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A SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF CAREER ADAPTABILITY IN CAREER CONSTRUCTION THEORY

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we begin with an overview of concepts that relates to the theoretical notion *career adaptability* (Savickas, 2005). Next we raise concerns about conflation of terminology and concepts. We subsequently present a semantic and pragmatic analysis of career adaptability in order to demonstrate its similarities and differences to social cognitive constructs and suggest how its conceptual articulation in the scientific literature may progress. We conclude the chapter by presenting some implications for research and practice, particularly with regards to measurement of constructs.

BE PREPARED

In his conceptual paper on *career-life preparedness*, Lent (2013a) invoked Lord Baden-Powell's exhortation and motto of the Scout Movement: Be prepared. Far from anachronistic, this motto seems as relevant today as it was when youngsters of generations past faced their own challenges. Around the world still, Cub Scout leaders today upon millions of their young cubs the importance of being prepared for all challenges that may come one's way. It does not matter whether these challenges are practical or moral; what matters is being prepared.

More than being reactive to the vicissitudes of life, some career development theorists suggest that individuals should be proactively ready to take advantage of the pace of change and, moreover, to personally cultivate change by use of notions such as *serendipity* (Gladwell, 2008), *planned happenstance* (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) and *luck readiness* (Pryor & Bright, 2011). In this way, to be prepared can be conceptualised as a vital dimension of career self-management for readiness for success in the contemporary world-of-work. How does one achieve this state of readiness? What does "be prepared" mean? What is prepared? Prepared for what? How does one be prepared? The word "prepared" invokes a variety of connotations: readiness, resources-in-hand, and a time perspective of future orientation. It may connote psychological resourcefulness (e.g., attitudes, knowledge, traits), social resourcefulness (e.g., supportive family, community), or material resourcefulness (e.g., capacity to acquire goods and services on demand). Similarly, the clause "be prepared" has time perspectives (i.e., a present state of preparedness for a future challenge). Given all of these crucial questions, in this chapter we explore the notion of what it means to be prepared from a career development perspective.

Savickas's conceptual articulation of agency into CCT is important because it has connotative and denotative similarities with the same notion presented in social cognitive theory (SCT; Bandura, 2001), which is the progenitor of social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, 2013b; Lent & Brown, 2013). We accept Lent's description of preparedness as vigilance to threats,

awareness of resources and opportunities, and the use of proactive strategies (p. 7); moreover, we believe that his description raises important considerations in light of recent theoretical developments in the field. Furthermore, we are inspired by Lent's incisive argument to reflect on the construct career adaptability that is foundational to the career construction theory (CCT; Savickas, 2005) and subsequent formulations of career adaptability in terms of *agency* (Savickas, 2013). With agency now posited at the juncture of CCT and SCCT, Lent's paper is timely because it reminds the reader that—as the corpus of knowledge is constructed by the community of scholars who constitute the field of career development/vocational psychology—those in the field should reflect upon the discourse of the field that enables its members to construct meanings with one another.

A key objective of this chapter is to mitigate the risk of the construct career adaptability (Savickas, 2005) being awash in discourse and attenuation of its meaning among scholars. Accordingly, we present a conceptual analysis of career adaptability—semantically and pragmatically. Toward an end of conceptual and discursive clarity, we situate the intent of our analysis in the project of convergence in career theories (Collin & Patton, 2009; Savickas & Lent, 1994) and thus present an exploration of career adaptability that is appreciative of the social cognitive perspective (Bandura, 2001; Lent, 2013b; Lent & Brown, 2013).

CAREER ADAPTABILITY

There are many words that may describe the objectified phenomenology and subjective experience of career adaptability to which the very notion of *career self-management* pragmatically speaks. With the panoply of words, metaphors, and aphorisms in the professional literature and public media that may be indicative of being prepared (e.g., "Keep Calm and Carry On"), there is a risk that the scientific discourse will lack precision in meaning and conceptual clarity. This profusion of words becomes a discursive conundrum whereby the meanings of words are semantically and pragmatically confused and inadvertently misused in theory and in practice. Consider that at the time of writing this chapter in late 2013 a perfunctory search for the words "career" and "adaptability" in Google Scholar produced nearly 18 000 responses—clearly too many for the ordinary scholar to digest! Surely, among the 18 000 there could not be concordance of meaning? Using the same search terms as subjects in the database PsychInfo, there were 34 peer-reviewed papers within the range of years 1993–2002, and 120 within 2003–2012. That is a four-fold increase!

