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Semioticians’ Glassy Essence: The Discursive
Construction of Semiotics Through the Eyes of its
Practitioners

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# Table of contents

List of figures ... v
List of Tables ... vi
Abbreviations ... vi
Declaration ... vii
Acknowledgments ... viii
Abstract ... ix

## Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale for this study ... 1
1.2 Methodological and theoretical approach ... 4
1.3 Research questions and contribution ... 7
1.4 Organisation of the thesis ... 8

## Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Semiotics’ structuring discourses ... 12
2.2 Epistemological shifts in semiotics
   2.2.1 Semiotics of texts ... 16
   2.2.2 Visual semiotics ... 17
   2.2.3 Semiotics of culture ... 18
   2.2.4 Semiotics of media ... 19
   2.2.5 Current trends in semiotics ... 19
2.3 Transition: moving towards semiotics scholars ... 21
2.4 Identity and discourse ... 25
2.5 Academic identity ... 29
2.6 Narrative research ... 32
   2.6.1 Semiotics’ mobilisation through narratives in interaction ... 36
2.7 Personal narratives and non-biographical accounts ... 37
2.8 Positioning ... 39
2.9 Categorisation ... 47
2.10 The principle of relationality ... 50
2.11 Concluding remarks ... 51

## Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Research interviews ... 53
3.2 Inviting respondents to participate in the study ... 55
3.3 The data
3.4 Setting up the interviews
  3.4.1 Videoconferencing as a complimentary data collection tool
3.5 Ethical considerations
  3.5.1 Informed consent
  3.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality
3.6 Questioning respondents
  3.6.1 Conducting the interview
3.7 Transcribing the data
3.8 My own positioning in the study
3.9 Concluding remarks

Chapter 4. Inquiring into semioticians’ essence
4.1 Preparing the data and getting a first glimpse
4.2 Stage one: Getting a comprehensive view
4.3 Analytic challenges: Story identification
4.4 Types of stories
  4.4.1 Structure of stories
  4.4.2 Biographical accounts
  4.4.3 Generic account of tasks
  4.4.4 Projections of the self
  4.4.5 Anecdotes
  4.4.6 Exemplum narrative
  4.5.1 Positioning as a methodology of analysis
  4.5.2 Respondents’ self-positioning
    4.5.2.1 Agency and evaluation
  4.5.3 Positioning characters in the story: reference and deictics
  4.5.4 Positioning characters in the story II: reported speech and indexical positioning
  4.5.5 Positioning salient characters from the past: reported speech and modalisation
  4.5.6 Positioning salient characters from the past II: evaluative Indexicals and categories
4.6 Most common subject positions
4.7 Stage three: Agency, constancy-change and othering in positioning
  4.7.1 Relational positioning: sameness and difference
  4.7.2 Constructing difference
  4.7.3. Shaping the D-discourse: Negative orientations about semiotics
6.2 The dominant D-discourse of semiotics 203
6.3 Different identities for an heterogeneous group 210
  6.3.1 Being an accepted member of the community 210
  6.3.2 Disengaging from the community of semioticians 212
  6.3.3. Mixed identities 214
  6.3.4 Representations of the academic practice of semiotics 215

7. Chapter 7. Conclusions 218
7.1 Summary of the thesis 218
7.2. Contributions of this thesis 220
  7.2.1 Contribution to studies of identity in interaction 220
  7.2.2 Contributions to the field of semiotics 225
  7.2.3 Contributions to academic labour in general 226
7.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research 228

Bibliography 229

Appendix 1. Consent form and information sheet in English 258
Appendix 2. Consent form and information sheet in French 260
Appendix 3. Transcription key 263
Appendix 4. Full transcripts of extracts used in Chapters 4 264
Appendix 5. Extracts in Chapter 5 281
# List of figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Stages of data analysis</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Summary of respondent</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>MaxQda screenshot</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Screenshot of MaxQda</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Main events</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Positioning as a model of analysis</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Most common subject positions as active agents</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Most common subject positions as passive agents</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Dimensions of the D-discourse</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Representation of the D-discourse of semiotics</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1  Distribution of respondents  61

Abbreviations

CA  Conversation Analysis
MCA  Membership Categorisation Analysis
Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work except where acknowledgement is given to outside sources. This thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.
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Abstract

This thesis offers insights into the under-researched area of semiotics scholars’ identity construction, which it examines by focusing on their narratives, produced in a particular setting. I address this topic by using research interviews and a linguistic analysis of unfolding interactions. The analysis is informed by a toolkit that consists of different strands of narrative positioning theory (Bamberg, 1997; Wortham, 2000, Søreide, 2006; De Fina, 2013; and Deppermann, 2015).

For this, I draw on an oral corpus composed of 40 research interviews with respondents from 12 countries (Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Bulgaria, Germany, Mexico and the US) conducted in three languages: English, French and Spanish. This study explores locally co-constructed narratives in order to explain how respondents take on multiple acts of positioning and negotiate different aspects of their identity with me, the interviewer.

The findings reveal that respondents do not adhere to a single identity, but rather represent themselves by choosing from within an inventory of identity affordances that either intersect or contradict with each other according to the moment of the interaction. At some moments, and in a more coherent way, they coalesce around a particular subject’s position or around macro-discursive contexts in order to enact stronger identity claims.

In addition to the above arguments, I account for the existence of a prevailing discourse that intends to convey the scholars’ own subjective experiences of working in a marginalised field. This study, therefore, helps in our understanding of how semioticians interact and negotiate their academic identities and how they struggle to achieve recognition for their field, despite the institutional constraints of their domestic academic systems.
Chapter 1: Introduction

In this study, I examine co-constructed narratives among forty semiotics scholars in the particular setting of a research interview. I investigate the construction of different affordances of identification, as they negotiate some practices of the field through their talk. In the rest of the chapter, I advance the rationale for conducting this study with semiotics scholars’ identity. I then discuss my methodological and theoretical approach. From this, I turn to my research questions and the way my findings contribute to knowledge, before closing with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Rationale for this study

My main motivation to conduct this study lies in a combination of interests in regard to the current status of the field of semiotics in society and academic environments as a marginal field. As a field of knowledge (Posner, 2003), semiotics is relevant to all the aspects of human life, as the domain, which seeks for the production and circulation of meaning. Nonetheless, semiotics is not an established field in most of the academic systems, and it lacks full recognition in the disciplinary market’ as Rastier (2001) pointed out. The local situation of semiotics in every country is contingent upon two facts: firstly, the mainstream academic cultures it is embedded in. Secondly, it is constrained by higher education institutions, or research councils in countries such as France, Italy or Denmark. Moreover, lack of organisation and institutional recognition have direct impact on those who construct and maintain this field: semiotics scholars, or semioticians.

On the individual level, semiotics practitioners have to learn to dissociate their identities as researchers and to negotiate them according to the discipline, they are attached to. In this thesis, I understand a discipline as an organised form of
knowledge, which has been institutionalised in university faculties as well as in scholarly associations (Weingart, 2010: 10). On one hand, no single researcher is a semiotician from the very beginning. They become semioticians in the course of diverse encounters with people and authors, by developing membership feelings within the field. Those feelings are constructed by the means of time and language and discursively enacted. Such developments prompt individuals to make choices in the sense of deciding to do research in this field and to stand up for it. These decisions provoke different dilemmas in the life of each scholar, which can be framed in terms of belonging and remaining in one or more discipline (for instance, linguistics or philosophy), struggles to fit in the own home field (psychology or media), or being trapped in liminal positions between two fields (as in the case of cognitive science and semiotics).

As Greco (2014) pointed out about the negotiation of linguists’ identification: ‘a syntactician does not need to justify his work as being ‘linguistic’ enough. A syntactician is de facto a linguist (Greco, 2014: 20). Conversely, not only do semioticians need to justify and negotiate the pertinence of their research, according to the field they are institutionally attached to, but they are also obliged to show and confirm their right to exist in the field of semiotics by producing outstanding research and negotiating their positions with their home institutions. This is why I decided to enquire about the quandaries practitioners face when working in this field.

On the local level, this takes place through an interplay between multiple identification mechanisms – conveyed through narratives and categories of self-representation that enact flexible, and even, contradictory identities as linguists, researchers or people shifting from one discipline to another, and external mechanisms that constrain the practice of semiotics, prompting practitioners to cross different academic spaces in order to get recognition and secure their positions in academia.
Very little is currently known about semioticians’ identification mechanisms and how the absence of institutional recognition affects their lives as academics. Yet little research has been undertaken to investigate these issues (Darras, 2012; Biglari, 2014). This study intends to illustrate how the respondents’ answers contribute to have a clearer idea of the field of semiotics, since it considers the ways in which scholars live and produce representations of the field. On the other hand, this thesis is also about how discourses and practices, outside individuals, interact (or separate) within a community. Hence, on the group level, it aims at providing a current state of semiotics, according to the responses provided by a population of forty scholars who tell how they interact and (de)construct identification in the field.

In inquiring the dilemmas semiotics practitioners face when working in this field, my research interests and my own life intersect. I discovered semiotics as an undergraduate linguistics student back in my home country. This took me to delve into the broad field of semiotics and to realise how it works as a sensibility to make sense of the surrounding reality. Further events led me to undertake a semiotics master’s programme in the place which has probably achieved the most sustainable organisation of semiotics in the world: Estonia. Living in a radically different environment and interacting with established semiotics scholars helped me to realise my wish to enter this community of practitioners. This is why I chose to write papers on semiotics-oriented topics, to participate in semiotics conferences and to observe how these scholars work and interact when gathered.

The link between my readings and investigations about the field and its figures, as well as the encounters with some researchers, were insightful insofar as I became aware of the potentialities of semiotics as a trans-disciplinary field to approach manifold aspects of culture. The multiple interactions I have had with the field and its practitioners led me to see the other side of the coin: even though semiotics is rich
in approaches and traditions, and fertile when explicating meaning-generation processes, it is not well-established and it further lacks recognition in academic environments. Thus, I decided to investigate its practitioners, who are the ones to construct the field and keep it alive.

The title of this thesis, rather than making reference to Shakespearean ‘glassy essence’, intends to draw an intertextual link between Charles Sanders Peirce’s 1892 essay entitled *Man’s glassy essence* and Milton Singer’s 1984 homonymous book on semiotic anthropology. I interpret the titles of these texts as putting to the fore the question of identification. The conceptions of the semiotic self are multiple, yet the reflection on the ‘semiotician self’ is seldom seen, if not inexistent. The second part of the name refers to a collective vision and appraisal, and the ways in which a group of researchers conceives of the discipline they practice; how in fact it is being experienced, talked and represented.

1.2 Methodological and theoretical approach

In order to address the research gap outlined above, I conducted a study with forty respondents from 12 countries (Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Bulgaria, Germany, Mexico and the US). Thus, I draw on a dataset composed of an oral corpus of research interviews in three languages (English, French and Spanish). As such, these languages also point to the existence of different traditions in semiotics –mostly to Saussurean, Greimassian and Peircean orientations.

The choice of methods corresponds with the in-depth type of data that I wanted to obtain and, with foreknowledge of the research topic through my review of the literature and my personal experience in semiotics. In this thesis, I pursue a discursive
approach to interviews as conceived by Richards and Talmy, i.e. a speech event in which both participants produce meaning, co-construct knowledge and participate together in social practices (Richards & Talmy, 2010). Besides that, these events are interactional rather than artificial encounters (De Fina, 2009). Hence, these research interviews are regarded as a performance of the self with and for the interviewer.

Across the interviews, a variety of identity dilemmas arose, when I invited the respondents to elaborate on multiple topics, which include their academic practice, the interaction with peers or their own particular representation of semiotics as a field. When evoking these issues, the participants performed different facets of identity in discourse, including the choice of certain terms, pronouns or categories over others, as well as the enactment of different, and sometimes contradictory, subject positions that ranged between success, marginalisation and distancing. At certain moments, however, they consistently aligned to either a particular subject position, or to macro-social frames, and constructed stronger, more ‘durable’ (Bamberg, 2010) identity claims.

The interviews were thus the setting that afforded a great deal of identity work. In these interactions, the participants are engaged with the narrative mode (Bruner, 1991) as well as the telling of argumentative stories. When doing so, they reflected and discursively enacted their actions in the storyworld as characters, as well as from the perspective of the here-and-now of the interaction. Consequently, they made sense of different social situations, and were able to elaborate on the presentation of themselves and others (Bamberg & McCabe, 1998; Bamberg, 2004). The narratives resulting from the interviews are considered as outcomes of self-reflexive processes that shed light on new insights and levels of sense-making about respondents’ practices and lives (Lucius-Hoene & Depperman, 2000).
My theoretical approach to this thesis departs from a broader perspective in the domain of identities-in-interaction. Concretely, in the way in which the identity is constituted in linguistic interaction. The framework that I draw upon in this thesis is *positioning theory* (Davies & Harré, 2001; Harré et al. 2009), as applied to narratives in interaction which offers insights into how people could engage in explicit or driven self-positioning in interactions. Positioning theory has diversified and refined its concepts in order to overcome multiple gaps in its theoretical tenets. In this manner, Davies and Harré’s abstract treatment of the notion of positioning has been addressed by Deppermann (2015). This author has provided a more comprehensive definition of positions as ascriptions which are semiotically structured, linked to social action and accomplished by social practice. In addition to this, they can be locally situated and convey a multiplicity of identities.

In line with Bamberg (1997), the thesis pays special attention to locally co-constructed narratives in order to explain how semiotics practitioners take up multiple acts of positioning (Søreide, 2006) vis-à-vis themselves as researchers and vis-à-vis a collective other. Additionally, this perspective also addresses the navigation between respondents’ local identity claims (Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin, 2011; Depperman, 2015) and larger macro contexts to formulate and construct concrete types of identification (De Fina, 2013).

In their narratives, the respondents mobilised a variety of explicit and indexical (Silverstein, 2003) linguistic markers that help to negotiate different aspects of their identification. This diversity includes categorisation (Schegloff, 2007a), reported speech (Rosier, 1999), or modality markers (Johansson & Suomela-Salmi, 2011). Lastly, the principle of relationality was also articulated as an additional resource to (de)construct membership from the larger group of semioticians (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005).
1.3 Research questions and contribution

In this thesis, I address three inter-related research questions. Together these examine how and in what ways the particular interaction of a research, afford and constrain different possibilities of identification as a member of the community of semiotics for my participants.

My research questions were recalibrated during the course of this research, including through the early data analysis. My research questions are as follows:

- How do semiotics scholars identify themselves and how are they identified by others through narratives and representations in research interviews?
- In what extent do narratives in interaction mobilise positioning to enable the construction and negotiation of identification of participants and among participants?
- In what extent do the concerns made relevant in the interviews could account for the individual status of semiotics in each respondent’s context?

In addressing these questions, my thesis contributes to the studies of identities-in-interaction, to the field of general semiotics, and to academic labour in general. In terms of its contribution to the studies of identities in interaction, my thesis adds to the literature relating to positioning theory but extends this literature to apply and combine different perspectives of this approach. My thesis brings together and establishes a synergy between different strands of positioning (mainly those of Bamberg, 1997; Søreide, 2006; Wortham (2000; 2001) and Deppermann (2015). From a methodological perspective, my thesis adds to the body of literature adopting a discursive approach, applying this to the study of co-constructed identities in a research interview.
In addition, this thesis adds to general semiotics by providing a reflexive account of the field, through the told personal experiences and identity constructions of its practitioners. As such, this thesis adds to the literature on general semiotics insofar as it investigates how a group of semiotics scholars do identity work, considering them its main research object in order to determine their identity dilemmas vis-à-vis the multiple problems emerged when they felt that the recognition of the field was challenged.

Finally, this study also contributes to academic labour overall because it addresses the lives and stories of a group of scholars who work in an oft-neglected field of knowledge. Hence, the thesis accounts for some of the difficulties they face in regards to the field’s lack of academic organisation and how it is constrained by domestic academic systems.

1.4 Organisation of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the epistemological background of semiotics. I start by showing how semiotics was organised around two fundamental discourses (Foucault, 1969) in the twentieth century: Saussure’s semiological approach, mainly followed by structuralist and poststructuralist researchers and Peirce’s pragmatist approach, which was adopted by semiotics researchers. Afterwards, I present the epistemological shifts that diversified semiotics’ research objects – from text as the main analytical unit to visual production, then to the study of culture as a sign system, multimodality and multimediality, and further approaches that include cognitive semiotics, sociosemiotics or biosemiotics. Then, I turn to my research object: semioticians’ identifications. In the second part, I will discuss developments in identity theory that are relevant for my research from a discursive perspective. In this part I also incorporate the discussion of academic identities since this type of identity
will also be approached in the thesis. In the third part, I review literature on narrative research, and I try to expose my argument for the use of narrative in this thesis. I present the main types of narratives to be used in the study and introduce the main theoretical approaches of positioning theory. Lastly, I introduce the core linguistic resources, whereby identity is negotiated and constructed in narratives in interaction.

