds is concerned, she uses impersonal constructions, positioning herself as a victim. In this manner, she depicts her problems as triggered by outer forces.

**5.** In the area of the **social self** Olivia positions herself as someone in desperate need of a relationship. At the same time, she claims that the chances for her to find a partner are slim. Also, the coachee presents herself in inconsistent ways with respect to the membership category of coaches. Here Olivia makes contradictive positioning statements: Sometimes she distances herself from the group (which includes Coach III); sometimes she declares herself a member of it; and sometimes she wonders how she can become a member of it. Moreover, the coachee emphasises her identity as an American, often positioning herself in contrast to the coach, who is German.

**6.** Olivia employs **metaphorical language** to a large degree. Some of the most important aspects of her self-presentations are expressed by metaphors. In this section, several of them have been analysed. Expressions of brokenness and incoherence are particularly

prevalent in the conversation.

7. Olivia provides different **self-evaluations** in coaching 5. In several instances, she produces unmitigated positive self-evaluative clusters. In these cases, she praises herself highly without including elements of modesty. In other instances, the coachee employs unmitigated negative self-evaluative clusters – here she presents herself solely in negative terms. The vast majority of self-evaluations is negative, with mitigating elements added to their semantic design. It has been established that the coachee employs mitigating strategies whenever she construes herself as a victim of the circumstances. These sequences, therefore, contain mitigated negative self-evaluative clusters. Moreover, at times Olivia also uses the conventional way of positive self-presentation. She does so mainly by employing strategies of indirectness. In this context she produces the fourth cluster type, i.e. mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters.

## 13.7 Coach I

### 13.7.1 Initial self-presentations

In point of fact, there are only few sequences in coachings 1 and 2 in which Coach I talks about himself. This finding is plausible due to the fact that business coaching conversations are designed to concentrate on the personalities of the coachees. Yet in the context of the introductions at the beginning of the conversations, Coach I does reveal some aspects about himself. Despite the fact that the first few seconds of **coaching 1** are cut off from the video recording, the context (*the other thing is* (00:00:11)) suggests that the coach has likely just said a few words about himself when the transcript starts:

#### Excerpt 13.25:

- 1        C: *uhm the other thing is (-) well I'm just open, yeah for the things that are going on in your life at the moment.*
- 2        K: *ok is it business coaching, personal coaching what's this the: ah*
- 3        C: *ah normally I'm a business coach,*
- 4        K: *aha (pouring water into a glass)*

In line 4 the coach expresses his openness to listen to Kate's coaching issues (00:00:11). Moreover, in response to Kate's question, he states that *normally* he's a *business coach* (00:00:15), but in his opinion there's *no border between business life and private life* (00:00:26). As Table 13.2 (cf. Section 13.2) illustrates, this short sequence which occurs in



Episode 1 is the only instantiation of an initial self-presentation by Coach I in coaching 1.

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Explicit self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:00:42	Interactants discussing setting of coaching session	Coach I (other-initiated)
2	00:00:42 – 00:05:00	Interactants discussing Kate's background and her coaching issue	Coachee Kate (other-initiated)

Table 13.2: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 1

In **coaching 2** it is the coachee Bobbie who initiates a sequence of self-presentations by the coach (cf. Section 13.3):

**Excerpt 13.26:**

- 1 B: so I don't really know what you do either.
- 2 C: okay. so [just uh sh-]
- 3 B: [laughing]
- 4 C: short introduction of myself, ahm. I'm (telling her his first name) C, ahm thirteen year (...) t-h-i-r-t-y (...) nine years old and I'm living here with my wife R. (FIRST NAME) and my daughter P. (FIRST NAME) here right in D. (CITY),
- 5 B: mhm,
- 6 C: I'm uh working on my own ah,
- 7 B: (leaning back)
- 8 C: as a coach (-) as a consultant as a trainer,
- 9 B: okay,
- 10 C: I've founded a company this year with two other guys ahm (-) to ahm (-) (on the table, rubbing thumb and index finger against each other) connect our strengths,
- 11 B: (nodding)
- 13 C: from market and want to have a brighter ahm, (repeatedly putting his hands on the table as though he is sweeping something away) range of things we can offer to our clients.
- 13 B: (nodding)
- 14 C: for this (-) being here, I'm here as a coach,
- 15 B: hmhm,
- 16 C: well to look together with you (tapping on the table with four fingers) if there is a uh (...) uhm, if there are some things-
- 17 B: (slightly nodding)
- 18 C: where you need coaching,
- 19 B: (nodding)
- 20 C: ah in private or in the business context,

This sequence has already been considered in Section 13.3 in relation to the coachee Bobbie's self-positionings. Here, it is examined with respect to the coach's self-presentations. His introduction is other-initiated, and he sets out with two pieces of information from the personal and the social domain, i.e. he states his age and his family status (00:00:33). Then, he tells the coachee where he lives. In the next unit he presents himself as a freelance *coach*, *consultant*, and *trainer* (00:00:40), thus defining his professional membership category. The third positioning is concerned with the fact that the coach has *founded a company* that year *with two other guys* (00:00:49). Also, Coach I explains the purpose of this joint venture: The three coaches want to *connect* their *strengths from market* and *want to have a brighter (...) range of things* they *can offer* to their *clients* (00:00:59).

Despite the unidiomatic style of the passage, the coach manages to convey power and energy by means of this self-presentation. Its construal is very agentive in that it contains active constructions and portrays the coach as someone who has made clear decisions for rational reasons. The expression *connect our strengths* activates an image of successful teamwork. Further, the coach argues that it is ultimately the benefit of the clients he has in mind – he wants to *offer* valuable services to them. This statement also represents a transition to the second episode of the conversation (cf. Table 13.3; Section 13.3).

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Explicit self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:00:59	Coach I introducing himself	Coach I (other-initiated)
2	00:00:59 – 00:01:37	Interactants discussing the setting and the roles in the coaching session	-
3	00:01:37 – 00:05:05	B introducing herself	Coachee B (self-initiated)

Table 13.3: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 2

The coach then leads over to the fact that he wants to offer his services as a coach to Bobbie. In Excerpt 13.27 he elaborates on his willingness to work with the coachee:

**Excerpt 13.27:**

- 1 C: (waving his hands around as though fishing for words) just to look how we can have an hour or ninety minutes for talking about something,
- 2 B: (nodding slightly)
- 3 C: uh that is (...) RELEVANT for you?
- 4 B: mhm,
- 5 C: that's my (-) (moving open hands slightly towards B) offer for you.

- 6        *B: (slightly smiling) great.*
- 7        *C: you know? and I'm (bending forward to adjust his position on the chair, then bending backwards) an expert on the process,*
- 8        *B: okay,*
- 9        *C: but not of the content.*

The coach presents himself as someone with an offer, thus construing the coaching session in terms of voluntariness. Moreover, he positions both himself and the coachee as experts (00:01:23): He claims expertise for the *process*, whereas he attributes expertise on the *content* to Bobbie. In this way, he partly restores symmetry of roles in the coaching interaction. Overall, the initial self-presentations of Coach I are very short in comparison to those of Coach II (cf. Section 13.8). Coach I seems to put little emphasis on his own background, but he carefully defines his view of his role in the coaching process.

### 13.7.2 Self-presentations occurring after the initial self-introduction

In the course of the coaching conversations, Coach I makes several explicit statements about himself, mainly in the context of advice-giving. For instance, in **coaching 1** he advises Kate with respect to energy management, giving an example from his own experience. By revealing a personal piece of information, the coach aligns himself with the coachee. He suggests that his advice is just as valid for himself as it is for the coachee: He tells Kate that he only performs well at his job if he commits efficient energy management (00:09:35). Of course, the coach's presentation of this insight about the causal connection suggests that he is on top of things, making sure that his energy management is always sufficient. Thus, the coach positions himself as someone who can explain the way to success. However, Kate's resistance indicates that she rejects being positioned in the complementary role as an advice-seeker in this context. There are three more instances in coaching 1 in which the coach gives information about himself in order to align himself with the coachee and to prepare the ground for advice: He tells Kate that he gets transition money himself (00:39:36); he talks about advisors at his former bank who had *the same fear* of asking for recommendations as Kate (00:54:59); and he states that, like Kate, he cannot work *at the same desk everyday* (01:01:32).

Moreover, on one occasion in coaching 1, Coach I provides another explanation of his understanding of coaching and consulting: *I think uhm the diff- uhm (-) in in coaching you're uhm I try to uh (-) coach you to get your own solution (...) and the consulting (-) ah environment, I have an idea and I give you a solution from the situation I understand*

(00:13:20). Again, Coach I explicitly presents himself as a facilitator of solutions for the coachee, rather than as an expert who can resolve her problems. This positioning stands partly in contrast to his actual advice-giving patterns: As has been revealed in Section 10.2, Coach I is eager to steer the coachee toward change. I will comment on the interactive patterns behind this contradiction in more detail in Section 16.3.

In the closing phase of coaching 1 the coachee Kate asks Coach I several questions about his professional and personal background. In this context, he talks about his business partners (01:23:38), as well as about the meaning of the company name (01:23:58). Furthermore, Coach I reveals the motif for his participation in the research experiment. First he presents himself as sociable, pointing out twice that he is interested in getting in touch with people (01:27:42, 01:27:53) before explicitly stating: *I like other people, to work with them* (01:27:55). The coachee Kate suggests a more utilitarian interpretation: *it's good PR* (01:27:59). Yet the coach rejects this other-positioning by Kate, arguing that PR is not his priority when he meets people: *that's not the focus, if there is will be a business contact afterwards, fine, (...) but ahm from my mindset I'm not looking for it, or don't force it you know*. Instead, he claims that relationships are meaningful for him (01:28:24). He summarises his attitude in the idiom *contact before contract* (01:28:29).

In **coaching 2** the coach displays similar patterns of self-presentation. He gives advice based on his own experience in one instance: When Bobbie asks him whether she should do her job interview in person, he states that if he was in her place, he would do so. Here Coach I produces a metacomment which functions as a disclaimer: He points out that it is *a typical u:h fault of a coach* (00:56:00) to give advice on the basis of his/her own experiences (see Section 13.3.1 on face-saving strategies). However, he states that he will consciously do so anyway (00:56:18). Following that, he expresses his conviction that *personal contact is always the best* (00:56:33), thus presenting himself as relationship-oriented. Then he employs another disclaimer (*I'm, not the esoteric guy, or that kind of stuff, but* (00:56:45)) before he talks about the advantages of *transport[ing] one's personal energy to another person* (00:56:45). Overall, the coach positions himself as someone who is fully aware of the rules and the risks of his job, but who will break a rule if he is convinced that it is the right thing to do. Moreover, he presents himself as sociable, with a clear focus on relationships. By distancing himself from the category of 'esoteric guys', he has placed himself within the realm of reasonable people.

There are only three more instances in which Coach I presents himself explicitly in coaching 2. In the first, he uses the disclaimer *I don't play an instrument, I sing under the shower* (00:34:54) before he makes a claim about the musical scene. In the second scene he reacts to Bobbie's utterance that she would not like to move to Idaho (00:29:24): (*laughing*) *[I've been] to Idaho. so I-* (00:29:29). This represents another alignment with the coachee

functioning to affirm the mutual relationship. The third and last explicit self-positioning occurs when the coach announces the closing phase. Having declared his coachee problem-free several times, Coach I categorises the coaching session as atypical: *actually this wasn't a real coaching, in case of or in terms of personality* (01:00:55). However, he argues that it was *not the right time* for a real coaching, and he bases his assessment on his intuition: *the thing I've learned ah to trust uh well, 'h my instinct* (01:01:03). Also, he argues that the coachee would have told him if there was anything else to discuss.

In essence, the coach's explanations indicate that he considers there to be reason to defend his 'atypical style' in coaching 2. Once more, he positions himself as reflective and intuitive with respect to the methods and interventions employed in the coaching. The coachee Bobbie completely agrees with the coach's statements, and she expresses her gratefulness for the coaching (01:01:38).

### 13.7.3 Presenting self-evaluations

Coach I only produces positive self-evaluations, employing conventional mitigation strategies and creating mitigated positive clusters of self-evaluation. For instance, as discussed in Section 13.7.1, he claims to be *an expert on the process, (...), but not of the content of the coaching* (00:01:35). Here the first part of the statement contains a positive self-evaluation (*expert*), whereas the second part mitigates the evaluation by means of a limitation of scope (*but not of the content*) (cf. Figure 13.11).

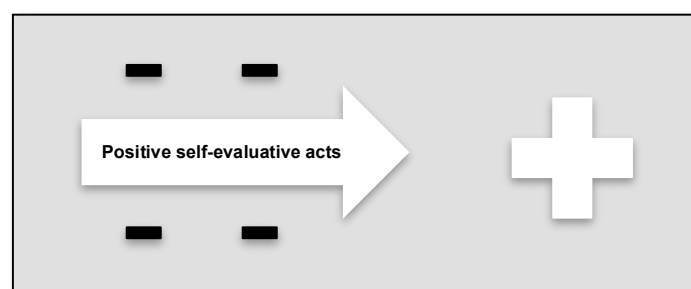


Figure 13.11: Idealised sketch of a mitigated positive self-evaluative cluster

Coach I employs concrete evidence of his characteristics rather than abstract descriptions. Thus, he chooses indirect means to evaluate himself positively.

### 13.7.4 Conclusion

The analysis of self-presentation by Coach I has led to the following results:

1. The **initial self-presentations** of Coach I in coaching 1 were either lost in technical start-up problems, or were non-existent. In coaching 2 the coach gives only very little information about himself in his introduction (i.e. his age, his family status, etc.). Instead, he focuses on the negotiation of his role in the coaching, positioning himself as an expert on the process, but not on the content of the coachee's issues. However, the explicit positionings he undertakes convey the image of an energetic, sociable, and successful professional. Also, he emphasises his interest in the benefit of the coachees.
2. The **self-presentations occurring after the initial introductions** of Coach I are similar in both coaching conversations. However, in coaching 1 he employs more instances of advice-giving on the basis of personal experiences. In this context, he discusses, for instance, his energy management habits, thereby aligning himself with the coachee Kate but positioning himself as someone who knows the way to success. In several instances, Coach I makes a point of being very relationship-oriented and sociable. Also, he produces metacomments on his coaching styles in a few situations. Here he positions himself as a reflective professional who knows his job, but also as an emotional person who follows his instincts.
3. The **self-evaluations** by Coach I are exclusively positive. However, he complies with the requirement of modesty, employing conventional mitigating strategies such as, for instance, indirectness. In the few explicit self-presentational sequences he uses positive complementary self-evaluative clusters.

## 13.8 Coach II

### 13.8.1 Initial self-presentations

Coach II provides considerably more explicit self-presentations in his sessions than do Coach I and Coach III in their sessions. It is especially in the opening phase that he produces elaborate initial self-positionings. As demonstrated in Section 13.4, the opening phase in **coaching 3** is rather complex (cf. Table 13.4).

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Explicit self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:00:22	Practical talk with research assistant	
2	00:00:22 – 00:00:59	Introductory talk by the coach	
3	00:00:59 – 00:03:32	Coach introducing himself	Coach II (self-initiated)
4	00:03:32 – 00:04:03	Interactants negotiating about the process	
5	00:04:03 – 00:05:41	Interactants negotiating over coaching expertise	
6	00:05:41 – 00:18:41	Rachel introducing herself, introducing her team and her problem construal	Coachee Rachel (self-initiated)

Table 13.4: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 3

In Episode 2, Coach II starts with a short introductory talk, in which he states: *we are in a special situation today, for me it's the first time, (turning around and pointing to the camera) (-) (laughing) (...) working like that, or at least uhm, (-) that kind of lab situation* (00:00:33). Also, the coach tells the coachee Rachel that he is an alumnus of the university on whose compound the coaching session is recorded (00:00:37). He argues that for this reason he *thought it would be, great to support the project* (00:00:41). In only a few sentences, Coach II manages to present an aspect of his professional training, and to demonstrate a generous attitude toward his alma mater. Also, he makes his motives of participation transparent to the coachee.

In Episode 3, Coach II introduces himself, giving a very detailed account of his career:

**Excerpt 13.28:**

- 1 C: ye::s. because otherwise it's a little bit strange situation. (-) a::hm, (-) I'm X. (FIRST NAME), X.R. (FULL NAME), I'm a founder of D.K. (C's COMPANY), (...)
- 2 C: a::nd uhm (regular facial expression) I'm one of the three founder uh co-founders of D.K. (COMPANY), that's a consultancy (...). 'hhh beFORE (-) starting this company, I used to work fo:r ten years as an internal HR (= Human Resources) consultant, and I was a (-) leader of a team too, so I'm experienced in leadership topics,
- 3 R: (writing something down)
- 4 C: 'hh that's sometimes very helpful in a coaching situation,
- 5 R: (writing) [mhm,]
- 6 C: [when,] 'hh people are struggling with leadership challenges so I can, pretty well understand what's the problem-
- 7 R: (nodding)

- 8 C: *is about, being VERY alone in your office and (laughing) taking-*
- 9 R: *(nodding) mhm,*
- 10 C: *taking some decisions, (2s) 'h a::hm, (2s) I used to work a lot about emotional intelligence projects, and how to bring emotional intelligence to your leadership development, I used to work a lot of (-) with 360° topics (= standard feedback method in Human Resources), (...)*
- 11 C: *(smiling) ah okay. fine. fine. so::, (-) as mentioned before, I studied sociology here in S. (CITY), so I got a social science background, but I did a lot of training, development, coaching programmes, I'm a certified coach and I'm-*
- 12 R: *mhm.*
- 13 C: *'h heading for international certification, because for me it's very important to::,*
- 14 R: *(nodding)*
- 15 C: *OFFER you a certain level of quality in my coaching, 'hh and I'm familiar with all the RANGE of topics uh, which can show up in coaching from-*
- 16 R: *(nodding)*
- 17 C: *very business-related topics to even more personal ones,*
- 18 R: *(nodding) mhm,*
- 19 C: *so: you can choose the deepness of our conversation,*
- 20 R: *(nodding)*
- 21 C: *uh it's important to let you know that it's, completely confidential.*

The first professional self-aspect Coach II mentions is that he is a *founder of D.K. (C's COMPANY)* (00:01:11). He repeats this statement once more in (00:02:06), at which time he states that he is *one of the three founder uh co-founders of D.K. (COMPANY), that's a consultancy (...)*. In the ensuing sequence (which I have removed for reasons of anonymity), he explains the meaning of the name of his company. Then he adds that he *used to work for ten years as an internal HR (= Human Resources) consultant*; and he tells the coachee that he *was a (-) leader of a team too*, so that he is *experienced in leadership topics* (00:02:06).

In this sequence the coach positions himself with a high degree of agency, and he mentions concrete self-aspects that are evidence of his competency in Human Resources and leadership topics. In particular, his positioning as a *founder* conveys a highly agentive, competent, and successful image. Also, he explicitly argues that his experience is an asset in his coaching work: *[when,] 'hh people are struggling with leadership challenges so I can, pretty well understand what's the problem (...) is about, being VERY alone in your office and (laughing) taking (...) taking some decisions* (00:02:32). This perspective not only place the coach's skills in a very positive light, it also shows appreciation of the coachees (who are construed as *struggling with challenges*, as opposed to, e.g., failing at their jobs), with whom the coach aligns himself. In the same way, the following lines are concerned with the coach's expertise in the area of emotional intelligence and feedback methods (00:02:32). After the



coachee Rachel questions the coach's other-positioning of her as someone who is not familiar with leadership methods (00:02:35; cf. Section 13.4), Coach II remains calm and friendly, continuing his talk. In the last part of his introduction he speaks about his professional training. He mentions that he has a social science background, as well as expertise in *training, development, coaching programmes*. He states: *I'm a certified coach and I'm (...) 'h heading for international certification* (00:03:26). Having explained that he can prove his qualification by means of certificates, Coach II argues that he wants to *offer* good services to his clients. As is evident, he phrases his coaching concept in terms of a proposal based on voluntariness. At the same time, the coach has led over to the current coaching interaction, and he starts to negotiate the setting and the process.

In Section 13.4 I analysed the ensuing struggle over the question of expertise in the area of coaching. In this context, Coach II provides another collection of self-presentations because he defends his territory of knowledge, claiming high expertise on coaching matters. He reveals the professional self-aspect that he spends *a lot of money and time and time [on] eduCation*. In order to highlight his efforts, he tells Rachel that he has just *spent a week in T. (CITY) with P. (COMPANY) Leadership Institute. they are from G. (CITY) in the States, and N.O. (FULL NAME), (-) she's writing a lot of books on leadership. (...) uhm and sh- (-) she's very good. (nodding)* (00:05:38). I have already established in Section 13.4 that he aligns himself with renowned representatives of the membership category of 'coaches'. In this way, he demonstrates his affiliation to the in-group. In the end, Rachel lets the issue rest.

In coaching 4, the coach opens in a similar way as in coaching 3 (cf. Table 13.5; Section 13.5): He first gives a short introductory talk (Episode 2), in which he reveals his perspective on the situation (*so: uhm, (-) for me it's uhm (-) the SECOND time today uhm* (00:00:37), easing the coachee into the coaching setting and facilitating a bonding process.

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Explicit self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:00:30	Small talk, practical issues (camera)	
2	00:00:30 – 00:01:07	Introductory talk by the coach	
3	00:01:07 – 00:04:09	Coach introducing himself	Coach II (self-initiated)
4	00:04:09 – 00:07:15	Interactants discussing a bank for which both have worked in the past	
5	00:07:15 – 00:11:17	Pauline introducing herself and her problem construal	Coachee Pauline (other-initiated)

Table 13.5: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 4

In Sequence 2 (Episode 3) the coach initiates his own introduction. In fact, his explicit self-presentations in coaching 4 closely resemble those of coaching 3. Coach II sets out describing his profession (00:01:16) and depicting the building of his own company (00:01:21). He reveals his motifs of participating in the research study (00:01:41), and he gives an account of his university studies (00:01:41), as well as his ensuing professional biography. Again, he dwells on his leadership experience (00:02:20), his different qualifications, and the educational efforts he takes so as to be able to *offer* something valuable to his coachees (00:03:45).

However, in this introduction Coach II gives some additional information about his work in the area of emotional intelligence. In this context, he tells the coachee about a project in a German bank. By characterising the culture of the bank in question as a *very 'hh male-dominated area* (00:02:51), Coach II distances himself from *male-dominated* cultures and aligns with the coachee Pauline (who is female). Also, he chooses a construal which suggests that his project represented a particularly difficult mission: *(smiling) so:, you can imagine (laughing) what kind of resistance I sometimes (smiling) could face during this time* (00:03:00). However, he makes clear that his mission was successful, as he managed to bring *these guys to open up their mind[s]* (00:03:03) *and to move their heart[s]* (00:03:11). The positive self-evaluations inherent in these positioning acts are conveyed indirectly by inference, thus establishing modesty.

When the interactants talk about the bank, the coach produces two more narratives, one of which deals with the way he secured the training job in the first place. His story provides more evidence of his self-confident and highly agentive self-presentational style in coachings 3 and 4. Characteristically, his construal implies that it was the bank that showed an interest in him and he was the one that had to be persuaded. Coach II even states that he would not have considered their offer had they not recently turned into an international company. This perspective suggests that he is free to reject job offers at any time, which, in turn, indicates that he is running a successful business. A similar kind of construal has been used by the coachee Rachel in coaching 3 (*a::nd eventually they said we're spending so much money on consulting (...) with you, why don't you come and JOIN us* 00:06:20).

In sum, the self-presentations of Coach II in coachings 3 and 4 are conducted in a chatty and confident manner. The coach uses the opening phase to position himself in order to facilitate the coaching process and to establish his expertise.

### 13.8.2 Self-presentations occurring after the initial self-introduction

After the opening phase of the conversation has finished, Coach II continues to offer explicit self-presentations. These appear to occur mainly for three reasons. First, he talks about himself in order to support pieces of advice. Second, he uses narratives and personal statements to align with the coachees. Third, he intersperses pieces of information that give evidence of his competency and expertise.

The first motive occurs four times in coaching 3 (four instantiations), and once in coaching 4. For instance, when the coachee Rachel describes her reaction to the *rude comments* of her employee J. (i.e. she tried to deal with them and was *really really upset afterwards* (00:42:43)), the coach appears to think that Rachel should communicate her feelings toward the coachee. However, he does not give her a direct piece of advice, but tells a story from his own experience. The protagonists of this narrative are designed as members of the same category as Rachel (i.e. as *leaders* in an *international* organisation). Also, the coach refers to his experience in two different functions: He mentions his job as an HR consultant as well as his profession as a coach (00:43:03). In both capacities he would have been able to witness the daily practice of leaders himself.