> Career adaptability is a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas. (Savickas, 2005, p. 52)

As a construct, career adaptability evolved from similar theoretical constructs, namely: *adjustment* (Super, 1951) and *maturity* (Super, 1955). Indeed, the theory's conceptual roots are in Super's life-space, life-span theory (Savickas, 2002). This connection saw Savickas's (1997) appropriation and extension of the notions of adjustment and maturity as key constructs that were ultimately subsumed by his career construction theory. However, Savickas (1997, 2005) carefully differentiates career adaptability from these progenitor constructs in terms of their being formulated for use in a world-of-work that by-and-large no longer exists. Instead, career adaptability is proffered as a new construct for the

extant world-of-work, defined by incessant change and unpredictability historically unprecedented in the industrial (Western) world of the 20th century.

With respect to the phenomenology of career adaptability, Savickas (2005) described adaptive individuals as:

> Becoming concerned about their future as a worker; increasing personal control over their vocational future; displaying curiosity by exploring possible selves and future scenarios; and, strengthening the confidence to pursue their aspirations (p. 52).

Thus, as a higher-order construct, career adaptability subsumes four lower constructs. Their respective definitive attitudes/coping behaviours are: *concern* (planful, aware, involved, preparing), *control* (decisive, assertive, disciplined, wilful), *curiosity* (inquisitive, experimenting, risk taking, inquiring), and *confidence* (efficacious, persistent, striving, industrious) (Savickas, 2005, p. 53). Akin to the notion of adjustment to the world-of-work:

> Adaptability shapes self-extension into the social environment as individuals connect with society and regulate their own vocational behavior relative to the developmental tasks imposed by a community and the transitions encountered in occupational roles" (Savickas, 2005, p. 52).

In the most recent statements on the career construction theory, (2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) the terms *adaptation*, *adapting*, and *adaptivity* are described in some detail to differentiate adaptability. This appropriates and extends the developmental language of Super's (1990) theory to describe adaptation with respect to developmental stages: orientation, exploration, stabilization, management, and disengagement. Adaptation is used in the sense of personally meaningful outcomes "resulting from adaptivity, adaptability, and adapting" (p. 157). Adaptivity is the "personal characteristic of flexibility or willingness to meet career tasks, transitions, and traumas with fitting responses" (p. 157). Adaptation may be thought of in the past sense of having adapted to something; whereas adaptivity may thought of in the present or future sense of the potential of being ready and willing to bring all of one's resources to bear on a moment; that is, to pragmatically use and manifest one's resources of adaptability (viz., concern, control, curiosity, and confidence).

The differences among the key terms used in the CCT (i.e., adapt, adaptation, adapting, adaptivity, adaptability) are subtle and therefore at risk of conflation with one another and with the terminology of other theories. For example, Lent's notion of preparedness may be understood as a combination of adaptivity (as readiness and willingness) and adaptability (awareness and possession of resources). Thus, there is a need to carefully consider the above-mentioned terms in light of other theories to establish conceptual divergence and convergence.

CONCEPTUAL DIVERGENCE AND CONVERGENCE

Career adaptability complements the two other dimensions of the career construction theory: vocational personality and life themes (Savickas, 2005). Vocational personality and life themes are not the focus of this chapter; however it is important to note that, inasmuch segmented as three contiguous dimensions, vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes can be, and should be, used as a holistic framework of career. As a framework, it has the capacity to accommodate new interpretations and concepts that evolve from its tenets. Furthermore, it has the capacity to appropriate interpretations and constructs from other theories with compatible epistemological foundations.

The vocational personality dimension of CCT cannot be overlooked for it frames career adaptability and life themes. It is important to remember that vocational personality implies stability and the latter two dimensions flexibility—a truly paradoxical mixture of being human. Consistent with CCT's integration of the stable (i.e., vocational personality) and the flexible (i.e., career adaptability), through the lens of the SCCT, Lent (2013a) argued for the complementarity of preparedness to traditional, matching approaches to career planning and adjustment, and reminded readers that the traditional paradigm of career is neither obsolete nor inadequate when implemented alongside contemporary concepts and practices. Meta-analytic research of 60 empirical studies undertaken over six decades demonstrates a predictive relationship between interest congruence and performance (Nye, Su, Rounds, & Drasgow, 2012). Therefore, scholars should not go past relevant constructs such as the traits openness to experience and conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 2003). From the perspective of SCCT (Lent, 2013b; Lent & Brown, 2013), conscientiousness may act either as a moderator or mediator of the complex relations among self-efficacy, expectations, intentions, goals, and ultimate actions and choices. Thus when considering the theoretical dimension of career adaptability, one must give due attention to (vocational) personality factors that impinge its being a constitute dimension of a person's career, objectively or subjectively considered.