The first part of Chapter 3, Methodology, provides an account of literature on research interviews and gives an outline of the type of interview I used in this thesis: a semi-structured research interview. The second part outlines the background for the respondents in terms of institutional positions, countries of work as well as their scientific orientations. Thirdly, the setting of the interviews is discussed, and I make a case for the discussion of the ethical considerations that were addressed in this study with regard to informed consent, anonymisation of participants and confidentiality. Lastly, I present the type of questions posed to respondents and the aims they had to elicit acts of positioning. I also accounted for the transcription system I used.

Chapter 4 is divided into four parts. In part one I outline the analytical approach and provide the means to addressing the data in three stages of examination. In addition, I show the type of stories analysed and their structural characteristics. In the second part of this chapter, I account for the linguistic resources utilised to mobilise positioning and present the case to use positioning as a methodological tool. In the third part, I discuss the ways, whereby the respondents constructed sameness in the group of semioticians as well as in other groups, how some respondents disengaged from the community of semioticians by displaying how they want to be known. In the fourth part, I discuss three identity struggles, reported by the interviewees, in which they felt their identity was in jeopardy: 1) meeting additional audiences, 2) getting
recognition of the field of semiotics by national academic systems, and 3) grappling with issues of interdisciplinarity.

Chapter 5 provides the analysis of three cases studies of representative respondents. I present how each respondent, based on their own personal stories, showed a more coherent process of identity work when aligning with a particular subject position. In doing so, they construct three identity affordances, which include: disengagement from the community of semioticians, a twofold construction between marginality and acceptance, and full membership in semiotics by evoking a social identity (De Fina, 2011).

Chapter 6, summarises and discusses the findings and relates them back to the literature, reviewed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 7 outlines the conclusions of the thesis, summarises the overall insights and formulates explicit answers to one of the research questions. I close the thesis by highlighting the limitations and indicating areas for further research.
Chapter 2. Literature review

In this chapter, I will provide a review of the literature relevant to the research topics of the current study. Conceptual and theoretical knowledge of the phenomena relevant to my inquiry will be introduced as well.

In the first section, I will give the epistemological background of the field of semiotics in order to briefly introduce it. Here, I will show how semiotics was grounded on two main discourses and I will address the main epistemological shifts of the field. I will then move to point out its current situation and how the lack of institutional organisation causes an impact on semiotics scholars. Researchers, conceived as the main agents involved in the construction, preservation and development of this field, are the ones who experience the consequences of this absence of institutionalisation. As such, semiotics scholars are the research object of this study. That is to say, I am not doing a study about the field of semiotics itself, I am rather approaching the field through its practitioners in the particular context of research interviews in order to understand how a semiotics scholar identifies themselves and how they are identified by others in the same field.

Insofar as the core issue of this thesis is the construction and negotiation of identities in interaction in a population of forty semiotics scholars, I will also review literature on a) identity and discourse, b) narrative research, c) positioning theory and d) the resources through which identities are linguistically mobilised. This will provide an explication of the theoretical tenets of my study.
2.1 Semiotics’ structuring discourses

In this section I will show that semiotics, as a field of knowledge, has been and continues to be, a product of discourses. I advance one core argument: semiotics was organised as a community of inquiry around two fundamental discourses, i.e. discourses that give origin to others (Foucault, 1970): Saussurean linguistics and Peircean philosophy.

All cultural or human practices have sought to understand meaning generation processes by means of explanatory models. Semiotics is the field dealing with the production and re-production of meaning-making mechanisms. Despite the fact that semiotics, as a separate and comprehensive form of study, has come to the fore during the last hundred years, as a research object, it is as old as other fields of the humanities, such as philosophy, rhetoric or literature. A general definition of semiotics addresses the study of signs and its structure. A sign (from Greek σημεῖον – semeîon) is a perceptible reality that stands for another non-present reality. It is the material for conveying thoughts, and thus the material of communication (Deely, 2015b).

The next definition, by Jakobson, provides a more classical and complex approach to what semiotics is:

Every message is made of signs; correspondingly, the science of signs termed semiotic deals with those general principles which underlie the structure of all signs whatever, and with the character of their utilisation within messages, as well as with specific of the various sign systems, and the diverse messages using those different kind of signs. (Jakobson, 1971a: 698)

Surveying literature on semiotics in the twentieth century lists some semioticians’ main concerns regarding the epistemological status of semiotics as well as its foundations in Saussurean linguistics or Peircean philosophy. Now let me show how
semiotics has been dominated by two overarching frames that can be conceived of as two fundamental discourses (Foucault, 1970).

As Beuchot (2015) argues, Saussure, in the 1910s, without knowing about either of the medieval scholars, such as St. Augustine or John Poinsot (1632), who already had written on ‘the doctrine of signs’, nor Locke (1690) or Peirce, put forward the name of ‘semiology’ for his new, non-existent science of signs. However, as it is very well known, Saussure (1916) decided to focus on language (la langue) and, hence, did not develop semiology. As a matter of fact, not only did Saussure propose a name but a fundamental discourse upon which to found a new science: a model having the linguistic sign as the main concept for the whole theoretical grounding. During the first half of the twentieth century, Saussure’s model was set up as the basis of the new science, which was accepted in the East and West alike. The name ‘semiology’, which he had chosen to designate his model, was accepted by a few communities of practitioners (in the US for example). This is directly linked to an issue which Deely considers a ‘coalescence of a community of inquirers on the subject of semiotics’ (Deely, 2015a: 37). This process explains how diverse practitioners who based their work explicitly on two discourses took up the research of semiotics all over the world. As Foucault mentions, one property of fundamental discourses is their continuity: ‘discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again’ (Foucault, 1970: 57).

The second model of a science of signs involves Peirce who, as Beuchot (2015) maintains, was unaware of Saussure’s works. Not only did Peirce come to focus on the idea of semiotics as a possible ‘new science of signs’, but also formulated an interdisciplinary classification of all sciences in 1903. This classification has been addressed by Pietarinen (2006).
For Peirce, science had to be understood in broader terms. It was a systematic, institutionalised method of organising human knowledge:

the total activity of a social group whose members devote, as far as they can, their whole being to finding out and helping one another to find out the truth in a certain department into which they are peculiarly well equipped to search. (MS 675: 13, 1991\(^1\), A Sketch of Logical Critic)

Peirce’s classification was divided in ‘three kingdoms of science’. To him all science was either ‘A. Science of discovery; B. Science of review; or C. Practical science’ (CP 1.181, 1903). In Peirce’s terms, semiotics belonged to the first kingdom (heuretic science, explanatory science), particularly in the realm of cenoscropy (philosophia prima), which simultaneously unfolded in phenomenology (renamed as phaneroscopy\(^2\) by Peirce) and normative sciences (aesthetics, ethics and logic). The Peircean theory of signs, ‘semeiotic, speculative grammar studies signs in relation to other signs, and is thus the study of relationship between signs and the general conditions of signs being signs’ (1.444, c.1986 The Three Categories).

Ironically, Peirce and his work did not really figure in the development of semiotics until the mid-twentieth century. Interest in Peirce’s work was confined mainly to small circles of students in the US, and a real interest in Peirce as a semiotic theorist would arrive only later. Deely depicts the challenge to Saussurean canonical discourse, and its ‘epistemological foundations’ for re-developing a new semiotics that came from the work of Sebeok (1976), rather than Peirce (Deely, 2015: 42).

Thanks to the influence of Sebeok, the figure of Peirce in the second half of the twentieth century emerged within semiotics as a central figure, but eventually grew to efface the work and figure of Saussure in the US. Here, we can notice how

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\(^1\) Due to the numerous collection of references, Peirce scholars adopted special conventions when referring to the Peirce papers and their editions. For instance, CP [vol.#para#] makes reference to the text Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, volume and number of paragraph.

\(^2\) The purpose of phaneroscopy is to contemplate universal phenomena and to discern ubiquitous elements of these three categories (firstness, secondness and firstness) (Pietarinen, 2015: 373).
semiology was superseded by semiotics. In Kuhn’s terms, the acceptance of a paradigm affects the structure of the group of practitioners (Kuhn, 1962). The semiological paradigm did not disappear in the US, but it was surpassed by the adoption and conversion of a large proportion of members to the Peircean paradigm. Only then did the Peircean model become a fundamental discourse that positioned semiotics as a modern project.

On the other hand, Lotman, in Soviet Estonia, knowing both Saussure and Locke, was among the scholars who initially embraced the Saussurean approach. Nonetheless, Lotman, from the very beginning, adopted the name ‘semiotics’ for his theory in preference to Saussure’s ‘semiology’. Something similar happened in France with Greimas, who like Lotman accepted the Saussurean model as developed by Hjelmslev’s glossematics. Both Lotman and Greimas gathered groups of researchers concerned with particular aspects of enquiry. In this way, they constituted schools around them (the Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics in the case of Lotman and the Paris school of semiotics for Greimas). The development of a school implied a theoretical or an ideological emphasis around them, as well as the characterisation of an uncritical acceptance on the part of ‘disciples’ of a leader’s ideas (Crane, 1972 in Becher, 1990).

What follows is an account of the main epistemological shifts that provided grounding for semiotics as a field of knowledge.

2.2 Epistemological shifts in semiotics

In the previous section, I outlined the two main dominant discourses in semiotics during the twentieth century. This followed an argument that the epistemological
foundations of semiotics were largely grounded on the Saussurean and the Peircean fundamental discourses.

Personalities may shape and influence, but do not constitute, scientific domains. Discursive communities, as Beacco and Moirand point out, are institutions shaped by their own textual practices inasmuch as they provide them with coherence (Beacco & Moirand, 1995: 2). The constitution of a semiotics field was only possible thanks to shifts in its research objects, as pointed out by Haidar (2006).

2.2.1 Semiotics of texts

Originally settled in the study of signs and sign systems, semiotics intended to adopt an interdisciplinary position (Haidar, 2006) by means of an in-depth diversification in both its epistemological approach and the units of analysis. The first paramount shift was from the semiotics of the sign towards the semiotics of the narrative text. Bakhtin (1958 [1981]) was the first scholar to discover a difference between an abstract linguistic system of signs and a concrete utterance in which each sign gets another metalinguistic function due to its role in the whole of discourse. This distinction was re-discovered by Benveniste (1969). The gap between system and text constituted the main point of his semiotic theory. He suggested that the semiotic approach would be possible only insofar as linguistic signs or separate words are concerned, whereas the structure of texts should be studied through semantics.

Barthes, following Saussurean ideas, explored how the literary text is guided to individuality instead of subjectivity in (Barthes, 1973). The text becomes a separate, individual unity insofar as an infinite generation of meaning takes place. Simultaneously, the text is an intertext that makes life outside itself impossible, be this a literary text, a newspaper or the TV screen: ‘book shapes thought, thought
shapes life’ (Barthes, 1973: 59). This treatment of intertextuality is the first connection with *intermediality* (the intertwining of texts and media) in his work.

### 2.2.2 Visual semiotics

Within the interdisciplinary sphere, the second epistemological shift in the field of semiotics was the change from narrative semiotics towards visual semiotics. The more systematised developments of visual semiotics took place in the 1960s, with the arrival of mass media. Barthes was one of the first scholars who put forward a formal analysis of images (Barthes, 1964; 1964).

Eco (1974) also provided some grounding for the establishment of visual semiotics by introducing the discussion of visual codes as well as the distinction between analogical and digital codes. For both Eco and Barthes, the analysis of images needs to be addressed by means of a visual rhetoric capable of adapting its tropes (metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole and so forth). With regard to the rhetoric approach to visual analysis, the Groupe μ constructed their version of visual semiotics and a methodological approach based on two main axes: cognitive structures and rhetoric (Groupe μ, 1970).

Visual semiotics should not be confused with the semiotics of image since the visual production overweighs the production of images. The visual production entails a larger division between statics and dynamics. After some conventions, scholars agreed upon three larger objects of research for visual semiotics: 1) the semiotics of the static image; 2) the semiotics of the dynamic image; 3) visual semiotics (production related with the sign-function (Hjelmslev, 1971)).
2.2.3 Semiotics of culture

The development of cultural semiotics represents one of the most important advances for modern semiotics because it provides the first steps towards transdisciplinarity. Thanks to cultural semiotics culture is approached as a unit of analysis—culture as a text. For the Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics, culture is seen as ‘the object of analysis for cultural semiotics, and culture is semiotic by its nature because it is information and communication’ (Lotman et al., 2013 [1973]: 53).

Cultural semiotics has developed from linguistics, to text semiotics, towards the semiotics of the semiosphere in three phases (Torop, 1999; Portis-Winner, 2002; Torop, 2006). The first phase of this trend comes from the strong link with structural linguistics of the 1960s to subsequently entering a period of possible decentralisation of ‘pure’ linguistic methodology (Uspensky, 1993).

The second phase occurred in the 1970s, when the Tartu–Moscow school evolved towards the semiotics of culture. Through the examination of the entire aggregate of sign systems that are united in culture, they came to see culture as a comprehensive semiotic modelling system. Thus, culture, from the social point of view is a system of relationships between man and collective and may be regarded as a dialogue between them.

The third phase is characterised by a shift from the semiotics of text towards the semiotics of the semiosphere, by way of the introduction of the notion of semiosphere as semiotic space (Lotman, 1996 [1984]). There is a shift from the point of view of the analysability of culture when the semiosphere is approached as an object and as a metaconcept. That is to say, human culture is seen as a semiosphere, which can be studied; the semiosphere is also seen as the set of media used for analysing a culture (Torop, 2006).
2.2.4 Semiotics of media

The development of new media obliged semiotics to incorporate different research objects. The central discussions for media studies were focused on how reality is based on previous representations and how human beings negotiate their access to the world in which they live by using media (Jensen, 1995). What was paramount to the development of a semiotics of media was the review of the representation theory through which a plurality of approaches converged (Hjelmslev, Halliday, poststructuralist and Peircean). This re-evaluation of theory unleashed a crisis of representation, since it questioned the ways in which we grasp reality and simulated reality through the creation of media and mechanisms designed to enhance it (for instance, virtual reality, augmented reality or Photoshopping). Media scholars established some tenets in order to approach the mediatised processes of communication from a semiotic point of view in the concepts of: a) medium; b) media typologies; c) multimediability; d) multimodality (Kress, 2010).

2.2.5 Current trends in semiotics

Already in the twenty-first century, semiotics is still struggling to find its own discursive position in the disciplinary market, either as part of the language sciences, or as a catalyst agent between humanities and social sciences, and even among natural sciences as well. During the last decade, several researchers have been trying to elucidate the role semiotics should play in the twenty-first century. In this way, we could list two main types of up-to-date concerns.

On the one hand, it is possible to point out historiographical inquiries that propose to highlight the achievements accomplished by some semiotic school or tradition (on the Paris School and its expansion in other countries see Hénault, 2012; Lindenberg
Lemos et al., 2012; Broden, 2017; on the development and organisation of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics see (Waldstein, 2008; Kull et al., 2011; Salupere & Torop, 2013; Pilshchikov & Trunin, 2016), among others. On the other hand, there is a diversity of epistemological concerns in the current state of semiotics either as a single discipline (Fontanille, 2008), an interdiscipline (Li, 2006; Klinkenberg, 2012) or from a transdisciplinary approach (Haidar, 2006; Salupere & Torop, 2013; Brier, 2013). From a global semiotics perspective, Li (2006) claims that semiotics might be regarded as the most accurate theoretical and methodological tool for the modernisation of the humanities. Fontanille (2008) and Klinkenberg (2012) question the roles played by semiotics in civil society, beyond the university, and how semiotics might be useful for societies in the current century either as a methodological instrument or as an academic stance. Among this type of inquiries, there have been self-reflexive attempts to trace the most important challenges for semiotics (Bundgaard & Stjernfelt, 2009; Kull & Velmezova, 2014).

In addition to these theoretical concerns, there is a great deal of scholarly research devoted to applied semiotics from inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches. In the upcoming paragraphs I will briefly describe the most prominent trends. Cognitive semiotics seeks ‘to integrate methods and theories developed in the disciplines of cognitive science with methods and theories developed in semiotics and the humanities (...) aiming to provide new insights into the realm of human signification in cultural practices’ (Zlatev, 2012: 3). Some research objects for cognitive semiotics are: 1) bio-cultural evolution; 2) semiotic development in ontogeny; 3) gesture and modality, or 4) the embodied mind.