Having established both his own reliability as an observer and the relevance of the protagonists to the coachee, Coach II goes on to state that *some of them struggled with their emotion in the sense of they weren't able to bring them (opening his right hand) IN (-) the discussion* (00:43:03). By marking the leaders' incapacity to communicate their feelings, the coach elegantly presupposes that they should have this capacity in the first place. Rachel comments on this presupposition in a mirroring action: *so you think I SHOULD bring them into [discussion]* (00:43:04). Thus, the coachee has interpreted the personal information given by the coach as leading over to an instance of indirect advice-giving.

As established above, Coach II also uses personal information to align with his coachees. For instance, in coaching 4 the coachee Pauline complains about the fact that it is hard to subsist as a career changer in Germany (00:12:26). The coach agrees with her, and he tells her that he does career coachings with students at a local university. Pauline conveys her opinion that this is a very worthwhile enterprise, and she asks the coach whether this programme was his idea (00:12:51). When he affirms that this is the case, she expresses her appreciation: *(smiling, forming an 'AH' with her mouth without uttering it) well (laughing) well I'm glad somebody did, because that's one of the things about the German educational system that's always (...) (smiling, shaking her head) really really annoyed me* (00:13:01). To this statement the coach responds with another affirmation: *(smiling) it's REA::LLY strange. (shaking his head) you're absolutely [right.]* (00:13:04). In this case, the

explicit self-presentation by the coach has activated common ground between the interactants. By affirming their shared attitudes they affirm each other's faces (cf. Section 13.2). Thus, the coach has facilitated bonding mechanisms and has strengthened the coaching relationship.

The third function fulfilled by the explicit self-positionings of Coach II is that they give evidence of his competency and expertise. It was demonstrated in the analysis of his initial self-presentations that Coach II skilfully construes his statements in order to achieve this goal. In particular, he presents a current project of his company to the coachee Rachel: *it's a WORLDWIDE delivery of a leadership training* (01:28:17). He designs his account in a way that must give evidence of his expertise in international leadership training matters. Again, he uses an element that evaluates the project as very difficult: *'h when I hearst heard first about it I said it's impossible, to do a worldwide training, 'hh because you have to pay attention to the culture and so on* (01:28:24). He then goes on once again to talk about his successful handling of the challenge (*but then the other xx, "that" was in (counting on his fingers) A. (AFRICAN CITY), I. (AFRICAN CITY), F. (EUROPEAN CITY), (...) 'h H. (EUROPEAN CITY), (-) and it's so easy* (01:28:33). In general, the coach's positioning successfully places him and his company as an interesting potential partner for Rachel and her company.

### 13.8.3 Presenting self-evaluations

Clearly, Coach II presents himself in very positive terms, emphasising his professional expertise, his experience, his success, and his sociability. Also, it is clear that he does so very elegantly, complying with the requirements of modesty.

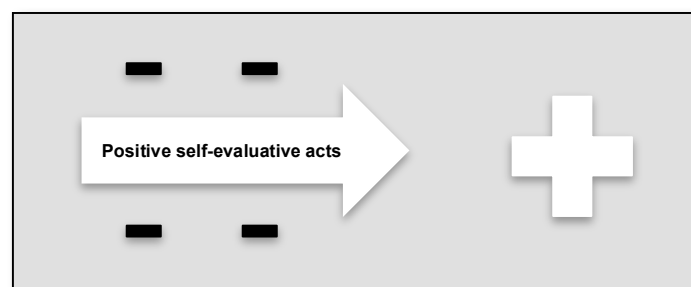


Figure 13.12: Idealised sketch of a mitigated positive self-evaluative cluster

He does not present himself in terms of explicit characterisation, but uses indirect strategies. Thus, he conveys his positionings by means of accounts and narratives that provide evidence of his skills. As is evident, Coach II employs mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters when he positions himself in the conversation (cf. Figure 13.12).

## 13.8.4 Conclusion

The analysis of self-presentation by Coach II has led to the following results:

1. The **initial self-presentations** by Coach II are much longer than the ones provided by Coach I and Coach III. He presents his professional biography in detail, selecting aspects that establish his competency, his high agency, his success, and his appropriateness for the role of the coach. In this context he highlights especially his professional identity as a founder and his experience as an HR consultant. When the coachee Rachel initiates a struggle over authority issues, he maintains his claim to his territory of knowledge by demonstrating his affiliation with the in-group of coaches.
2. The **self-presentations occurring after the initial introductions** of Coach II are similar in both coaching conversations. Despite his initial struggle with the coachee Rachel in coaching 3 and despite the coachee Pauline's tendency to unmitigated bluntness in coaching 4, he maintains a friendly, chatty, and confident self-image throughout both sessions. Coach II positions himself in ways that create alignments with his coachees. Thus, he manages to bond with both of them in different ways. The coach mainly employs self-presentations in three different ways: He uses pieces of information about himself to support his advice; he employs them to align himself with the coachees; and he positions himself strategically so as to give evidence of his competency and expertise.
3. Like the other coaches, Coach II exclusively produces positive **self-evaluations**. Thus, he employs mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters. Also, he skilfully complies with modesty conventions by using conventional mitigating strategies. Most importantly, he construes accounts and narratives that imply positive self-evaluations.

## 13.9 Coach III

### 13.9.1 Initial self-presentations

This section is justifiably brief, as Coach III reveals almost nothing about herself in explicit terms. While the first few seconds of the conversation are cut off on the videotape for technical reasons, it does not seem as though the coach produces an introduction of herself during that initial period. Instead, the session has apparently started out with the introduction by the coachee Olivia (Episode 1; cf. Table 13.6; Section 13.6).

Episode no.	Time	Contents of episodes	Explicit self-presentations by
1	00:00:00 – 00:01:45	Olivia introducing herself	Coachee Olivia
2	00:01:45 – 00:02:25	Humorous remark coach; negotiation goal of coaching	Coachee Olivia
3	00:02:25 – 00:03:34	Coach III looking after coffee; Olivia questioning her about her company	Coach III (other-initiated)
4	00:03:34 – 00:07:56	Olivia going on to give background information about herself	Coachee Olivia

Table 13.10: Context of initial self-presentations in coaching 5

There is only one instantiation in which the coach reveals any information about herself in the opening phase. It emerges in Episode 3 when the coachee Olivia questions the coach about her company (cf. Excerpt 13.29):

**Excerpt 13.29:**

- 1 O: [I've heard] of D.K. (= C's COMPANY) before, I've HEARD of it, at the Weiterbildungsmesse (= training trade fair), do you think they have [stands,]
- 2 C: [u::hm,]
- 3 O: at some of these,
- 4 C: (shaking her head) D.K. (C's COMPANY) is our own company. we are (holding up three fingers) three partners, and we just founded the company, (-) in January, so we've NEVER been to any (-) Messe (= fair),
- 5 O: (nodding)
- 6 C: of-
- 7 O: trade fair it's a trade fair, yeah.
- 8 C: wi:th trade fair, no. so-
- 9 O: it's just a lot of times xxx [xxx-]
- 10 C: [but you] will hear from D.K. (C's company) from now on, no problem.
- 11 O: (smiling) will you do publishing, or mo:re, (neutral facial expression) (-) how (-) what will you do to become more uh better known.
- 12 (2s)
- 13 C: uh (-) we just uh (-) do it all with networking.
- 14 O: okay,
- 15 C: a:nd we get our clients just with networking.
- 16 (2s)
- 17 O: (smiling, nodding)
- 18 C: but, (raising her hands) (-) it's not about (touching her cleavage twice with both hands) me, it's about (pointing towards O with both hands) you.

This sequence has been analysed in Section 13.6 with respect to Olivia's self-presentation. It has been established that the coachee's questions entail a role challenge because she is, in fact, reversing the roles in exactly the way that Coach III had humorously suggested before.

Coach III plays along with the coachee, answering her questions and even addressing the implicit suspicion that her company might lack a marketing strategy: *[but you] will hear from D.K. (C's company) from now on, no problem* (00:03:16). Moreover, when Olivia corrects her English, she accepts the correction right away. However, the coachee persists in her role position: *(smiling) will you do publishing, or mo:re, (neutral facial expression) (-) how (-) what will you do to become more uh better known* (00:03:21). The coach answers this question, and she repeats her response one more time before she interrupts the sequence and switches the topic to Olivia's own issues. As is typical for her in this coaching session, Coach III does not comment on this communicative event at all.

### 13.9.2 Self-presentations occurring after the initial self-introduction

The opening phase is uneventful concerning explicit self-presentations by Coach III, and this does not change in the course of the conversation. Coach III presents information about herself in only three more situations. In the first, Olivia asks the Coach if she *would like a cup of coffee too* (00:12:36). The coach declines the offer, claiming that she drinks *TOO much coffee* (00:12:38). Remarkably, this is the only piece of information in coaching 5 that Coach III presents on her own initiative.

In the second sequence, the coachee asks the coach why she is not worried about getting older. In her explanation Coach III positions herself as a member of the category of *women over fifty: we are the ones, like you were talking about (-) the men with grey face, (-) UH (touching her temples with both hands) uh grey uh (-) obviously, (...) Schläfen- (= temples), what's the English word* (00:49:40). Here the coach refers to Olivia's earlier statement that the lives of men become better and easier when they get older because older men are respected. Coach III concludes that she experiences her current phase in her life as *good* (00:49:50). When the coachee asks her whether she feels *taken seriously and respected* (00:49:53), she confirms this question. Thus, in this sequence Coach III presents herself as confident and happy with her age. On the other hand, the coach's struggle for words weakens her assertiveness to a certain degree, especially because Olivia treats the coach's lapses in marked ways (cf. Section 13.3).

The third sequence containing explicit self-presentations by the coach occurs right at

the end of the session. Coach III has already announced that it is time to come to a close. After having received a piece of advice, the coachee suddenly switches to a questioning mode. She asks the coach about her methods, e.g. concerning homework in between coachings, about the duration of coaching sessions, and about the location of the conversations. Coach III responds to all of these inquiries, despite the fact that they seem to have arisen disjointedly. However, when Olivia compliments her on her office, Coach III stands up and walks toward the camera, thus signalling that she wishes to end the recording, which she does only a minute later. She does not answer Olivia's question as to *how* she *became a coach*, (01:02:06), but she declares that she wants to stop the camera. Overall, it is quite obvious that Coach III is reluctant to explicitly discuss her own personality in this conversation, particularly in that the coachee seems to use her questions as a means of diversion from the coach's advice.

### 13.9.3 Presenting self-evaluations

It is reasonable to conclude that in the very few instances of explicit self-presentation analysed above, the coach presents herself in a consistently positive way. This is especially true for her descriptions of her company and for her statements about her age. As we have seen in the analyses, in these instances Coach III employs positive complementary self-evaluative clusters (cf. Figure 13.13).

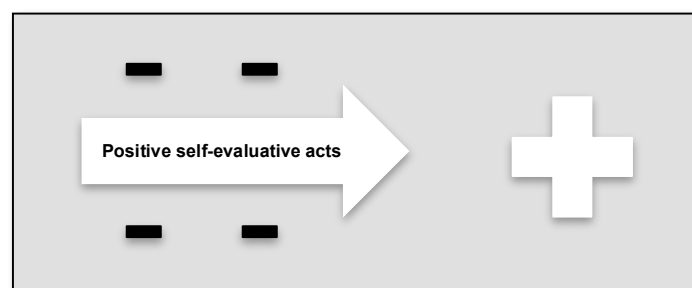


Figure 13.13: Idealised sketch of a mitigated positive self-evaluative cluster

### 13.9.4 Conclusion

The analysis of self-presentation by Coach I has led to the following results:

1. The **initial self-presentations** of Coach I are extremely sparse. The only sequence containing explicit self-positionings by Coach III is other-initiated. Here the coach responds to



questions about her company. However, she switches the topic when Olivia begins to interrogate her about her marketing strategy.

2. Likewise, the **self-presentations occurring after the initial introductions** of Coach III only amount to three instantiations. Apart from the fact that she drinks too much coffee, she also reveals parts of her attitude toward her age. Moreover, in the last few minutes of the session she responds to questions about her coaching practice. In sum, she positions herself in a favourable light, but she only does so when she is solicited by the coachee.

3. Like Coach I and Coach II, Coach III also uses positive **self-evaluations**. In this context she employs several mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters. However, what is more striking is the fact that she tends to refrain from positioning herself explicitly at all.

## 14. Face work

### 14.1 Introduction and methodology of the analysis of face-related sequences

#### 14.1.1 Introduction

In this section I will relate back to the literature reviews in Sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.8, introducing my own methodological approach to the analysis of face-related sequences. As stated in Section 5.8, face work can be categorised according to different orientations, for instance, in face-enhancing, face-maintaining, face-saving, or face-aggravating terms. Through these orientations interactants may employ different kinds of face-related activities, such as confirmative sequences, face-saving activities, face-threatening activities, and remedial sequences. Since the origins and the basic design of the concepts involved have been covered (cf. Section 5.3; Section 5.8), in this section I will provide a condensed description of my analytical frameworks and tools, including within this discussion a few adjustments that have been made.

#### 14.1.2 Confirmative sequences

In my analysis of confirmative sequences I will draw on Holly's (1979) classification of confirmative sequence types, as discussed in Section 5.8. Thus, I will present the results of my analysis of three different categories in my coaching corpus in the following order: First, access rituals (which can be realised by means of greetings, goodbyes, or social introductions); second, ritual offerings (which can be realised, for instance, by means of POLITE OFFERS, INVITATIONS, WELCOMING and INTRODUCING activities); and third, rituals of identificatory sympathy (which comprise confirmative sequence types that are "based on an empathetic anticipation of the other interactant's need for solidarity" (cf. Goffman 1971: 92; Section 5.8).<sup>42</sup> The category 'rituals of ratification' (which refers to the acknowledgment of change) will be subsumed under 'rituals of identificatory sympathy'.

It is the purpose of my analysis to test Holly's classification by applying it to my coaching corpus. In this context, I am especially interested in prototypical confirmative pairs that occur in coaching conversations. Also, I will point out the links between classic coaching-based activity types (i.e. questions, feedback, and advice), and confirmative sequences. Following this, these connections will be reviewed and Holly's categorisation of confirmative

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<sup>42</sup> For the sake of consistency, I will refer to Goffman's category 'ritualisation of identificatory sympathy' as 'rituals of identificatory sympathy'.

sequences will be renamed to suit the particular characteristics of my coaching corpus.

Moreover, as I have argued in Section 5.8, I will explore the practical merit of the distinction between face-maintaining and face-enhancing communication. In this respect, it will be considered whether a second-order perspective of analysis will allow for a categorisation of confirmative moves according to these two concepts.

### 14.1.3 Face-saving strategies, face attacks, and remedial sequences

In the analysis of face-damaging behaviour, an important aspect to take into account is the activities interactants employ to prevent face attacks from being initiated. As I have established in Section 5.8, in linguistic politeness theory, face-saving acts are defined as activities that function to avoid or mitigate face threats before they occur. It has also been determined that I will neglect the speech act level of mitigation and will instead focus on the use of face-saving strategies in overarching sequences.

Furthermore, in my analysis I am interested in face-damaging behaviour, as first described by Goffman (1971). In Sections 5.3 and 5.8 I have established that, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 60ff), face threats are communicative actions violating other interactants' face needs. With respect to terminology, I will principally treat the terms 'face threat', 'face damage', 'face attack', 'face violation', and 'face aggravation' as synonyms, although I am aware that the labels occupy slightly different conceptual spaces. In my analysis of face attacks, I will concentrate on five different constellations of face damage, i.e. coaches damaging their own faces, coachees damaging their own faces, coaches damaging the faces of coachees, coachees damaging the faces of coaches, and third parties damaging the faces of coachees (cf. Figure 14.1).

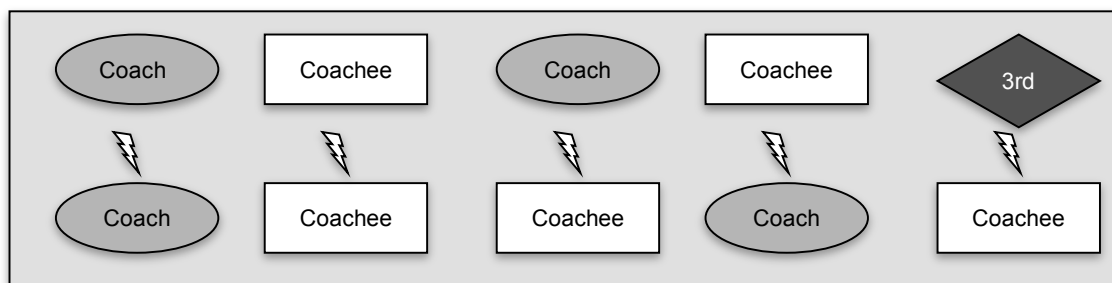


Figure 14.1: Five constellations of face damage

The fifth type of face threat represents the 'afterburn sequence' in Goffman's framework (cf. Section 5.8). The analytical focus on objects of face work is derived from Brown and

Levinson (1987), who classify face-threatening acts according to this criterion, and from Holly (1979), who discusses confirmative sequences with respect to the objects of affirmation. Ultimately, I will examine the contexts and the characteristics of these five constellations in my corpus.

From a methodological viewpoint, it is important to remember that the identification of face attacks is a matter of perspective (cf. Locher and Watts 2008; Section 5.8). In this context important factors are: the speaker's intentions (which are not directly accessible and often remain unclear), the hearer's interpretations (which are not accessible either, and which are not necessarily expressed), and the analyst's interpretations (which are always in danger of being based on speculation). Thus, all second-order categorisations of face-damaging acts (and of different orientations of face work in general) are principally problematic.

In my approach I will particularly focus on face attacks that are marked as such by the reactions of the hearers. However, I will also consider cases in which behaviour could be expected to be treated as face-aggravating, but in which the threatened interactants overlook the incidents. In this respect I follow Upadhyay (2010: 109), who argues that some face attacks are so blatant in relation to accepted social norms that they must be considered as salient, whether the addressees mark them as face-damaging or not. I will demonstrate later that Upadhyay provides a useful approach with respect to my data, because coaches often seem to overlook potential face threats to their own faces due to the expectations tied to their roles (cf. Section 4.4).

Furthermore, in my analysis of face-aggravating behaviour I will explore the question of whether face threats can be categorised according to their severity. I have argued that I do not consider Brown and Levinson's (1987: 76) formula for the computation of "the weightiness of an FTA" to be a suitable tool in this respect (cf. Section 5.8). Rather, I am inspired by the discursive view of politeness, according to which communicative behaviour can be assessed in terms of a continuum (cf. Locher and Watts 2005). In relation to norms of face work, I have discussed the claim that face-attacking behaviour is regarded as more acceptable in some contexts than in others, although the interactants may take offence despite this fact (cf. Culpeper 2005; Section 5.8). Therefore, one of my aims in this study is to assess the acceptability of face-damaging behaviour with respect to the conversations in my coaching corpus.

As in my analysis of confirmative face work, I will focus on links between coaching-specific activity types and face-aggravating behaviour: In this way, I intend to contribute to a description of the preconditions of relational work in the coaching genre. As I am interested in the interactive dynamics of face work, I will also test Goffman's concept of remedial sequences and afterburn sequences, as discussed in Section 5.8. In this context I will

illuminate the specific forms taken by remedial sequences in my corpus and the functions they fulfil for the creation and maintenance of the coaching relationship. Furthermore, I will focus on the question of to which degree face threats are remediated at all in my corpus.

Again, before conducting the main study, I tested the categories by means of a pilot study.

### **14.1.4 Conclusion and research questions**

In Section 14.2 I will address the following research questions:

- Which types of confirmative sequences occur in my corpus and to which degrees of frequency?
- Which specific pair patterns of confirmative sequence types occur in my corpus?
- Do the sequence types differ in the degree to which they are conventionalised?
- To which degree can confirmative sequences be categorised as realising face-maintaining or face-enhancing behaviour?
- If a difference between face-maintaining and face-enhancing behaviour can be identified, are some of the sequence types prototypically linked to one or the other (i.e. to face-maintaining or to face-enhancing behaviour)?
- What kinds of claims can be made about the degree of explicitness or implicitness of confirmative activities?
- Which specific confirmative patterns occur in the individual coaching conversations (e.g. do they differ concerning the degree of confirmative action)?

In Section 14.3 I will address the following research questions:

- Which face-saving strategies do the interactants use on the discourse level of interaction?
- Which types of face threats occur in my corpus to which degrees of frequency and in which contexts?
- Are the face attacks in my corpus tied to prototypical situations?
- Are any of these prototypical situations coaching-specific?
- Can the face attacks in my corpus be categorised according to severity?
- How acceptable is face-damaging behaviour in the coaching genre, as exemplified by the conversations in my corpus?

- To which degree and in which contexts do remedial sequences and afterburn sequences emerge in the conversations?
- Which interactants tend to provide remedies in which context?
- In which contexts do face threats remain unremediated?
- What are the particular patterns with respect to face threats, remedial sequences, and afterburn sequences in the individual conversations?
- In which way are face threats and their remediation tied to the relationship creation in the coaching conversations?

## 14.2 Results of the analysis of confirmative sequences

### 14.2.1 Access rituals and ritual offerings

The first finding of the analysis was that several access rituals emerged in my coaching corpus. Predictably, they occur in the opening phases and the closing phases of the respective conversations. Most of these rituals are constituted by formulaic expressions, and they are produced in a very casual and unmarked way. On the other hand, failures to complete the rituals would likely be strongly marked, and would result in serious face damages. The following sequence from coaching 3 is an example of an initial greeting sequence following the pattern GREETING - GREETING:

**Excerpt 14.1:**

- 1        C: *(nodding) well, (-) so. hello Rachel, once again uhm,*  
 2        R: *(long nod)*

On the whole, initial greeting sequences are rare in my corpus; most of the conversations have formally begun before the camera is turned on because the interactants have already greeted each other in the hall before they enter the room. Likewise, the interactants typically close the conversations after having left the room. In Excerpt 14.1 above the coach apparently repeats a greeting that he has already performed before the tape sets in, a fact that is indicated by the phrase *once again* (1). Thus, by performing the greeting, the coach initiates the start of the 'real' conversation in front of the camera. Note that the coach greets Rachel verbally (*hello*), whereas Rachel answers non-verbally by nodding (2). The less explicit, weaker response on the part of the coachee may indicate that she considers it unnecessary to perform another greeting sequence – but nevertheless, she completes the

sequence, demonstrating her cooperation and her care to maintain the face-related balance.

In my corpus the counterpart to the initial greeting sequence is the closing sequence. In the five conversations in my corpus this sequence type often contains pre-closing elements (e.g. the coach announces the closing, and the interactants thank or compliment each other (cf. Sacks 1992). Excerpt 14.2 (coaching 2) represents a good example of such elements:

**Excerpt 14.2:**

- 1        *C: (smiling) okay.*
- 2        *B: thank you so much.*
- 3        *(B and C are shaking hands)*
- 4        *C: enjoy, take care. (opening the door for B)*
- 5        *B: thank you. (leaving the room)*
- 6        *C: (also leaving the room, but remaining in sight of the camera)*
- 7        *(C and B are talking to the researcher, who is waiting outside)*

The pre-closing sequence consists of the coach's initiation of the closing sequence (a smile and the discourse marker *okay* (turn 1)) and the coachee's response (an expression of thanks (turn 2)). The actual core of the closing sequence consists of two elements: first, a non-verbal farewell gesture (3) and second, a verbal farewell interchange (4-5). At the same time, the coachee's response in (5) also represents a second pair part to a ritual offering initiated by the coach in (4) (*opening the door for B*). Apart from the practical purpose of actually closing the conversation, this sequence also serves to affirm the faces of both interactants.

The two examples above illuminate the finding that access rituals are a rather limited resource with respect to the analysis of relational work; this is due to the fact that they come in quite conventionalised forms. All of the access rituals that appear in my corpus represent instances of unmarked confirmative behaviour, so that they must be regarded as having a 'face-maintaining' orientation. Their use leaves comparatively little room for individual design, so that these sequences are not very informative in relation to individual and interactive patterns occurring in specific conversations.

The representatives of the second type of supportive interchanges, ritual offerings, differ from the first type in that not all of them are tied to the fringes of the conversation. However, like access rituals, ritual offerings draw on rather basic, archetypical forms of face-related confirmations. For instance, there are several instantiations concerning the offering of food and drink in my corpus. These sequences follow the pattern POLITE OFFER –

THANKS/ACCEPTANCE or THANKS/POLITE DECLINE. Moreover, in one instance the coachee Olivia asks for coffee (00:02:33) thus triggering the pattern POLITE REQUEST – GRATIFICATION. Other ritual offerings occur in relation to the exchange of business cards, or to small gestures of help (for example in Excerpt 14.2 above, when Coach I opens the door for the coachee Bobbie). Also, when the coaches hand over media to the coachees (e.g. small rocks in coachings 1 and 2, or cards in coaching 4), they also initiate ritual offering sequences in Goffman's sense. Likewise, welcoming gestures are considered by Goffman (1971) to constitute first pair parts of ritual offerings. In my corpus there are, indeed, two instances in which coaches explicitly welcome their coachees to the session. For an overview, see Table 14.1.