Conversely, both CCT and SCCT identify that (vocational) personality has an interactive relationship with experience of the world-of-work. This stance suggests the traits of personality must have moderating or mediating relationship with a person's career adaptability, and vice versa. Indeed, longitudinal research (Wille & De Fruyt, 2013) indicates that it is the case that work-related performance and learning experiences can influence personality through vocational interests.

Consistent with the theoretical roots of the SCCT, there are conceptual parallels of career adaptability with Bandura's (2001) SCT, particularly the notion of *agency*. As a higher-order construct agency of SCT, agency comprises *intentionality*, *forethought*, *self-reactiveness*, and *self-reflectiveness*. Intentionality "is not simply an expectation or prediction of a future course of action but a proactive commitment to bringing them about (Bandura, 2001, p. 6). Forethought enables individuals to use expectations and predictions of the future to guide current behaviour and its progress toward the future state. Thus, forethought is a key component of the mechanism of self-regulation, of "anticipatory self-guidance" (p. 7). SCCT is an elegant theoretical model of SCT. Hypotheses regarding career behaviours that are formulated through the SCCT inevitably involve self-efficacy and cognitive processes of self-reflection. SCCT implicitly assumes the role of intentionality, forethought, and self-reactiveness as part-and-parcel of being self-reflective and self-efficacious. In terms of the parallel between SCT and career adaptability in SCT, concern for, curiosity in, and control of career goals in a future sense are concordant with a proactive commitment to making career goals happen, and forethought is that cognitive process whereby current attitudes and behaviour of career adaptability are modified to bring a cognitive and behavioural concordance between the future and the present.

The volitational modification of a person's current cognitive, emotional, and behavioural states, in light of the conditions of the present and future (i.e., self-regulation) requires self-reactiveness. Engagement in actions that are consistent with future goals and current status enables a cognitive process of comparison and contrast between current and future idealised goals. Concomitantly, self-reflection enables a people to judge their

> capability to exercise some measure of control over their own functioning and over environmental events. (Bandura, 2001, p. 10)

Self-efficacy, as such, plays a crucial role in consciously recruiting the resources of one's self-reflectiveness, forethought, and intentionality to bear on a situation linked to the future.

> Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions. (Bandura, 2001p. 10)

Thus, self-reflectiveness that is self-efficacy is akin to the CCT's construction of confidence. It is self-efficacy that cognitive underpins a person's optimism or pessimism for the future, and which goals and challenges are selected, and how one goes about attaining the expected outcomes.

The CCT's constructs of adaptability resources, concern, control, and curiosity, seem to have a degree of conceptual similarity with the elements of agency, as described by Bandura (2001). In regards to the methodology of the measurement model of career adaptability, Savickas and Porfeli (2012) state:

> Career adaptability resources are the self-regulation strengths or capacities that a person may draw upon to solve the unfamiliar, complex, and ill-defined problems presented by developmental vocational tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas. These resources are not at the core of the individual, they reside as the intersection of person-in-environment. Thus adapt-abilities are psycho-social constructs. (p. 662)

There are two crucial themes that align with SCT and SCCT. First, adaptability resources are described in terms of self-regulation (cf. self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness). Second, CCT is extends into the psycho-social domain with reference to the "intersection" of the person and his/her environment. This echoes the SCT notion of reciprocal determinism among person, behaviour, and environment. Therefore, there is scope to converge concepts or to better differentiate them if they are in fact names given for phenomena differently conceived.

SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS OF ADAPTABILITY

Traditionally, linguistic analysis has followed two distinct approaches: *semantic analysis* and *pragmatic analysis*. Semantic analysis seeks to articulate the agreed meaning of a word or group of words that are used to represent something. What seems at first glance a relatively simple task is, in fact, extremely complex. For example, a semantic analysis of the word "chair" may articulate an agreed meaning along the lines of "something to sit on". However, one can sit on a rocky outcrop, a milking stool, the back of a bucking bronco, and many other things that we would not call chairs. Semantic analysis, therefore, seeks to articulate all of the properties of a thing that would appropriately be signified by the word "chair", in both the positive and the negative. That is to say, a chair is (positively) something to sit on; a chair is not (negatively) something to serve a meal on; and so forth. A fine-tuned semantic analysis could, potentially, contain hundreds of positive and negative property statements, including many which require hedging devices (e.g. a chair "usually" has four legs). In order to be of practical use, therefore, the semantic analyst is required to decide which of the properties are most important for achieving the purpose of the analysis.