Socio-semiotics, which is rooted in sociology, sociolinguistics and communication theory, has more disciplinary correspondence with cultural anthropology, cultural semiotics, pragmaticism as well as constructionism and the linguistic turn (Cobley & Randviir, 2009: 8). Its main research objects are the creation of meaningful structures
within societies as well as the communication between cultural structures and social processes.

The semiotic approach that is currently intending to bridge natural sciences with humanities is biosemiotics. Biosemiotics was firstly developed by Sebeok and is the analysis of living systems as sign systems underlying processes of self-organisation (Emmeche & Kull, 2011). This approach deals with the semiosis of living systems beyond human life. Biosemiotics departs from the pre-supposition that life and its development imply semiotic processes (Sebeok & Umiker-Sebeok, 1992; Hoffmeyer, 1996).

Other trends that aim to mediate between nature and culture are: a) zoosemiotics, a synthetic paradigm between semiotics and ethology aiming at providing a comparative approach to the communicative skills of every species by departing from the premise that all animals are semiosic (Maran et al. 2011); b) Ecosemiotics, the semiotics that works as a link between nature and culture and addresses the semiosis of the relationships between human beings and their ecosystem (Maran, 2007); or c) landscape semiotics, which is the study of landscape as a sign system and considers landscape as a holistic notion that links both the physical and cultural ideas generated by society and the individual (Lindström, 2010).

2.3 Transition: moving towards semiotics scholars

The discussion so far has rested on the epistemological background of the field of semiotics, something that has helped me to position the field by showing what is composed of: founding discourses, shifts in the units of analysis, or main figures. I will now address the current state of semiotics, which will serve as a springboard to approaching my research object: how through narratives, in a qualitative research
interview, semioticians negotiate and construct their identities with regard to the lack of institutional organisation of the field.

In the last years, we have seen a growing interest in literature addressing multiple aspects on the organisation of semiotics, particularly, on the following topics: the teaching of semiotics (Kull, 2008; Kull et al., 2015); the development of semiotic programmes in higher education (Nöth, 2010; Danesi, 2012; Pessoa de Barros, 2012), semiotics outlets (Kull & Maran, 2013); how semioticians have established a number of associations (Tarasti, 2012; Bertrand, 2014; C rubble & Bankov, 2016).

Despite these efforts, the current status of semiotics in society and academic environments is rather marginal, and just as Gaines (2015) remarks, this is one of its many paradoxes. It is paradoxical because semiotics deals with all aspects of meaning; it is relevant to every field of inquiry (Posner, Robering and Sebeok, 2003) and is applicable to everyday experiences producing meaning. However, even for those in favour of its practice as an academic endeavour, its disciplinary status is rather polemic. In fact, semiotics has a different status according to the context in which is practiced, namely, in its degree of organisation in national academic systems.

In this manner, semiotics is considered a fully-fledged discipline in Estonia, with chairs, journals, study programmes and research traditions (Torop: 1998; Kull & Välli, 2011; Kull et al., 2011). At the other extreme, in Great Britain, semiotics has no degree of organisation at all. This asymmetry in organisation generates problems when placing semiotics at institutional levels. For instance, as Salupere (2011) pointed out, the Common European Research Classification Scheme (CERS) locates semiotics as part of ‘philology (H004)’ in subsection H352 Grammar, semantics, semiotics, syntax (‘H’ stands for humanities). The fact that semiotics does not have
an official designator as a field and is considered as a branch of philology (not even linguistics), restricts the allocation of resources for grants and research projects.

Another example of institutional constraints takes place in France, where semiotics is institutionally separated into two disciplinary fields (Ablali, 2007; Jeanneret, 2007). According to the National Council of Universities (CNU) semiotics belongs either to the language sciences (CNU section 07), or to the information sciences and communication (CNU section 71). This division hampers the accurate development and recognition of the field.

As we have seen in the literature reviewed in the previous sections, semioticians attempted to ground the epistemological identity of semiotics as a field of knowledge. Nevertheless, they did not really make great efforts to underpin the institutional organisation of the field. The absence of a recognised disciplinary status alongside institutional constraints has consequences for practitioners, since they are the ones who construct and maintain the field.

No single scholar is a semiotician from the beginning and, just in the same way as other academics in different fields, this development could be straightforward and linear, or can involve ‘marginalisation and exclusion’ (Colley & James, 2005). In this way, those who have chosen to remain in the field of semiotics have to learn to dissociate their identities and to negotiate them according to the field they are working in (literature, linguistics, philosophy and anthropology, among others).

Very little is currently known about semioticians’ identification mechanisms and how the absence of institutional recognition affects their lives as academics. Previously published studies are limited to local surveys as in the case of Darras (2012), in the English language or Biglari (2014), in the French language. Both analyses are limited, since they rely heavily on internet-based surveys and email interviews. Therefore, the
question of identification is relevant for the semiotics community and needs to be addressed by semioticians themselves, so that the field can achieve better levels of organisation and dialogue. This issue deserves to be investigated since, in global terms, the current state of semiotics is a late outcome of the institutionalisation of disciplines in academia at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century (Foucault, 1966; Becher & Trowler, 2001). This process contributed to the disciplinarisation of certain ‘forms of knowledge’, leaving semiotics out of this process as noticed by Rastier (2001).

Locally speaking, this issue was also raised in my data, when I asked my respondents about their careers and trajectories, and they made reference to this difficulty of recognition. In Ricoeur terms, it is a problem of unrecognised identity (see below Ricoeur, 2004). Thus, semioticians feel that they are not fully recognised when they see that semiotics cannot be accurately organised or that their peers reject the field and represent it as some sort of fad within other disciplines. By pointing to these issues, I make the case that analysing semioticians’ identification in regard to a not-so-well organised field is relevant to be studied as the research object of this thesis.

Identity is thus made relevant in this research at the micro level when interviewees present themselves in the local context of the research interview. Therefore, my focus will be on the types of identities researchers locally perform, construct and negotiate (with me, as interviewer), through language, when talking about themselves, their personal and professional links with semiotics, and how they refer to the semiotic discourse(s) they produce and reproduce as academics.

This concludes the first part of this literature review. What follows is an account of different relations between identity and discourse that will allow me to outline my approach in this research.
2.4 Identity and discourse

In this section, I explore the developments in identity theorising which are relevant for my research. Then, I move on to explain some accounts that treat identity as constituted in discourse. Lastly, I position myself within a concrete treatment of identity which will be pervasive in this thesis.

The question of identification is a very complex topic, since identities are contradictory and multidimensional, but also unconscious, emergent or mobile. This subject implies many problems, because it turns out to be one of the least well-understood concepts, drawing its meanings from multiple sources. A great deal of previous research into identity theorising focused on a psychologically-oriented conceptualisation of the self. This dimension deals with the nature of the self, which has veered towards a critique of the self in which it is not regarded from a traditional, isolated, self-contained viewpoint anymore. The focus on the self began in psychological approaches to identity, mainly in the works of Erikson. He regarded the self as a property of the individual and as located in his or her mind. Furthermore, Erikson was also responsible for coining the term ‘identity crisis’, i.e. a crisis of overproduction and devaluation of the ‘identity’ concept (Erikson, 1982; Gleason, 1983). Erikson isolated the self from its social environments, something that provoked fierce critiques, particularly from postmodern sociologists such as Giddens, who argued that it was necessary to be aware of changes in social life in postmodern societies due to their impact on identification processes (Giddens, 1991).

During the 1960s, symbolic interactionist sociology, concerned with the origin of ‘the self’, increasingly spoke of identity; in part, it was influenced by the works of Mead (1934) and Strauss (1959). More influential works on identity from this perspective came from Goffman (1963), Berger and Luckman (1966) as well as from
ethnomethodologists such as Finkel (1967), who highlighted interaction as the ideal environment for the deployment and negotiation of identification traits.

The discursive view of identity, heavily influenced by poststructuralism in the first moment, harkens back to Foucault’s conceptualisation of how discourses form the basis of subjectivity (Foucault, 1969; 1971). To him, identity is immersed within a set of available discourses that operate to reproduce social inequalities. In this manner, identities shape and direct the individual in her everyday life. The model put forward by Foucault presumes that meaning lies in representations mediated by sign systems, as in the case of language. Later, Hall (1996), embracing Foucault’s approach, conceived of identity as a psychological and discursive process that reflexively acknowledges and ‘invests in subject positions’ (Hall, 1996: 12). Foucault has inspired most strands of modern discourse analysis, from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2000), discursive psychology (Wetherell, 2001), to interactionism and constructionism, which I will examine in more detail below.

A second discursive approach to identity emphasises the role of language in the enactment of identity as a parallel to interaction, due to the way we use language to convey images of ourselves and to identify others. Therefore language and discourse are central to the construction (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). A constructionist viewpoint assumes an anti-essentialist stance which disregards identity as one’s property, a product that people possess and construct (Potter, 1996). Hence, social constructionism is oriented towards the relation between interaction and practice (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). To social constructionists, there is no such thing as a ‘true self’, and identity is considered to be a process that is continuously negotiated in interaction inasmuch as identities are plural, contradictory and scattered (De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006). Furthermore, as a discourse-bound phenomenon, identity is visible and subject to empirical investigation (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). The social constructionist stance claims that speakers, and
people in general, do not possess a single identity, but they rather choose among a fluctuating catalogue of identities that changes according to the interlocutor or the social situation (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; De Fina, 2009).

One criticism of much of the literature on social constructionism comes from the controversy it has unleashed in some academic circles (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Lavanza & Lafferté, 2005). In this way, Brubaker and Cooper criticised both ‘clichéd constructivism’ and its ‘weak conception of identity’ (in opposition to a hard conception of identity) since they are ‘routinely packaged with standard qualifiers indicating that identity is multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented’ (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 11). The authors thus point the risk of ‘emptying out’ the meaning of the term identity, and of rendering it incapable of doing serious analytical work. In order to overcome the polysemic crisis of the term identity, the authors proposed to use another term such as self-understanding, which despite lacking ‘the theoretical pretensions of identity’ (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 19), could be more operative when approaching issues of identification.

Within the interactionist paradigm, another relationship between identity and discourse is found in narrative identity (Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1990; Ricoeur, 1990). Narrative identity is a concept that was defined by Ricoeur as ‘the personal identity associated with the ability to narrate and to narrate oneself’ (Ricoeur, 2004: 150). What Ricoeur intended to outline was actually a dialectical relationship addressing the processes of recognition in narration between the self and others. To him, narrative identity can be found in the exploration of three notions: self-recognition, (idem or sameness identity), recognition of others (ipse identity) and mutual recognition (Ricoeur, 2004). However, Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) and Deppermann (2013a) take issue with the fact that narrative identity is a very abstract and metaphysical notion, since this means it is not very operative when approaching identities from an empirical perspective. This is because it fails to
address how ‘identities are deployed in situated narrative interaction’ (Deppermann, 2013a: 2).

In this manner, researchers have pointed out two main issues for addressing narrative identities, regardless of whether they arise from everyday interaction or a research context. The first one is that identities in interaction need to be regarded as an accomplishment of a somewhat ephemeral character (Bamberg, 1999). A second issue is how tellers develop and establish their own subjective perspectives while making relevant certain frameworks, at both micro (local) or macro (global) levels. This issue has to do with the performative function of the story, and it has been addressed through the concept of *positioning* (Davies & Harré, 1990; Bamberg, 1997), which will be examined below in Section 2.8.

To conclude this section, I will briefly explain my positioning in my research. Here, I adopt a non-monolithic approach that examines different facets of identity in the way it is performed through discourse with my respondents. Semioticians thus choose to identify themselves in the interaction with me through resources that are mobilised in the interplay of the research interview, using linguistic markers that help to negotiate different aspects of their identities. In this thesis, I attempt to describe the experiences of being an academic semiotician based on the narratives elicited in the collected interviews with members of this community. These conversations show that there are different identity issues at stake. Therefore, my focus will be on the types of identities researchers perform when they talk about themselves as well as their personal and professional links with semiotics.

Insofar as this research draws on scholars from an academic community as the main research object, I will also approach certain issues of academic identity, which will be discussed in the following.
2.5 Academic identity

A common interest regarding academic identity research is the roles of the individual rather than on the individual themselves, i.e. job titles, qualifications, or whether they consider themselves academics or something else (Feather, 2009). What Nixon has called the ‘holy trinity’ of academic identity is composed of three main components: research, teaching, and scholarly activities (Nixon, 2001). This is why some authors have reflected on the definition of an academic as someone performing different roles: as a teacher (Kreber, 2010), a researcher (Henkel, 2004; Whitchurch, 2008), or as someone who has a great deal of experience in higher education (Harris, 2005), either as a professional (Whitchurch, 2008), or a manager (Winter 2009).

The current research on academic identity suggests that ongoing changes happening in higher education around the world are putting significant pressure on the representation of academics about themselves. Such changes include multiple reforms in higher education, as in the case of the development of innovation agendas in national research systems, universities’ separation from states’ budgets, mergers between universities and so on. Semiotics as an academic field is also contextually contingent (Flowerdew, 2014), due to its dependence on local struggles over monetary resources, recognition and labelling.

The literature on academic identities acknowledges three main developments: the first development regards identity work as a salient phenomenon in higher education research that needs to be studied. In this way, Nixon (2001) was one of the first scholars to hold a position about a crisis in academic identity. In subsequent years, seminal works by Barnett (2000) and Henkel (2005) showed that academic identity was regarded as ‘fragmented’ due to emerging conflicts in values as well as the loosening of institutional boundaries in higher education.
The second development focuses on the social construction of academic identity as a process of interaction between agents (academics) and organisations (universities and higher education institutions). It starts with Barnett and Di Napoli’s work, in which they stress the role individuals play in higher education and the ways they grapple with multiple challenges, like competitiveness and/or funding problems (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2008). To this extent, Harris (2005), drawing on Henkel, maintains that fragmentation of academic identity is linked to the contextual effects of a neoliberal shift in higher education as well as reforms introduced by this agenda. In the same vein, Clegg (2008) describes the crisis in academic identities by arguing that academics are forced to model their identities by responding to a rapidly changing higher education environment.

Furthermore, Whitchurch (2009) puts forward the elaboration of ‘hybrid identities’ arising from changes in higher education, mainly from the blurring boundaries between administrative and academic roles that challenge the concepts of what academics are.

Perhaps one of the most complete examination of this interaction between internal and external factors affecting the modelling of academic identities has been provided by Archer (2008), who raised attention to the existing tensions between the dominant model of managing universities and the internal influences of academics that shift their performance expectations. To Archer, this tension renders academic identity insecure and unstable.

The third development also draws attention to the existing tensions between emerging identities as products of the realities faced by academics. Winter and O’Donohue (2012) maintain that such tensions are a factor that may have an impact on academics’ commitment, motivation and self-esteem. Conversely, Alexiadou (2013) proposed the term ‘transnational identity’ to describe resilient academics working and moving between universities on an international level. Nevertheless, the
literature representing this trend suggests that the different identities available to scholars are characterised by an ongoing mingling of diverse and professional selves, in which the personal self is the most relevant (Sheridan, 2013). This particular perspective on academic identity work has led to the emergence of studies focusing on the individual from different methodological perspectives: ethnography (Winkler, 2013), auto-ethnography (Learmont & Humphries, 2012) or academic identity as a process in which the individual and her academic roles are influenced by her peers, institutions, as well as her own beliefs and values (Fitzmaurice, 2013).

While academic identity has been researched from multiple perspectives resulting in the acknowledgement of its complexity and multiplicity, no previous study has investigated the processes through which identities are constructed and enacted by people who identify as semioticians. This research aims at making a small contribution to this gap by focusing on the identity-construction process in a population of forty semiotics experts.

As we have seen in this section, there are different external factors impinging on academics’ identities. Across my interviews, respondents constructed narratives in which they mentioned several relevant issues, experiences and concerns regarding their realities as academics working in a not fully-established field in most countries. In telling these narratives, respondents talked about themselves, the group(s) they belonged to, other groups and so forth. Thus, they revealed different interplays of similarity and difference to position themselves in relation to other identities – both individual or collective, as well as the audience being addressed (me, as the interviewer). Through this process, particular academic identities were formed, and different outcomes were achieved. In this way, academic identity fits in with the type of discursive identity that I outlined before insofar as it seeks to point out issues of (de)construction of the self and the other.
In the following pages I will approach narrative inquiry to sketch the relation it has with identification as well as to state the connection with my research.