Confirmative sequence type	Object of face-confirmation	Initiation (1 <sup>st</sup> part)	Response (2 <sup>nd</sup> part)
<b>I. Access rituals</b>	<b>Confirming self and other</b>	GREETING	GREETING
		CLOSING	CONFIRMING CLOSING
<b>II. Ritual offerings</b>	<b>Confirming self</b>	POLITE REQUEST (e.g. for coffee)	GRATIFICATION
	<b>Confirming other</b>	POLITE OFFER (e.g. of food, drink, business cards, media, small gestures of help)	THANKS/ACCEPTANCE; THANKS/POLITE DECLINE
		WELCOMING	ACCEPTANCE

*Table 14.1: Results of the analysis of access rituals and ritual offerings*

In sum, both access rituals and ritual offerings emerge regularly throughout the conversations of my corpus. As comparatively formulaic types of confirmative sequences, they are indicative of the fact that all the interactants comply with the fundamental requirements of social interaction. Thus, these confirmative sequence types serve to affirm the faces of the interactants in a prominent way, without revealing much about the particular dynamics of the conversations. Often, they involve ready-made ritual patterns or classic adjacency pairs, such as, for instance, greeting formula (cf. Schegloff 1990; cf. Section 5.8). From the perspective of the interactants, compliance with and usage of access rituals and ritual offerings respectively represents rather unmarked communicative behaviour. Therefore, access rituals and ritual offerings appear to be prototypical sequence types for the realisation of face-maintaining behaviour.



## 14.2.2 Rituals of identificatory sympathy

In comparison to access rituals and ritual offerings, rituals of identificatory sympathy represent a category that is much more diverse and frequent in my corpus.<sup>43</sup> Table 14.2 contains an overview of the specific sequential patterns emerging from my data:

Confirmative sequence type	Object of face-confirmation	Initiation (1 <sup>st</sup> part)	Response (2 <sup>nd</sup> part)
III. Rituals of identificatory sympathy	Confirming self (and other)	SEEKING INTEREST  by telling a story by telling a joke by explicating a complex issue by talking about a problem by giving advice by requesting feedback	SHOWING INTEREST  by listening to the story and by accepting the evaluation by laughing at the joke by listening to and commenting on the issue by discussing the problem by processing the advice by giving feedback
		NOTIFYING CHANGE	RATIFYING CHANGE
		REQUESTING HELP  by asking for information by asking for advice by asking for feedback	PROVIDING HELP  by giving information by giving advice by giving feedback
		PRAISING SELF	CONFIRMING PRAISE
	Confirming other (and self)	SHOWING INTEREST  by inviting the other interactant to talk about him/herself by asking questions by asking for feedback by giving positive feedback by asking for advice and processing it by praising other	ACCEPTING INTEREST  by talking about oneself by answering questions by giving feedback by accepting positive feedback by giving advice by accepting praise
		RATIFYING CHANGE	ACCEPTING RATIFICATION
		PROVIDING HELP  by giving information by giving advice by giving feedback	ACCEPTING HELP  by accepting information by accepting advice by accepting feedback
		PRAISING OTHER	ACCEPTING PRAISE

Table 14.2: Rituals of identificatory sympathy

As the table shows, my categorisation relies on Holly's (1979: 51f) framework (cf. Sections 5.8 and 14.1). However, I have only listed those sequence patterns that actually occur in my corpus. Further, I have re-labelled and regrouped the categories so as to accommodate them to the characteristics of my coaching data. In particular, the data suggest a straightforward

<sup>43</sup> As established in Sections 5.8 and 14.1, Holly (1979: 51f) actually distinguishes between four different sequence types, but I will treat the fourth category, 'rituals of ratification', as a special case of 'rituals of identificatory sympathy'.

categorisation according to four sequence patterns: first, SEEKING INTEREST – SHOWING INTEREST, second NOTIFYING CHANGE – RATIFYING CHANGE, third REQUESTING HELP – PROVIDING HELP, and fourth PRAISING SELF – CONFIRMING PRAISE. All of these sequence patterns focus primarily on the confirmation of the face of the initiating interactant (self). However, the confirmative moves may also work in favour of the other interactant's image. For instance, if an interactant tells a story, he/she activates the pattern SEEKING INTEREST – SHOWING INTEREST, which confirms his/her own face. Yet, it could also be argued that the storytelling activity represents the other-confirming move SHOWING INTEREST, which is completed by the second pair part ACCEPTING INTEREST. The pattern GIVING ADVICE – ACCEPTING ADVICE is particularly ambiguous in this respect. For this reason I have included it both in the category SEEKING INTEREST – SHOWING INTEREST above (which is primarily oriented toward the self) and in the category PROVIDING HELP – ACCEPTING HELP below (which is primarily oriented toward the other). Whether the primary recipient of confirmation is 'self' or 'other' can therefore depend on the context and on the perspective from which the assessment is made. Also, a confirmative sequence may confirm both interactants, or it may confirm the face of one interactant and threaten the face of another.

As Table 14.3 shows, the sequence patterns primarily oriented toward the self have complementary counterparts, i.e. SHOWING INTEREST – ACCEPTING INTEREST, RATIFYING CHANGE – ACCEPTING RATIFICATION, PROVIDING HELP – ACCEPTING HELP, and PRAISING OTHER – ACCEPTING PRAISE. This set of sequence patterns can be characterised according to two aspects: The sequences are primarily oriented to the face of the responding interactant (other); and they often tie in with the first set of sequence patterns, which is oriented to the initiating interactant's face (forming confirmative chains such as REQUESTING HELP – PROVIDING HELP – ACCEPTING HELP). Thus, a confirmative move may confirm different faces at the same time, completing one confirmative sequence while simultaneously initiating another.

Evidently, the patterns realising rituals of identificatory sympathy can come in a very wide range of variations. Due to the spatial limitations of this thesis, I will not provide a complete catalogue of all of the forms I have found in my corpus. Rather, I will demonstrate the scope by way of some selected examples, before highlighting the links to prototypical coaching interventions. Three aspects are crucial in this context: First, just as no linguistic form is inherently polite, no face-related sequence pattern is inherently confirmative. Yet the instantiations of rituals of identificatory sympathy collected in Table 14.3 above are prototypical sequences realising face-confirmation in my coaching corpus, for "some linguistic expressions (...) do facework more frequently (...) than others" (cf. Terkourafi 2008: 8). Second, many aspects of the coaching interventions discussed in Chapters 8, 9, and 10

of this thesis (i.e. questions, feedback, and advice) can be linked to prototypical default patterns of confirmative face work (this issue will be developed in more detail in the next section). Third, despite the seemingly straightforward overview of face-enhancing sequences in Table 14.3, confirmative sequence patterns are in actuality very complex and multi-layered phenomena; and the question of whether they should be categorised as face-maintaining or face-enhancing is not easily answered.

Consider an example of a ritual of identificatory sympathy from coaching 1:

**Excerpt 14.3:**

- 1        *K: as my friends would all say, I've got a lot of very 'hh (-) esoteric friends,*
- 2        *C: [mhm,]*
- 3        *K: [who] say the inner (-) the universe will guide you. (laughing)*
- 4        *C: 'hhh*
- 5        *K: but it can't guide you if you don't leave your house. (laughing)*
- 6        *C: yeah. (laughing) (3s)*

This sequence follows the pattern SEEKING INTEREST (by telling a joke) – SHOWING INTEREST (by laughing at the joke). From the perspective of face work, it is a confirmative sequence directed at the initiator's face: By telling a humorous story, Kate seeks not only the coach's attention, but also a reaction that confirms her evaluation of the story as humorous and tellable. The coach acts in an unmarked way by completing the confirmative sequence: *yeah. (laughing)* (6). Thus, he confirms Kate's face by acknowledging the story as funny.

Much in the same way, all of the sequences in which interactants tell each other stories, give accounts, state their opinions, make arguments, talk about problems, or give advice are, on one level, first pair parts of confirmative sequences. On the most fundamental level, the speakers venture forth with contributions to the conversation, and it is a vital precondition for the ritual balance that the other interactant accept and affirm the value of these contributions. As Table 14.3 shows, they do so for instance by listening, laughing, commenting, agreeing, and processing the contents provided in the first pair parts.

By inference, this leads to the crucial finding that a major part of the communicative interactions that occur in my coaching corpus represent confirmative sequences in terms of face work. The confirmations of the interactants' faces are principally conducted in implicit and unmarked ways. Therefore, if all of these instantiations of confirmative sequences are analysed individually, we will tend to classify them as face-maintaining, rather than as face-enhancing: They signal compliance with the social norms in coaching conversations; they are completely expectable in relation to the setting and the roles; and they reflect appropriate

behaviour with respect to the coaching genre. Yet the analysis of questions, feedback, and advice (cf. Chapters 8, 9, and 10) has proven that seemingly mundane communicative activities can build up to create a very cordial and trusting atmosphere between two interactants. This is the most apparent in coaching 3, in which the coachee Rachel initiates a power struggle at the beginning, but the empathetic and affirmative communicative behaviour by coach II gradually leads to a turnaround of the relational setting, so that the interactants move on to a very appreciative dynamic. It appears that it is the consistent flow of small confirmative elements that facilitates the growth of trustworthy coaching relationships. As the coaching literature unanimously acknowledges (cf. Rauen 2007; Schreyögg 2012), it is exactly this relational aspect that forms the cornerstone of success in coachings.

Turning to rituals of identificatory sympathy, the following example depicts the interactants implicitly negotiating change (coaching 3):

**Excerpt 14.4:**

- 1        *R: I HAVE been offered a global job in T. (CITY).*
- 2        *(2s)*
- 3        *C: (smiling) [xx,]*
- 4        *R: [(laughing)] (2s) (smiling) well I've been offered head of global market research in T. (CITY).*
- 5        *C: (smiling) whooa, (-) oh,*

This confirmative sequence follows the pattern NOTIFYING CHANGE – RATIFYING CHANGE. The coachee Rachel provides a piece of information (she has been offered a prestigious job), downtoning her positive self-presentation for the sake of modesty goals (for instance, she employs laughter, smiling, and the use of the discourse marker *well*, all of which relativise the force of the speech acts involved (4)). In terms of self-evaluative patterns (cf. Section 13.4), Rachel produces a positive complementary self-evaluative cluster. From the perspective of face work, she initiates a confirmative sequence directed toward her own face. The coach ratifies Rachel's success by means of smiling, as well as by employing two interjections (*whooa*, *(-) oh*,). Later in the conversation, he will explicitly express his admiration through the positive evaluation *very impressive*. Therefore, in terms of the orientations of face work, this sequence contains two face-enhancing confirmative moves oriented toward the initiating interlocutor's face, although Rachel's version is mitigated while that of the coach is not. Like all accounts of positive change, this sequence could also be classified as an instantiation of the pattern PRAISING SELF – CONFIRMING PRAISE. Thus, it is important to remember the fact that categories of relational work may overlap and even imply each other. This is further evidence of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of rituals of identificatory sympathy.

Notifications of change may also refer to negative events. For instance, in Excerpt 14.5 (coaching 4) the coachee Pauline introduces herself through her main problem:

**Excerpt 14.5:**

- 1        *C: (smiling) "so what about you".*
- 2        *P: I have just been (-) betriebsbedingt gekündigt (= laid off for operational reasons), (-) downsized.*
- 3        *C: oh I see oh (-) where,*
- 4        *P: (nodding) at uh (-) my company was B. (COMPANY). out in E. (NEIGHBOURHOOD)?*
- 5        *C: (nodding) mhm,*
- 6        *P: that used to be B. (COMPANY). before that it was W. (COMPANY), and before that it was X. (COMPANY).*
- 7        *C: (laughing)*
- 8        *P: (smiling) I wasn't there that long though. it's just a bit over (-) two and a half years. two years and eight months.*
- 9        *C: hmm.*

As mentioned above, a dominant confirmative aspect in this sequence is the ratification of change: In turn 2 Pauline delivers the first pair part (NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE), whereas turn 3 represents the second pair part (RATIFICATION OF CHANGE). In this situation the change under discussion is negative. Thus, the coach expresses his sympathy to Pauline (*oh I see oh*). Moreover, the question in turn 1 could be classified as a first pair part according to the pattern SHOWING INTEREST (by inviting the other interactant to talk about him/herself). Accordingly, turn 2 would be the second pair part (ACCEPTING INTEREST (by talking about oneself)). Also, it is clear that the notification of change in turn 2 is a special case of the category SEEKING INTEREST (by telling a story/by talking about a problem); and turn 3 could be read as a second pair part to this confirmative sequence (SHOWING INTEREST (by listening to the story/by discussing the problem)).

In turn 4 the coach encourages the coachee to continue her story (SHOWING INTEREST (by inviting the other interactant to talk about him/herself/by asking a question)). Turn 5 represents the second pair part to this sequence (ACCEPTING INTEREST (by talking about oneself/by responding to the question)). At the same time, turns 5 and 7 contain a humorous element, to which turn 8 is the counterpart (the coach acknowledges the joke by laughing). In a more indirect way, however, the fact that the coachee talks about change and tells a joke to the coach can also be understood as a confirmation of his face, because essentially, all contributions to a conversation can be understood as positive attention toward the other interactants. This sequence clearly illustrates the complexity and equivocation of confirmative sequences. In many situations, different confirmative aspects may overlap,

intertwine, and at times imply each other.

### 14.2.3 Prototypical links between coaching interventions and rituals of identificatory sympathy

Having presented the general findings about rituals of identificatory sympathy in my corpus, I will now concentrate on the relations between this confirmative sequence type and the classic coaching interventions analysed in Chapters 8, 9, and 10. In fact, two of the three coaching interventions I have discussed thus far typically trigger confirmative sequences in different ways. First of all, questions about the other interactants often represent first pair parts of rituals of identificatory sympathy:

**Excerpt 14.6:**

- 1        *C: u::hm, (3s) a::nd, (-) do you like the situation? (...)*  
 2        *P: (nodding) (2s) no::, (-) I'm fine with it,*

The sequence in Excerpt 14.6 (coaching 4) follows the pattern SHOWING INTEREST (by asking a question about the other interactant) – ACCEPTING INTEREST (by talking about oneself); see Table 14.3 above. In this case, the confirmative action is initiated by the first speaker, and it is directed toward the face of the second. Moreover, question-answer sequences can also be interpreted in the other way: If the first speaker is regarded as someone in need of information, the second speaker may affirm the face of the first person by providing him/her with information, as shown in Excerpt 14.7 (coaching 1):

**Excerpt 14.7:**

- 1        *K: ok is it business coaching, personal coaching what's this the: ah,*  
 2        *C: ah normally I'm a business coach,*

Here the confirmative pattern is REQUESTING HELP (by asking for information) – PROVIDING HELP (by giving information), and it can be argued that the questioner activates a first pair part of a sequence intended to confirm his/her own face. Of course, questions can also be construed in a way that is face-threatening, rather than face-enhancing. For instance, I have established that some of the questions in my corpus function as challenges, which threaten the face of the other interactant. Moreover, when used in an inappropriate context, questions may violate the personal space of the other interactant in the sense of a threat to negative face (cf. Sections 8.2 and 14.3). However, most of the questions posed in my

corpus can be interpreted as face-maintaining.

Thus, it may be concluded that the coaching intervention 'questions' is a fundamental means of initiating confirmative sequences. The quantitative analysis has shown that questions are primarily used by the coaches in my corpus. From this finding, it follows that it is mainly the coaches who use questions to activate confirmative sequences. On the other hand, coachees do at times employ questions to affirm the faces of the coaches as well. Even more frequently, they initiate confirmative sequences primarily addressed to their own faces, as their questions often match the first pair part REQUESTING HELP, rather than the first pair part SHOWING INTEREST.

The second coaching intervention, i.e. feedback, is connected to face work in an even more fundamental way. I have introduced four types of feedback in Section 9.1: backchanneling, mirroring: repeating, mirroring: interpreting, and evaluating. Of these four types, the first differs from the other types considerably: As stated in Section 9.1,, backchanneling signals are verbal and para-verbal communicative activities that signal the hearers' attention, while not conveying any other factual information. Consider once again Excerpt 14.8, which was presented in Section 9.2:

**Excerpt 14.8:**

- 1        *P: (nodding) at uh (-) my company was B. (COMPANY). Out in E. (NEIGHBOURHOOD)?*
- 2        *C: (nodding) mhm,*
- 3        *P: that used to be B. (COMPANY). Before that it was W. (COMPANY), and before that it was X. (COMPANY).*
- 4        *C: (laughing)*

I have pointed out that the coach produces para-verbal (*mhm*; *(laughing)*) as well as non-verbal (*nodding*) backchanneling signals in this instance. The sequence is evidence of the fact that backchanneling fulfils two major functions. First, the coach uses feedback to communicate his attention to the coachee. Second, the backchanneling signals also constitute confirmative acts in terms of face work: The coach affirms Pauline's face by encouraging her situative communicative role as the narrator. By continuing her story, Pauline accepts this confirmation. Thus, Excerpt 14.8 contains two rituals of identificatory sympathy following the pattern SHOWING INTEREST (by encouraging the other interactant to talk about him/herself) – ACCEPTING INTEREST (by talking about oneself). Further, Pauline's narrative has an ironic note, which the coach acknowledges by means of laughter. This aspect, too, functions as an affirmation of the coachee's face.

Likewise, when interactants request feedback by means of backchanneling signals (such as *you know*, or *right*), they show an interest in their conversational partners. Thus,

requests for feedback also initiate rituals of identificatory sympathy. As stated in Section 9.1, backchanneling does not lend itself to quantitative analysis because backchanneling signals are almost ubiquitous accompaniments to most of the interactive moves made throughout the conversations. As single expressions, they may seem marginal, but when considered in combination, they form a crucial confirmative background to the coaching conversations in my corpus.

The second and the third type of feedback represent different kinds of mirroring activities. As established in Section 9.2, mirroring reflects to the other interactants which parts of their communication have been received, and (in the case of interpreting) how they have been understood. In particular, I have made the claim that mirroring: repeating involves the literal repetition of parts of the other interactant's statements. Mirroring: interpreting, in turn, produces interpretations of a selection of the other interactants' statements. Mirroring also functions as evidence of interest being taken in the other interactant, which can be seen clearly in the following Excerpt 14.9 (coaching 4):

**Excerpt 14.9:**

- 1        *P: it's to have a job where I AM taken seriously. Where somebody DOES listen to me.*
- 2        *C: (nodding slowly) so this is something important to you. (nodding)*
- 3        *P: (nodding)*

This sequence constitutes an instantiation of mirroring: interpreting, by which the coach signals his understanding and his acceptance of Pauline's wishes. In analogy to Excerpt 14.5, the coach's feedback can be interpreted as a first pair part of a confirmative sequence following the pattern SHOWING INTEREST (by mirroring) – ACCEPTING INTEREST (by accepting the mirroring action). Like backchanneling activities, all mirroring actions initiate rituals of identificatory sympathy.

The fourth feedback type, evaluating, is also generally used in a confirmative sense. As I have argued, it is concerned with assessments of the other interactants; and as there are no explicit negative evaluations in my corpus (cf. Section 9.2), evaluating actions can be regarded as prototypical triggers of confirmative sequences. What distinguishes evaluating actions from other coaching interventions in the area of feedback and from questions is the fact that they elicit more explicit face-confirmations. While questions activate the indirect expression of appreciation (e.g. by means of showing interest), evaluating actions provide specific and explicit verbal praise of the other interactant. Therefore, evaluating actions represent the resource that has the most distinct impact on individualised confirmations of the other interactants' faces and, thus, to face-enhancing communication.

The third type of coaching interventions, i.e. advice, relates to confirmative rituals in a



different way. I have already pointed out that advice may be experienced as a form of identificatory sympathy following either the pattern SEEKING INTEREST – SHOWING INTEREST or the pattern PROVIDING HELP – ACCEPTING HELP. In this perspective, advice activates confirmations of positive face. Moreover, other activities tied to advice-giving clearly carry face-related meaning. In particular, when coachees request advice or when they react to advice in positive ways (e.g. by agreeing with advice, embracing advice, and so on), they confirm the faces of the coaches. However, advice-giving is also potentially threatening in terms of negative face (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 66). In Western cultures in particular, advice is considered as inherently face-threatening to the autonomy of the advisee (cf. Locher 2006a; Section 5.6). Thus, advisors often employ confirmative activities to prepare the ground for the advice itself (cf. Section 14.3).

Overall, the coaching interventions discussed thus far are strongly linked to supportive behaviour and to prototypical supportive patterns in different ways. The ubiquitous presence of confirmative sequences throughout the sessions illuminates the fact that coaching conversations crucially rely on successful confirmative face work both by the coach and by the coachee. Also, the fact that coaching 5 is rather dysfunctional as a coaching session has much to do with how it co-occurs with a long series of severe face-related irritations (cf. Section 14.3). In sum, it is only in exceptional cases of violation that the importance and the omnipresence of a face-affirming equilibrium can be brought to light.

#### **14.2.4 Analysis of confirmative sequences in the individual conversations**

In the following discussion, I will sum up the findings of the analyses of confirmative sequences in the individual coaching sessions in my corpus. As I have established that the first two confirmative sequence types (access rituals and ritual offerings) are less revealing in terms of relational work, I will exclusively focus on the analysis of rituals of identificatory sympathy.

### **Coaching 1**

In coaching 1 both the coach and the coachee initiate and complete a broad range of confirmative sequences directed both at their own faces and at the face of the respective other. I have stated in Section 8.2 that coach I and the coachee Kate employ an unusually high number of questions as well as feedback actions. In doing so, the interactants initiate many rituals of identificatory sympathy. As far as her own face is concerned, Kate reluctantly

completes the confirmative sequences initiated by coach I in favour of her face. However, Kate gives much implicit and explicit positive feedback to the coach. Thus, she responds in overwhelmingly positive terms to his advice-giving, thus producing many face-enhancing elements. On the other hand, we have seen that Kate's ambiguity about her main coaching issue leads her to commit an equally high number of face-threatening resistance actions in response to advice. Thus, Kate's numerous confirmative moves work together to cushion her partly destructive resistance actions in terms of face work.

## Coaching 2

Coaching 2 is strongly characterised by confirmative patterns. Both interactants are highly appreciative of themselves and of their respective conversational partners; and the activities in the area of questions, feedback, and advice are nearly exclusively face-affirming. This includes implicit and explicit confirmative sequences both in favour of the coachee and the coach: While the coach presents himself positively, he also praises the coachee Bobbie many times, pointing out her many assets. Likewise, Bobbie confirms her own face in many instances, but she also expresses her appreciation of the coach's interventions on many occasions. As I have indicated in Section 9.2, this dynamic seems to have a tremendously positive effect on the atmosphere in the coaching session. There are many cases of face-enhancing behaviour, but the majority of the confirmative sequences represent unmarked, face-maintaining behaviour. Nevertheless, the overall atmosphere that emerges in the conversation is clearly face-enhancing for both interactants. This is evidence of the cumulative power of face-maintaining confirmative sequences.

## Coaching 3

After an initial struggle over authority issues, coaching 3 is conducted in a highly cooperative and appreciative mode. Although there are fewer instantiations of coaching interventions, the overwhelming majority of these activities fulfil crucial functions as face-maintaining and face-enhancing sequences. In particular, the coachee Rachel makes few, but very positive evaluative remarks about the coaching process, thus enhancing the coach's face. In this respect, it is worth repeating the observation that the quantity of confirmative coaching interventions may be, but does not have to be, tied to the quality of relationship creation.

## Coaching 4

In coaching 4 the coach activates many sequences confirming the coachee Pauline's face by means of questions. On the other hand, the coach uses little feedback and little advice action, which does not diminish the importance of the confirmative sequences that do occur: It has been shown (cf. Sections 9.2 and 10.2) that some of the most crucial confirmative events are tied to feedback and advice in this conversation. The coachee Pauline fully cooperates in confirmative sequences both directed at her own face and directed at the coach's face. However, there are few instantiations of unambiguous face-enhancing behaviour toward the coach, which seems to be related to Pauline's style of matter-of-fact and, at times, slightly distanced communication.

## Coaching 5

It has been a recurring theme in the prior chapters that coaching 5 is different from the other coachings with respect to its antagonistic character. Interestingly, despite the coachee Olivia's many face attacks (cf. Section 14.3), the majority of her contributions are, nevertheless, confirmative. This is evidence of the fact that confirmative actions are unmarked and preferred communicative behaviour in coaching conversations. Even if face-maintaining acts far outnumber the face-threatening activities, the interpersonal balance can be seriously disturbed by face attacks. However, while coach III produces face-enhancing behaviour by means of feedback activities, the coachee tends to reject the positive assessments of herself. Also, she produces much fewer instances of positive feedback than the other coachees in the corpus. In this case the low quantity of positive feedback actions does in fact correspond to the low quality of the rapport process. Moreover, the absence of marked face-enhancing behaviour on the side of the coachee might be symptomatic of the underlying tensions in the conversation.

