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Synchrony and metaphoricity in Career Clean Coaching Conversations

Analysis of metaphor deployment in dialogues, such as psychotherapy sessions, shows how elaboration of various metaphors supported by therapists leads patients to happier and healthier life (Tay 2013). The “transformative powers” of metaphor (Loue 2008; Kottler and Carlson 2009) are also applied in rational emotive behaviour therapy (Smith 2008), cognitive coaching (Smith 2008), clean coaching (Sullivan and Rees 2008) and many other approaches (see Tay 2013 or (Needham–Didsbury 2014) for some of them). By focusing and reflecting on his/her metaphors, the client, together with the therapist, is able to draw out implications that can provide insights into his/her own feelings, reactions and behaviour (Needham–Didsbury 2014). However, the coach or therapist is not only using specific questions to elicit and explore client’s or patient’s metaphorical expressions but they also built rapport by repeating client’s or patient’s words and gestures (Ramseyer and Tschacher 2014; Lausberg, Dvoretzka, and Kryger 2013; Sullivan and Rees 2008; Lawley and Tompkins 2000). Moreover, synchrony and symmetry in communicative behaviours displayed nonverbally by both interactants in a dialogue are often correlated with positive, subjective perception of the interaction and relationship between interactants (Agliati et al. 2006). Additionally, syntactic and lexical alignment results in successful communication (Pickering and Garrod 2006).

The aim of the paper is to present results from research on the relationship between synchrony and metaphoricity in dialogue. Data for this study was collected during coaching sessions which were recorded in Polish Language using clean coaching questions to elicit and explore client’s metaphorical expressions about his or her career. Twenty participants were recorded in two sessions each. Sessions were recorded in four conditions: (1) the coach was repeating client’s words and gestures, (2) the coach was repeating only client’s gestures, (3) the coach was repeating only client’s words and (4) the coach was not repeating anything.

We expected differences in metaphoricity in these conditions in client’s expressions. Sessions have been transcribed in ELAN and transcripts were analysed in AntConc to determine potentially metaphorical words. Three indicators of metaphoricity were developed for this study: novelty (number of potentially metaphorical keywords in each session), saturation (sum of frequencies of potentially metaphorical words in each session) and elaboration (saturation divided by novelty). All indicators were normalized to the length of the session, that is the

number of all words used.

Statistically significant results were obtained for the difference between gestural synchrony and elaboration of metaphorical expressions, as well as for the novelty of the latter. Such results suggest that metaphoricity depends more on gestural than on lexical synchrony. However, saturation depends on the interaction of lexical synchrony and the sequence of sessions (i.e. whether it was first or second session of a given participant). Subsequent analysis reveals that the more words of the client were repeated by the coach the more saturated sessions were. Hence synchrony plays a key role in the process of developing metaphorical expressions in clean coaching sessions and in dialogue in general.

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