2.6 Narrative research

In this section, I will review literature regarding narrative research in order to position the topic of narratives in my research. Narratives serve to tell stories that help us to grasp reality and make sense of the world we live in. Through narratives speakers are able to describe their experiences, feelings and thoughts about their everyday lives or about concrete events that have had an impact on their lives, stories are both enabled and constrained by a wide range of circumstances. Moreover, narratives are a salient place in which identities not only converge but also diverge, since speakers may perform different types of identity while telling a story or by explicitly indicating how they wish to be perceived. By means of narratives, the speaker is able to make sense of herself by asserting her identity.

The study of narratives is a junction point for discourse analysis and semiotics, since both have common antecedents in the structuralist (Propp, 1928 [1958]) and poststructuralist studies on narratives of Barthes, Bremond Genette and Greimas (all published in 1966) as well as Todorov (1968; 1971) and Riffaterre (1971). These approaches assumed that there should be a division between stories as series of events and the story as narrated by the author. Furthermore, Barthes, deeply anchored in a narratological viewpoint, identified narratives in a multitude of forms that included legends, tales, history, comedy, drama, myth, as well as conversation (Barthes, 1966).

Narrative research may also address written materials, either published or unpublished, documentary or fiction, as in the case of diaries, letters,
autobiographies (Tamboukou, 2013), as well as social service and health records, archival documents, or scientific theories (Riessmann, 2008). Actually, Elliot (2005) distinguished between first-order narratives and second-order narratives. The former makes reference to those narratives stemming from autobiographical accounts, whereas the latter alludes to those narratives used by scholars to grasp the social world, as well as ‘other people’s experiences’ (Elliott: 2005: 13). For a number of years, scholars have drawn on the seminal work of Labov and Waletzky (1967) which was focused on how narratives are formally structured serving to enact self-identification and conveying social meanings. Labov and Waletzky developed a model of narrative analysis for approaching oral versions of personal experiences; its main aim was to explore the semantic and syntactic aspects of narratives which have to do with particular clauses produced by the narrator. In a nutshell, Labov’s model consists of the following six components (Labov, 1972):

- Abstract: a summary of the story
- Orientation: it provides the context: location, time and character to orient the reader
- Complicating action: this is the main scaffolding of the plot, or an event that causes the engagement of the reader
- Evaluation: evaluative comments on events, justification of its narration, or the meaning the narrator ascribes to an event
- Result or resolution: resolution of the story
- Coda: bringing the narrator and the interlocutor back to the present

These six elements provided a framework to analyse stories and use them to reconstruct the stories or to retell stories. Notwithstanding, this model does not consider the interactional context in which the narratives are produced, so this will be the main argument of Labov’s detractors: interactionist scholars who placed an emphasis on the dialogic process between teller and listener (Schiffrin, 1996).
Most research on narrative from an interactional viewpoint highlights the reductionism of the Labovian approach, since it does not account for the diversity of narrative genres and functions. Interest in narratives-in-interaction evolved as a critical departure from decontextualised, isolated texts. As Potter argues: ‘the analysis of narratives in the human and social sciences has mostly ignored the interactional business that people might be doing in telling them’ (Potter, 1997: 265). Ochs and Capps argue that narratives digressing from this canonical structure tend to be overlooked and disregarded in narrative research and greater attention should be paid to ‘less coherent narratives that pervade ordinary social encounters and are a hallmark of the human condition’ (Och & Capps, 2001).

Not only have interactionist researchers remarked that audiences also shape the construction of narratives, they have also insisted on the multiplicity of genres in formal and less-formal contexts of story-telling, as in the case of habitual narratives (Carranza, 1998), anecdotes (Holmes, 2006; De Fina, 2009) small-stories (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) or what Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008) consider to be ‘big stories’: autobiography, life histories, or memoirs. Preceding these authors, Riessman had proposed the term long stories (accounts or oral histories) to designate ‘stories that engage us in quite different ways’ (Riessman, 1991: 46).

Prior to these interactionist approaches, the analysts’ argument on the role of narratives as a paramount way to understand people’s lives and as a place where different identities converge, have led to the so-called ‘narrative turn’ (Bruner, 1986; Ricoeur, 1991). In this turn, Bruner suggested that there were two types of cognitive functioning, each providing diverse ways of modelling experience or constructing reality. Bruner called one mode the narrative mode and the other, argumentative mode. The narrative mode concerns the human intentions, vicissitudes and the outcomes marking their course (Bruner, 1986: 13). Conversely, the argumentative, or paradigmatic mode, found in scientific and philosophical ways of thinking, ‘seeks to
transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction’ (ibid). The narrative turn put narrative research into the forefront in different disciplines of social sciences and humanities, as in the case of anthropology, psychology or sociology, anthropology, literary criticism, law, history and so forth (Georgakopoulou, 2011).

This turn also resulted in a large body of research working with identity construction in the academic workplace. It started in the 1990s with works that concentrated on the use of storytelling in the organisation of universities (Boje, 1991; Boyce, 1995). Then (as discussed in Section 2.5), researchers put institutions aside and resorted to academics as the main foci for observing identity construction. For instance, Ylijoki (2003; 2005), introduced a narrative perspective for studying identity in academic environments in northern Europe. Ylijoki’s work drew on narratives elicited from researchers from Finnish universities, in which they displayed nostalgia when talking about the loss of academic freedom.

There is a growing body of literature stressing a narrative perspective on different actors and aspects of academic work. Beyond professors, there are works on doctoral students (Hopwood & Paulson, 2012), academic developers (Fyffe, 2018) or the formation of academic communities (Attebery et al., 2017). Further studies include different methodological and theoretical positions, as in the case of autoethnography (Lermont & Humphries, 2012) or the construction of the ‘academic self’ in narrative fiction (Pick et al., 2015). Recently, Hyland (2018) has contended that academic biographies in research articles or webpages are the most suitable places for analysing the construction of academics’ identities through narratives.

As previously mentioned, my interviewees showed a disposition to work with narrative in the data. Participants recalled past experiences, emerging as longer
episodes of storytelling about their lives, but also other activities and circumstances of action (De Fina, 2009). This will be the subject of discussion in the next section.

2.6.1 Semiotics’ mobilisation through narratives in interaction

In this section, I argue for the use of narrative in this study: how my respondents (semiotics experts) have engaged with the narrative mode in the interviews I conducted with them. Schiffrin (1996) argued that people’s individuality is most clearly expressed through narrative, due to its ability to verbalise and place different types of experience that allow the display of the self. Through narration, people are able to reflect and talk about our actions in the past. But we can also correct and edit them in the telling. Narrative provides the opportunity to unite the selves of our pasts with the ones of the present, and even to project certain claims about the future (Polkinghorne, 1988). Not only do people make sense of themselves and their lives through narratives, but they can also use them to build their identities, including professional ones (Elliott, 2005).

A case for this can be made in light of the responses obtained in my interviews with semiotics scholars. The participants of my study showed a disposition to use the narrative mode. The narrative mode helps humans to discursively interact with ‘reality’, interpreting and encoding experience, as well as emotions, beliefs and doubts (Bruner, 1986; 1991). Respondents engaged in the relational activity of storytelling to create ‘plots from disordered experience’ (Riesmann, 2012:71). In doing so, respondents ‘make sense of themselves, social situations, and history’ (Bamberg & McCabe, 1998: 3). Furthermore, they are able to elaborate on the presentation of themselves and others (Bamberg, 2004).
The narratives resulting from my interviews are regarded as products of auto-
epistemical processes that reveal new insights and ‘levels of sense-making about
one’s life’ (Lucius Hoene & Deppermann, 2000: 205).

In these interviews there are two types of stories typically presented during the
unfolding conversations: on one hand, narratives that are told from a vantage point
enabling the teller to reflect on certain events or experiences of their lives and to
‘thereby engage in a process of meaning-making’ (Helsig, 2010: 30). On the other
hand, there are accounts embedded in the here-and-now of the interaction and that
are less personal, content-related but are factual explanations, or responses to
factual questions that divert from the participants’ larger biographies.

I suggested that my interviewees situate themselves in narratives, and use narratives,
as Bamberg (2004) mentions, to act and interact in a social world with others (peers,
relatives, acquaintances), as well as to present their claims regarding what they
consider is relevant. Narrative is pervasive enough in my data, mainly as narrative-in-
interaction, so my core argument here is that narrative analysis will be implemented
as the overarching approach to address the data.

What follows is an account of different types of narratives which are present in this
study.

2.7 Personal narratives and non-biographical accounts

Biographical accounts belong to a set of narratives that are considered personal
narratives. To Ricoeur, the nature of these narratives is ‘mimetic’ and situated in ‘the
plane of re-figuration by the teller, from a state of practical experience, as anchored
in a pre-comprehension of human action’ (Ricoeur, 1991: 109). To Riessman, they are
‘large sections of talk and interview exchanges – extended accounts of lives that develop in conversation over the course of interviews and other fieldwork interactions’ (Reissman, 2012: 370).

Personal narratives are mainly located in the framework of the experience-centred perspective that presupposes four main features of narratives: 1) as sequential and meaningful, 2) reconstitute experience and mirror it, 3) unfold change, and 4) are totally human (Squire, 2008). As such, personal narratives are regarded as texts bringing stories of personal experience into being through first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience. In addition, they might be fragmented and contradictory, as indicated by Patterson (2008), and the speaker thematises himself or herself in the story (Bamberg, 2004). Just as Schiffrin (1996) points out, personal narratives are one of the primary discourse modes for identity construction.

As previously mentioned, I also found multiple narratives that go beyond the definition of personal narratives. This is the case of narratives with different structure and reasons to be told: tellability. The tellability degree is negotiated between the teller and the listener in particular local contexts, and according to Norrick (2016), it depends on two factors: ‘its detached content as well as its contextual (embedded) relevance for the participants involved’ (Norrick, 2016: 235). In our case, the context of the interaction is a semi-structured research interview, that follows different interactional rules and asymmetrical social relationships (De Fina, 2009).

Among the types of stories encountered in my corpus, there is a diversity of narrative accounts whose main feature is being produced as responses to an open or implied inquiry by the interviewer (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Accounts are not ordered and coherent, and sometimes, we might find accounts that are abbreviated and lack evaluation. From the opposite position, there are accounts with a larger degree of evaluations and negotiations. In this research, I am mainly using De Fina’s definition
regarding the main features of accounts taking place across interviews (De Fina, 2009: 253):

• They are recapitulations of past experience constructed as respondents to explicit or implicit interviewers’ evaluative inquiries about how or why those experiences took place
• They invoke explanations
• They are recipient designed
• They are generally oriented towards factuality
• Their structure varies a great deal as it is the emergent result of the specific questions asked and the relationships established between interlocutors

Either personal narratives or accounts, both types of narratives constitute the main sample to be analysed in this thesis from the presentation of multiple selves to me, as interviewer, as an aspect that I gloss over under the umbrella of identity. In the next section I will address positioning theory as an overarching framework that grounds the foundations for a multitude of possible identity-constructions that can be realised by narrators (as interviewees).

2.8 Positioning

The main theoretical approach that I will use in this thesis is known as positioning theory. This is not a rigid approach and intends to address multiple facets of identity in the way they are performed through discourse (Deppermann, 2015). The concept positioning finds its origin in the notion of ‘subject position’ coined by Foucault, who rejected the notion of a fully agentive, controlling subject having power over behaviour and knowledge. In this way, Foucault argued that discourses position subjects in different terms: in terms of power, knowledge and certain practices they
are entitled to perform (Foucault, 1969). This concept was later taken to discursive psychology by Davies and Harré (1990), who offered different insights into how people could engage in explicit or driven self-positioning in interactions. Both authors regarded positioning activities (being assigned positions by others or assigning positions to them) as the main sites of the discursive production of the self, as well as the primary mechanisms by which the self and its identities are attained in social interaction.

Thus, positioning is done interactionally, to others and the self, in a continuous manner. It is ‘not part of a linear non-contradictory autobiography, but rather, the cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography’ (Davies & Harré, 1990: 44). Researchers have criticised the lack of clarity in the definitions of position and positioning since the latter has been presented as an object, rather than a process (Herbel-Eisenmann et al., 2015).

However, in a more recent paper, Harré (2012) has acknowledged the dynamics of positions and treated them as multi-layered, emerging and changing over the course of an interaction. That is to say, positions arise in ongoing talk, storytelling, and are congruent with an interactional view of narrative. Deppermann (2015) provided a more comprehensive definition of positions as ascriptions which are semiotically structured, linked to social action and accomplished by social practice. In addition, positions can take place locally and represent a multiplicity of identities.

*Story-lines* is one of the basic components of positioning theory. Story-lines are taken as the organising principles of discourse, encompassing different narrative practices and ascribing positions to actors which are related to each other in a sequence of events (Davies & Harré, 2001; Harré et al. 2009). Nevertheless, Harré and his colleagues fail to fully address the narratological dimension of positions. This has been argued by Deppermann (2013a), who has shown that the concept of story-lines
is used in a metaphorical sense, solely. That is to say, both concepts of story-lines and narratives are confused, being equally utilised to refer to ‘texts, the contents of conversations, their sequential deployment, and even life itself’ (Deppermann, 2013a: 4). Moreover, studies carried out by Harré and his colleagues speculate about narrative practices and the negotiation of positions between actors without addressing language, something that is incompatible with the type of linguistic analysis of narrative and social interaction.

Since Harré et al.’s framing of positioning was not entirely satisfactory for narrative research; Bamberg (1997) reframed this concept in his theory of analysing narratives. Bamberg’s perspective focuses on its situatedness vis-à-vis the relationship between the teller and the audience. Bamberg also offers a break with canonical stories of the self in that his approach to positioning implicitly involves ‘the others in any story of narration’ (Bamberg, 1997: 342). By bringing to the fore the narrating domain and the fact that this domain is analytically separable, he focuses on the possibility of multiple presentations of the self and others.

Bamberg proposes an analytical schema of three levels:
Level 1 deals with how the story world is displayed and how the speakers take up certain positions in relation to others in the course of the interaction. This level is specific to narrative, since it works on the referential plane of the story world.

Level 2 shows how speakers are positioned in regard to the audience. This level operates on the interactional dimension and focuses on how the narrative is co-constructed as well as how discursive identities are generated in particular situations – as in the case of a research interview.

Level 3 seeks to explain how the speaker takes up a position in regard to herself by means of self-identification (Bamberg, 1997: 337). Level 3 aims at describing more
permanent and ‘portable’ identity traits, which go beyond local or situational identities (De Fina, 2013). Besides, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) have included more developments regarding this level and show how the speaker also projects identity senses vis-à-vis dominant discourses. Put another way, while levels one and two might reveal continuities and inconsistencies in characterisations in the narrative situation, level three might reveal ‘global situatedness [...] referencing and orientation to social positions and discourses above and beyond the here and now’ (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008: 3). Further developments in positioning theory have been put forward by Wortham (Wortham, 2000; Wortham: 2001; Wortham & Reyes, 2015), Søreide (2006), Slocum-Bradley (2010), Baert (2012) as well as Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000), or Deppermann (Depperman, 2013b; Deppermann, 2015).

By means of analysing autobiographical narratives, Wortham (2000) is interested in the interactional and representational functions of the story and the ways in which stories are able to change characters, relationships and identities through dynamic transitive positions. This alludes to Bamberg’s levels 1 and 2 inasmuch as it is focused on interactional positioning and how characters ascribe positions to each other (ibid). From a more sociolinguistic perspective, Wortham (2001) conceives positioning as a linguistic-mediated process which is not explicitly ‘pre-given’, i.e. utterances do not project positions directly, they rather convey meaning through indexicality, or in other words, positions are linked with certain ways of speaking, evaluative, moral or epistemic stances, as well as social groups and interpretive repertoires used to construct relevant positions.

I briefly stop here to provide a short explanation of indexicality, which is a metapragmatic resource involved in the construction of identities. Indexicality, as defined by Peirce, involves sign vehicles that, through time–space contiguity, or a causal relationship, point to their object of reference (CP 2.283). Still, indexes are
context-dependent types of signs: without an appropriate context, indexes become meaningless, or their meanings need to be re-defined. Thus, indexes point to a context which can be an object (as in the typical example of a sign indexing a fire exit door), a practice (as a particular way of speaking which points to a particular identity) or, as Silverstein (2003) showed, a social context. For instance, indexicality also occurs when language, through the use of linguistic forms, indexes, the characteristics and qualities associated with certain groups to construct identity positions, as in the case of the use of the word *dude* in American English (Jaffee, 2016). Another case of indexicality can be found in the use of a second-person plural pronoun, as a deferential, to honourificate an interlocutor. Here, this pronoun indexes certain qualities of the speaker as ‘gentile’ (Nakassis, 2018). Overall, indexicality refers to semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings. Through indexical processes, we can point out different identity-construction mechanisms by means of certain resources.