### 14.2.5 Conclusion

The analysis of confirmative sequences has resulted in the following answers to my research questions:

1. All of the **confirmative sequence types** defined in Holly's (1979) framework, i.e. access rituals, ritual offerings, and rituals of identificatory sympathy, play vital roles in all of the coaching conversations in my corpus.

**2. Access rituals** clearly occur at the beginning and the ends of my coachings. **Ritual offerings**, on the other hand, may emerge throughout the conversations. Both confirmative sequence types tend to follow conventionalised forms, and the compliance with their patterns is unmarked. Thus, while they ensure the face-related balance on a basic level, they do not reveal much about the individual dynamics of the respective conversations. The access rituals in my corpus include the patterns GREETING – GREETING, and CLOSING – CONFIRMING CLOSING. With respect to ritual offerings, I have found the patterns POLITE REQUEST – GRATIFICATION, POLITE OFFER – THANKS/ACCEPTANCE, THANKS/POLITE DECLINE, and WELCOMING – ACCEPTANCE.

**3. Rituals of identificatory sympathy** represent a much more frequent, more complex, and potentially more customised type of confirmative sequence. They are prototypical forms for the realisation of face-confirmations.

**4.** My analyses have produced **four fundamental patterns** that function primarily to confirm the self, i.e. SEEKING INTEREST – SHOWING INTEREST, NOTIFYING CHANGE – RATIFYING CHANGE, REQUESTING HELP – PROVIDING HELP, and PRAISING SELF – CONFIRMING PRAISE. Confirmations that are primarily directed at the other may follow four complementary patterns, i.e. SHOWING INTEREST – ACCEPTING INTEREST, RATIFYING CHANGE – ACCEPTING RATIFICATION, PROVIDING HELP – ACCEPTING HELP, and PRAISING OTHER – ACCEPTING PRAISE. In practice, the first and the second set of patterns may be chained together, forming for instance a pattern such as SEEKING INTEREST – SHOWING INTEREST – ACCEPTING INTEREST. Thus, any element may simultaneously function as a first pair part and a second pair part, and it may serve to confirm the face of both interactants at the same time.

**5.** I have shown that the patterns in Conclusion 4 above may be **realised in a great variety of ways**. The overwhelming majority of communicative moves in my corpus are, on some level, parts of rituals of identificatory sympathy. I have shown how complex and multi-layered confirmative sequences can be by means of selected examples. In this respect I have established that most confirmative actions are committed implicitly.

**6.** Most rituals of identificatory sympathy represent **implicit confirmations**; and most of them can be categorised as face-maintaining, because they are unmarked. However, my data suggest that a consistent use of face-maintaining confirmative actions may combine to

create a markedly positive, face-enhancing atmosphere. Thus, the workings of confirmative activities seem to be complex and multi-layered.

**7. There are strong links between coaching interventions and rituals of identificatory sympathy.** I have shown that most of the questions in my corpus initiate confirmative sequences that may be oriented toward the faces of both interactants. It is especially the coaches that employ questions as a means of face work. Furthermore, the first three forms of feedback in my approach (backchanneling, mirroring: repeating, and mirroring: interpreting) activate implicit confirmative sequences, while the feedback type 'evaluating' triggers explicit confirmative sequences in the form of verbal praise. For this reason, evaluating is the most effective means to produce customised face-enhancements; that the coachees in coaching 4 and coaching 5 rarely employ this option is telling with respect to the more or less problematic relational dynamics of these conversations (cf. Chapter 14). Furthermore, I have established that requests for advice, advice-giving actions, and positive reactions to advice may also constitute elements of positive confirmative sequences. On the other hand, advice can certainly also fulfil face-threatening functions, which is the reason for it being so often surrounded by confirmative elements that mitigate the force of the speech act.

**8. The individual coachings all share a strong confirmative orientation** on the level of face work. All the interactants work towards face-related harmony by communicating in face-confirming ways (even though some of the coachees criticise themselves and, thus, force the coaches to produce repair sequences; cf. Section 14.3). Thus, my data suggest that confirmative communication constitutes the norm in business coaching conversations. However, I have pointed out that the individual coachings bring about unique features and styles of face confirmation. Coaching 5 represents an exception in that the coachee Olivia produces a high number of face violations (cf. Section 14.3). Nevertheless, even in this coaching, the confirmative moves are far more frequent than the face-threatening acts. This highlights the predominance and the preferred status of face-maintaining and face-enhancing communication.

**9. In sum, the analysis has shown that confirmative sequences are indispensable prerequisites for the successful course of coaching conversations.** They permeate all of the conversations from the beginning to the end, and they are essential for the creation of trustful coaching relationships. While all confirmative sequence types contribute to the process of relationship creation, rituals of identificatory sympathy are the most complex and most flexible sequence type in that they offer the opportunity to customise face confirmations in very individual ways. As far as face-maintaining and face-enhancing communication is

concerned, the analytical distinction has been exposed as useful, if not necessarily clear-cut. It is apparent that unmarked, face-maintaining behaviour comprises an enormous range of different communicative options, so that different instantiations of unmarked behaviour can lead to very different relational dynamics. For this reason, the analysis of face work alone is not enough to achieve a wider picture of relational work, but it should be combined with the analysis of identity construction and positioning and with an exploration of the specific relational dynamics emerging between the interactants.

## 14.3 Results of the analysis of face-saving, face-aggravating, and remedial face work

### 14.3.1 Face-saving strategies

As previously established, face-saving strategies hold the function of avoiding or mitigating face threats before they occur (cf. Sections 5.3; 5.8; 14.1). In this respect, each of the confirmative sequences discussed in the previous section can also be regarded as face-saving strategies. To be clear, it is only on the grounds of a sound confirmative basis that interactants may dare to ask critical questions, to give challenging advice, or to question the attitude of the other interactant. In particular, I have identified three face-saving strategies on the discourse level in my data (cf. Table 14.3):

Object of face-saving activity	Type of face-saving activity
Coaches saving the faces of coachees	Preparing the ground for advice
Coachees saving their own faces	Preparing the ground for problem construction
Coaches saving their own faces	Using disclaimer strategies

*Table 14.3: Overview of face-saving activities on the discourse level*

First, confirmative sequences must be interpreted as face-saving strategies when they prepare the ground for potentially face threatening acts, such as advice-giving. For instance, in Section 8.2 I have pointed out that Coach II uses a high number of questions before he gives advice to the coachee Rachel. Thus, he first offers the coachee opportunities to contribute to the solution herself. Also, by asking for the coachee's opinion and by processing her thoughts over a long period of time, he demonstrates his attention and his interest in her perspective. After having invested in face-saving purposes over a long stretch of talk, in the end, the coach presents an alternative solution to the coachee in an extended advice-giving action. In this way he reduces the force of face-aggravating acts and thus the likelihood of resistance actions against his advice. Interactants can achieve similar outcomes

by using other kinds of confirmative acts, e.g. realised by acts of feedback.

In much the same way, some of the coachees in my corpus prepare the ground for presentations of their problem constructions (in particular, Bobbie in coaching 2 and Rachel in coaching 3; see analysis in Section 13.4). In many ways, explanations of personal or professional problems are face-threatening to the speaker. In coaching 3 Rachel introduces herself by means of a long list of achievements, strengths, signs of status, and other positive elements. After having established her leadership skills and her popularity, Rachel finally sets out to introduce her problem with her former team member J.

Another type of face-saving strategy found in my corpus occurs when coaches announce that they are about to break their own rules or to use unorthodox methods. In these cases they protect their own faces from potential damage. For instance, in coaching 2, points out that it is a typical mistake of coaches that they tend to apply their own experience directly to the situation of the coachees (00:56:11). Despite this disclaimer, he goes on to give the coachee Bobbie a direct piece of advice based on his own experience: *but, ahm (-) I do it ahm (-) full of mind, (...) and well (-) there (-) is opportunity to fly, I (-) would fly* (00:56:29). Thus, disclaimer strategies prepare the ground for self-criticism. All three strategies can be considered as special cases of what Miller (2013: 81) calls “embedding ‘delicate’ material within longer syntactic or interactional material”.

### 14.3.2 Coaches threatening their own faces

In my corpus there are two types of face threats that coaches commit to their own faces. The first type is concerned with minor lapses resulting from language difficulties, misunderstandings, or knowledge gaps. In these situations the coaches fail to present themselves as capable and competent adults in control of themselves – or in Goffman’s terms, they fail to display appropriate ‘demeanour’ (cf. Goffman 1971; Section 5.1).

#### Excerpt 14.10:

- 1        *K: which would require me setting aside an hour a day to do it.*
- 2        *C: sorry?*
- 3        *K: setting aside one hour a day,*
- 4        *C: yeah yeah yeah.*

Excerpt 14.10 (coaching 1) is an example of a small infringement immediately repaired by a remedial sequence. By indicating that he could not grasp what Kate said, the coach displays a small weakness regarding his communicative competence, thus threatening his own

image. Also, he might appear inattentive to his fellow interactant; and he causes Kate to interrupt her speech, thus potentially disturbing her personal 'sacred space' (cf. Section 5.1). Therefore, indirectly, he is also threatening Kate's face. Notably, in this case the conventionalised discourse marker *sorry* represents the violation, the priming action, and the remedy all in one.<sup>44</sup> Also, it serves as a trigger for the coachee to repeat her utterance, so that the conversation resumes again quickly.

Incidents of this type are typically minor. The coachees usually do not comment on them at all – with the exception of the coachee Olivia in coaching 5, who corrects and complements the coach's language in marked ways several times (cf. Section 14.3.8). Nevertheless, the fact that small mishaps are regularly remediated shows that their mending is relevant to the face-related balance in the conversation. On the other hand, there is likely a limit to the amount of minor infringements that an interactant can commit and remediate without undermining his/her self-presentation in the conversation. This would seem to be especially true for the role of the coach with its requirements of competency and poise. Moreover, in some situations the coaches display hints of embarrassment when they struggle for words in English.

The second type of face threats by coaches against themselves that emerges in my corpus is marked by means of meta-comments on coaching methods. As I have established above in the context of face-saving strategies, there are several situations in which coaches comment on their own coaching styles, indicating that they have broken their rules or that they have deviated from their coaching methodology. For example, in coaching 2, evaluates the session as atypical: *actually this wasn't a real coaching, in case of or in terms of personality, but- (...) it's not the right time for this* (01:00:57). In brief, these cases of meta-comments correspond to the ones described in Section 14.3.1 under the label of 'disclaimer strategies'. While disclaimers can be categorised as face-saving due to their mitigating function, they also function as markers of face damage and as remedial elements. In practice, the concepts of face-saving and remediating activities often merge into one. With respect to the severity of this type of face-damaging behaviour, most of the instantiations seem to be assessed as more severe than the first type by the coaches (but not by the coachees). This is apparent from the effort the coaches make in order to justify their courses of action. They clearly feel strongly committed to their methodologies, and aberrations from their standards seem to lead to clashes within their professional self-concepts.

Apart from these two contexts, the coaches in my corpus generally do not consciously threaten their own faces. They do not place their identities as up for discussion in the way that the coachees do; they do not question themselves; and they certainly do not criticise themselves in the harsh manner that some coachees do. The role asymmetry seems to

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<sup>44</sup>A different choice of discourse marker, such as *what?*, or *huh?* would have fulfilled the same trigger function for the flux of the conversation, but it would not have implied an apology for a potential face threat.



prevent the coaches from setting themselves up as the centre of attention and from presenting themselves in negative ways.

### 14.3.3 Coachees threatening their own faces

The constellation of coachees threatening their own faces is very frequent in my corpus. This phenomenon occurs mainly in three different types of situations. In analogy to the categorisation in the previous section, the first type is concerned with minor lapses. The coachees are all native speakers, but even so, they sometimes struggle for the right words. Also, there are a few unintentional incidents and misunderstandings: For instance, in coaching 2 the coachee Bobbie accidentally knocks over a water bottle that sits on the floor; and in coaching 3 the coachee Rachel accidentally puts the business card she has given to the coach back into her bag. Again, these minor infringements are repaired routinely (typically, the offenders use the discourse markers *sorry*, and *excuse me* as remedies; and often both interactants use laughter to remediate the offence and to express relief). When repaired properly, the incidents do not seem to have much impact on the images of the coachees. Yet these temporary displays of carelessness and/or lack of control are remediated.

The second type of face threat committed by coachees to their own faces emerges when the coachees construe their problem accounts. As mentioned above, talking about problems is an inherently face-threatening action in many ways: By admitting to having a problem, an interactant simultaneously presents him/herself with a reduced degree of power, competency, and control. Also, coachees must make decisions as to the degree of responsibility they attribute to themselves and, potentially, to other protagonists in their accounts.

The face-saving strategy 'preparing the ground' has been introduced in relation to problem presentations. Coachees must risk face damage in order to communicate the problems they want to discuss with the coach. For instance, in one situation in coaching 2 Bobbie presents a problem construction, and the coach signals his awareness of the face-threatening implications by means of non-verbal and para-verbal signals (he responds to Bobbie's amused tone with a smile, and he speaks in a soft tone; cf. Miller 2013). The remedy to the face threat is provided by Bobbie herself, who immediately goes on to talk about a recent success. Later on, she stresses the fact that she can cope with rejections, because she is such a relaxed person: *but (-) you know. (-) since I'm (smiling) (-) pretty easy-going, it kind of (...) bothers me for a couple of days, and then, (...) (smiling) I get back to work*, (00:31:57).

The third type of face threat by coachees committed against their own faces is

concerned with self-criticism. In fact, the coachees Bobbie (coaching 2) and Pauline (coaching 4) never commit intentional face threats to themselves, apart from the face threats implied in their problem constructions. The other three coachees, on the other hand, exercise strong self-criticism in many instances. Thus, by explicitly attacking themselves, they advertently add to the load of the face threat that comes with having problems in the first place. The spectrum of criticism starts with small confessions of shortcomings (e.g. Kate admits that she sometimes fails to organise her own time, although she is mostly good at it (00:22:23)); and it ends with coachees' general devaluations of themselves: Kate (coaching 1) conceives of herself as *her own worst enemy*; Olivia claims that she is doomed to live a meaningless life as a lonely spinster (coaching 5); and Rachel thinks she is too soft (coaching 3). Strong face threats like these influence their self-presentations in powerful ways. From the perspective of self-presentation and positioning, the face-damaging activities combine into negative self-evaluative clusters (cf. Chapter 13); and as such, they convey negative self-concepts. These negative self-presentations tend to influence the coaching sessions tremendously – the overview on the dominating themes shows that negotiations of identity and face play an extremely important role in the conversations (cf. Chapter 4).

Regarding repair activities, in coaching 1 it is mostly Coach I who remediates Kate's face by contradicting her self-criticism. II attempts to do the same for Olivia, but her coachee tends to reject her positive evaluating actions (cf. Section 9.2). In the case of Rachel, I mostly leaves her priming actions uncommented, refusing to provide the remediating elements. It is only at a comparatively late stage of the session that he explicitly addresses the issue: *'hh mmm as long as you say, uhm I'm feeling weak uhm, (-) the weakness will grow* (00:50:26). Afterwards, he advises Rachel to change the way in which she talks to herself (00:50:36).

### 14.3.4 Coaches threatening the faces of coachees

In several instances in my corpus, coachees indicate attacks against their faces by the coaches. Some of these incidents are tied to coaching-specific issues, in particular to the negotiation of problem constructions, and to advice-giving. Others emerge inadvertently in the same way that critical incidences may occur in any oral conversation. The following excerpt from coaching 4 represents a face attack occurring during the negotiation of a problem construction:

#### Excerpt 14.11:

- 1 C: so, (3s) *'h what I perceive while listening to you is uhm, (4s) there's not a huge need to:: go back again in terms of thinking what happened there, what could I change, it's more, (-) (moving his hand forward and backward in one quick movement) I left the scene and "what's good it works". so, (-) do you need any further time to spend there, what the pattern is about or, (-) I don't know if that-*

- (5s)
- 2      *P: what the pattern is about? I don't think, I don't think-*
- 3      *C: [it's just a strange (-) boss or,]*
- 4      *P: [xxxx a pattern.] (-) I think it was just him. because I asked him, (-) because I asked him, in that (-) I mean that con- that to- conversation last November, it took a long time. we were (-) talking for about two hours.'hh (-) a::nd he was telling me those things that had happened far in the past, (-) and I asked him, but (-) why didn't you tell me at the TIME. 00:27:21-6*
- 5      *C: (nodding)*

This excerpt was first presented in the analysis of advice (cf. Section 10.2). Here I suggests that Pauline's conflict with her former boss may be indicative of a certain communicative pattern on her part. Later in the conversation, he will mirror to Pauline that she may have conveyed passive aggression to her boss and that she might want to work on her communicative habits. However, at this point Pauline rejects the idea of a *pattern*, because she does not feel responsible for the problem at all. She interprets the coach's suggestion as an unjust accusation, and she remediates her face by giving evidence that it is her boss who is responsible. In the end, she finishes by arguing that her boss is *to put it harshly, an IDIOT* (00:27:47), a claim that the coach does not question at this point. He chooses to switch the topic because Pauline does not seem ready yet to put up with his criticism.

Moreover, I have established that advice can be experienced as face-threatening, especially when a coachee feels underestimated. For instance, when gives advice on energy management in coaching 1, the coachee Kate produces a resistance action, stating: *[that's true]. and that's something I've worked on.* (00:09:45). Even though the setting of coaching conversations suggests that the coach help the coachee with a problem, the interactants must negotiate the scope of asymmetry and their respective 'territories of knowledge' (cf. Liebscher Dailey-O'Cain 2007).

To further generalise this finding, face damage by coaches against coachees occurs when the coachees feel misrepresented regarding aspects of their social or professional identities. Depending on the degree of misrepresentation, the coachees mark potential face threats as such, or they pass over them. For instance, in coaching 2, talks about musicians. He tells Bobbie (who, as we remember, has introduced herself as a singer) that he is not a musician himself, but that he knows a piano player: *and he told me (-) uhm a lot of ah piano players or musicians uh, drink lots of alcohol uh, (...) on their own? and uh also together with other people* (00:35:30). This account must be interpreted as potentially face-aggravating to Bobbie because she has made a point of characterising singers as fun and sociable, whereas the coach makes them sound more like a group with a high potential for alcoholism. However, it is rather clear from the context that the coach wants to encourage Bobbie to make use of the sociable trait that is supposedly shared by musicians and to attend parties

for networking purposes. This is evidence that the coach did not intend to devalue the sociability of Bobbie's membership group. Bobbie, for one, does not challenge the coach's argument.

### 14.3.5 Coachees threatening the faces of coaches

The face-aggravating actions committed by coachees to the faces of coaches represent a diverse collection in my corpus. There is one case of a minor lapse, namely when the coachee Kate complies with the coach's request to list her strengths, but initially forgets to write them down (coaching 1). Moreover, an important source of potential face damage is resistance against advice, because in these cases the coaches' competency is questioned. However, the coaches' reaction to the resistance is crucial: In general, the coaches in my corpus do not mark resistance as face-aggravating. This is not to say that the coaches do not experience it as such: It is possible that the coaches' professional roles prompt them to pass over face-damaging aspects of resistance despite experiencing negative affective reactions. For instance, as discussed in Section 10.2, in coaching 4 the coachee Pauline produces several unmitigated resistance activities. At times, she does not react to advice at all, whereas in other cases she expresses her disapproval in non-verbal ways, e.g. by means of frowning. I, however, tends to react to Pauline's expressions of resistance in a friendly and humorous manner. In several instances he simply asks the coachee about her state of mind: *what does happen to (touching his heart with his right hand) you. while I'm talking "like" that to you. (laughing)* (00:57:08). It is likely that the interactants regard this kind of poise concerning the management of potentially face-threatening situations as a distinctive role requirement of the coaches.

Other sources of face threats emerge when coachees implicitly characterise the coaches by means of group stereotyping (e.g. when the coachees talk about Germans or Germany). Yet one of the most important triggers of face attacks is represented by communication that undermines the role of the coach. In one of the more harmless situations the coachee Kate (coaching 1) humorously criticises the coaching process, i.e. the fact that she is supposed to do some homework: *it's one of the reasons I quit my job, (ceasing to write) so I wouldn't have to (laughing) send reports*, (01:17:03). Both interactants mark the face threat as minor by means of laughing and smiling, but nevertheless, the coach marks the face threat as such and remediates his face (*I don't see it as a report* (01:17:07)). Kate is quick to restore the ritual order by means of an additional action: she undoes her violation by stating it was just *kidding* (01:17:07). In contrast, coaching 5 features plenty of instances of role challenges which represent very severe face attacks (cf. Section 14.3.8). Also, the struggle over authority issues at the beginning of coaching 3 must be seen as a very marked

incident with respect to face issues. Finally, the resistance acts in coaching 4 might have led to face-related disruptions in other settings, but, as I have pointed out, Coach II chooses not to take her communicative actions personally.

Overall, my analyses have brought to light a wide range of face threats to coaches by coachees. However, in many situations the coaches seem to generously overlook potential face threats, thus retaining the focus of the conversation on their coachees and demonstrating poise. The more a face attack undermines the role of the coach, the more severe it is and the more likely it is that the coaches implicitly mark face threats as such. While this is not true for Coach III (cf. Section 14.3.8), in the case of Coach II we have seen that he does engage in the struggle over authority in coaching 3, defending his professional identity and, thus, his face, before he successfully leads over to a more cooperative mode (cf. Section 13.4).

### 14.3.6 Afterburn sequences - third parties threatening the faces of coachees

A fair amount of the remedial sequences initiated by the coachees refer to absent others. In Goffman's terminology, they represent afterburn sequences: As the face threat has not been remediated in the primary interaction, the coachee brings up the issue once more in the coaching session. A major point of these afterburn sequences is to convince the coach that he/she should take the side of the coachee. In Excerpt 14.12 (coaching 3) the coachee Rachel presents one out of a very large series of allegations against third parties:

#### Excerpt 14.12:

- 1        *R: (pointing to the document) also an ex-salesman is our head of marketing.*
- 2        *C: mhm,*
- 3        *R: and he is my biggest adversary within the company. (-) 'h uhm, (-) 'h he used to walk into my department and say, (expressive) good morning, LACK of business intelligence.*
- 4        *C: (laughing, taking a sip of tea)*
- 5        *R: and he is another person who really undermined my confidence and made me wanna fight back. 'h BU:T. (-) I have proved to him, (-) that I can bring a team together. who can create really good business analyses.*
- 6        *C: (nodding)*

Rachel characterises the head of marketing as her *biggest adversary within the company* (3); and she delivers a grounder highlighting this man's malignity (*he used to walk into my department and say, (expressive) good morning, LACK of business intelligence. (3)*). The coach acknowledges the tellability of the story by laughing (4), but he does not provide any

remedy for Rachel's face. In fact, Rachel provides the remedy herself by pointing out that she has successfully proven the head of marketing wrong (5).

In my corpus there are strong differences concerning the use of afterburn sequences by the coachees. In coachings 1, 2, and 5 this special case of a remedial sequence plays a minor role. However, the coachee Pauline (coaching 4) initiates several afterburn sequences concerning her former boss and her former colleagues. The coachee Rachel (coaching 3) draws on this sequence type constantly. As has been established, both coaching 3 and coaching 4 are led by Coach II, who generally presents himself as reluctant to complete the afterburn sequences by providing remedies. In both coachings he listens sympathetically to the accounts, signalling his attention and his benevolence by means of backchanneling activities. However, he does not seem to regard it as his primary task to remediate faces in hindsight. Instead, he tends to shift the focus away from the aggressors in the narratives, and concentrates on the feelings of the coachees. In this way he is able to address the underlying issues, rather than just remediate individual cases of face threat.

### **14.3.7 Analysis of face-saving strategies, face damages, and remedial sequences in the individual coachings**

#### **Coaching 1**

Coaching 1 features all of the types of face threats that have been discussed up to this point. However, overwhelmingly the most frequent type of face threat in coaching 1 consists of violations committed by the coachee against her own face. As outlined in the previous sections, the coachee Kate's preference for negative complementary clusters of self-evaluation and her frequent claims of being her *own worst enemy* contribute to a high rate of face threats against her own self. This is also more than evident in her problem accounts.

Coach I is eager to remediate Kate's face whenever she is self-critical, but by the end of the conversation he seems to get slightly tired of doing so, and he starts to pass over many of Kate's threats to her own face. At other times, the coachee provides the remedial action herself. As far as resistance is concerned, we have seen in Section 10.2 that Kate produces a very high amount of activities in this area. However, Coach I does not usually mark expressions of resistance as face threats. In sum, the remedial sequences triggered by threats to Kate's own face and completed with remediations by Coach I represent the most dominant pattern in the conversation (cf. Section 16.2).