Pragmatic analysis, on the other hand, seeks to articulate the illocutionary intent of the use of a word or group of words. In other words, what

is the speaker or writer intending to do in using a particular word? For example, a monarch may utter the word "chair", and the domestic staff would understand that this is an order to bring a suitable piece of furniture for sitting on. However, it would be most bizarre for English language students to bring their teacher something to sit on every time he or she uttered the word "chair" in a lesson reviewing vocabulary related to household furniture. The same word can have a different pragmatic meaning (or intent) in a different context. The goal of pragmatic analysis is to articulate the agreed understanding around what the use of a word is intended to do.

Herein we present a semantic analysis of the signifier "adaptability" as a specialist term in the field of career development theory and practice. This aim is consistent with the life design scholars' research agenda in regards to a top-down approach to constructs, noting that:

> The subjective perception of what adaptation actually means might vary substantially from one individual to another. Nevertheless, all concepts addressing this core notion of adaptability might be considered as promising future research directions. (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 248)

The analysis presented here highlights the complexity of the meaning of career adaptability and associated constructs.

Semantic Analysis

For the purposes of the semantic analysis, a semantic map was constructed from the literature reviewed earlier in this chapter. Both authors consulted on many iterations of the map, in order to present what we believed to be a useful, albeit contestable, representation of the agreed meaning of the term "adaptability" in the literature, as well as links between this term and other signifiers from the same literature. This was then used as an instrument for identifying significant properties of the signifier. The final version of the semantic map is given in Figure 1, and the list of important semantic properties is given in Table 1.

As demonstrated in the semantic map, career adaptability can be seen to be different than vocational personality, in the sense that the former refers to abilities that are relatively flexible (i.e,. can be changed) and the latter is relatively fixed. This is an important distinction for career development theorists and practitioners, as it highlights the fact that the term "adaptability" focuses on psycho-social resources that can be developed. In this sense, we note one significant semantic property as +*flexible* (the + indicating that this is an attribute that an entity must have in order to be appropriated represented by the signifier).

An important property of the signified concept, which is not clearly articulated in the literature, is whether or not "adaptability" is reactive, proactive or both. The use of the word "coping" in defining adaptability as "resources for coping" (Savickas, 2005, 2013) suggests that adaptability refers to reacting to changes in the world-of-work; that is to say, is reactive. However, there are other models and explanations in the literature (e.g., surrounding the terms "author", "agency" etc.) that suggest that the concept being signified by the term "adaptability" might also be proactive, in the sense that individuals can author their own stories, and can be proactively committed to bringing about change. This semantic flocculence could lead to discourse confusion, and warrants clarification. Thus, the property of proactive is noted with a question mark, as *?proactive*, whilst reactive is noted as +*reactive*. This finding suggests that it would be useful for experts to achieve agreement about whether or not "adaptability" is only reactive, or is also proactive.

As highlighted on the semantic map, the term "adaptability" occurs twice, and this also is a point that might result in discourse confusion. In the first instance, the term is a broader concept that incorporates both the readiness and the resources for responding to change. In the second instance, it is used as a signifier pointing to the resources for responding (i.e., concern, control, curiosity and intentionality) and "adaptivity" represents the readiness to respond. Thus, "adaptability" is positioned as a hyponym of "career adaptability", in the same way that "chair" is a hyponym of "furniture". This creates problems for semantic analysis in determining whether to define the properties of the hyponym or the superordinate. This confusion is indicated by an asterisk before the + sign in the semantic properties of *+*readiness to respond to change*. As the property "resources for responding to change" is signified by both terms, it can be given without an asterisk as +*resources for responding to change*. At a more specific level of categorisation, this property might be variously noted to include +*concern, +control, +curiosity, +confidence* (following Savickas) and +*intentionality, +forethought, +self-reactiveness, +self-reflectiveness* (following Bandura). As it is preferable to be as specific as possible in noting semantic properties, these latter eight properties are included in the semantic properties list, rather than the superordinate property of +*resources for responding to change*.