Now, coming back to Wortham’s approach, this author has identified five cues that index interactional positioning which I will use in this thesis (Wortham & Reyes, 2015):

- **Reference and predication** see how people, objects, actions or events can be categorised. For instance, *my mother/lawyer/professor* may be used to refer the same agent, but they frame the person in different terms according to relevant identity traits.
- When narrators depict characters as speaking, they use *metapragmatic verbs* (Silverstein, 2003) such as ‘to say, to tell (*dire* in French or *decir* in Spanish)’ to describe the past event of the telling. Choosing a verb presupposes socially-relevant features about the character.
- **Reported speech** is a resource used by tellers to quote their characters. As defined by Voloshinov, reported speech is ‘regarded by the speaker as an
utterance belonging to someone else’ (Voloshinov, 1987: 116). It can display different forms of direct, indirect, free (in)direct speech and the relationship between the reporting and the reported parts (Rosier, 1999).

- **Evaluative indexicals** presuppose something about characters’ social positions and help to frame the speaker with respect to those positions.

- **Modalisation** expresses the speaker’s attitude or opinion pertaining the contents of the sentence. In this thesis I will draw on three types of modality: epistemic, deontic, and commitment. Epistemic modality is related to knowledge and beliefs, dealing with the certainty of propositions in terms of possibility, necessity and prediction (Johansson & Suomela-Salmi, 2011). Deontic modality relates to obligation and permission (Palmer, 1986). Commitment modality (*modalité de la prise en charge* in French) has to do with the subjective origin validating or contemplating the validation of the propositional content (Coltiet, Dendale & De Brabanter, 2009).

Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) have dealt with narrative identity in the context of research interviews and they concur with Wortham (2001) regarding the interactional negotiation of identity. By working with autobiographic storytelling in research interviews, they point out that, during this interaction, we could not solely find single, pre-existing identities, but manifold identities that arose throughout the telling. This is why, building on Bamberg’s levels 1 and 2, they offer a model of autobiographical research interviewing that aims at ‘capturing the various temporal levels of positioning in play in this setting’ (Deppermann, 2015; 377).

Let’s take a glance at Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann’s model as unfolded by Schnurr et al. (2014):

**Level 1a.** Positioning of story-characters in relation to each other: on the story level, how the participants position each other through reported dialogues.
Level 1b. Positioning of story-characters by narrative design: how the narrator constructs the referential world which includes the when, where and the setting up of the scene.

Level 2a. Self-positioning of the teller by extra- and meta narrative self-reflexive activities: how narrators draw attention to his/her self-positioning by means of retrospective comments, evaluations and argumentations of past events and their past selves.

Level 2b. Interactional positioning by narrative design: how the narrator performs an interactional positioning as an ‘skilled entertainer teller’.

Level 2c. Interactional positioning by meta-narrative activities of the teller: how the teller positions the recipient through meta narrative interactional positioning.

Level 2d. Interactional positioning by the story recipient’s factual activities: how the recipient is interactionally positioned and co-authoring the telling.

We can observe how this model highlights positioning level 1 and 2 as the main foci for the negotiation of identities in interaction. As such, it does not take into account positioning level 3. More recently, Depermann (2015), pointed out how theorising about societal discourses may be a difficult task to achieve, since different notions alluding to societal discourses can be pointed out. The most common are:

- **D-discourses**: Gee (1999) distinguishes between small-d discourse (which refers to language use and practices in different interactional contexts, ‘stretches of language which hang together so as to make sense to some community of people in a particular setting’; Gee, 2008: 115), and capital D-discourse (referring to distinctive ways of speaking and listening, as well as distinctive ways of writing and reading). D-discourses can also denote a more macro-level concept, i.e. ideologies or value systems that circulate in particular socio-historic locations.

- **Master narratives** were conceived by Bamberg (2004) as story structures that are regarded as enduring and constraining parts of the social
structure. They are culturally accepted frames that tend ‘to normalise and naturalise’ [...] The more we become engaged in them, the more we become subjected to them’ (Bamberg, 2004: 360). More recently, McLean et al. (2017) have argued that despite master narratives are culturally specific, they share certain principles, i.e. they are ubiquitous, useful, invisible, rigid and have a compulsory nature. Their main argument is that subjects not aligning with master narratives are prone to be marginalised, unless they counter the master narrative by enacting alternative narratives.

Deppermann’s critique mainly focuses on both the identification of D-discourses and their relevance for each context. On one hand, the characterisation of a D-discourse is not an obvious process that can be taken for granted. In fact, it is necessary to observe the macro-contexts of these types of discourses. On the other hand, it is difficult to show how certain discourses are more salient than others in certain social environments, as well as how and why subjects are more prone to follow some discourse streams.

De Fina (2013), makes an explicit call for ethnographic methodology as a complementary technique when analysing positioning level 3. However, she fails to address the ethnographic dimension in her paper. Instead, she relies solely on the data obtained in her interviews with Latin American immigrants in the US.

To conclude this section, I would like to ‘position’ positioning as a theoretical framework that can work as an approach to the negotiation and construction of identities in a particular interaction. In this manner, positioning theory is relevant in my research, since the framework outlined by Bamberg (1997), Wortham (2001), Wortham and Reyes (2015) and Depperman (2015) suits a detailed study of identity construction inasmuch as it involves the narrators’ engagement (and their self-
positionings), and me as the main audience. When interactional positioning occurs, respondents occupy positions as part of a group or community and they even engage in intergroup positioning by positioning their community in relation to others.

Moreover, level 3 positioning is relevant to the research in two ways. Firstly, my position as interviewer brings with it prior knowledge of the majority of participants. I might be aware of factors that can contribute to broader identity constructions and I need to be aware of the interplay between those and locally made representations. Secondly, level 3 positioning breaks with a more conversation analytic-oriented approach that mobilises narratives-in-interaction (see below). Level 3 suggests the need for more knowledge of the scene and a greater part of my interpretation as analyst. Thus, level 3 positioning bridges the gap between conversation analysis (henceforth, CA) approaches that fully commit to the text and methods that might ascribe pre-existing social categories to actors by means of engaging into broader discourse contexts regarding D-discourses (Gee, 1999), master narratives (Bamberg, 2004) or hegemonic narratives (Lyotard, 1984).

There are two ways through which narrators position themselves vis-à-vis themselves and others and through which they generate identity (de)construction claims. The first one is categorisation and the other is through the principle of relationality.

I will examine categorisation in the next section.

### 2.9 Categorisation

Categorisation analysis can work hand-in-hand with positioning as it occurs in talk, showing the way a particular image of self is built up and presented. Identities are communicated in different ways and one of these communicative devices is categorisation. Categories of identification are used as a reflection of a list of available identities in interactional situations. In this way, delving into categories of
identification permits us to access dimensions of identity expression as well as the criteria for conveying belongingness.

Membership categorisation analysis (hence MCA) draws upon the seminal works in the 1964 Sacks’ lectures (Sacks, 1992) and is rooted in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1974). The main aims of this approach are the examination of how speakers categorise others and the ways in which this is used to discursively ascribe properties, explain and justify actions or attribute responsibilities, to other people. Sacks claimed that the analyst could build up knowledge of local ascriptions and could start to understand warrantable practices and qualities subscribed to in local discourses (Sacks, 1972). Initially intended to describe classifications of people, MCA embraced non-human categories, types of objects and cultural phenomena (Hester & Eglin, 1997).

Moreover, MCA stresses the use of locally constructed categories. MCA researchers have vindicated what they call a method of analysis of categorisation processes in discourse focused on the implications of what it means to be locally or socially categorised in one way or another. In this manner, Edwards (1997), as well as Antaki and Widdicombe (1998), maintain that the relevance of identity categories should be stressed only if the participants in interaction themselves are the ones who stress it. Nonetheless, there is a gap in the MCA literature insofar as they have not managed to explain how narrating a story is linked with the uses of categories and the types they produce in narratives (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

Other studies on categorisation from a narrative viewpoint have focused on this aspect when criticising CA – especially how its practitioners lack attention to stories (De Fina, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2008). They put forward the fact that there is a need to pay attention to the local construction of identities and how they are related to different discursive, social and ideological formations and the role they play in
interactions. This is why Deppermann (2013b) maintains that membership categorisation is surpassed by positioning, since the latter fully works with identities in interaction when addressing its biographical dimension. Positioning arises in storytelling from a narrative analysis viewpoint. By telling a story, speakers deploy two temporal layers: in the here-and-now of the telling, and the past story, thus setting up the first two levels of positioning. In addition, Deppermann argues that ‘the double temporal indexicality of narratives (in terms of telling versus tale) can index more complex identities than categorisation and action-description’ (Deppermann 2013a: 8).

By deploying categories, the means are provided for speakers to represent and make sense through predicates. By categorising, additional cultural information is implied, inferred and made available. In fact, particular categories come with particular ways of being and doing such activities, obligations, knowledge, and competencies (Lepper, 2000:32-34). For instance, categorising someone either as a university professor, a mother or an outcast does more than merely label; it also implies that the person conducts herself in particular ways and engages in certain activities. Predicates become locally enacted, tacitly understood regimes of implied conduct that build (dis)affinity among speakers. Lexical choice, and the consequent locally available cultural knowledge, enable self and other positioning in local discourse.

Categorisation analysis can work together with positioning as it occurs in talk. Positioning, on one hand, offers a method that shows what people are doing. On the other hand, categorisation reinforces the interpretation by showing in a concrete way some of how it is done through lexical choices.

Now, I turn to the second resource which will allow me to account for my respondents’ management of self-differentiation and self-integration: the principle of relationality.
2.10 The principle of relationality

The last resource I will review in this chapter is the *principle of relationality* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This stresses the fact that identities become meaningful in relation to other available identity positions. This concept is relevant in my study because it helps me to address and to underscore some aspects of the existing identity struggles among my respondents and how their identities acquire social meaning in relation to other social actors. This principle was developed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) in the framework of their theory of the discursive construction of identity. To them, identity is not an isolated process. It is rather seen as a phenomenon that is constructed in relation to three particular relations: *similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice* and *authority/delegitimacy*.

These relations address different dimensions of identity construction. The first set shows how interlocutors generate similarities or divergences in relation to other individuals. The second couple reveals how individuals perceive others’ identity claims and whether they are considered as being genuine or not. Lastly, the third pair of relations is related to power and ideology and how these features influence the production and enactment of identities. According to the authors, these relations can happen simultaneously (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005: 598-604).

This framework accompanies positioning theory in this thesis since it helps to capture and explain the respondents’ diversity of identity claims. Let’s remember that I follow a social constructionist stance that regards identities as dynamic and not constructed in isolation. Thus, I regard identity as a process that is continuously built and negotiated in relation to others’ identities. In this case, the audiences my participants interact with are academic peers, students and other semioticians. Moreover, during the interactions we had, my respondents also enacted more than one identity. In this
way, they simultaneously constructed themselves as agents, people who portrayed themselves as ‘being in control and self-determined’ (Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin, 2011: 189). Respondents also chose to position themselves as professors, linguists, semioticians, or theoreticians, but also as belonging to an ethnic group.

By disengaging from (or being complicit in) these categories, participants established boundaries around themselves and others so that their own individual identities and group membership become visible. This parallel enactment of identity might not always be harmonious, but can often lead to potential conflicts or struggles. This is why an interaction among positioning, categorisation and the principle of relationality is possible, since it can help me to account for the process of negotiation and construction of participants’ identification when accounting for three main dimensions: the first, in which respondents construct their world as active or passive agents through time and space; the second, when respondents make relevant their identities vis-à-vis others through the lexical choice of categorisation, and the third, when respondents take up different positions when feeling that their identities are at stake in concrete moments of the interaction.

**2.11 Concluding remarks**

In this literature review I have aimed at describing the epistemological background of an eclectic field of research. I described how semiotics has been discursively organised around two *fundamental discourses* (Foucault, 1969) in the twentieth century. The first discourse was grounded on Saussure’s semiological approach, and mainly followed by structuralist and poststructuralist researchers. The second discourse was based on Peirce’s pragmatist approach, which was adopted by semiotics researchers (2.1).
Insofar as semiotics changed its objects of research, it experienced different epistemological shifts. From the text as the main unit of analysis (2.2.1), it moved to visual production (2.2.2), going through culture as a sign system (2.2.3), multimodality and multimediality (2.2.4), and finally into further approaches, including sociosemiotics, cognitive semiotics or biosemiotics (2.2.5). Semioticians were concerned with providing epistemological and theoretical identity to the field. However, they did not really worry about the institutional organisation of the field and did not pay attention to how this absence of organisation could affect their identity, either as a research community or as individual researchers. By pointing to this issue, I made the case that analysing semioticians’ identification is relevant as a single study that composes the main justification of this thesis (2.3). I then proceeded to discuss developments in identity theory which are relevant for my research from a discursive point of view that includes language relations (2.4).

I also included the discussion of academic identities, since this is one of the many identities at stake during our interactions (2.5). I then turned to narrative research (2.6) in order to illustrate how respondents use the narrative mode during the interviews I conducted with them (2.6.1). Moreover, I showed the types of narratives found in the data (2.7) and the main theoretical approaches to be used in this thesis to analyse the linguistic resources through which identities are mobilised: positioning theory (2.8), categorisation (2.9), and the principle of relationality (2.10).

In the next chapter I will discuss the methodological approach adopted in this thesis.
Chapter 3. Methodology

In this chapter I will describe the methodology I use in this thesis. The main issues addressed in this part comprehend the selection of data and the methods used in the data collection process. I designed a research project that attempt at finding out how semiotics researchers talk about different instances of the academic practice of semiotics and their relationships with it. So, I am focusing on the elicitation of narratives to stress the construction and negotiation of identities. Thus, my main data source is: a pool of forty research interviews with semiotics scholars. In this manner, my study is based on research that analyses instances of spoken discourse situated in their production contexts.

3.1 Research Interviews

Research interviews are my main method for data collection. In this section, I will review literature on research interviews and then I will justify my choice of methods.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on different aspects of interviews (Hyman et al., 1975; Briggs, 1986; Potter, 1996; Schegloff, 1997 and so on). More recent attention has focused on the provision of the actual lived practice of the interview. That is to say that interviews have stopped being regarded as pure questioning processes and started to be regarded as sites for both interviewer and interviewees to present themselves in specific ways (in relation to the topic) and to negotiate different senses of identity. In this manner, interviewing is more frequently approached as a co-constructed event based on a meaningful interaction between the interviewer and the respondent.
Larson (1997), for instance, was one of the first researchers who made a call for a ‘dialogic’ type of interviewing, which was followed by Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000). All three scholars argued that research interviews allowed the opportunity for participants to ‘untangle the complex meanings of their own lived experiences’ (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000: 456).

Within the same constructionist stance, we can observe a diversity of approaches: dominance (Kvale, 2006); meaning negotiation (Tanggaard, 2007); ethnographic (Heyl, 2005); discursive viewpoint (Richards & Talmy, 2010); narrative stances (Baynham, 2011; De Fina & Perrino, 2011; Slembrouck, 2015); reflexivity (Zienkowski, 2017a), among others.

Current approaches to qualitative research interviews underscore the role of the interviewer due to the role he or she plays throughout the interviewing process (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012). In this way, interviewers cannot take for granted respondents’ replies and accept them irrefutably. Researchers instead need to get acquainted with the role they perform and go beyond the utterance level in order to find the hidden insights in meaningful talk (Mann, 2016).

I argue that interviews are the most suitable method for approaching my research object. Firstly, this choice corresponds with the in-depth type of data I wanted to obtain. Secondly, I had foreknowledge of the research topic through my review of the literature and my personal experiences in semiotics. This experience allowed me to develop an agenda and some of the questions that needed to be asked.

Lastly, considering the theoretical frameworks underpinning my research (as outlined in Sections 2.6-2.8), there are some implications of working with interviews that arise regarding the treatment of the interaction and the interviewer’s role. Thus, in this thesis, I wish to pursue a discursive approach to interviews, as presented by Richards...
and Talmy: that is to say, a speech event in which interviewer and interviewee produce meaning, co-construct knowledge and participate together in social practices (Richards & Talmy, 2010). According to these authors, the interview is also a space in which various positionings are realised and can be viewed as different ways to access to various facets of identity.