## Coaching 2

Coaching 2 is special with regard to two aspects: It does not feature any instantiations of serious face threats by the coachee against the coach; and neither does the coachee present serious cases of afterburn sequences. This finding is in line with the generally confirmative atmosphere of the session. Furthermore, it has been shown that the coachee Bobbie uses face-saving strategies such as preparing the ground, as well as remedial activities, when presenting her problem accounts. The analysis of positioning and self-presentation in Section 13.3 has demonstrated that Bobbie makes a huge effort to establish herself as an unproblematic, relaxed personality. It seems essentially important to her self-concept to remediate face threats concerning this self-aspect. In line with this positioning strategy, Bobbie typically never criticises herself in any severe way.

Regarding the face work of Coach I in coaching 2, he commits a few minor face threats to himself, which he instantly remediates. Moreover, in Section 14.3.4 I have presented one of three situations in which Coach I inadvertently threatens the coachee Bobbie's face (by characterising musicians as having a strong affinity to alcohol). Overall, coaching 2 is largely dominated by confirmative patterns and by an eagerness to eliminate any face threatening elements as quickly as possible.

## Coaching 3

Coaching 3 is characterised by a high degree of self-criticism by the coachee and by a high frequency of afterburn sequences. However, the coachee Rachel employs many face-saving strategies (in particular, the strategy 'preparing the ground'; see Section 14.3.1); and she also completes many afterburn sequences herself, thus repairing her own face. I have established the fact that Rachel can be extremely hard on herself – a phenomenon that is discussed explicitly in the coaching conversation (cf. Section 13.4.7). In contrast to Coach I in coaching 1, Coach II does not usually do the remediation work for Rachel. Instead, he advises her to change the way she is talking to herself (cf. Section 14.3.3). Moreover, Rachel's frequent use of afterburn sequences supports her presentation of her workplace as a hostile environment (cf. Section 13.4). Again, Coach II mostly refuses to complete the afterburn sequences initiated by the coachee. Instead, he shifts the focus to Rachel's feelings, as well as to the feelings of her team members. In the course of the session, the coachee seems to restore her image as a leader; and in consequence, to focus on her resources. In the process of regaining her confidence, the afterburn sequences gradually seem to lose some of their importance to the coachee.

## Coaching 4

Coaching 4 is the only conversation with a comparatively even distribution of types of face damage. In other words, it features several instances of all of the types discussed above. Thus, Coach II commits a few minor threats against his own face; and the coachee Pauline threatens her face implicitly by means of her problem construction (however, Pauline never criticises herself explicitly). As discussed in Section 14.3.4, Pauline marks threats to her face by the coach in a few instances, for example when she rejects the idea of a *pattern* of communicative behaviour as the cause of her work conflicts.

As was also previously established, Pauline's resistance actions may be considered as face-threatening to the coach, especially because she makes very little effort to mitigate them. However, Coach II does not mark any of these activities as violating his own face needs. He does, however, address Pauline's interpersonal communication style in the context of her work conflicts. It is most likely that Pauline's somewhat unrefined face work in the coaching interaction may have inspired his analysis of her work communication. Furthermore, Pauline launches a series of afterburn sequences against her former boss and her former colleagues. Again, Coach II refuses to complete the sequences. Instead, the remedy is provided by the coachee herself, whereas the coach tries to reframe the conflict as a learning situation.

## Coaching 5

The previous chapters have demonstrated clearly that coaching 5 turns somewhat into a battlefield with respect to face work. This is mainly due to the more or less subtly uncooperative communicative style displayed by the coachee Olivia. Interestingly, she does not only damage the coach's face in numerous situations, but also her own face. Concerning the first type of face threat, I will reconsider Excerpt 14.13 (coaching 5) from Section 13.6:

### Excerpt 14.13:

- 1      *O: my question is, ah, I'm ah (-) very interested, I I see, I've read some of the books that you have, I'm aware of some of these techniques these tools,*
- 2      *C: (nodding) mhm,*
- 3      *O: these procedures methods processes structures and all that, and I'm interested in it, I'm wondering ahm (2s) h" to what extent it's (long nod) FEASIBLE, (-) and also financially attractive, because at the university I have an infrastructure. I'm allowed to use their entire infrastructure I have a certain unit status. when you say that you're a Dozent (= lecturer) or a lecturer, (-) you get a little bit of recognition and respect. when you say you::re (-) a freelance*



- coach they all look at you OH, well you couldn't get a real job. a lot of (raising her eyebrows, nodding) oh yeah. you know, look at XING (= German social network for professionals),*
- 4 C: *(moving around in her chair, looking on the floor, folding her hands)*
- 5 O: *look at [ALL]-*
- 6 C: *[okay,]*
- 7 O: *the little Möchtegerns (= wannabes) that-*
- 8 C: *mhm,*
- 9 O: *wannabes on XING who who (-) you know, they basically couldn't get (-) 'h uh other jobs, I can get (tapping on the table with her left hand several times) ANY job as a Dozent (= lecturer) at any university, because of my background, my age, but my age is going to be a handicap, it's xx I'm (putting her left hand to her heart) fifty, (-) and (-) [and there's-]*
- 10 C: *[okay. so what] are you doing right (putting her hand up and down on the table several times) NOW, and what are you looking for.*

I have previously identified the contradictory claims Olivia makes about the membership group of coaches: Sometimes she aligns herself with them, and sometimes she does not; sometimes she expresses her wish to be one of them in the future, and sometimes she classifies them as socially inferior to herself. The excerpt above is clearly an example of a derogatory characterisation of the coaching profession. Olivia begins by expressing her interest in the books about coaching that she can see on the coach's shelves. She then sets out to construe an indirect question to the coach (i.e. whether this profession could be *FEASIBLE* and *financially attractive* to her (line 3)). Following that, she immediately expresses her doubts concerning her idea, arguing that as a university lecturer she can draw on an *infrastructure*; and she is attributed a certain *status*: *when you say that you're a Dozent (= lecturer) or a lecturer, (-) you get a little bit of recognition and respect. when you say you::'re (-) a freelance coach they all look at you OH, well you couldn't get a real job* (line 3).

Needless to say, this statement contains a very severe face threat, because Olivia's scathing verdict about freelance coaches extends to the group member to whom she is speaking at that very moment. Not only does Olivia invalidate the coach's professional identity, but her claim also violates the role balance of the coaching setting. If the coachee does not appreciate the role of the coach, it does not make much sense to seek advice and guidance from her in the first place. Thus, the evaluation above is in line with Olivia's general refusal to cooperate with the coach.

Olivia's face attack becomes even more severe when she further supports her argument. She argues that the social network site XING is full of *little Möchtegerns (= wannabes) that (...) basically couldn't get (-) 'h uh other jobs* (line 9). As is typical for Olivia's face-related behaviour in this session, she does not remediate her face attack in any way – whether this is due to the fact that she has not realised the face threat at all or whether she insults the coach intentionally remains unclear. Further, her confidential and superficially cordial mode certainly adds a disparate element to the face-aggravating force of the overall

sequence. However, it is clear that Olivia's face attacks contribute massively to the dysfunctional interpersonal patterns that emerge in this conversation (cf. Section 14.6).

It is of note that Coach III reacts to the face threat by ignoring it altogether – she retains this strategy throughout the conversation. At the beginning, she conveys the impression that she is willing to overlook Olivia's face-related offences. Later on, it seems more as though she has given up on the session and just wants to get it over with. In this respect, Coach III might be considered as threatening her own face by not fighting for her authority as a coach (e.g. in the way Coach II defends his authority against the attacks of the coachee Rachel at the beginning of coaching 3) and by neglecting her responsibility for the process. It is possible that Coach III feels that her proficiency in the English language is not sufficient to fight a war with Olivia, although this is probably not the case. The fact that the coaching session is filmed to be analysed might add to the pressure on Coach III and to her refusal to address the face threats head-on.

Another characteristic of Olivia's style is the way in which she seamlessly leads over from describing herself as superior (thus violating the modesty principle) to characterising herself as problematic (thus threatening her face by means of self-criticism). This inconsistent line of self-presentation may be regarded as threatening her own face, as well. Further, while she seems to intend that her problem constructions prompt compassion and solidarity from the coach, this concept is certainly undermined by the blatant threats to the coach's face that she has launched just seconds earlier. It is exactly this juxtaposition of contradictory interpersonal strategies that makes Olivia's communicative style in this session appear incoherent, and often downright disconcerting and exhausting for the coach. Thus, by displaying inconsistency, Olivia implicitly threatens her own face. This kind of face threat also occurs, for instance, when the coachee talks about her criminal past without remediating her responsibility (cf. Section 13.6), or when she displays contradictory attitudes with respect to relationships (see Section 13.6).

The other source of face threats by Olivia to herself is the harsh self-criticism she often displays. In Section 13.6 I have explained in detail that Olivia presents herself as problematic with regard to a wide range of issues. One of her main complaints concerns her age. In one situation she describes the *change* mature women undergo (00:18:51), enumerating the symptoms of menopause (*don't have your period anymore, ahm your weight is changing, your skin, unfortunately your hair, (...) everything you know your nails xx, (...) your health (-) is changing*, (00:19:01). This account is face-damaging to herself as well as to the coach, because both women belong to the membership group of mature women that Olivia describes. Moreover, the face damage to the interactants is twofold: On the one hand, the coachee describes mature women in a devaluing way, calling them *old ugly women*, who are *socially irrelevant* (00:19:17) and comparing them to unwanted goods (we

*lose our (-) market value, (00:10:18)).* At the same time, Olivia's detailed account may also be considered as touching taboo topics, whose explicit discussion among strangers is regarded as dispreferred in many contexts (i.e. the issues of sexuality and body functions).

Table 14.4 gives an overview of the most salient face-damaging instantiations against the coach. Their scope is impressive: The coachee's violations range from subtle disclosures of knowledge gaps to implicit role challenges by means of sabotaging the coaching process, to invasions of private space and explicit attacks on aspects of the coach's identity. In some ways, these types of face threats partly overlap, so that it is, for example, fair to claim that each and every face threat in the list ultimately represents an implicit role challenge.

Incident no.	Explanation of incident	Type of face damage
1	Olivia interrogates the coach about her marketing strategy	Challenging role of the coach
2	Olivia claims that coaches are just wannabes who could not get other jobs	Attacking coach's professional identity (via professional membership group)
3	Olivia devalues the coach's company, because it is small	Attacking interactant's professional identity
4	Olivia corrects a mistake by the coach in a marked way	Marking knowledge gap/error
5	Olivia threatens her own face and that of the coach by devaluing mature women and by discussing the physical and social effects of menopause in great detail	Attacking the coach's social identity (via social membership group), invading private space
6	Olivia speculates about the coach's private situation and her marital status	Invading private space
7	Olivia makes a compliment in a way that must be interpreted as patronising (I)	Challenging role of the coach
8	Olivia implies that the coach should know the name of a particular writer, which she does not	Marking knowledge gap/error
9	Olivia corrects the coach's language in a marked way	Marking knowledge gap/error
10	When the coach is struggling for words for a second, Olivia complements the coach's language in a marked way (I)	Marking knowledge gap/error
11	When the coach struggles for words for a second, Olivia complements the coach's language in a marked way (II)	Marking knowledge gap/error
12	Olivia interrupts the coach's advice-giving action (I)	Challenging role of the coach
13	Olivia interrupts the coach's advice-giving action (II)	Challenging role of the coach
14	Olivia claims that German women do not seem to care how they look	Attacking coach's social identity (via social membership group)
15	Olivia talks about the supposedly very high earnings of executive coaches	Invading private space (via professional membership group)
16	Olivia responds to the coach's advice by asking unrelated questions	Challenging role of the coach
17	Olivia makes a compliment in a way that must be interpreted as patronising (II)	Challenging role of the coach

*Table 14.4: List of the most striking face-damaging acts against Coach III in coaching 5*

To summarise, Olivia's sabotage activities concerning the coaching process represent serious face threats in themselves. Yet the reverse is also true: By committing face attacks of various kinds, the coachee sabotages the emergence of a functioning coaching relationship.

Coach III never challenges Olivia's irritating communicative style, but she consistently passes over the face threats, trying to focus on the 'official' coaching issue. Her refusal to address the interpersonal friction may be considered as threatening to her own face, because, in part, she neglects the responsibility she has for the coaching process.

### 14.3.8 Conclusion

The analysis of face-saving strategies, face attacks, and remedial sequences in my corpus has led to the following results:

1. With respect to face-saving activities I have found two strategies on the interactive level of communication. First, the interactants often prepare the ground for potentially face-damaging acts with confirmative activities. In particular, coaches prepare the ground for advice in order to save the coachees' faces, and coachees prepare the ground for their problem constructions in order to save their own faces. Second, coaches use disclaimer strategies to protect their faces before they break rules concerning the coaching methodology.
2. All of the five possible directions of face attacks are relevant in my corpus (for an overview of the results see Table 14.5). The severity of face damage is not measurable in absolute terms, but the incidents can often be categorised as more or less severe in relation to each other. In my overview I have acknowledged this by means of three levels of severity (i.e. a low, medium, or high degree of severity respectively).
3. The first type of possible direction of face attacks, i.e. coaches threatening their own faces, emerges in two different contexts in my corpus: First, coaches commit minor lapses (e.g. resulting from language difficulties). These incidents are immediately remediated and usually passed over by the coachees. Second, in analogy to the disclaimer strategy, coaches may remediate violations of established coaching methodologies after the fact. These incidents seem to be considered as more severe face threats, which are remediated thoroughly and extensively.
4. The second type, i.e. coachees threatening their own faces, partially follows the same patterns of the first type, namely when coachees commit minor lapses to their own faces (e.g. resulting from physical mishaps). Remedial sequences can repair and close this kind of violation quickly. Moreover, coachees threaten their own faces when they present their problem constructions. I have shown that problem presentations are inherently face-damaging, but are at the same time a necessary requirement of the process. Thus, all of the

coachees in my corpus need to commit this kind of face threat – however, the degree of face-saving, the degree of mitigation, and the general construal tend to display the underlying self-evaluative stances held by the coachees. Third, three of the coachees in my corpus deliberately threaten their own faces by criticising themselves. In some cases the coaches provide the remediation; and in others the coachees do so, but there are also many cases of unremediated face threats.

Object of face damage	Type of face damage	Typical degree of severity	Typical remedial patterns
Damage to own face: coaches	Coaches committing minor lapses	Low	Very casual remedy by coaches, no further attention to incident
	Coaches deviating from their coaching methodology	Medium	Coaches providing grounders and excuses, no further attention to incident
Damage to own face: coachees	Coachees committing minor lapses	Low	Very casual remedy by coachees, no further attention to incident
	Coachees construing problem accounts	Medium to high, depending on the coachees' self-presentations	Coachees providing more or less mitigation and reinforcement
	Coachees criticising themselves	Medium to high, depending on the coachees' self-presentations	Coachees providing more or less mitigation and reinforcement; Coach I and Coach III often provide remedies
Damage to other's face: Coaches attacking the faces of coachees	Coaches giving advice that damages faces of coachees	Medium to high, depending on the coachees' interpretations	Coaches revise advice, withdraw it, or pass over incident
	Coaches attacking social or professional identities of coachees	Medium to high, depending on the coachees' interpretations	Coaches revise statement, withdraw it, or pass over incident
Damage to other's face: Coachees attacking the faces of coaches	Coachees committing minor lapses that have an effect on the coaches	Low	Very casual remedy by coachees, no further attention to incident
	Coachees attacking social or professional identities of coaches	Medium to high, depending on the coaches' interpretations	Coachees revise statement, withdraw it, or pass over incident
	Coachees challenging roles of the coaches	Medium to high, depending on the coaches' interpretations	Coachees revise statement, withdraw it, or pass over incident
Afterburn sequence: Coachees reporting damage to their faces by third parties	Coachees report attacks by third parties	Medium to high, depending on the coachees' interpretations	Coaches provide remedies; more often, coachees provide remedies themselves

Table 14.5: Overview of face-aggravating patterns in the coaching corpus

5. The third type, i.e. coaches threatening the faces of coachees, may be concerned with minor infringements, or with more severe face threats. As far as the latter are concerned, some incidents are tied to coaching-specific activities. In particular, negotiations of problem

constructions are very face-sensitive, and the same is true for advice-giving. In other situations, the coaches simply misrepresent the coachees regarding aspects of their identities, thus committing attacks that might occur outside of the coaching setting as well.

**6.** The fourth type, i.e. coachees threatening the faces of coaches, may also be tied to coaching-specific activities. For example, resistance to advice is potentially face-threatening, although the coaches in my corpus tend to pass over the threats. Also, at times coachees undermine the role of the coaches (e.g. by competing for the role of the moderator). Moreover, coachees may attack aspects of the coaches' identities.

**7.** The fifth type, i.e. third parties threatening the faces of coachees (which I also refer to as 'afterburn sequence'), represents a common category in my corpus: Coachees do enter coaching interactions for advice and training, but they may also strive for vindication concerning face-aggravating situations in prior interactions. Afterburn sequences are particularly frequent in two conversations in my corpus. In both sessions Coach II is reluctant to complete the sequences, so that the coachees often provide the remedies themselves. However, the coach addresses the underlying issues in a way that shifts the focus away from temporary face repairs and toward change.

**8.** With respect to the individual coaching conversations, the management of face-aggravating communication has been exposed as a crucial element of the relational level. The remediation of face threats is a vital element in the creation of relationships. Also, it seems to be a sign of successful face work if coaches pass over potential face threats. On the other hand, when face threats are severe and when they occur very frequently, the strategy of overlooking face violations no longer works as an effective strategy. This is apparent in the case of coaching 5, which is an example of a disturbed face-related balance and a seriously impaired bonding process. In general, my data suggest that face-damaging behaviour is not socially expected or sanctioned in the genre of business coaching conversations.

**9.** In sum, face-saving strategies, face damages, and remedial sequences have proven to be key to understanding the dynamics of the conversations. The analysis of sequence types, as coined by Goffman (1971) and Holly (1979), is a very useful instrument in this respect, although it should be combined with other perspectives on relational work, such as identity construction, positioning, and interactive patterns of relationship dynamics.

## 15. Conclusion to Part III

In Part III of this thesis the conversations in my corpus were examined with respect to issues of identity construction and relational work. In Chapter 13, a synthesised framework of analysis was employed to reveal the co-constructions of the identities of the individual interactants. Chapter 14 focused on face work, exploring those aspects of relational work that specifically revolve around the social evaluation of sensitive self-aspects. The results of the analyses contained a variety of notable findings in their own right, both with regard to the linguistic exploration of identity construction and relational work, and with regard to the interdisciplinary examination of coaching conversations as a unique practice.

Yet, it was particularly striking throughout the chapters that the various methodological approaches highlighted phenomena which were inextricably interwoven. Thus, the different domains of self-presentation and positioning (i.e. the professional self, the personal self, and the social self), the metaphorical expression of self-aspects, the construction of problem views and of agency, and the evaluation of selves evidently displayed facets that were all interrelated in complex ways. The same was true for the mutual positioning activities of coaches and coachees respectively: As was established in Section 5.7, self-presentations necessarily always imply other-presentations (cf. Spiegel and Spranz-Fogasy 2002). Furthermore, the logic of face work in the conversations could only be fully grasped in relation to the individual self- and other-presentations by the interactants as well.

This finding is fully in line with the depiction of the structure of selves in psychological research: As argued in Section 5.2, individuals conceive of their selves in terms of objectified entities. Nevertheless, in actuality, 'selves' can be best explained as self-organising systems that are based on extremely complex knowledge structures (cf. Mischel and Morf 2005). Moreover, the analyses underlined the social constructionist approach to the analysis of identity which emphasises the fact that identities are co-constructed in an ongoing process of negotiation between the participants of an interaction.

However, it became also evident that the individual patterns and strategies of positionings that formed the basis for these negotiation processes tended to follow rather consistent 'lines' in Goffman's sense (cf. Goffman 1967). Even the coachee Olivia, whose unusual deviations from the norms of face work fundamentally sabotaged the coaching process, produced elements of incoherence in a rather consistent way. This is also true for the inconsistencies in her self-presentation strategies: The inherent contradictions were already detectable in the initial stage of the conversation, and they tended to follow the same patterns until the end of the session. In sum, these findings foreshadow the topic of Part IV of this thesis: In the last perspective on analysis, the powerful formative influence of interactive patterns of relational dynamics in coaching communication will be explored.

## **Part IV: Analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics**



## **16. Interactive patterns of relational dynamics**

### **16.1 Introduction to Part IV and methodology of the analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics**

In this chapter the results of the analysis of questions, feedback, advice, self-presentation and positioning, and face work in my corpus (cf. Chapters 8; 9; 10; 13; 14) will be synthesised with analyses undertaken following the systemic view of communication in therapy and coaching, as introduced in Section 4.10. As a result of this synthesis, condensed overviews of the interactive patterns of relational dynamics emerging in the individual conversations will be presented. In this context I will employ visualisations of interactive patterns in order to highlight their dynamics.

It was established in Section 5.10 that according to the systemic framework, interactional structures emerge from feedback circles, even though laypersons tend to interpret their own contributions as reactions to the contributions provided by other interactants (cf. Watzlawick et al. 1967). Moreover, the notion of the ‘psychological game’ from transactional analysis was introduced to the discussion. Psychological games were described in the sense of stable interactional structures which follow rules and which lead to predictable outcomes of interactions (cf. Berne 1964). As established, a typical game that may occur between advisors and advisees is the ‘drama triangle’. This game offers three ‘roles’, i.e. the ‘persecutor’, the ‘victim’, and the ‘saviour’. Moreover, von Schlippe and Schweizer’s (2003) types of ‘contractual offers’ by advisees were discussed: ‘Visitors’ merely attend the session to participate in a pleasant exchange; ‘complainants’ talk about their problems, but resist change; and ‘customers’ actually commit themselves to a ‘change contract’ with the advisor.

In the following sections, I will draw on these concepts in order to carve out the overarching dynamics steering the interactions in my corpus. However, my approach will differ from the traditional systemic view of interactional patterns in two respects. First, I examine temporally limited interactions in dyads of interactants who encounter each other for the very first time. In contrast, interactional structures are typically analysed as results of long-term relationships (cf. König and Volmer 2000). Moreover, my analyses rely on empirical data, which are analysed according to linguistic categories in discourse analytical close readings. This is a crucial difference from the methodology proposed in the context of therapy and coaching, which relies on narrated perspectives on perceived communicative

patterns (cf. Berne 1967; Watzlawick et al. 1967). In essence, the analyses will demonstrate the central role that interactive patterns of relational dynamics play with regard to both the content and the course of coaching conversations.

The following research questions will be addressed in the ensuing sections:

- Which interactive patterns of relational dynamics occur in the corpus of coaching conversations?
- How are these patterns interrelated with the previous categories of analysis in this thesis?

## 16.2 Interactive patterns of relational dynamics in coaching 1

Table 16.1 provides an overview of the results of the analysis of relational patterns in coaching 1:

Field of analysis	Place of analysis in this thesis	Results of analysis
<b>Questions</b>	Chapter 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High number of questions by Coach I: Initiating reflection on current work situation and on change scenarios, eliciting solutions, preparing the ground for advice</li> <li>• Extremely high number of questions by coachee Kate: Often eliciting advice, confirming Kate's eagerness to find solutions, and confirming asymmetrical roles</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	Chapter 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High numbers of feedback activities by Coach I, particularly 'repeating'; validating Kate's perspective</li> <li>• Extremely high numbers of feedback activities by Kate, validating the coach's perspective, numerous positive evaluations of advice</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b>	Chapter 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kate encourages advice activities by Coach I</li> <li>• Coach I produces a high number of advice activities</li> <li>• Kate produces both a high number of positive reactions and an extremely high number of resistance activities; ambivalence</li> </ul>
<b>Positioning and Self-presentation</b>	Chapter 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kate presents herself as her own worst enemy; ambiguity, change-side versus anti-change side, thus both agentive and non-agentive construal</li> <li>• Kate emphasises difference of her self from others</li> <li>• Kate employs colourful, expressive metaphors</li> <li>• Kate typically produces mitigated negative self-evaluative clusters; defensiveness, inconclusiveness</li> <li>• Coach I responds with positive reframings, focusing on Kate's resources</li> </ul>
<b>Face work</b>	Chapter 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High number of confirmative moves by Coach I toward Kate</li> <li>• Extremely high number of confirmative moves by coachee Kate toward Coach I</li> <li>• Kate's resistance activities could be regarded as face-threatening, but Coach I does not mark them as such</li> <li>• Kate often threatens her own face; Coach I mostly remediates the face aggravations, but appears to get tired of doing so by the end of the coaching</li> </ul>

Table 16.1: Overview results coaching 1

Both interactants present themselves as cooperative and motivated. Coach I employs a large number of questions, feedback activities, and advice activities. Moreover, from the perspective of face work he produces consistently confirmative patterns. The coachee Kate's high level of involvement is even more apparent in her use of highly frequent use of questions, feedback activities, positive reactions to advice, and confirmative face work.