If we consider "career adaptability" as the superordinate term to include being both willing and able to change, then the terms "agency" and "self-efficacy" would be co-hyponyms (at the same semantic level of categorisation) of adaptability (i.e. the resources for responding to change). Thus, these terms might also be added to the semantic properties list. However, as superordinate terms for the last four properties mentioned in the previous paragraph, adding them to the list does not add any specificity, and so they have
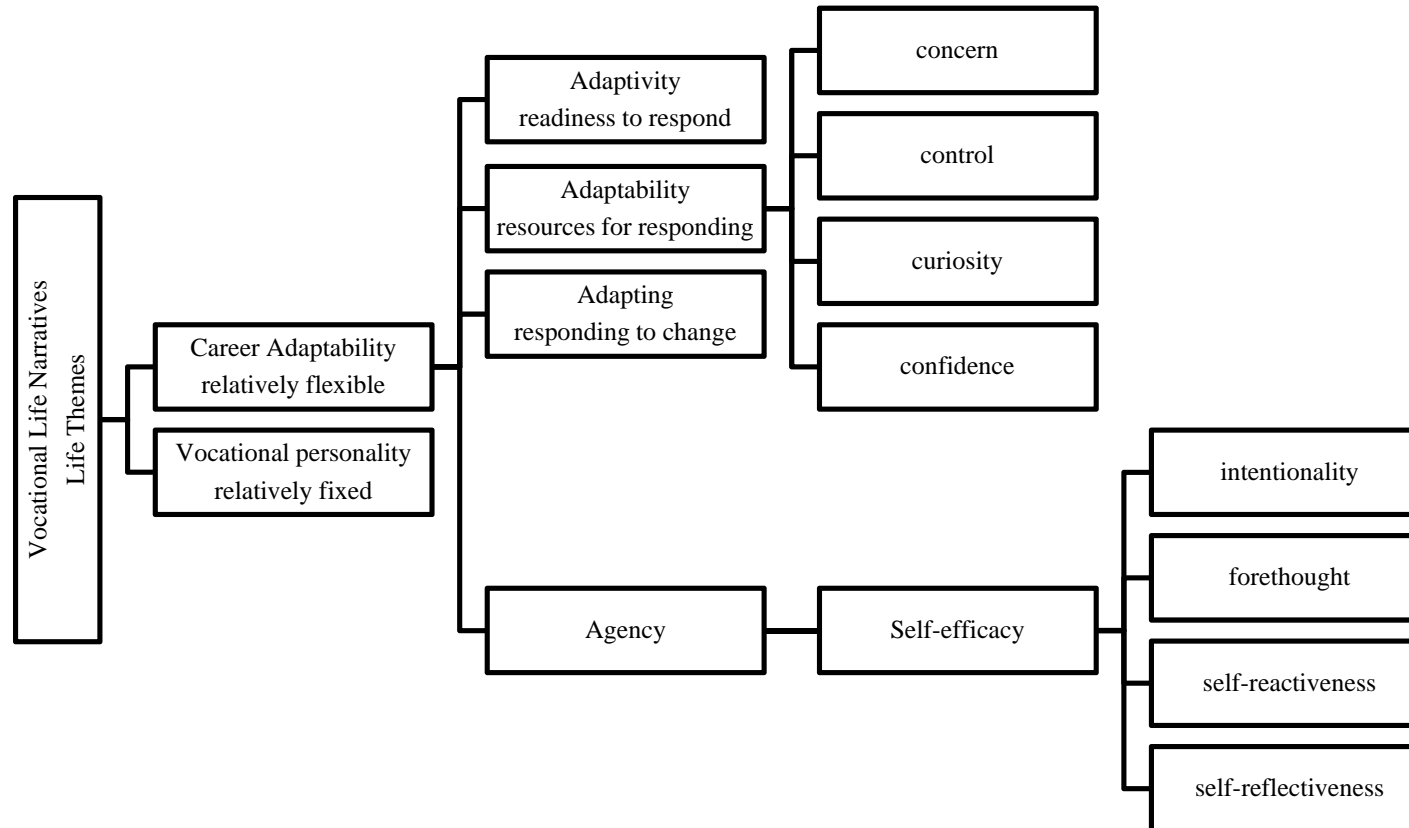
Figure 1. Semantic map of career adaptability

not been included. One other property on the semantic map is "responses to change", which Savickas calls "adapting". This, as a hyponym of "career adaptability" but a co-hyponym of "adaptability", has been included in the semantic properties list as *+*responding to change* to highlight the lack of clarity over whether the hyponym or superordinate should be considered the core term.