In addition, I consider research interviews to be *interactional events* instead of artificial encounters (De Fina, 2009: 237). In this way, the interview is regarded as a performance of the self with and for the interviewer. This means that knowing that I have a background in semiotics would also imply that my interviewees would develop certain ideas about my person and my knowledge. In this way, they would often make a guess about my aims in asking this or that question. Furthermore, the role of the interviewer needs to be accounted for in the analysis of data, since it is crucial in the meaning-making process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). In my interviews, I invited people to elaborate on their professional practice through the positions they take up vis-à-vis themselves, me as an interview co-participant, the practice of semiotics and a collective other (including peers, acquaintances, influences, institutions, groups, associations and so forth) in order to narrate and to create sense and identities with regard to particular incidents. The interviews thus contain a great deal of identity work, in which interviewees display the telling of argumentative stories and choose from among a diversity of identity affordances.

What follows is an account of how I selected people to take part in this research.

### 3.2 Inviting respondents to participate in the study

In this section, I will elaborate on the criteria I followed to select my respondents and to create a pool.
Firstly, there were initial ideas regarding who to contact and how to do it, so I started by creating a list of people I was interested in approaching. This process was based on my previous knowledge of people and included acquaintances, authors I knew, as well as former professors. Moreover, I also looked up names in semiotics associations webpages and in semiotics journals’ editorial committees. Afterwards, and by intending to refine this list, I developed some initial criteria that would help me to distinguish between semioticians and non-semioticians. These were not intended to be comprehensive and even clashed with the final selection. However, in this stage of the research, semioticians were considered those researchers fitting these criteria:

- Semiotics as the main area of expertise in their CV
- Semiotics as a main research interest in their CV (clearly stated)
- Semiotics papers in their selected publications
- Publications in semiotics journals or books (in the last 5 years)

These criteria were developed after I conducted a search on web profiles of researchers and referred to their CVs (if available online). This search was done, again, following my previous knowledge to ascertain whether they could be considered to fall into the category of semiotician. This notion of identification is completely opposed to the notion of identity I am using in my research: a non-fixed stance that regards identity as generated in interaction.

Further factors which influenced me when deciding who to contact arose after conducting the first round of interviews in Estonia and Great Britain. The organisation of semiotics in Estonia is diametrically opposed to that in Great Britain. In Great Britain, semiotics is rather marginal, there are no research centres, curricula or official associations. Yet, there are some semiotics scholars scattered around London and a few other locations. Finally, interviewing them was a good opportunity to know
more about the scarcity in organisation in this country. On the other hand, the organisation of semiotics in Estonia is perhaps the most sustainable nowadays (cf. Kull et al, 2011). By ‘sustainable’, I mean that the only semiotics department in the world is located at the University of Tartu in Estonia, and offers semiotics courses in BA, MA and PhD levels. Moreover, they have their own regional semiotics association and the oldest journal in the field, *Sign Systems Studies*, is also published there. Hence, I considered it fundamental to talk to Estonian semioticians.

After this first round of interviews, I realised that semiotics as a community is not of great size in Europe – unlike Latin America and China, regions that produce novel research outputs. Yet, semiotics is a variegated field in relation to the array of theoretical approaches (as discussed in Section 2.2.). Thus, I considered it necessary to account for this diversity and to find respondents who followed different semiotic orientations in order to enrich my pool. One way of doing this was by following the research networks of European semioticians and looking for respondents in places where I could find semiotics research centres. At that moment, my selection of respondents became more geographically oriented.

In this way, the third country involved in this research to look for respondents was France. Even though there are at least three regional associations, *laboratoires de recherche*³, postgraduate curricula in some universities, and at least one research centre (Hénault, 2012), semiotics is institutionally constrained by the boundaries of two disciplinary fields in this country. According to the National Council of Universities⁴ (CNU) semiotics belongs either to the language sciences (CNU section 3) or to the social sciences (CNU section 6) – unlike Latin America and China, regions that produce novel research outputs. Yet, semiotics is a variegated field in relation to the array of theoretical approaches (as discussed in Section 2.2.). Thus, I considered it necessary to account for this diversity and to find respondents who followed different semiotic orientations in order to enrich my pool. One way of doing this was by following the research networks of European semioticians and looking for respondents in places where I could find semiotics research centres. At that moment, my selection of respondents became more geographically oriented.

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³ In France the affiliation to a department refers to a professor’s teaching activities and the affiliation to a laboratoire to the research aspect of their job. Laboratoires are divided in: ‘équipes d’accueil’ or EA in universities; ‘unités mixtes de recherche’ or UMR for research institutions such as Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique. UMRs are both funded by the CNRS and universities (and sometimes by another institution). Consequently, their names refer to their sponsors: e.g. ‘UMR CNRS - Paris 3’. EAs are only funded by universities.

⁴ The National Council of Universities in the French higher education system comprises 57 sections covering all different scientific disciplines recognised in this country.
or to the information sciences and communication – *InfoCom* (CNU section 71). This causes an institutional separation that impedes the organisation of the field by its practitioners, a fact that was stressed by France-based participants.

The fourth selected country was Germany. Semiotics used to be stronger in previous decades, especially when the semiotics research centre at the Technical University Berlin was still active. Currently, it has the function of a seminar. The German Society for Semiotics (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Semiotik*), the most visible organisation in Germany, was founded in the late 1970s and has remained active since then. Semiotics is included in the curriculum of several universities as specific courses at the BA and MA level, but there is no specific PhD programme in semiotics there. The most relevant publication has been the journal *Zeitschrift für Semiotik*. Despite my attempts to carry out more interviews in this country, only one person responded and accepted to participate. I assumed that people were busy or did not want to be engaged in the study.

The fifth country selected was Belgium. Semiotics in Belgium is mainly concentrated in the French-speaking region of Wallonie, notably at the University of Liège, Louvain (UCL) and the University of Brussels (ULB). The journal *Signata* has been published out of Liège University since 2010. Although there is no regional association, Belgium-based researchers have established several links with Francophone researchers in Europe and the Americas (Catellani, 2012).

A similar case takes place in Luxembourg, the sixth country, where semiotics is thriving in the laboratory of French linguistics and literature at Luxembourg University. Even though this is a young research unit in a recently established university, they have been organising several events and have managed to establish a network with researchers from France, Belgium or Italy (Colas Blaise & Tore, 2010).
Further Nordic countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, were considered due to the well-established network of scholars and the continuous production of research. In addition, there is at least one semiotics research centre in each country and scholars from these countries (alongside Estonia, Norway and Lithuania) make up the core of the *Nordic Association for Semiotics Studies* (NASS).

The ninth country considered in this study was Italy. This is another country where semiotics has a larger degree of organisation. The main research centres and chairs in this country are located at the universities of Bolonia, Turin, Palermo, Rome, Siena and so on), some journals (*VS, Lexia, E/C, Carte Semiotiche*) and at least one regional association (Marrone, 2005). Furthermore, every communications department in Italian universities offers a mandatory semiotics course for BA programmes (Pozzato, 2009).

The tenth country contemplated is Bulgaria, a country where semiotics is mainly concentrated around the South-Eastern European Centre for Semiotics Studies at the New Bulgarian University. They have organised an early-fall school of semiotics for the last twenty-three years and the last but one world semiotics congress was hosted there.

Finally, there were two more countries considered in my pool. One of these countries is the United States. Currently, there is no single physical location (a research centre) where semiotics research is concentrated in this country, since American semiotics lost its main research locations during the 1990s: one in Bloomington, Indiana (directed by Thomas Sebeok) and another one at Brown University. When Sebeok passed away in 2001, this centre disappeared, and its faculty dispersed among different departments. Nevertheless, the Semiotic Society of America has been organising an annual conference for the past forty-three years. They also edit their flagship journal *The American Journal of Semiotics*. 
Lastly, I intended to conduct interviews in my home country, Mexico, because I am interested in the scarcity of organisation there. In Mexico, semiotics is barely organised, and it is regarded as a peripheral field scattered among different disciplines (linguistics, anthropology, and mainly, communication). With regard to institutions, there is at least one small research centre at the University of Puebla, and two registered, yet inactive, regional semiotics associations. Nonetheless, I was not able to recruit more respondents, since people did not respond despite several rounds of emails.

The section below describes the data composing the core of this research.

3.3 The data

The final pool of respondents includes interviews with 40 participants in 3 languages (English, French and Spanish) with academics from Great Britain, Germany, Mexico, Estonia, France, Italy, Denmark, Bulgaria, Sweden, Luxembourg, Belgium and the US. This population does not represent the entire field of semiotics. Thus, I am not suggesting that everything made relevant locally in this research is generalisable to all semiotics scholars. This is a study of a particular population that intends to include a diversity of researchers from different semiotic orientations involving: biosemiotics, cultural semiotics, visual semiotics, cognitive semiotics, semiotics of art and semiotics of law, among others.

Furthermore, the pool includes multiple institutional positions, ranging from Emeriti professors (7), full professors (19), associate professors (9), senior lecturers (2) and lecturers (2). In most cases, semioticians are researchers bordering two disciplinary fields: they are institutionally attached to a discipline: linguistics, communication,
anthropology or philosophy, but their common ground is that they have decided to do research in semiotics.

Most of respondents come from the language sciences (12), communication (4), semiotics (3), as well as information and communication sciences (2). The remaining ones are scattered among 11 different fields (education, media, psychology, anthropology, sociology, law, philosophy, art, architecture, cognitive science and visual communication).

The heterogeneity of this population, with regard to the diversity of fields the respondents are institutionally attached to, as well as the different career stages, became abundantly clear. Respondents come from multiple national contexts where disciplinary boundaries are different and, as discussed above, where semiotics has different disciplinary status. Yet, as a community, they are intertwined through theoretical connections and common research interests.

Concerning the amount of data elicited, I would like to point out that I obtained 34,7 hours of audio recordings. The mean length of these research interviews was 52 minutes. The longest interview lasted 110 minutes, while the shortest one lasted 22 minutes only.

The following table illustrates the respondents’ institutional affiliation as well as status, and country of work. Each respondent has a token plus a number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Country of work</th>
<th>Institutional Affiliation</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I01</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>I02</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>Emeritus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I03</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I04</td>
<td>UK</td>
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<td>Lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I05</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Semiotics</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I06</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Semiotics</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I07</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>Professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>I08</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I09</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Language sciences</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I10</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I11</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Language sciences</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I12</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>InfoCom</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I13</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>InfoCom</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
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<td>France</td>
<td>Language sciences</td>
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<td>Lecturer</td>
</tr>
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<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Country</td>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Title</td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I32</td>
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<td>Associate Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I33</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Philosophy and Theory of Languages</td>
<td>Senior lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I34</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Language Sciences</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I35</td>
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<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I36</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I37</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<td>Emeritus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I38</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Cognitive Science</td>
<td>Emeritus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I39</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>Emeritus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I40</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Distribution of respondents

3.4 Setting up the interviews

Now, I will explain the data’s occasioning and setting. After having identified possible respondents, I contacted them and sent them an invitation to participate in the study. The invitation clarified the larger ERC DISCONEX study, in which I did my research, the aims of the interviews and gave an explanation of how they were relevant to the study.

It was demanding to get respondents to agree to interviews, since I invited 112 people from 13 countries to participate in this study. 68 expressed their will to participate, 6 explicitly declined for various reasons such as being too busy to schedule a date for interview or because they were not interested in taking part in the study. Three researchers agreed to concede an ‘email interview’ (I am not counting them here although we had them done). One particular case requested money to be interviewed.
For people who responded positively, I requested from them an updated CV and two to five of their publications that they considered representative of their research in semiotics in order to familiarise myself with their research and see their citations praxis. They either sent me a list of publications or singled out one to three papers for me to peruse. Finally, we agreed a date for our meeting. Interviews with respondents from Estonia, UK, Mexico and mostly everyone in France, were done in real space and time. That is to say, 15 out of 40 interviews were conducted face-to-face and, as I will show below, the remaining 25 interviews were conducted via videoconference. Prior to the interview, I looked into their lists of publications, CVs and web profiles in order to see their careers, research interests, publications, crucial points and changes in their academic lives. Lastly, from the texts sent by them, I examined their citations and references.

In the next section I will elaborate on using videoconference-mediated interviews and discuss some implications for my research.

3.4.1 Videoconferencing as a complimentary data collection tool

Videoconference interviews, via a VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technology such as Skype or FaceTime, was a *mode of qualitative interviewing* (Mann, 2016) I drew on heavily in this research. The main reason for using this mode of research interviewing was due to its practicality and the restrictions on the research budget. Overall, it allowed me to involve participants from different countries by conducting interviews with 25 participants (out of a pool of 40). I normally proposed Skype, since this is the most common type of VoIP. However, after one respondent specifically requested that we use FaceTime, I started to suggest this option too. Eventually, 21 respondents chose Skype and four preferred FaceTime over Skype.
I conducted these interviews on campus in order to secure a reliable internet connection on my side. In many cases, participants were also in their own offices at their universities and we did not have connection issues. I need to say that with regard to France-based interviewees, a couple of times, the connection was not very stable and I had to call them again. This is because the use of Skype is not allowed in public French institutions, so the calls had to be rebooted. In consequence, these interviews had a short hiatus while we were trying to reconnect.

Respondents did not find any obstacle to using VoIP technology and, contrary to my expectations, most senior participants were comfortable using it.

In regard to rapport, I did not have particular issues. Before the interviews, we exchanged several emails as well as pre-interview chats (sometimes post-interview too), and this somehow served to build rapport. During the interactions, rapport construction was slightly difficult, with a few participants who were less responsive, or more reserved.

Lastly, non-verbal cues, like tone of voice or gestures, as Lo Iacono et al. (2016) point out, ‘provide a certain richness to qualitative data’ (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 12). It is true that with VoIP calls, some of these cues may be missed. However, I tried to overcome this through listening more carefully to their voices and looking more conscientiously at their facial expressions.

Finally, using this mode of interviewing was a helpful method of data collection with respondents from other countries, something which could not have been possible otherwise, due to financial and geographical limitations. Despite the fact that I was not able to share the same space as my participants and lost the possibilities of face-to-face interaction, I still consider that the data gathered using this mode of interviewing is just as rich as the data gathered using face-to-face interaction.
I now turn to address ethical issues in this thesis.

3.5 Ethical considerations

In this section, I will elaborate on the need to address ethical considerations in my research and try to critically reflect on the issue of anonymisation by elaborating on some dilemmas faced.

By working with research interviews, I am fully embedded in a scenario, often in institutional settings, where two persons (a doctoral student and a senior academic) participate in an interaction as interviewer and respondent. In this interaction, the respondents are encouraged to reflexively talk about themselves and about their academic practices in order to turn their responses into formal research outputs.

Since the respondents’ locally-constructed identity is at the core of this study, it is necessary to refer to participants as anonymised participants in order to avoid any possible harm. Nonetheless, despite the fact that anonymity is analytically useful, it is also inescapable that the participants are real people working in a small community of practitioners and that the data include both situated professional life as well as biographical trajectories. Even though I am not using pseudonyms to identify participants, but rather a token, plus a number (e.g. I10), the respondents live outside the data. Therefore, I provide the minimum necessary information regarding their institutional positions, fields they are ascribed to and their country of work in order for the reader to understand the data (see Table 1 above).

Prior to data collection, this research was approved according to the Ethical Guidelines stipulated by the Centre for Applied Linguistics Ethics Committee at the University of Warwick. Having received approval, I abided by these ethical guidelines
in collecting data. The formal ethical procedures were developed to guarantee the respondents’ rights to anonymity and confidentiality. They include informed consent, assurance of confidentiality and anonymity as well as data protection. I consider these points in the two sections below.

### 3.5.1 Informed consent

The participants in this research were given consent forms and information sheets (examples of both documents can be found in the Appendix in two languages: French and English), and time to read and sign them prior to the interviews. The information sheets described the purposes of the larger ERC DISCONEX project and the handling of data. They also assure that the contents of the interviews and the documents they sent prior to the interview would be kept confidential and anonymised. Respondents kept the information sheets for their records.

Participants were pre-warned that the interviews were going to be audio-recorded only. In addition, they also were informed that the recording could be stopped at any time at their request and that they could withdraw at any time from the research.