Yet, Kate also produces a large number of resistance activities. Also, she often threatens her own face by means of self-criticism. These patterns may be explained on the grounds of Kate's self-presentation as a torn personality: While one part of her strives for change, the other part is afraid of taking risks. As highlighted in Section 10.2, Kate enacts her ambivalence in the coaching conversation, contributing to the emergence of three recurrent moves in coaching 1 (cf. Figure 16.1):

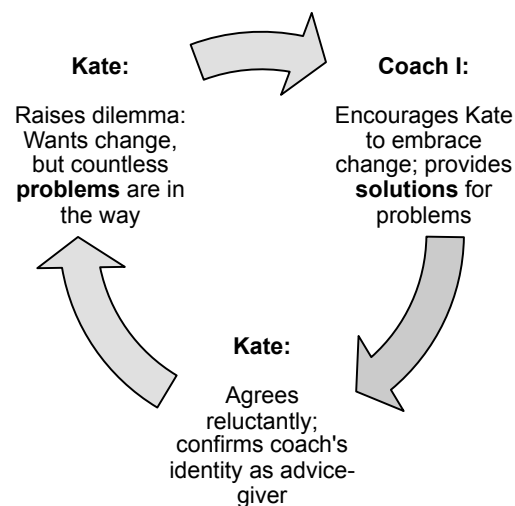


Figure 16.1: Dilemmatic circle between Coach I and Kate

In terms of transactional analysis, the interactants play the game 'Yes-but' (cf. König and Volmer 2000; Dehner 2013; Section 5.10). The coachee consistently confirms the coach's authority, and she expresses her need for change. Coach I takes this 'bait' in Berne's (1964) sense early on, assuming the role of a change agent. However, the more advice he provides, the more resistance is produced by the coachee Kate. While she tends to let the coach convince her with counter-arguments, she is also quick to raise new arguments. Thus, the coach comes to represent Kate's change-promoting side, whereas Kate emphasises her change-obstructing side (cf. Figure 16.2).

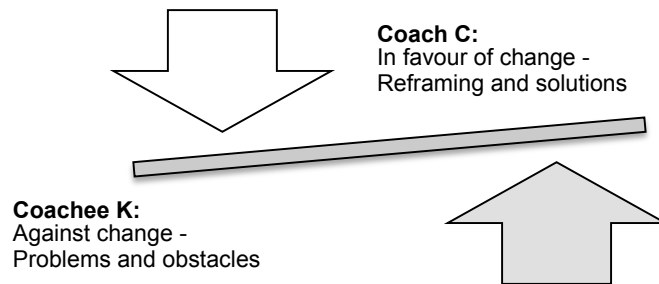


Figure 16.2: The 'Yes-but' game in coaching 1

Another way of visualising the face-related patterns emerging between Coach I and Kate in coaching 1 would be by means of a transactional circle: Kate presents herself in self-critical ways, employing mitigated negative self-evaluative clusters. The coach provides the remedy for Kate's face by means of positive reframings and other confirmative and remedial moves, as illustrated in Excerpt 16.1 (cf. Section 13.2):

**Excerpt 16.1:**

- 1      *K: it's just a (-) a (3s) because I didn't study, (2s) translation. I didn't study like they did. (2s) I came in from a completely different (-) I majored in Political Science. (laughing)*
- 2      *C: wow,*

I refer to this interactional pattern of relationship dynamics as 'turning dirt into gold'. Throughout the coaching session the coachee Kate offers problematic views of herself and her situation to the coach ('dirt'), and throughout almost the entire session the coach responds by reframing these views in more positive ways ('turning dirt into gold'). Interestingly, while Kate appears to achieve self-verification by sometimes presenting herself in negative terms, whenever she feels criticised by the coach she does not accept what she must interpret as 'dirt' (cf. Sections 13.2; 14.3). Rather, she defends herself. This is evidence that the psychological game only functions if the coach holds steady to his task of remediating Kate's face. Thus, in a third sense, the relational dynamic between Coach I and Kate can also be interpreted in light of the metaphorical 'drama triangle' (cf. Dehner and Dehner 2013; Section 5.10): Kate presents herself in part as a victim and in part as a self-critical 'inner persecutor', while Coach I acts as a saviour figure.

It is notable that Kate appears to procrastinate the end of the coaching session. This is in line with the general development of the interactive dynamics of the conversation: As the coach communicates in terms of change, proactive behaviour optimism, and positive reframing forreframings most of the conversation, and as Kate often displays indirect doubts, self-criticism, sarcasm, and scepticism, by the end of the session the coach appears to run out of 'gold' to give away. Kate appears to be livelier than at the beginning of the session:

She tells humorous anecdotes, and she initiates several strands of small talk (01:25:58; 01:29:04). The coach, on the other hand, appears less energetic than at the beginning: When the coachee jokes, he no longer laughs, but only reacts with a hint of a smile. Moreover, he does not follow Kate's digressions any longer, but he increasingly returns to the formula *Just do it*.

In sum, Kate's communicative behaviour reflects the underlying themes that she introduces into the conversation. She enacts the very patterns she presents as problematic in her biography (i.e. her ambivalence and her enmity against herself) within the frame of the coaching session. At the same time, Coach I, who presents himself as a positive, agentive personality (cf. Section 13.7), plays the 'game' in complementary ways. In sum, a distinctive interactive pattern of relational dynamics emerges. This dynamic can already be detected in the first minutes of the interaction, and it remains consistent until the end of the session. Figure 16.4 summarises the parallels between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 1:

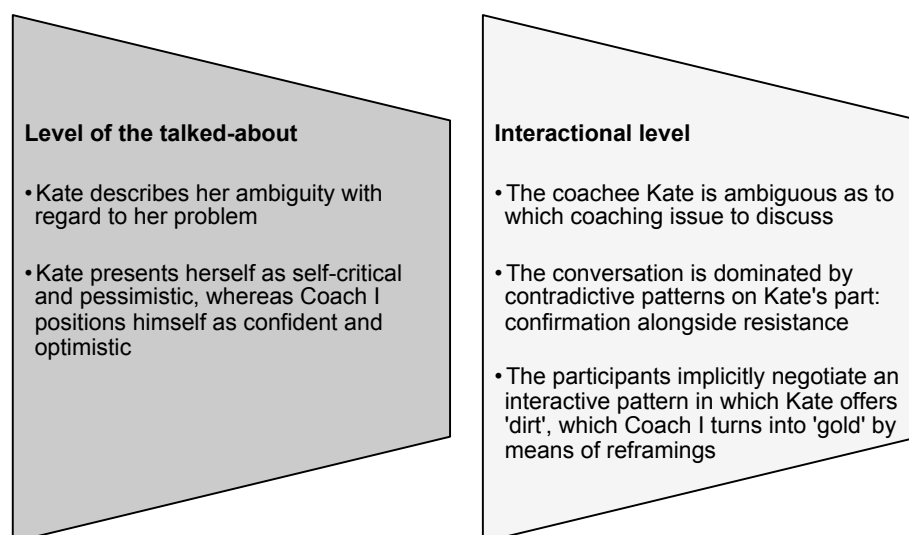


Figure 16.3: Correspondences between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 1

Although an alternative interactional pattern occurs in the conversation (i.e. during the discussion of Kate's other coaching issue; cf. Section 13.2), the dynamic that was highlighted in this section is so dominant that it influences the entire conversation.

## 16.3 Interactive patterns of relational dynamics in coaching 2

Table 16.2 provides an overview of the results of the analysis of relational patterns in coaching 1. Both interactants present themselves as active, cooperative, and confirmative participants in the conversation. While the category 'questions' is less predominant in coaching 2 than in other conversations in my corpus, Coach I provides a high number of feedback activities and a high number of advice activities. The coachee Bobbie, in turn, produces extremely high numbers of positive feedback, requests for advice, and appreciative responses to advice. Also, advice is often co-constructed by both interactants in coaching 2.

Field of analysis	Place of analysis in this thesis	Results of analysis
<b>Questions</b>	Chapter 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low number of questions by Coach I; no need to activate Bobbie, as she offers information on her own initiative</li> <li>• Average number of questions employed by coachee Bobbie</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	Chapter 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High numbers of feedback activities by Coach I, particularly 'interpreting' and 'evaluating'; validating Bobbie's perspective, appreciating her resources</li> <li>• Extremely high number of feedback activities by Kate, validating the coach's perspective, numerous positive evaluations of advice</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b>	Chapter 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bobbie encourages advice activities by Coach I</li> <li>• Coach I produces a high number of advice activities</li> <li>• Numerous co-constructions of advice by both interactants</li> <li>• Bobbie employs a high number of positive reactions to advice; few resistance activities</li> </ul>
<b>Positioning and Self-presentation</b>	Chapter 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bobbie presents herself in strongly positive terms, in particular as a sociable, competent, optimistic, and relaxed person, and as a member of the category 'singer'</li> <li>• Bobbie positions herself as agentive and highlights the fact that she does not have any serious unresolved problems</li> <li>• Bobbie emphasises sameness, rather than difference of her self from others, aligning herself with successful musicians</li> <li>• Bobbie typically produces slightly mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters; use of indirectness as a means of mitigation</li> <li>• Coach I confirms Bobbie's self-presentation, evaluating it extremely positively</li> <li>• The interactants present themselves similarly regarding agency, sociability, and optimism</li> </ul>
<b>Face work</b>	Chapter 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High number of confirmative moves by Coach I toward Bobbie</li> <li>• Extremely high number of confirmative moves by coachee Bobbie toward Coach I</li> <li>• The interactants enter a reciprocal confirmative feedback loop</li> </ul>

Table 16.2: Overview results coaching 2

As was demonstrated in Section 13.3, much in contrast to the coachee Kate in coaching 1, the coachee Bobbie positions herself as an optimistic, sociable, and well-connected person.

She emphasises her identity as a singer, and she carefully constructs her situation as well as her personality as unproblematic. Furthermore, her social self-presentation relies on her identification with prototypical group members, rather than on difference from groups or individuals. Coach I embraces these positionings by taking them up and reconfirming them. Moreover, he provides consistently positive feedback about Bobbie's personality and her professional achievements. Notably, his own self-presentation follows similar lines as that of the coachee: Like Bobbie, Coach I highlights agentive, optimistic, and people-oriented self-aspects. In part, this correspondence is likely to account for the immediate interpersonal connection the interactants appear to experience. Thus, the interactants confirm their own faces as well as each other's faces throughout the session, entering a communicative feedback loop in which face-related confirmations are returned by means of further confirmations, while potential face-threats are not interpreted as such. Thus, overall, the conversation in coaching 2 follows an exceptionally harmonious and cooperative course. Figure 16.4 demonstrates the confirmative feedback loop emerging between the interactants in coaching 2:

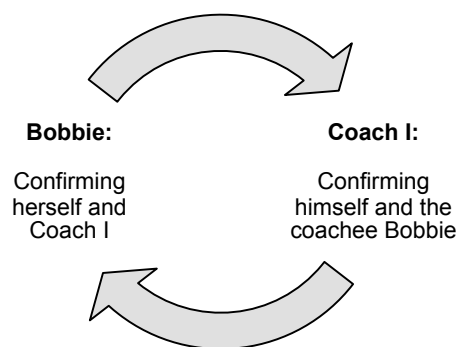


Figure 16.4: Confirmative feedback loop between Coach I and Kate

In the terminology of von Schlippe and Schweizer (2003), Bobbie could be categorised as a 'visitor' (cf. Section 5.10): She emphasises the fact that she does not have any explicit problems, and while she authorises the coach to steer her toward change, she also makes clear that she is not in need of it. Thus, the interactants do not negotiate a 'contract of change'. However, Coach I explicitly comments that he is aware of this status of the session (cf. Excerpt 16.2; Section 13.3):

**Excerpt 16.2:**

- 1 C: *actually this wasn't a real coaching, in case of or in terms of personality, but-*
- 2 B: *right.*
- 3 C: *it's not the right time for this.*
- 4 B: *okay.*

5 C: and that's (pointing to his breast) the thing I've learned ah to trust uh well, 'h my instinct,

Thus, Coach I accounts for the fact that he makes a conscious decision against a change contract with the coachee Bobbie because, in his view, a focus on problems would be ill-timed.

As was the case in coaching 1, there are clear correspondences between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 2 (cf. Figure 16.5):

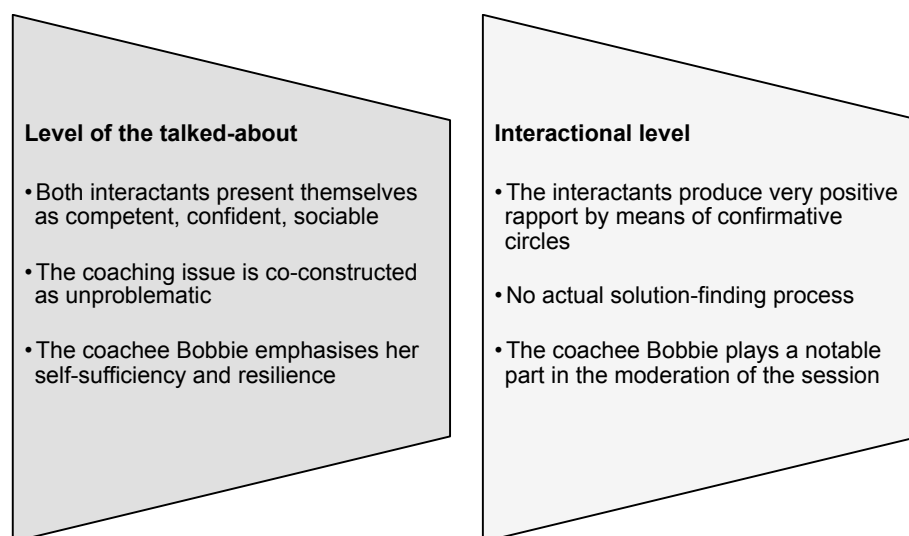


Figure 16.5: Correspondences between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 2

While the interactants, and the coachee Bobbie in particular, emphasise the self-aspects linked to competence, confidence, and sociability, these characteristics are also predominant in their interactive patterns. Likewise, the coachee's problem presentation is conjointly designed as unproblematic. Thus, the coaching conversation itself emerges as smooth and conflict-free. Moreover, Bobbie's self-presentation as agentive and self-sufficient is reflected in the active part she takes in the steering of the process, as evidenced, for example, in the opening of the conversation (cf. Section 13.3).

Overall, this conversation demonstrates the fact that an apparently 'effortless', harmonious coaching relationship must be co-constructed as a conjoint effort. Moreover, it reveals that a functioning coaching relationship does not necessarily correlate with a deeply productive solution-finding process.



## 16.4 Interactive patterns of relational dynamics in coaching 3

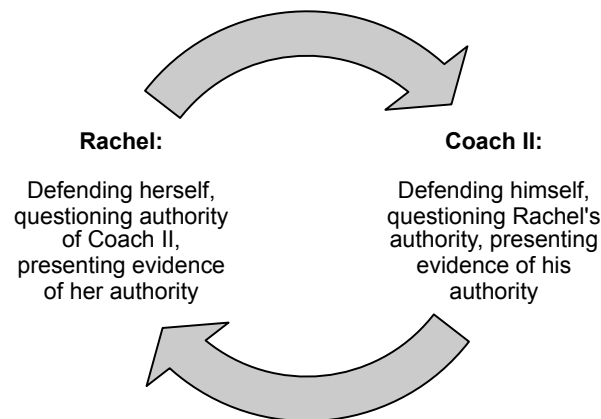
Table 16.3 provides an overview of the results of the analysis of relational patterns in coaching 3:

Field of analysis	Place of analysis in this thesis	Results of analysis
<b>Questions</b>	Chapter 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low number of questions by Coach II; no need to activate Rachel, as she offers information by her own initiative</li> <li>• Extremely low number of questions employed by coachee Rachel</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	Chapter 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average number of feedback activities by Coach II, but extremely high frequency of 'evaluating'; validating Bobbie's perspective, appreciating her resources</li> <li>• Coach II typically focuses on coachee's emotional state</li> <li>• Extremely low number of feedback activities by Rachel, positive feedback is conveyed implicitly</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b>	Chapter 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely low number of requests for advice by Rachel</li> <li>• Coach II produces a low number of advice activities</li> <li>• Rachel is typically extremely open to advice, but responds to it implicitly, rather than evaluating it or agreeing with it explicitly</li> <li>• Rachel produces a low number of resistance activities; resistance is typically task-oriented and can be overcome by means of counter-arguments</li> </ul>
<b>Positioning and Self-presentation</b>	Chapter 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The coaching begins with a notable struggle over authority issues; Rachel presents herself as competent and as on a par with Coach II, challenging his authority; Coach II defends his territory of knowledge</li> <li>• Later Rachel introduces the image of the 'outer self' and the 'inner self'; contradiction between her hard shell and vulnerable core; perceives her environment as potentially dangerous</li> <li>• Coach II reframes strong-weak dichotomy as emotional concernedness; encourages her to communicate her emotions</li> <li>• Rachel's identity as a leader is crucial to her; describes maternal feelings toward team members</li> <li>• Rachel's problem presentation revolves around an authority conflict with her employee J., her identity as a leader is shattered</li> <li>• Rachel positions herself as agentive, but accuses herself of failing as a leader; also, she accuses her employee J. of betrayal</li> <li>• Rachel employs a high degree of metaphorical language</li> <li>• In the first phase Rachel produces mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters</li> <li>• The more Rachel opens up to Coach II, the more she uses mitigated negative self-evaluative clusters or even unmitigated negative self-evaluative clusters (when exercising harsh self-criticism).</li> <li>• By the end of the coaching Rachel restores a positive view of herself and produces mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters again</li> <li>• Coach II encourages Rachel's positive view of herself</li> </ul>
<b>Face work</b>	Chapter 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial struggle over authority issues brings about face-aggravating patterns</li> <li>• Later the interactants enter an extremely appreciative, confirmative atmosphere</li> <li>• Rachel initiates many afterburn sequences; Coach II does not complete them</li> </ul>

Table 16.3: Overview results coaching 3

Both interactants ask a low number of questions. Moreover, while Coach II employs an average number of feedback activities (with the exception of a high number of evaluating activities), the coachee Rachel produces an extremely low frequency of acts of feedback. The picture is similar with regard to advice: The number of requests for advice by the coachee, the number of advice activities by the coach, and the number of responses to advice by the coachee are all low. Overall, a large part of the coaching-typical interventions that occur explicitly in coaching 1 or coaching 2 are negotiated implicitly in coaching 3.

Rachel's patterns of self-presentation are characterised by the image of an 'outer self' and an 'inner self': At the beginning, she seems to display the 'outer self'. Thus, she positions herself as a competent professional, employing mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters (cf. Section 13.4). Also, she questions the coach's authority on coaching issues. As a consequence of this, Coach II defends his territory of knowledge, and a face-aggravating competitive interactive pattern of relational dynamics emerges (cf. Figure 16.6, Section 14.3)



*Figure 16.6: Combative feedback loop between Coach II and Rachel*

As Figure 16.6 illustrates, a symmetrical combative feedback loop emerges between the coach and the coachee (cf. Watzlawick et al. 1967; Section 5.10).

Yet, after the interactants have settled their conflict, Rachel presents her 'inner self', revealing a complex self-image which is based on high standards and ensuing self-criticism on the one hand, but also on her perception of the outer world as dangerous on the other hand. Rachel positions herself as a vulnerable person who must form strategic alliances and identify potential enemies in order to survive. Likewise, she feels responsible for those who belong to her circle of allies, a phenomenon which she captures with the mother metaphor (cf. Section 13.4). In this frame of thinking, her problem with her former employee J. is compared to a conflict between a recalcitrant teenager and a disappointed mother. Another recurring theme in the conversation is her fear of being too weak: She provides several examples of relationships that started to flourish only after she established her authority with

the other person.

Coach II encourages Rachel's reflections about herself and her situation. His responses are consistently appreciative. Clearly, he does not encourage Rachel's self-criticism, and neither does he complete the afterburn sequences she initiates (cf. Section 5.3; 13.3). Thus, in terms of the drama triangle (cf. Dehner and Dehner 2013; Sections 5.10; 16.2), Coach II refuses to take on the role of the 'saviour' both with regard to the 'persecutors' Rachel presents in her narratives and with regard to the 'inner persecutor' Rachel displays when criticising herself so harshly. Instead, Coach II offers confirmative feedback in combination with several pronounced challenges, for instance when he expresses the opinion that Rachel should discard the mother metaphor or when he advises her to change the way she talks to herself (cf. Section 10.2). Figure 16.7 illustrates this process of productive solution-finding which emerges in the second part of coaching 3:

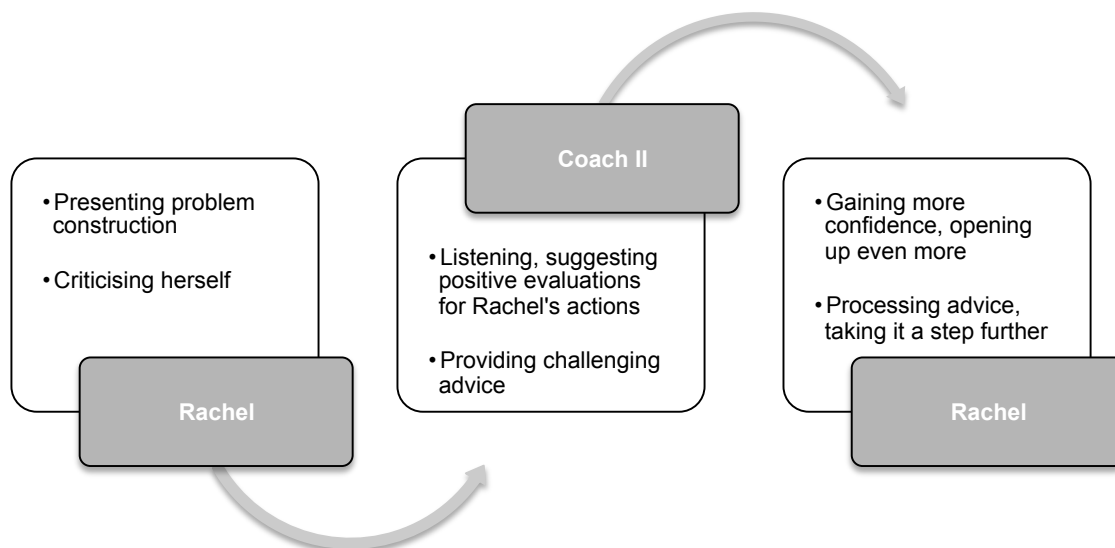


Figure 16.7: Productive solution-finding process emerging between Coach II and Rachel

Figure 16.7 is depicted in terms of a process, because the interaction is characterised by a striking progress with respect to the coaching issue. In comparison to the other coachees in my corpus, Rachel displays an unusually high degree of openness and solution-orientation, and her interest in genuine self-assessment and self-improvement is apparent.