The key semantic properties discussed thus far are included in the list that follows in Table 1. As noted earlier, this is far from an exhaustive list. Rather it is an initial attempt to identify significant semantic properties for the purpose of clarification. The list should be taken as open for both contestation and refinement, as identifying levels of "agreement" is another key process in a semantic analysis of key terms in a field of study.

Table 1. Significant Semantic Properties List of Adaptability

Semantic Property
+*flexible*
?*proactive*
+*reactive*
+readiness to respond to change
+*concern*
+*control*
+*curiosity*
+*confidence*
+*intentionality*
+*forethought*
+*self-reactiveness*
+*self-reflectiveness*
+responding to change

Pragmatic Analysis

Turning to a pragmatic analysis of the term "adaptability", we note firstly the context in which the term appears. This analysis is based on literature published in a specific field of academic study (career development theory and practice) and therefore the term should be treated as a specialist term, or "jargon"; that is to say, the term carries with it not only the semantic properties outlined above, but also the underlying tacit message that the term "belongs" to academic discourse and its practitioners (i.e., academics) within a particular field. Others may interlope, by browsing a copy of the text, but only insiders—academics in this field—are expected to be in a position to make an appropriate connection between the signifier "adaptability" and the phenomenon the term is used to signify.

Secondly, we note intertextual ambiguity. The theory of intertexuality, following Bakhtin (1984), suggests that all utterances carry with them echoes of previous utterances. Sometimes the intertextual references are clear. In the case of the literature examined in this chapter, the connections between texts discussing the same phenomenon (in this instance, the works of Bandura and Savickas) are not clearly indexed. Thus, although similarities and connections can be identified at the semantic level (e.g., between "adapting" and "agency"), these are not pragmatically indexed through the use of direct or indirect references. The pragmatic analyst would suggest that this indicates the intention to develop distinct theoretical pathways. Whether or not this is a helpful approach cannot be determined by linguistic analysis; it is something that warrants discussion by

experts in the field, whereby they engage in a critical analysis of the field's discourse.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The items of the international version of the *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale* (*CAAS*; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) that measure the four resources of adaptability: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, have meaningful similarities with intentionality, forethought, and self-reactiveness. Take the following items as examples from the CAAS (p. 672) and note our reading of their meaning from the perspective of agency in SCT, given in parentheses:
—Preparing for the future (intentionality)
—Planning how to achieve my goals (forethought)
—Taking responsibility for my actions (self-reactiveness)
—Working up to my ability (self-reflectiveness)
Albeit four out of the total sixteen items of the CAAS, this sample demonstrates the potential for connotative convergence or, in the case of not knowing the theoretical roots of the items, connotative confusion.

What would a scholar who is from outside the discipline of vocational psychology and who is unaware of the CCT and SCCT take as read from the mainstream perspective of the SCT? Would he or she arrive at a conclusion that the items load on the higher order construct agency as given in SCT? Without surveying scholars it is difficult to answer the questions; however you the reader may arrive at your own conclusion as to the similarities in the terminology. Another solution would be to reanalyse the multiple validation studies of the CAAS to discern which of its items correspond to SCT agency. Another solution is to call upon other disciplines to provide different perspectives on what analysis of what is meant by adaptability in the discourse of the field. A useful disciplinary perspective is that of linguistic analysis. To that end, in this paper we have conducted a limited semantic and pragmatic analysis of adaptability, and this analysis demonstrates some convergence of meaning among the key terminology of CCT, SCCT, and SCT.

The meanings of the terms go to their phenomenology, as constructs brought into the discourse of the science as socially constructed entities to be observed, albeit indirectly through procedures such as questionnaires and interviews, and as words that research participants, clients, and others, use naturally in their everyday life to describe their experiences. It is quite important that the researcher and practitioners using the words from a particular theoretical perspective understand that their intended meanings may not necessarily be taken-as-given by the receiver.

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the conceptual articulation of the career construction theory and its dimension of career adaptability. We took the methodological approach of linguistic analysis to explore the diversity in connotation and denotation of career adaptability. It is our hope that this example of interdisciplinary research demonstrates the value of collaboration with scholars from other field and the potential to enrich career development theory, research, and practices.

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