### 3.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

During the encounters with my respondents, I intended to construct an empathic relationship with them and to respectfully address significant aspects of their lives. In the stories told by my respondents, multiple names and locations were constantly evoked. The first dilemma arose when trying to protect the integrity of participants themselves and their relationships with the characters of their stories. The most convenient way I found for anonymising characters and spatial locations was
substituting them with different terms. For example, I use ‘city’, ‘country’, ‘region’, or ‘university’ when there are references to spatial locations (with the exception of Sections 4.9.3.1 and 4.9.3.2 in which respondents openly talk about the situation of semiotics in two concrete countries). In the same way, I only use the term ‘name’ when respondents evoke other people’s names or their own names. In the analysis of the data, I diminished the use of third person pronouns (he/she) when referring to respondents, and as previously mentioned, I have assigned a token and a number to each participant (i01, 02 and so forth).

Another important dimension of anonymity is the anonymity of my respondents in possible future publications. In a community like the one I am doing my research with, there are some dangers of publication which could outweigh the potential benefits. I concur with Joselsson (2007) when she argues that ‘when we study people who know one another, people could be harmed by what others have said about them’ (Joselsson, 2006: 554). Thus, I acknowledge that publication of the material could affect the respondent’s position within the community. In this manner, before intending to use the material for a publication, I would need to collaborate with my respondents about what I intend to publish so that they read what is to be published and agree to its dissemination. I am also conscious that I would need to rescind any material the participant feels might be dangerous or injurious to herself or others.

Lastly, I would like to briefly explain how data is handled and archived. In order to meet the confidentiality requirement, once collected, data was stored in computer hard disks protected by passwords, anti-virus software and anti-spyware to prevent any file leak. Only the people involved in the project have had access to the research data.

A more detailed account of questioning my interviewees is given in the following section.
3.6 Questioning respondents

During these research interviews, I tried to explore how respondents perceived their research, how they constructed themselves and how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis the field of semiotics. On the other hand, since I am also interested in their interaction with the academic institutions of semiotics and its outlets (associations, research groups and journals), I made them reflect on these issues. The interviews were designed to be semi-structured, aiming at covering all these aspects, which I divided into three parts:

1) biographical information, 2) institutional relationships and 3) publications. During the interviews, I posed the following questions to my respondents:

1. How come that you have become who you are?
2. What is your academic activity (in terms of research, teaching or any other administrative duties in the university)?
3. What do you think is your research about and how is it perceived by the others?
4. According to you what is the status of semiotics?
5. You are member of this organisation, what is your role in this organisation and what tasks do you do there?
6. You are member of editorial board(s) in this (or more) semiotics journals. Could you tell of your experience working in there (as member of the board, editor, etc.)?
7. Who do you cite and why? Do you know your citees personally? I noticed that a consistent author in the citations of your papers is this author. Why is it so?
8. What is the current state of semiotics in (the country of work)?

Relevant to our discussion here is that narrative elicitation was explicitly part of the research design, through certain questions. That is to say, these were questions through which I consciously sought to encourage the narration of some experiences
and elicit acts of positioning. These questions were the first, second and third. The first question was designed to elicit biographical information and therefore possible narratives about respondents’ becoming processes. Question two was aimed at seeing how respondents’ research was constructed and whether they positioned by means of the academic activities they perform in their everyday life. Question three intended to see how respondents interact with other audiences and take positioning acts vis-à-vis them. This question, particularly, greatly showed the projection of the self into specific roles as researchers and the (de)construction of membership into an academic community (or more communities).

As I will show in the analysis, questions five, six and eight also shed light on further forms of positioning when respondents characterised themselves as established members of the academic community of semioticians or when describing the situation of the field in their country of work. Questions four and seven are intended to specifically obtain their particular stances and representations on the epistemological status of semiotics. The questions on citations were designed to see the citation praxis they are engaged in, i.e. motivations to cite or issues of self-citation.

### 3.6.1 Conducting the interview

With regard to the development of the interview, respondents provided short, relatively factual answers, whereas in several cases, the respondents felt more comfortable and the responses were more elaborated, producing more conversational and informal interviews. Most interviewees seemed to feel comfortable talking to me and several interviews lasted longer than the originally anticipated 30 minutes. They narrated their experiences while guided and
questioned as part of the construction. They discussed different experiences as researchers, and sometimes as educators, sharing insights into these roles.

Throughout the interviews and, in fact, the whole processes of data collection, I aimed at establishing rapport and giving participants enough space to share their thoughts (Silverman, 2006). Rapport was salient in all aspects of my research, since it allowed me to build a closer relationship with my respondents and to conduct more relaxed interviews in a friendly environment. This also leads me to address issues of reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) and my awareness of my positioning as researcher in the research context (Elliott, 2005).

With regard to what Mann (2016) has suggested as parameters of an interview (context, co-construction and sensitivity), I have to mention how they affected the course of the interview and contributed to the emergence of our identities as researcher and interviewer, something that happened upon the disclosure of the research project and my background in semiotics. In every interview, different roles arose inasmuch as there were multiple elements affecting us as participants. For instance, the interactions were different when having face-to-face interviews (or via videoconference as shown above), or when conducting the interview in a formal setting (as in the case of the researcher’s office), in opposition to an informal setting (a café).

Furthermore, my roles and relationships with my participants shifted throughout the interview process. After assuming roles as researcher and participant, we eventually started to position each other: newcomer to semiotics, or PhD student (in my case) in opposition to an established academic or positioning myself as examiner of experiences and participants as narrators of experiences. I also felt more and more secure in terms of interacting with them. In some cases, at the end of the interviews,
my position was boosted and respondents even invited me to attend certain events or to publish in the outlets they edit.

The last important methodological issue to be covered here is my experience of interviewing in three different languages. Like most PhD students in Great Britain, my academic context is in the medium of English. However, fieldwork was carried out in French, Spanish and English. It included negotiating access, communicating with participants and administering and transcribing interviews. In all situations, both the interviewer and the interviewees shared a common language, so there was no need to use an interpreter. We did not experience communication issues, with the exception of some cultural misunderstandings that were immediately solved through clarification of questions or responses. Overall, interviewing respondents in these three languages was rewarding in that I learned much about my respondents and the academic cultures they are embedded in.

A few linguistic challenges emerged during the transcript stage, but I will talk about them properly in the next section, in which I discuss the transcriptions I use and how they will be presented in the analysis chapter.

3.7 Transcribing the data

In this section I will discuss some issues regarding the transcripts I use in this research.

All 40 interviews were fully transcribed, and transcription was done in English, French and Spanish. Twenty-nine transcripts out of 40 were done by a company. I transcribed six interviews in English, three in Spanish and two in French, using qualitative data analysis software such as MaxQDA and Microsoft Word. When I had all my data collected, I considered some questions about how to handle multilingual
interview data and about the length and the style of transcripts. Just as Ochs pointed out, ‘transcription is a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions’ (Ochs, 1999: 168).

First of all, I will discuss the issue of having the data transcribed by a company. In this way, I need to recall that my research has been done in the framework of a larger project, so I had the opportunity to get my transcripts done by a company. Prior to that, I fully transcribed three interviews in order to get acquainted with the process of transcribing and with the data itself. When I started to work with the company, I became aware of possible issues that could arise, since having the transcription done by others inevitably creates distance from the original data (Tilley & Powick, 2002). This is why I endeavoured myself to carefully collaborate with the transcribers in order to ensure consistency and quality of work. While working with them, I provided the style of transcript I wanted to have in first place. Once I received the resulting transcripts, I checked them against the original recording files and, in some cases, I had to ask them to amend the transcript and to correct certain omissions. Lastly, we signed a confidentiality agreement with the company as a way to address ethical issues.

With regard to the transcripts of multilingual data, the main challenge was the translation and representation of the transcripts in French and Spanish. At some point in this research, I considered translating the selected fragments and analysing these translations. However, I realised that this would involve losing some features of the original transcript, particularly when speakers use figures or speech, make jokes or indexically take up acts of positioning. Thus, I decided to analyse the transcripts in the original language and to offer translations of extracts in Spanish and French into English.
Now, the main concern of this research is the content of the data and the use of certain narratives as a resource of self-presentation. Some of the talk is jointly produced, but I am less concerned with the sequential mechanics of the production of dialogue. This is the case of CA, which has inspired narrative analysis (Georgakopoulou, 2015) and encourages an emic perspective of the insider’s point of view on what is happening during the interaction. However, the transcriptions do not need to carry the same level of detail used by researchers, who study narratives as interaction based on CA (Taylor, 2010). Even though I draw on the works of one strand of positioning theory relying on CA approaches (Lucius-Hoene, 2000; Depperman, 2013b), I also use another strand that integrates third-level positioning (Bamberg, 2004; Van De Mieroop & Bruyninckx, 2009; De Fina, 2013). This last approach in positioning theory aims to demarcate a boundary with a CA approach. As previously mentioned (in Section 2.8), a level three positioning approach puts forward the need for more knowledge of the scene and a greater part of my interpretation as an analyst by looking into broader discursive contexts.

The thesis is grounded in narratives as situated social practices, and part of my position is that people are talking together, contributing to co-construction. Thus, transcripts are presented in an uncomplicated script style with interactional markers when necessary for the analysis. Several extracts are single-speaker utterances. Each speaker is normally given a new line start. I represents the interviewer’s turns, while B is used for the respondents’ turns, and I endeavoured to include pauses and paralinguistic features, like laughing, since both are features of research interviews in which speakers carefully reflect on their thought or show the evaluation of something that has been said.

In the Annexes section, I include the transcript conventions I use in this thesis as well as an example of the transcription carried out.
3.8 My own positioning in the study

In this last section of this chapter, I intend to state a reflexive position that will allow me to acknowledge the impact of multiple factors on the project and on me as researcher. Reflexivity has been defined by Finlay as ‘a thoughtful, conscious self-awareness’ which includes a change in treating data as truth to regarding it as co-construction of reality (Finlay, 2002: 532). Concurring with this argument, Zienkowski locates reflexivity as a way in which ‘researchers (should) acknowledge their own subjectivity and its effects on the production of scientific knowledge’ (Zienkowski, 2017b: 6).

By acknowledging this reflexive position, I aim at offering a clearer idea of my relationship with my object of study. My relationship with the field – a field I have been observing as someone who intends to enter it, also models my interpretation of the data, since during the interviews, I also shared some aspects of my background in semiotics and knowledge of the field.

In this way, I agree with De Fina’s claims that my experiences contribute to understanding the community I am approaching (De Fina, 2013). Here, my research interests and my own life intersect. So, I have to include the fact that I found semiotics as an undergraduate linguistics student back in my home country. This drove me to read papers and books on semiotics and to realise how it works as a sensibility to make sense of the surrounding reality. Further events led me to undertake a semiotics master’s programme in the place which has probably achieved the most suitable organisation of semiotics in the world: Estonia. Studying in a radically different environment alongside several international students with different backgrounds, and interacting first-hand with semiotics scholars helped me to realise my wish to enter this community of practitioners. This is why I decided to write papers on semiotics topics, to participate in semiotics events and to observe
how these proponents work and interact when gathered together. The link between my readings and investigations about the field and its figures, as well as the encounters with some researchers, were insightful because I became aware of the potentialities of semiotics as a trans-disciplinary field to approach manifold aspects of culture.

The multiple interactions I have had with the field and its practitioners led me to see the other side of the coin: semiotics is not well-established and lacks recognition in academic environments, in spite of its fertility when explicating meaning-making processes. This is why I turned to its practitioners, who are the ones who construct the field and keep it alive. When interacting and talking to them, my knowledge of the field becomes relevant, since it helps me to understand how semioticians, as respondents in a particular interaction construct their identities – and negotiate them with me as the interviewer.

3.9 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have outlined a methodological approach to the thesis. I firstly reviewed literature on research interviews and discussed the type of interview I used in this study: a semi-structured research interview. Then, a description of the collection of data was provided, as well as how people were invited to participate in the study.

I provided the background for the respondents, who conform to the data in terms of institutional positions, countries of work as well as their scientific orientations. The setting of the interviews was discussed and a case was made for the discussion of the ethical considerations that were addressed in this thesis in terms of informed consent, anonymisation and confidentiality.
Furthermore, I outlined the type of questions posed to respondents and the objectives they had to elicit acts of positioning. I also accounted for the type of transcription system I used and how transcripts were organised. Finally, I positioned myself in this thesis as a newcomer in the field of semiotics and gave arguments for doing this research.

In the next chapter I will describe the data I have used and how my analysis has been carried out.
Chapter 4. Inquiring into semioticians’ essence

In this chapter, I will present the analysis of the data I collected in the interviews with respondents. The chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part, I will discuss the data elicitation and its representation. The second part will show the grounding for using positioning theory as a method of analysis. In Part Three, I will address the analysis of different narratives in order to account for three different dimensions of identity: sameness and difference across time, agency and the construction of sameness and difference. In Part Four, I will show three different instances in which my respondents’ identities were challenged. Lastly, I will argue for the existence of a particular type of D-discourse (Gee, 1999) that gathers multiple ways of talking about the experience of being a semiotician and working and living within this field.

As I discussed at the very beginning of this study (Section 1.1), the term ‘essence’ in the title of the thesis underscores the question of identification. This term, as used in this chapter’s title, is inspired by the way in which Singer (1984), following Peirce (1892), addressed the formation of individual and collective identities in some groups of human beings through ethnographic lenses. Thus, in this chapter, ‘essence’ is related to the fluid nature of identity insofar as it aims to explore how the ‘selves’ of this group of scholars speak, as well as how their extended identities unfold, overlap or are (re)shaped.

Throughout this chapter, I will address the following research question:
How do semiotics scholars identify themselves and how are they identified by others through narratives and representations in research interviews?
4.1 Preparing the data and getting a first glimpse

In this section, I will discuss how I combined the analysis of my different data-types to create a two-layered analysis of both the linguistic and non-linguistic practices that bear on my research questions.

The first stage started as soon as I first began gathering data and became involved in preparing those data for analysis. The initial stage in all my interviews included:

- **1st stage**
  - Mapping of events
  - Identification of stories

- **2nd stage**
  - Examination of positioning acts (self and others)

- **3rd stage**
  - Examination of agency, constancy-change and othering to find similarity or difference and further identification issues
multiple listenings to the audio-recordings, which fostered considerable familiarity with the content of each audio file. Despite the fact that I had 29 interviews transcribed by a company (as mentioned in Section 3.7), I listened repeatedly to all the interviews in order to get acquainted with the data itself. When I undertook these listening sessions, I wrote observations of the data (e.g. at a gross level, how the interaction unfolded; how participants told different accounts about their lives as semioticians).

At this stage, I also produced what I called participant summaries. These were comprised of each interviewee’s personal information together with notes from my research diary and observations of what happened during the interview and were about one page long. Initially, these were done to support my interviews. However, they became an excellent resource to help me keep in mind both the uniqueness of each participant and her situation within the overall patterns of the research site. Figure 2 below is an example of such a summary.
4.2 Stage one: Getting a comprehensive view

At this point, and after I concluded the verbatim transcription of the interviews (a process which included my own transcripts as well as the revision and correction of the company’s transcribed interviews), I engaged with the entirety of my dataset. That is to say, I went through both the raw data (audio-recordings and field notes) and the summarising documents. This involved me re-listening to and re-reading all the data collected. This allowed me to look for wider patterns or repeated phenomena (such as, for example, the repeated patterns in the stories told by participants) and, also, to identify singular instances that stood out (as in the case of many participants talking about their PhDs).
Since I conducted semi-structured interviews, I gave instructions to my participants to elaborate on certain topics that were organised in three parts (as shown in Section 3.6): 1) biographical information, 2) institutional relationships and 3) publications. For example, all participants were asked to tell a story of them reaching semiotics in their own words in the first part of the interview. As expected, different respondents told different stories. Hence, the story patterns identified were the way in which they became interested in the field of semiotics, the way they undertook training in semiotics (or not) and so on.

I thus examined the events being talked about and the setting in which these events took place (e.g. how the university cancelled a semiotics chair after a professor’s retirement in a particular country). In order to talk about these events, I drew on Jakobson’ distinction between narrated events and narrating events (Jakobson, 1971b). The former concerns the sets of events told in the narrative. These events normally take place in the past. The latter has to do with the interactional event taking place in the here-and-now (the interaction between teller and interviewer). I identified events by the types of actions which involved change of states with reference to a character or group of characters (see below ‘etic criteria’).

In this step, the mapping of events was carried out with the help of MaXQDA software. Figure 3 gives an example of this mapping of events, while Figure 4 shows a screenshot of the MaXQDA project page as a whole (including the mapped events and the interview transcript).
Figure 3: MaxQda screenshot

Figure 4 Screenshot of MaxQda
This process aided the more systematic exploration of the interviews and supported the identification of larger categories. By the end of this stage, I had identified a first list of foci for my analysis. The figure below shows a list of the main events being told in the interviews.