Considering the spirit in which the conversation started, Rachel's openness and trust toward the coach later in the conversation is quite remarkable. Within only 15 minutes of talk, the atmosphere changes completely. Figure 16.8 highlights the confirmative feedback circle emerging between the interactants:

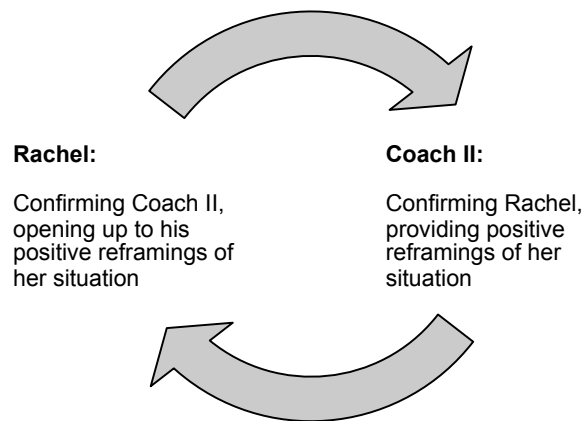


Figure 16.8: Confirmative feedback loop between Coach II and Rachel

Again, like coaching 1 and coaching 2, the correspondences between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 3 are striking (cf. Figure 16.9):

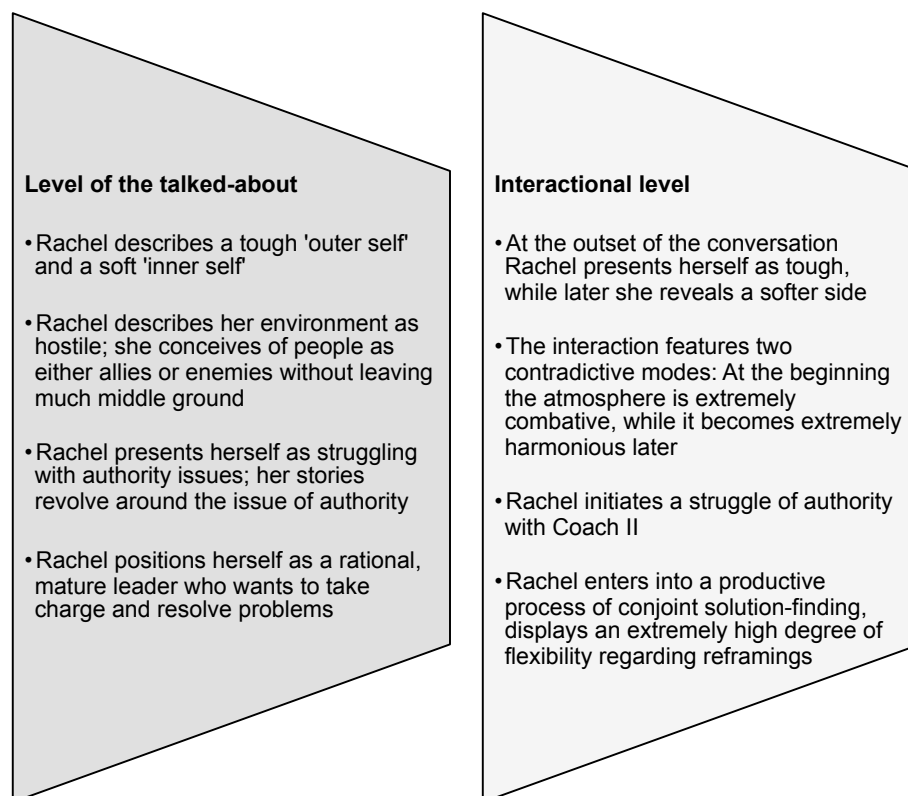


Figure 16.9: Correspondences between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 3

Rachel's concept of her tough 'outer' and her soft 'inner' self is clearly conceivable in the interaction. Moreover, her initial struggle over authority issues, in which she positions Coach II as an opponent, is reflected in the narratives she provides about her professional

relationships. Furthermore, Rachel's self-presentation as a responsible and solution-oriented professional clearly corresponds with her productive role in the solution-finding process. Coach II displays a high degree of adaptiveness both in the delicate opening situation and in the ensuing negotiation of solutions.

## 16.5 Interactive patterns of relational dynamics in coaching 4

Table 16.4 provides an overview of the results of the analysis of relational patterns in coaching 4:

Field of analysis	Place of analysis in this thesis	Results of analysis
<b>Questions</b>	Chapter 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extremely high number of questions by Coach II; Pauline does not offer much information without being prompted to do so; coach attempts to activate her</li> <li>Low number of questions by Pauline</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	Chapter 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low number of feedback activities by Coach II; possibly accommodating to Pauline's matter-of-fact style, but his feedback nevertheless fulfils a crucial function in several situations</li> <li>Extremely low numbers of feedback activities by Pauline; likely reflecting her issues with interpersonal communication as described in the coaching</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b>	Chapter 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low number of requests for advice by Pauline</li> <li>Coach II produces an extremely low number of advice activities; often discards classic opportunities for advice-giving; places advice carefully after preparing the ground for it</li> <li>Low number of response activities to advice by Pauline; displays lower degree of openness for advice at the beginning; more open at later stage</li> </ul>
<b>Positioning and Self-presentation</b>	Chapter 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The coach and the coachee discover a common feature at the beginning; they both used to work for the same bank</li> <li>Pauline presents two issues: conflict at former work place; search for a new job. Low agency; positions herself as a rationally thinking, innocent victim of outer forces</li> <li>Pauline presents herself by means of concrete facts; does not engage in self-reflection; matter-of fact speech; extremely low degree of emotional expression; few modulation activities; unusually long pauses; conveys a certain degree of detachedness</li> <li>Pauline's positioning strategies are straight-forward and less refined than those by the other coachees; presenting herself as neutral; presenting others as defective; indicates low self-monitoring</li> <li>Pauline does not evaluate herself explicitly, but her self-presentations presuppose her own perspective as reasonable and 'normal'. Thus, she produces unmodulated indirect positive self-evaluative clusters</li> <li>Coach II appears to interpret Pauline's narratives as well as her behaviour as evidence of issues with interpersonal communication; he establishes this topic carefully in several steps</li> <li>Pauline rejects interpersonal issue at first, but gradually becomes more open; discusses her own self in the same detached style;</li> </ul>

		apparently she is interested in self-assessment, but she does not respond well to implicit communication, especially on the para-verbal and non-verbal level
<b>Face work</b>	Chapter 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach II employs a moderate amount of confirmative sequences; face-maintaining, rather than face-enhancing communication</li> <li>• Pauline does engage in face-maintaining behaviour, but generally not in face-enhancing communication</li> <li>• Pauline marks threats to her own face in several instances; Coach II remediates the face-aggravations</li> <li>• Coach II overlooks potentially face-threatening behaviour by Pauline</li> <li>• Pauline initiates several afterburn sequences, which Coach II does not complete</li> </ul>

*Table 16.4: Overview results coaching 4*

Coach II employs an unusually high number of questions in coaching 4, most likely so as to activate the coachee Pauline, who tends to offer information only if she is asked to do so. Moreover, Pauline herself asks a low number of questions (cf. Section 8.2). Moreover, both interactants refrain from employing a high number of feedback activities. Yet, the coachee's contributions in this area are extremely rare, which highlights the fact that the coachee Pauline does not engage in circles of return information in the same way as the other interactants do in my corpus. In contrast, the coach's use of mirroring activities plays a central role for the course of the coaching process in several situations; particularly when he mirrors Pauline's emotional state (cf. Section 9.2).

In accordance with her generally reduced level of communicative initiative, Pauline does not request advice frequently, and her responses to advice are sparse as well. Likewise, Coach II handles advice activities carefully, preparing the ground for advice and discarding several classic opportunities for advice-giving. In this way, he manages to encounter a low number of resistance activities by the coachee. Also, the coach's care likely accounts for the fact that Pauline's openness for the coach's ideas grows in the course of the conversation.

As far as her general self-presentation is concerned, Pauline employs a matter-of-fact style, focusing on concrete facts and refraining from evaluating herself and her situation explicitly. Her speech is unemotional and lacks modulation, which results in an impression of detachedness. Her positioning strategies appear somewhat unrefined: In contrast to the other interactants, she does not construe her self-presentations so as to render them positive. Rather, she appears to presuppose the fact that her own perspective is naturally valid. Thus, she presents herself as 'normal', while she positions others as defective. Her problem construction implies that she is the innocent victim of outer forces. Pauline produces unmitigated self-evaluative clusters which implicitly convey a positive attitude toward herself. Overall, Pauline displays communicative patterns which indicate low self-monitoring as well as a low degree of monitoring of the other interactant's reactions.

Coach II appears to perceive Pauline's communicative style as a source of her

conflicts. Thus, he subtly establishes the issue of interpersonal communication as a potential area of improvement. At first, Pauline ignores or rejects interpretations of this kind. Later in the conversation, she actually opens up to the ideas brought forth by the coach. Her discussion of her own potential deficits is conducted in the same visibly detached style of communication. Yet, she displays an interest in self-assessment.

Figure 16.10 illustrates the unidirectional feedback path emerging between Coach II and Pauline: While the coach presents himself as extremely sensitive to the coachee's responses, even if they occur implicitly, Pauline does not display the same degree of empathy and flexibility:

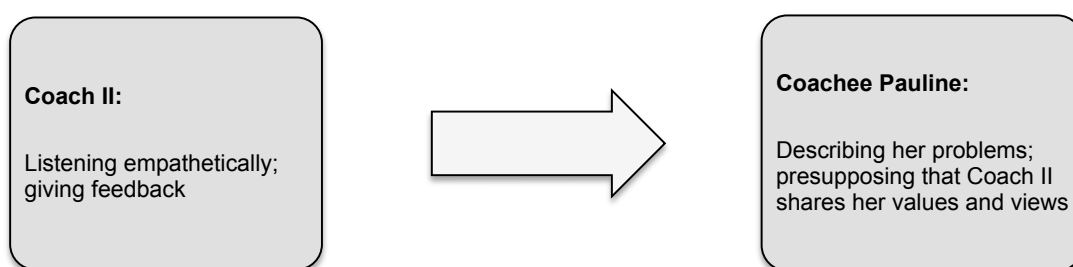


Figure 16.10: Unidirectional feedback path between Coach II and Pauline

Furthermore, as Table 16.4 highlights, the amount of confirmative activities is comparatively low in this conversation, and several of Pauline's activities could be interpreted as face-aggravating. However, the potential face-threats appear to occur indeliberately, and Coach II chooses not to interpret them as such. In sum, these findings indicate a clear correspondence between the level of the talked-about and the level of interaction in coaching 4. Figure 16.11 summarises the results as discussed above in this section: Pauline's partially explicit and partially involuntary problem-presentation of issues with what the interactants call 'emotional intelligence' is reflected on the interactional level of talk; Pauline's contributions tend to lack a sense of empathy for the perspective of the other interactant. In particular, Pauline appears to disregard para-verbal, non-verbal, and further implicit aspects of communication. However, thanks to the coach's sensitive moderation of the coaching process, the coachee does begin to face these issues in the course of the conversation.

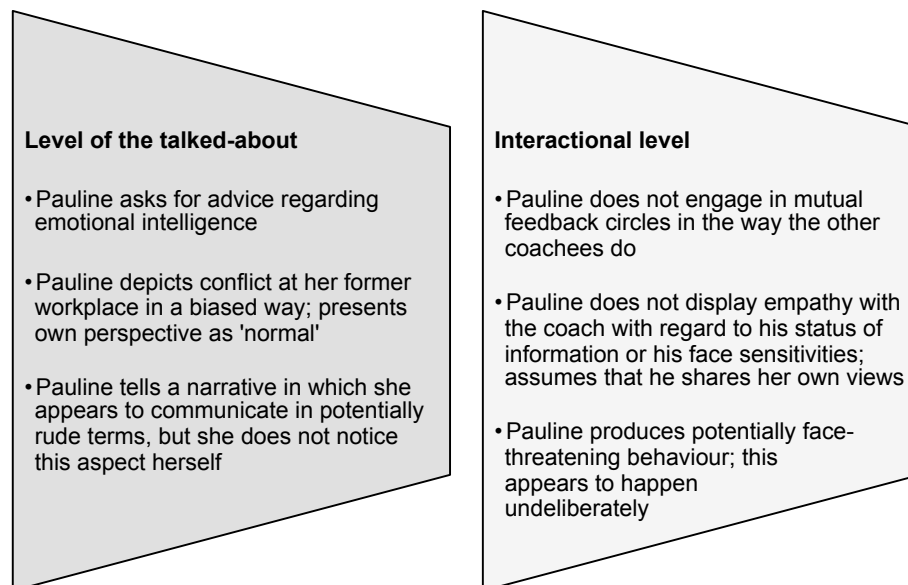


Figure 16.11: Correspondences between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 4

Also, the coachee explicitly appreciates the fact that Coach II helped her to connect with her own emotions. Overall, the importance of the role of the coach in steering the process through delicate issues is particularly evident in this interaction.

## 16.6 Interactive patterns of relational dynamics in coaching 5

Table 16.5 provides an overview of the results of the analysis of relational patterns in coaching 5:

Field of analysis	Place of analysis in this thesis	Results of analysis
<b>Questions</b>	Chapter 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average number of questions by Coach III, but employs questions frequently to challenge the coachee Olivia</li> <li>• Extremely high number of questions employed by Olivia; some of them ostensibly confirming the coach's role as advice-giver, but many of them undermining the coach's authority</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	Chapter 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely high numbers of feedback activities by Coach III; validating Olivia's perspective, appreciating her resources</li> <li>• Olivia rejects the positive evaluations by Coach III; insists on framing her situation negatively</li> <li>• Extremely low number of feedback activities by Olivia; implicitly hostile, rather than confirmative moves</li> </ul>
<b>Advice</b>	Chapter 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely low number of requests for advice by Olivia</li> <li>• Coach III produces an extremely low number of advice activities</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extremely low number of positive reactions to advice by Olivia</li> <li>Extremely high number of resistance activities by Olivia; undermining her role as advice-giver; digressing from topic</li> </ul>
<b>Positioning and Self-presentation</b>	Chapter 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Olivia presents herself as a professional working in similar fields as Coach III; the coach humorously suggests a role switch; Olivia rejects this idea, but keeps undermining the role of the coach</li> <li>Olivia mentions a long list of professional services she can offer, but complains that there is no coherence; deploring her professional status, which she evaluates as low; implicitly also devaluing the coach</li> <li>Olivia presents herself as eloquent, employing rhetorical techniques, talking at high speed, leaving Coach III few opportunities to intercept</li> <li>Olivia switches between contradictory self-concepts: strong and agentive business woman versus vulnerable victim who has lost her old life</li> <li>Olivia often contradicts herself, she interrupts the coach's lines of thought, and she undermines the coaching process by creating incoherence</li> <li>Olivia presents herself in strongly contradictory terms: She employs the conventional mitigated positive and negative self-evaluative clusters, but also uses reinforced positive as well as negative self-evaluative clusters</li> <li>Coach III responds with positive reframings to Olivia's self-critical positionings; at times she tries to guide the conversation back to the actual coaching issue, but in many situations she remains silent</li> </ul>
<b>Face work</b>	Chapter 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High number of confirmative moves by Coach III toward Olivia</li> <li>Low number of confirmative moves by coachee Olivia toward Coach III</li> <li>Olivia commits many face-aggravating actions to her own face, but also to the face of Coach III</li> <li>Coach III overlooks most of the face-threats</li> </ul>

Table 16.5: Overview results coaching 5

Coach III asks an average number of questions in coaching 5, but it is notable that she employs several questions to challenge the coachee. In turn, the coachee Olivia asks an extremely high number of questions, but only some of them confirm the role of the coach as an advice-giver, whereas others are designed to challenge this role. Moreover, Coach III uses a high number of feedback activities. In particular, she attempts to reframe Olivia's situation in positive terms. However, the coachee tends to reject these positive evaluations because they run counter to her complaints about her life. Olivia herself produces an extremely low number of feedback activities, a fact which reflects the conflict-laden atmosphere of the conversation.

Furthermore, Olivia's limited interest in the coach's perspective is illuminated by her extremely low number of requests for advice. As a consequence, Coach III does in fact provide a low number of advice activities, and Olivia's reactions typically imply resistance, rather than appreciation of advice. Overall, it is apparent that the coachee does not conceive of the coach as an authority from whom she wants to receive advice. In essence, Olivia argues against any contribution the coach has to offer, even if it results in her contradicting herself. This is also evident from her initial positioning as a professional who works in the same field as Coach III. Yet, while she presents herself as competent in many fields, she

also claims that there is no overarching theme which would lend coherence to her professional identity.

Overall, however, the coachee's self-presentation is contradictory. While sometimes describing herself in grand terms, at other times Olivia puts herself down harshly. Partially, she positions herself as a highly intelligent, well-educated woman with a wide array of interpersonal strengths and an extraordinary talent for self-marketing. At other times, Olivia seems to be unaware of the conventions of face work. As discussed in Section 13.6, she tells the coach that she has been found guilty of a multi-million-dollar fraud crime, but she does not account for this incidence in any way. Instead, she repeatedly deplores her teacher and trainer status, implying that she is now on the same disreputable level as the coach herself and apparently expecting the coach to sympathise with her for the loss of her upper class lifestyle.

In terms of self-evaluation, Olivia employs a range of different clusters, i.e. mitigated positive self-evaluative clusters and mitigated negative self-evaluative clusters, but also reinforced positive self-evaluative clusters as well as reinforced negative self-evaluative clusters. Overall, these contradictory positionings create a picture of incoherence. In addition, Olivia claims a remarkably high share of the speaking time, talking at high speed, often wandering off the topic, going round in argumentative circles, and sometimes interrupting her interlocutor. As a result, the conversation is rendered incoherent in many situations.

Coach III is a highly experienced professional of senior status. Her contributions are task-oriented, analytical, and well-structured in nature. She seems to have slightly more language difficulties than her two colleagues in the first four conversations, although she is perfectly able to lead the coaching session in English. However, the coach's status as an ELF-speaker in combination with Olivia's dominant speaking patterns might contribute to the coach's sparse exercise of influence on the course of the conversation. She remains respectful and appreciative at all times, although her body language and her verbal contributions signal that she is irritated by some of Olivia's utterances and by the general course of the conversation. The major goal Coach III pursues is to bring Olivia back to the official goal of the coaching; and she remains with this goal until the moment that her alarm-clock ends the session. However, by this point she seems to have given up the hope that the coachee might actually listen to what she has to say.

In sum, coaching 5 represents a pseudo-mandate, and Olivia can be categorised as a 'complainant' in von Schlippe and Schweizer's (2003) terminology (cf. Section 5.10): Despite Olivia's seemingly straight-forward coaching question, it is clear that she has no intent to receive any advice from the coach. Instead, she attempts to make Coach III a listener to her mournful story. Considering the passive aggression that is inherent in the coachee's uncooperative communicative behaviour, she might also be using the coach to ease some of

her frustration. Figure 16.12 highlights the adversary relational pattern co-constructed in coaching 5:

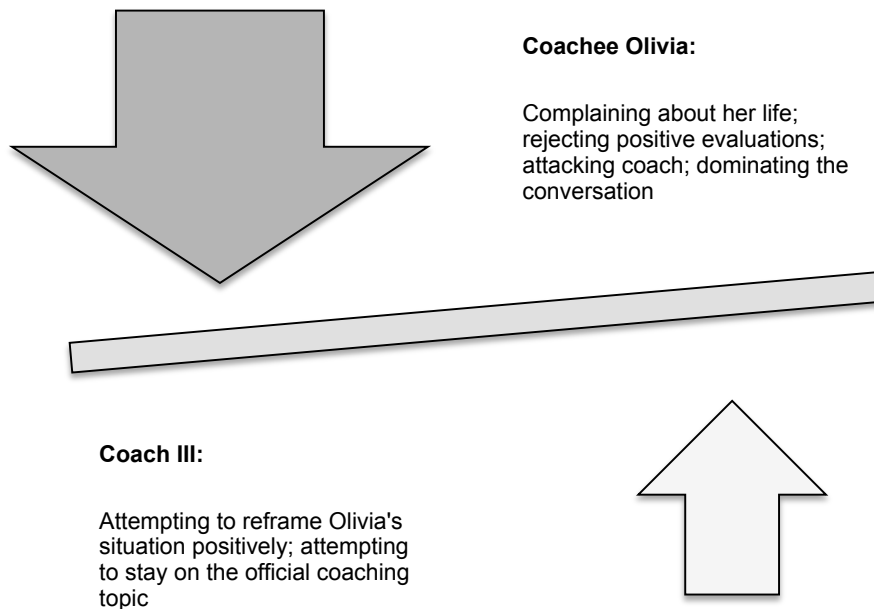


Figure 16.12: Combative dynamics between Coach III and Olivia

As was the case in the previous coaching conversations, there are parallels between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 5 (cf. Figure 16.13):

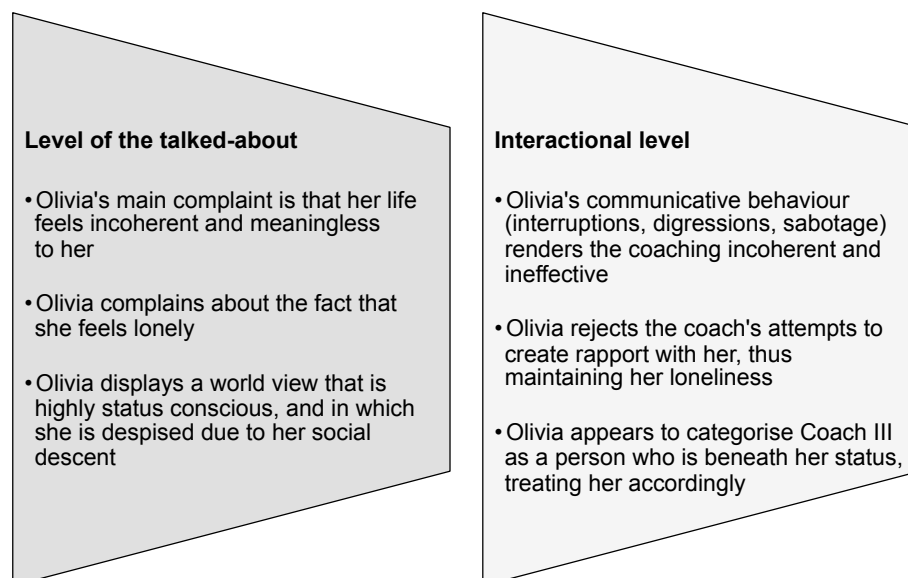


Figure 16.13: Correspondences between the level of the talked-about and the interactional level in coaching 5

As summarised in Figure 16.13, Olivia's complaint about incoherence and meaninglessness in her professional and in her private life is reflected in her communicative contributions,

which function to render the conversation incoherent and ineffective. Also, while Olivia deplores her loneliness, she systematically rejects the attempts by Coach III to create a warm and friendly atmosphere. Last, Olivia's status conscious world view is reflected in the manner in which she devalues Coach III due to her supposedly lower social status. In sum, the interactive patterns of relational dynamics emerging between the interactants in coaching 5 follow a particularly perfidious psychological game, in which the coach tries to establish a rational discussion, which Olivia constantly undermines by attacking both herself, the coach, and the order of the coaching process. It could be argued that Olivia 'wins' the game, because by the end, Coach III appears to give up on the session altogether. In a natural coaching setting taking place outside of a research project, it is likely that the coach would renegotiate the coaching relationship before continuing with any ensuing coaching sessions.

## 16.7 Conclusion to Part IV

The analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics in my corpus of coaching conversations has led to the following results:

1. Despite the fact that the conversations in my corpus represent first-time interactions of 60 to 90 minutes only, the **distinctive interactive patterns of relational dynamics** emerging between the participants are evident. As the analyses of the initial self-presentation in Chapter 13 demonstrated, in many cases the general direction that the interactive patterns would follow became apparent even in the first few minutes of the interactions.
2. It became apparent that the **different analytical perspectives** on the coaching conversations employed in this thesis (i.e. questions, feedback, advice, self-presentation and positioning, and face work) actually contribute considerably to the understanding of interactive patterns of relational dynamics. In turn, the findings from the analysis of overarching relational dynamics enlighten the interpretation of the individual categories of analysis.
3. The concepts derived from the **systemic view of communication** in therapy and coaching and from transactional analyses represented useful tools for the categorisation of interactive patterns. In particular, the drama triangle played an important role in coachings 1 and 3 (cf. Dehner and Dehner 2013). The notions of the 'visitor' and the 'complainant' proved to be revealing with regard to coachings 2 and 5 respectively (cf. von Schlippe and Schweizer 2003). Also, the game 'Yes-but' shed light on the dynamics in coaching 1 (cf. König and Volmer 2000). Moreover, the concept of reciprocal feedback circles illuminated the

interactive patterns in coachings 1, 2, and 3. Also, the observation that coaching 4 and coaching 5 do not feature intact feedback circles for different reasons was similarly revealing. Furthermore, the destructive interpersonal dynamics unfolding in coaching 5 were captured aptly by the notion of the psychological game.

**4.** A finding that consistently emerged in all of the conversations was that major aspects on the **level of the talked-about** were **reflected** on the **interactive level** of talk. Thus, the coachee Kate, who presents herself as being stuck in a dilemma, creates ambiguity in the interaction. The coachee Bobbie, who positions herself as unproblematic, contributes actively to co-constructing an extremely unproblematic coaching session. The coachee Rachel enacts her authority issues at the beginning of the coaching conversation, and later she accepts Coach II as part of her 'inner circle' of allies. The coachee Pauline cannot help but demonstrate the communicative difficulties she had with her former colleagues in the coaching. Most strikingly, by sabotaging the process and by undermining the authority of Coach III, the coachee Olivia ensures that the coaching conversation reflects the feelings of incoherence, meaningless, and loneliness she describes.

**5.** The analyses emphasised the finding that **coaching processes crucially rely on successful confirmative face work**. However, the case of coaching 2 also demonstrated that the creation of rapport does not necessarily lead to a constructive change contract. Yet, an appreciative attitude in combination with the capacity of resisting provocative 'baits', rather than entering psychological games, was found to be a crucial characteristic displayed by all of the coaches in numerous situations within all of the conversations.

## 17. Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis it was established that coaching sessions are fundamentally formed by the relational dynamics emerging in the course of the interactions. Yet, in the coaching literature these dynamics are merely described in metaphorical terms, at times leaving the impression of intuitiveness and subjectivity. On the other hand, linguistic approaches to identity construction and relational work have developed into extremely effective and fine-grained analytical instruments over the past decades, but they rarely focus on the higher-order communicative systems that emerge during conversations. In the previous chapters of this thesis it was demonstrated that interactive patterns of relational dynamics can be made explicit by means of linguistic analysis. In this way, revealing insights can be added to the linguistic perspective of relational work. Also, coaching theory benefits from the linguistic view in that findings that are seemingly ‘just’ based on intuition can be accounted for by a solid empirical argument.

In the following, I will briefly summarise the results from the different perspectives of analysis, as well as the methodology applied in this thesis. Following this, I will suggest potential areas of further research.

### Questions

The analysis of questions in my corpus presented in Chapter 8 was in line with descriptions of the role of coaches in the coaching literature (cf. Fischer-Epe 2006; Zumkeller 2010): The coaches employed questions as a crucial intervention type serving to elicit information, to activate the coachees, to steer the conversation, to provide feedback, or to challenge the coachees. Overall, the sequences in which questions were employed served to prepare the ground for advice. Also, it was notable that the coaches did, in fact, use more *wh*-questions (or ‘open questions’) than *yes/no*-questions (or ‘closed questions’), just as the coaching literature would predict.

The coachees employed questions as an important communicative category as well, despite the fact that they asked significantly fewer questions than the coaches. Interestingly, in contrast to the coaches, the coachees tended to produce more *yes/no*-questions than *wh*-questions. Questions by the coachees were employed, for instance, to elicit elaborations, feedback, or advice from the coaches. Yet, the coachees displayed differing frequencies both in relation to the overall use of questions and to the use of questions fulfilling specific functions. Moreover, it was made evident that the communicative patterns in relation to questions differed from interaction to interaction: Both Coach I and Coach II, who participated in two conversations each, displayed varying patterns depending on their conversational

partners. As was highlighted, the results of the analysis of the specific patterns of individual interactants' use of questions were clearly interrelated with the other categories of analysis in this thesis.

## **Feedback**

The exploration of feedback in Chapter 9 resulted in the finding that both the coaches and the coachees drew on feedback to achieve central functions in the coaching interactions. The coaches, who generally produced the main share of feedback activities, used feedback as a means of steering the course of the conversation, of facilitating the flow of return information, of activating the coachees, of preparing the ground, and of creating confirmative coaching relationships. Thus, feedback was identified as an important linguistic category realising face-maintaining and face-enhancing communication. As was the case with questions, the frequencies of feedback activities by the coaches appeared to depend on the specific communicative dyads in the individual sessions, rather than on the personal styles of the coaches.

While the coachees tended to produce considerably less feedback than the coaches, their relative amount of contributions turned out to be revealing with regard to the relational dynamics in the interactions: Both the coachee Pauline in coaching 3, who displayed signs of interpersonal detachedness, and the coachee Olivia in coaching 5, who essentially presented herself as uncooperative, employed a significantly lower number of feedback activities than, for instance, the coachee Kate in coaching 1 or the coachee Bobbie in coaching 2. Coaching 3 represented an indicator of the limits of the quantitative analysis of feedback, because the coachee Rachel tended to express feedback mostly implicitly, thus drawing mainly on uncountable communicative activities. It was also demonstrated that the patterns of feedback activities and the patterns of questions often correlated in the specific conversations in which the interactants participated.

Overall, the most prominent feedback category in the group of the coachees was 'evaluating'. Typically, the coachees' evaluations referred to advice provided by the coaches. On the other hand, the coaches preferred the category 'mirroring: interpreting' over other types of feedback. Methodologically, it was proven that 'evaluating' represents a form of explicit feedback, while 'mirroring: repeating', 'mirroring: interpreting', and especially 'backchanneling' represented much more implicit categories. Further, it was demonstrated that 'evaluating' as an explicit form of assessment of other interactants is almost exclusively used in positive terms in my coaching corpus. Thus, resistance, disagreements, and other forms of negative evaluation are consistently expressed in more indirect, implicit ways. Also, an instance occurred in which the coachee Olivia provided a positive evaluation about Coach

III in a potentially patronising way. This example illustrated the fact that different norms and rights of evaluation appear to be tied to the roles of the coaches and the coachees.

## **Advice**

The analysis of the third prototypical coaching intervention, i.e. advice, led to the finding that advice activities are predominant in my corpus despite the ideal of nondirectiveness that is prevalent in the coaching literature (cf. He 1994, Limberg and Locher 2012). Yet, this finding was clearly related to the broad notion of ‘advice’ employed in my approach: I defined advice as “comprising those contributions which are treated as suggestions that the other interactant should think or act in a particular way” (Section 10.1). Thus, it was explained that, according to my data, the coachees typically treat expressions of opinion or general information by the coaches as authoritative advice. It was concluded that the setting of coaching sessions and the expectations tied to the roles of the coach and the coachee appear to create a frame which lends directiveness even to indirect and implicit contributions by the coaches. In sum, my data suggest that advice is a crucial discursive practice in the process-oriented coaching genre.

However, the quantitative overview displayed significant variations between the instances of advice-giving produced by the coaches. Also, while advice was mostly occasioned in the context of the conversations, the coachees differed with regard to the number of direct requests of advice they employed. Further, the reactions of coachees to advice were proven to be mainly appreciative in my corpus: The coachees often agreed with advice, complemented advice, or provided positive evaluations of advice. As argued in the section on feedback, explicitly negative evaluations of advice were not part of the repertoire of the coachees.

Nevertheless, resistance activities against advice were found to be commonplace in my corpus. In particular, counter-arguments, the signalling of a lack of relevance of advice, and humour were employed to convey resistance. Yet, it became apparent from the qualitative analyses that resistance activities could be task-oriented or relationship-oriented, and they could also originate in perceived threats to one’s self-concepts, rather than in aversion against the advisors. In essence, it was revealed that resistance did not necessarily impede the coaching process, but often it inspired constructive contributions to a broader negotiation of solutions. Notably, regarding resistance against advice, the coaches tended to overlook it in many instances, waiting for more appropriate occasions to bring up their pieces of advice once more. Also, the coaches often made an effort to overcome advice by means of counter-arguments. As was the case with questions and feedback, the coaches and the coachees produced individual patterns of advice-related activities in the specific interactive



dyads. These patterns were related to the other categories analysed in this thesis, and they were also interwoven with the issues of the coaching conversations.

Another notable finding that emerged in the qualitative analyses was the fact that, like feedback activities, advice-related activities may be expressed on an implicit level of communication, thus making a qualitative analytical approach essential. Also, it was highlighted that advice is characteristically negotiated over long sequences of talk in my corpus. Thus, the overall patterns were different from the rather fixed patterns of step-wise entry, as described by Heritage and Sefi (1992) in the context of the discourse of health advisors. Yet, as is suggested by many linguistic analyses of other advisory contexts, the coaches in my corpus also employ questions and feedback to prepare the ground and customise advice, so as to make it relevant and to reduce resistance (cf. Heritage and Sefi 1992; Silverman et al. 1992; Vehviläinen 1999, 2001; Section 5.6).

### **Self-presentation and positioning**

The analysis of self-presentation and positioning shed light on the co-constructions of identities in the coaching conversations. An observation that was confirmed throughout the corpus was the fact that the initial self-presentations of the interactants generally foreshadowed both the themes and the patterns of self-presentation that dominated the ensuing conversations. This was evidence that most of the patterns identified in the analyses were relatively consistent, even though they were constantly reconstructed and adjusted in relation to the specific dynamics of the interactions.

Moreover, it was a common trait in the themes and patterns of self-presentations of the coachees that they were mainly centred on the professional domain, as had been anticipated in consideration of the genre. For this reason, coaching 5 appeared exceptional with regard to the coachee Olivia's strong focus on personal issues (in particular, her problem with ageing). Furthermore, the category of agency and problem construction represented a crucial key to understanding the links between the coachees' problems and their self-concepts. The coachees' decisions as to whether to present themselves and their problem constructions in agentive or in non-agentive terms were intrinsically tied to the general self-images they produced. The same factor applied to the analysis of the social self: The decision as to which groups and individuals were chosen to be referenced by the interactants was a defining factor of their positionings. Moreover, by managing the moderation of sameness and difference in their self-presentations, the interactants further constructed their social identities.

The analysis of metaphors was confirmed as a valid method of analysis with respect to positioning and self-presentation: Those interactants who produced a high degree of

salient metaphorical expressions tended to summarise crucial aspects of their identities by means of metaphors. However, the interactants differed in their affinity to metaphorical language: While the coachee Kate (coaching 1), the coachee Rachel (coaching 3), and the coachee Olivia (coaching 5) employed much metaphorical speech, the coachee Bobbie (coaching 2) made less of use of metaphors, and the coachee Pauline (coaching 4) avoided it almost entirely. Also, the coaches introduced fewer metaphors than the coachees, although Coach I and Coach II in particular often drew on the metaphors introduced by the coachees.

Furthermore, the tool of self-evaluative clusters provided a useful perspective on the overarching patterns of self-evaluation produced by the interactants. A notable result was the fact that those self-evaluative clusters that appeared to reflect norms of appropriateness the most in my data were mitigated positive evaluative clusters: This pattern suggests that the speaker likely has a positive self-concept, which is socially desirable. At the same time, mitigating devices also signal modesty to the other interactants. In this respect it is important to recognise the differences between the roles of the coaches and the coachees: While my data suggested that coachees may principally discuss negative self-evaluative aspects in coaching sessions without breaking the norm, the three coaches in my corpus presented themselves in consistently positive terms. This appears to be a positioning choice that is largely required in relation to their roles.

On the other hand, whenever coachees evaluated themselves negatively, this was treated as reason to 'work' on their issues by the coaches. Thus, negative self-evaluations were marked as deficient, and acts of resistance against positive reframings by the coaches constituted critical incidents in terms of face work (cf. Section 14.3). In essence, it is evidently a prototypical feature of coaching situations that the interactants make an effort to change negative self-evaluations on the part of the coachees – either by resolving problems that lead to negative self-evaluations, or by reframing the self-assessments directly (cf. König and Volmer 2000). The case of Rachel in coaching 3 showed that self-evaluations of coachees can change considerably in the course of just one coaching session. Further self-evaluative clusters that emerged in my corpus were mitigated negative clusters and reinforced positive and negative clusters.

In relation to the coachee Olivia's self-presentation in coaching 5, the requirement of consistency of positioning strategies came to light. Olivia constantly switched between contradicting 'lines' of self-presentation without moderating the transitions in any way (cf. Goffman 1967; Section 5.1). In doing so, she appeared to trigger moments of confusion and disalignment on the side of her fellow interactant. It is likely that Olivia's patterns of self-presentation and positioning would not be highly frequent in a large corpus of coaching conversations. Rather, her identity work in coaching 5 appears to deviate from the norm of coaching conversations.

## Face work

Considering the analysis of confirmative face work, Holly's (1979) advancement of Goffman's (1971) approach to the analysis of confirmative sequences was further refined with respect to my corpus of coaching conversations. As became apparent, all of the categories mentioned by Holly were relevant in my data. Access rituals emerged at the beginnings and the endings of the coachings, while ritual offerings were produced throughout the sessions, but both sequence types produced unmarked face confirmations with a high degree of conventionality. This was reflected, for instance, in the patterns GREETING – GREETING, or POLITE OFFER – THANKS/ACCEPTANCE. As a result, it was concluded that access rituals and ritual offerings were linked to the face-maintaining orientation of face work, rather than to the face-enhancing orientation (cf. Watts 2004; Locher 2004; Spencer-Oatey 2005; Sections 5.3; 5.8).

In contrast, rituals of identificatory sympathy could be characterised as a more complex ritual sequence type that offered more opportunities to customise face confirmations to the individual images of the interactants. In sum, rituals of identificatory sympathy turned out to be the most common and most prevalent category in my analysis of confirmative face work. Moreover, four fundamental patterns were identified for the confirmation of selves and others respectively. These patterns could be chained together, so that elements could function simultaneously as pair parts of different sequences, as was demonstrated, for example, by means of the chain SEEKING INTEREST – SHOWING INTEREST – ACCEPTING INTEREST.

In practice, these overarching confirmative patterns turned out to be extremely multi-layered phenomena. Thus, they often functioned on an implicit level, and they could be realised by a great variety of linguistic instantiations. Notably, the confirmative patterns in my corpus were linked to the prototypical coaching interventions in complex ways: Questions were identified as an intervention type that is predominantly used in a confirmative sense, in particular by the coaches. The same applied to feedback, which was demonstrated to entail implicit confirmative moves, i.e. through backchanneling, mirroring: repeating, and mirroring: interpreting, as well as explicit confirmative moves, i.e. through evaluating activities. In essence, implicit confirmative face work could be linked with the face-maintaining orientation, while explicit confirmative face work could be tied to the face-enhancing orientation. Thus, the category 'evaluating' tended to correlate with more marked forms of communicative behaviour, and thereby, with face-enhancement. Last, requests for advice, advice-giving, and appreciative reactions to advice also realised confirmative face work in my data.

In essence, it was demonstrated that confirmative face work represented the foundation of successful relationship creation. Moreover, it was established that even

coaching 5, an interaction with a clearly critical relational dynamic, featured an overwhelming majority of confirmative moves by the interactants. However, the face attacks produced in this conversation appeared to overrule the confirmative sequences due to their distinct markedness in relation to the implicit norms in the coaching practice. On the other hand, a notable finding was the fact that unmarked and seemingly mundane face-maintaining confirmative moves could nevertheless add up to create a decidedly harmonious atmosphere. It seems that a distinction between the dichotomous categories of 'marked' and 'unmarked' confirmative face work is likely too simplistic to grasp the complex intricacies of confirmative face work in coaching conversations. Yet, the distinction has proven valuable as a general guiding post for analysis.

The face-saving orientation of face work was represented by two strategies that emerged on the discourse level of talk in my corpus: The interactants prepared the ground for potentially face-damaging moves (i.e. the coaches prepared the ground for advice, and the coachees prepared the ground for their problem constructions), and the coaches in particular employed disclaimer strategies before violating their own methodological standards. Moreover, in terms of face-aggravating behaviour, all of the five possible directions of face attacks occurred in the conversations: There were instances in which coaches threatened their own faces, coachees threatened their own faces, coaches threatened coachees, coachees threatened coaches, and coachees produced narratives about third parties who had attacked their faces in previous interactions. Both the coaches and the coachees at times committed minor lapses against their own faces. These incidents were generally remediated instantaneously. In a few instances, coaches threatened their own faces by violating methodological rules. These situations appeared to be interpreted as potentially more severe by the coaches than minor incidents, and they were repaired by the coaches themselves.

Moreover, in accordance with their roles and the structure of coaching conversations, the coachees were forced to commit face-threats against themselves when presenting their problems. The manner in which the coachees mitigated and remediated these face-threats was most revealing with regard to their positionings: Some of the coachees (i.e. Kate in coaching 1, Rachel in coaching 3, and Olivia in coaching 5) criticised themselves in much more encompassing ways than others (i.e. Bobbie in coaching 2 and Pauline in coaching 4). Further, at times both the coaches and the coachees committed face-aggravating acts against their fellow interactants by misrepresenting aspects of their identities. These incidents had a potential for severe face damage, although the coaches tended to overlook them altogether. Last, reported face-related incidents caused by third parties, or 'afterburn sequences' in Goffman's (1971) sense, were characteristic of coaching 3 and coaching 4 in particular, but Coach II was reluctant to deliver remediation in both cases. In response to the

research question raised at the beginning of the discussion of face-aggravating face work, it was concluded that the severity of the face-threat had to be inferred from the hearers' responses. Thus, the face-damaging activities in my corpus could be broadly categorised into a low, medium, and high level of severity, though the transitions between these levels were clearly fluent and at least partially subjective. Coaching 5 was highlighted as an exceptional example of a session throughout which severe face damages to the coach destroyed the relational foundation of the interaction.

Coaching conversations in general were characterised as being fundamentally dependent on the management of face work both with regard to confirmative face work and with regard to face-saving, face-aggravating, and face-remediating aspects. Moreover, it became evident that an analysis of face work in business coaching conversations must be complemented with a perspective on the co-constructions of the specific identities of the interactants.

### **Interactive patterns of relational dynamics**

Last, the different analytical perspectives of this thesis were synthesised with a systemic view of the interactive coaching dyads. It became evident that the use of questions, feedback and advice, the strategies of self-presentation and positioning, and the patterns of face work emerging in the individual interactions could be understood in a much more profound way within the wider context of the relational dynamics of the interactions. In this context it was demonstrated that even though Coach I and Coach II participated in two conversations each, they developed completely unique communicative systems with the coachees in each interaction. Another distinctive result was the fact that the main features of the interactive patterns of relational dynamics tended to occur already in the initial stages and remained stable until the end of the sessions.

The characteristics of the interactive patterns of relational dynamics in the conversations were brought to light by means of analytical tools from coaching theory and transactional theory. Thus, coaching 1 could be described in terms of the 'yes-but' game, in terms of a dilemmatic circle, or in terms of a transactional pattern which was referred to as 'turning dirt into gold'. Moreover, the level of the talked-about was reflected on the interactive level with regard to Kate's ambiguity. In coaching 2, a confirmative feedback circle emerged between the coachee Bobbie and Coach I. Moreover, Bobbie's unproblematic presentation of both herself and her coaching issue was reflected in the superficial and harmonious character of the interactive level in this conversation.

In contrast, coaching 3 featured a combative feedback loop between Coach I and the coachee Rachel in the first few minutes of the session. Later the interactants entered a

productive process of conjoint solution finding, and they produced a positive confirmative feedback loop. Further, Rachel enacted the 'outer' and the 'inner' aspects of her self-concept within the conversation, and the theme of authority issues was present both on the level of the talked-about and on the interactive level. Coaching 4 was exceptional in that the coachee Pauline did not participate in feedback circles in the same way as the other interactants. Thus, the dynamics of the interaction were captured in the concept of a unidirectional feedback path from Coach II to the coachee Pauline. In sum, Pauline's issue with interpersonal communication was reflected on the interactional level of the conversation to a high degree. Last, in coaching 5, the interactants co-constructed a combative setting that was characterised by similar themes as in the coachee Olivia's narrations, i.e. incoherence, confusion, and frustration. Olivia was described in terms of the label 'complainant' due to her clear disinterest in solutions (cf. von Schlippe and Schweizer 2003).

In essence, the analyses of interactive patterns of relational dynamics revealed the variety of patterns that can emerge even in a small corpus of only five conversations. Also, the power of the underlying relational dynamics and its strong influence on the course of the conversation and the success of the coaching was more than evident. Further, it became clear that Rauen's (2007: 18) claim that coaches who cannot tell the difference between symptoms and actual issues are "in the dark about everything they do" was accurate (cf. Chapter 1).

In contrast, the coaches in my corpus demonstrated their refined skills in this area. In coaching 2 Coach I explicitly commented on the fact that he did not think it would be wise to search for 'real' issues in the case of the coachee Bobbie. Coach II demonstrated both in coaching 3 and in coaching 4 that a skilful use of questions, feedback, advice, and face work can lead the interactants toward a discussion of underlying issues without damaging the coaching relationship. Coaching 1, however, did appear to be stuck in a psychological 'game' at times, and the same was certainly true for coaching 5. It is mostly likely that outside of the research project, Coach III would not have continued the coaching work with the coachee Olivia due to her apparent uncooperativeness. In fact, this coaching session highlights the fact that the success of coaching depends not only on the skills of the coach involved, but it is also fundamentally based on the coachee's openness to the process.

## **Methodology**

All of the analyses on which this thesis was based relied on qualitative discourse analytical close readings. Pilot studies were conducted for each of the categories of analysis before the frameworks were finalised, and the analyses themselves were conducted at least twice for the purpose of quality management. The methodology of the analysis of questions, feedback,

and advice also relied on quantitative studies, whose main results were examined with regard to their significance by means of the chi-square test. The categories of analysis were based on the linguistic research of advisory interactions, but also on approaches from coaching theory. In the case of self-presentation and positioning, I formed seven categories for qualitative analysis. Four of these categories (professional, social, and personal self-presentation, and the issue of agency and problem construction) were derived from concepts and tools in positioning theory and the sociolinguistic analysis of identity construction. The category 'initial self-presentation' was based on the specific structures of the coaching conversations in my corpus; the category 'self-presentation by means of metaphors' drew on the cognitive theory of metaphor; and the category 'self-evaluation' had its roots in psychological research on the self and in the study of mitigation in linguistic politeness and face work theory.

Overall, this framework of analysis provided profound insights into the different ways in which the interactants in my corpus negotiated their identities, their relationships, and the coaching issues under discussion. Yet it also shed light on common characteristics of the genre of business coaching communication.

### **Further research**

The issues discussed in this thesis were multifaceted and involved a wide variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. Further research would be extremely rewarding in all of the topics which were covered in this thesis. Above all, it would be interesting to test my categories of analysis by means of a larger corpus of coaching conversations. Also, it would be useful to compare the use of *wh*-questions and *yes/no*-questions by the coaches in business coaching conversation with their frequencies in other genres of oral communication. Further, analyses of frequencies of advice in coaching conversations could be compared with interview material evaluating the degree to which the coaches adhere to the principle of nondirectiveness.

In the area of self-presentation and positioning, the category 'humour' would represent an interesting complement, because humour occurred in several of the coaching interactions in my corpus, and its importance to identity construction is well established (cf. Locher and Graham 2008). Moreover, the analysis of face work on the discourse level could be combined with a classical analysis of face work on the speech act level of talk. Also, it would be revealing to compare the different manifestations of interactive patterns of relational dynamics in a large collection of coachings, thus contributing both to a categorisation of prototypical patterns and to an exploration of the constitutive factors which influence their emergence. Last, the analysis of interactive patterns of relational dynamics would also

represent a worthwhile approach to other conversational genres in the area of Human Resources and Human Resources Development. Thus, research on interaction types such as job interviews or appraisal interviews would certainly benefit from the inclusion of this specific perspective on communication.

It is my hope that this thesis has contributed to the linguistic research on relational work and identity construction as well as to the emerging field of interdisciplinary research on coaching. While the actual complexity of interactive dynamics in coaching interactions can naturally only be traced in broad strokes in an academic paper, it is nevertheless satisfying to make explicit some of the purposeful patterns forming the stream of communication. Regarding the coaching practice itself, it would certainly be a desirable aim to add relevant linguistic insights to the training curricula of coaches, thus facilitating processes of self-reflection by means of a valuable additional perspective on prototypical coaching interventions, relational work, identity construction, and interactive dynamics of relational patterns.



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## 19. Transcription conventions

Symbol	Name of symbol	Meaning of symbol	Example
[ ]	Square brackets	Overlapping speech	<i>C: to fight?</i> <i>M: e-[against]</i> <i>C: [against] this change;</i>
(-)	Brackets containing a minus	Break (less than 1s)	<i>u:hm, (-) what I'm doing here is</i>
(1s)/ (4s)	Brackets containing a number + "s"	Breaks of a certain number of seconds	<i>those who have college degrees, (2s) DON'T believe in freaking esoteric medicine.</i>
: :::~	Colon; several colons	Elongated vowels	<i>M: and personally: (1s) seen</i> <i>l::'m</i>
'h/ 'hhhh	Apostrophe + "h"; apostrophe + several "h"	Breathing in/ breathing in for a longer time	<i>'h we:ll,</i>
h'/ hhhhh'	"h" + apostrophe/ several "h" + apostrophe	Breathing out/ breathing out for a longer time	<i>I wanna do something that's useful</i> <i>hhhhh'</i>
	Capital letters	Particular stress	<i>for me it's uhm (-) the SECOND time today</i>
.	Full stop	Intonation falling	<i>okay. this was inhouse.</i>
-	Minus	Intonation remaining on the same pitch (as though the utterance be unfinished)	<i>C: NOW. you're a-</i>
,	Comma	Intonation slightly rising	<i>I started to work, u::hm (-) on my own,</i>
?	Question mark	Intonation rising	<i>I had worked in an agency?</i>
x xxxxxxx	"x"; several "x"	Incomprehensible talk	<i>u:h xxxxxx</i>
" "	Inverted commas	Presumed utterance (unclear speech)	<i>"and then" we left.</i>
( )	Brackets	Gestures, non-verbal actions, extraordinary para-verbal events	<i>(shrugging his shoulders)</i>
	Capital letter + dot + brackets containing an explanation in capital letters	Anonymised and abbreviated names, place names, company names, etc.	<i>'hh and I studied in G. (CITY),</i>
	Word(s) in non-italic format + brackets with English word(s)	Non-English terms	<i>I didn't take Überbrückungsgeld (=transition money) or any of [that,]</i>

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