![Figure 5: Main events](image)

Once I identified the main events, I identified the characters in the narrative by ascertaining which actors were named in the story. This included collective and single actors: the narrator, peers in home department/university, peers in other universities/countries, disciplines, students, friends, relatives, supervisors/former teachers, myself, as the interviewer, the narrator’s group and other organisations (e.g., French CNU, evaluation agencies).

Before going to the next stage in which I will talk about subject positions, I will firstly discuss some analytic challenges regarding the identification of stories.
4.3 Analytic challenges: Story identification

There is no unified method or a ‘recipe’ to identify and elicit narratives in narrative research. Since the interviews were not conceived of as narrative interviewing from the very beginning (Mann, 2016), asking ‘only for narrative’ (Slèmbrouck, 2015: 245), I did not draw on a method of biographical narratives solely – for instance, the so-called Biographical-Narrative Interpretative Method (Wengraf, 2001), which focuses on eliciting life stories through questions like ‘Who are you?’. Prior to concentrating on emergent themes, I tried to see whether Labov’s model (Labov & Waletzky, 1967) (outlined in Section 2.6) for analysing narratives could be useful in this stage of my analysis, since it helps to provide structure to stories and could be useful to identify what respondents intend to communicate as the meaning of their stories (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012).

Nevertheless, as has been argued, Labov’s model does not consider the context in which narratives are produced (Schiffrin, 1996; Goodwin, 1997; Och & Capps, 2001). In addition, it avoids important passages, such as expectations, desires, failures, wishes, or anxieties, which are common and salient among the population I am working with.

I then used Kim’s suggestions regarding narrative research with large sets of data from a large number of participants: 1) broadening – looking for broader story contexts; 2) burrowing – paying attention to respondents’ feelings or dilemmas or events impacting their surroundings and 3) (re)storying – finding ways to include experiences in the narratives (Kim, 2016: 207). To her, themes in narratives are not always predetermined and often they can be identified later when doing the analysis. In this way, I endeavoured to identify my inquiry phenomena as they appear in the data during the analysis. Since my narrative inquiry is about researchers who told stories about their lives as academics in the fringes of, most of the times, two academic fields, it was necessary to shift from the telling of events to their
experiences of being academic semioticians. This is why, in this study, I am oriented towards what Riessman (2005) has called performative analysis, which examines how talk among speakers is interactively produced and performed as narrative. This type of analysis intends to account for different features of performance, including the characters’ positioning in the story, the settings (the conditions of production of the story and its setting), or ‘how narrators want to be known’ (Riessman, 2005: 5).

Stories recur in the talk in my interviewees. Some of them could look close to Labov and Waletsky’s account of narratives of personal experience. These take different forms in my data. Some are abbreviated accounts of recent events insofar as they are a temporally ordered list of more than two events (De Fina, 2003). However, many of them are non-biographical accounts (De Fina, 2009), stories more oriented towards factuality, or habitual stories of regular events and ongoing activities.

In the interviews, upon my request, when asking the first question, all forty participants talked about their lives as if they were ‘a continuous line of chronological marks’ (Brockmeier, 2000: 62). Therefore, there was a common way of using a linear model of telling their biographies and constructing narratives about themselves as a process of understanding one’s self throughout time. In this process, they talked about past events and experienced a process of linking those with the present, as well as future expectations (which are deployed in subsequent parts of the interview) when explaining their academic trajectories. An example is found in the narrative sequences in the two fragments below:

(I24)

B: I actually started studying literature and then I wanted to start linguistics to understand language a little better.
(I27)

B: And so, I did a regular degree course at (council) which is the research body in (country) (.) And there I followed a career path, a doctoral scholarship, then a postdoc, and then final appointment to (council). And I’m at the second level, which means that I became an associate professor. And I’ve been an associate professor for nine years now.

In both cases, the speakers tell a set of events regarding their studies. Both sequences include display of stance by respondents: I24’s displays his stance when stating his intentions to study linguistics, and I27’s includes a changing of states. In his case, the description of events is thicker and, in fact, the respondent enumerates the steps followed until becoming an associate professor (starting with a course followed by a doctorate, then a postdoc and the coda in which the respondent tells about his final appointment as an associate professor).

I will now turn to the type of stories found in my data.

4.4. Types of stories

Across the interviews, in their narratives, my respondents shed light on their experiences as individuals and members of groups through a self-reflective process of telling. In this thesis I am in line with interactionist approaches (De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012) and regard storytelling as an interactional process that points to its own production context including the participants, their relationships, as well as the local environment in which they are negotiating meanings.
Now, in order to provide a definition of narrative to be used in this thesis, I need to say firstly that I understand narrative, or story, not merely as a text, but as an interactional event told by a narrator, produced within acts of (story)telling involving tellers and an audience. In this way, I do not wish to pursue a fixed and static definition of narrative, but I rather embrace flexibility as Georgakopoulou (2015) has suggested. Georgakopoulou elaborates on the need to adopt a ‘middle way’ in identifying stories between an ‘anything goes’ position on one hand, and adherence to ‘analytical criteria’ on the other. She puts forward that ‘the middle way’ is about avoiding prescriptions and instead being flexible and relative in definitions of narrative (Georgakopoulou, 2015: 256).

Thus, a narrative here needs to comprise, as a minimum, a reference, yet fleeting, to the temporal unfolding of events or change of state, as well as a semantic display of stance taken towards the event(s) or state. It is paramount to note, though, that this temporal unfolding of events (or change of state) can be produced in the present or future as well as past.

Now that I have presented my understanding of narrative, I will present the type of stories found in my data. They range from stories with a higher degree of narrativity (mainly biographical narratives) to stories featuring a lower degree of narrativity (Carranza, 1998), i.e. narratives that might have a reference to a sequence of past actions or a character’s representation. Yet, the events being told are not discreet or singular. Plus, many of these events are not in the past.

The main stories found in my set of data are:

- **biographical narratives** (accounts of lives which mostly focus on personal experiences and biographical information, include evaluations and have a tellable point).
- **generic narratives** that ‘claim typicality’ and are linguistically characterised by features such as personal pronouns or the use of generalised actors and the
general present (in French, this is the tense known as present de vérité générale), signalling a repeated state of affairs (Baynham, 2011)

- projections of the self: I coined this term to refer to stories presenting a lower degree of narrativity due to their explanatory character. They are more focused on practices, representations and beliefs about the self and others as members of certain communities; they include explicit and non-explicit evaluations.

- Anecdotes: less salient but still recurrent stories in my data. As Holmes maintains, they are digressions from the main topic and ‘constitute the core of interaction’ (Holmes, 2006: 674). They feature a higher degree of tellability (see the next section below) because they illustrate a point, are concerned with personal experience and include evaluations – explicit or implicit (ibid).

- Exemplum narratives: according to Baynham, these were expressly designed to ‘illustrate a point’ (Baynham, 2011: 67).

4.4.1 Structure of stories

The structural components of these stories include characters, places, activities/events – the plot (Georgakopoulou, 2007). As previously shown (in Section 4.2), there is a short-list of events and a range of individual and collective characters, while places are usually academic environments. Nevertheless, Georgakopoulou also argues that the plot-lines include elements of what Labov (1972) called the orientation, i.e. the time and place of the story. She also suggests it encompasses interactional components – what characters said or thought, what Tannen calls ‘constructed dialogue’ (Tannen, 1986). Constructed dialogue does occur in respondents’ stories as reported speech (direct, indirect and free) as I will show in Section 4.5.4.
There are three additional structural features of these stories: tellability, agency and causality.

The first feature is tellability (see Section 2.7), or the characteristics that make a story worth telling (Norrick, 2016). My respondents told me their life stories as academics in the field of semiotics and despite a few digressions, most of their responses were oriented towards the contents of the interview. In addition, they wanted to make some claims about certain topics and events, as well as claiming positioning as semiotics practitioners.

Secondly, agency, a strategic resource available to individual characters for positioning themselves (and others) in the story. It has to do with volition and the performance of controlled actions and self-determination by the speaker. For instance, for Duranti (2004) agency is regarded as a property of those entities that 1) have certain degree of control in their own behavior, 2) whose actions in the world affect other entities (and sometimes itself), 3) whose actions are evaluated (in terms of responsibility of the obtained result).

The third feature of these stories is closely related to agency and is called causality. Causality in narratives operates through agents and the functions they perform. According to Bal, stories are constructions made by entities (human beings), involving human characters and addressed to humans: “they are based on the presupposition that human thinking and action is directed towards an aim” (Bal, 2017: 26). Then, causal action is carried by agents and is most of the time oriented to a goal.

In the next five sub-sections, I will introduce each type of story and illustrate them with an example.
4.4.2 Biographical accounts

Biographical accounts are the main type of story that was found in the interviews. These are accounts aimed at exploring lived experiences and perspectives people have of their everyday lives, including different moments in their past, their present and, as Denzin (1989) points out, their future. This is the most diverse type of story with regard to its structural content: the plot. Such stories include different characters, particularly paramount people in the respondents’ lives when they were younger students. The most typical characters are relatives, supervisors and teachers. Concerning events, respondents aimed at telling series of events that took them to the place they are now: academic trajectories and research interests.

For example, several respondents talked about their doctorates as starting points in their careers and some even delved into their dissertations, titles and supervisors. In addition, they also discussed wishes, inspirations and turning points (Mishler, 2009), i.e. stories introducing unpredictability for the tellers, opening up new directions in their lives, as well as reconfiguring their identities. They were extracted from each interview due to their embeddedness in the context of the research interview, i.e. an event in which I, as interviewee, asked them to talk about their lives as academics.

In the following extract I will show an example of a biographical account featuring a turning point:

Extract 4.1 (I35)

1 B: I was introduced to several people and (.) they invited me to a (semiotics
2 association) meeting
3 I: Mm-hmm
4 B: and that was my first (.) and this is before even when I back to get my doctorate,
5 so I went to this meeting and met (.) a lot of wonderful people (.) and so (4.0) (name)
6 invited me to come to this meeting
7 I: Right
B: at the meeting I met some wonderful people (name) and (name) and (name) and I realized as an art teacher really that was when I was an art teacher (.) this was like the most perfect place to look at interdisciplinary studies and (.) to find the theories and the words and the ideas that I was trying to discover and (2.0) during this conference (name) said ‘well you need to come back and get your doctorate’ and I didn’t know that was even possible because I had two little girls and (2.0) after a while I thought ‘yeah this is possible and yes this is what I want to do but I need to do it in art and semiotics’ so that I went to (university) (.) went back to (university) and they accepted me and majored in art education and I minored in semiotics.

This fragment is a longer account and unfolds into a story about several different events in the respondent’s life. It starts with a report of the events that took place in a meeting which would be the respondent’s first encounter with semioticians. We can see that characters are introduced in the story alongside an evaluation about I35’s past self as teacher.

Afterwards, in line 14, the mental verb ‘to think’ contributes to introduce the respondent as a character in the utterance: ‘yeah this is possible and yes this is what I want to do but I need to do it in art and semiotics’. Not only does the utterance ‘This is possible (...) this is what I want to do’ work as an evaluative comment, but it also conveys a turning point in the respondent’s life. Sometimes, as Mishler argues, turning points lead to ‘a restorying of the past and the adoption of a new identity that changes the meaning of past relationships’ (Mishler, 2006: 39). In this way, this turning point emerged when the respondent attended this meeting and interacted with semiotics people. Even though I35 already had a career as art teacher, she changed her life, went to graduate school and refashioned an aspect of her identity (lines 14–16). In addition, in lines 13-14, I35 also invokes a master narrative (Bamberg, 2004), a narrative that includes her general cultural expectations of what means to be a mother and fully committed to her children’s care. This utterance displays the respondent’s inner conflict regarding the idea about starting graduate school and how she makes relevant her motherhood.
4.4.3 Generic account of tasks

These stories introduce narrative shifts in participants’ stories, that is to say from accounts mainly focussed on the telling of past events to the enactment of experiences influenced by the particular interactive context of a research interview with an academic. As such, these low-narrativity stories invoke explanations and depict the general present state of affairs, in which respondents talk about their academic tasks. The length varies in each case, but the main affairs are told following this model:

(I31)

My primary academic activity is research, so reading, writing papers, organising seminars, research projects and symposia, then teaching for undergraduate and graduate in a doctoral level, and then I have also administrative duties. Currently I’m the president of a degree programme at my university and also in the council of the doctoral programme, so I have to attend meetings and deal with certain amount of bureaucracy.

We can observe how this account summarises the respondent’s prototypical academic tasks in terms of research, teaching and administrative duties. This type of story has an explicative character oriented towards factuality and is recipient-designed. Since it encompasses different activities of each respondent, there is a recurrent use of first-person deictics (pronouns: ‘I’, ‘my’).

In addition to these generic narratives of tasks, there are further narratives that can be considered as generic insofar as they are characterised by the constant use of a particular linguistic feature. In my data I also use this term to refer to habitual stories told with generic ‘you’.
So, you’ve been investigating this is sort of when you’re at a cocktail party you can say ‘oh my research is in this BUT also you can say ‘OH yeah’, I found all these things out’.

4.4.4 Projections of the self

These narratives account for different self-representations in which there are explicit traces of self-positioning and identification. Their degree of narrativity is lower since they are not usually in the past and may sometimes include the unfolding of events as well as the insertion of anecdotes. The main characters are the respondents themselves and the main audiences they interact with in academic environments or in the workplace: students, colleagues or institutions.

B: I have relatively big number of PhDs and tutor presently four doctoral students, all their research is directed towards the digital cultures and markets in big data, in the new interactive corporate communication, the back market and the new opportunities for this kind of branch. So, the field I have opened is very attractive.

This extract, as an explanatory account, introduces certain characters in the figures of the respondent’s PhD students and some actions they perform. There is an outlining of the way in which the teller interacts with students and provides the image he believes his students have of himself, and a small evaluation of the field he has contributed to open.

4.4.5 Anecdotes

Anecdotes are typically found in biographical accounts and, according to Holmes (2005) they have the following characteristics: a) they have a tellable point to make;
b) they are concerned with personal experience; c) they intend to entertain the audience and; d) they include an evaluation (which can be explicit or implicit).

Prior to this extract, the respondent tells an anecdote as a response to the recipient’s question regarding his return to his home country. In the following extract, we can observe a small anecdote.

**Extract 4.2 (I24)**

1. But I had a colleague from (. ) linguistics in (city) who wrote to me about (. ) ‘here is a position which is really is made for you and I asked for the professor who proposes this, and they have not seemed to think about anybody in particular’, so I applied from (country) by telegram ( (Laugh)) Because that was before the internet
2. I: Right
3. B: Then I went to a telegram station in the centre of (city) and sent the telegram
4. (laughter) telegraphed that all my papers will arrive later
5. I: Okay
6. B: Yeah. So (. ) that’s funny.

This fragment contains an anecdote, as a series of events, that represents a digression in the story original. As such, it is embedded in the telling of a trajectory. The anecdote is, thus, told to illustrate a point: the respondent’s experience to apply for a job offer – via telegram – to get his first fixed position at the university. The insistence on the means of communication is related to the fact that this anecdote took place in the 1980s, a period of time in which the internet was not widely available (lines 4–5). We can also appreciate two characters: the respondent and his concerned colleague. Lastly, I24 gives the evaluation of the story in the *coda* (i.e. the part of the story which brings the narrator and the interlocutor back to the present) as well.

**4.4.6 Exemplum narrative**

This is another instance of a low-narrativity story: an exemplum. Exempli are usually embedded in biographical stories and have minimum reference to past or present
actions and events. In the following sequence we can see how the respondent explains the evaluation process that is constantly carried out at his department.

(I21)

Now, for example, our department, which is a huge department, has around a hundred staff. The leadership have commissioned an external evaluation. So, they have hired a panel, an international panel to come and evaluate our research. So, we are, everyone now here trying to reassess how we present our research.

Prior to this extract, the respondent tells what he believes is the others’ perception of his research. Here, the marker ‘for example’ introduces the narrative and explains the context of evaluation at the workplace. This exemplum has an explanatory character and presents an evaluation in the coda: how the respondent and his colleagues are struggling with an evaluation process.

So far, I have illustrated the types of stories found in my data, focusing me on their contents (topics, events, actions, characters and tellability). I will now turn to positioning as a method of data analysis.

4.5.1 Positioning as a methodology of analysis

In this section, I will firstly frame positioning as an overarching method of analysis in my data. Then, I will introduce the linguistic resources that contribute to cue positioning in the three levels of narrative (Bamberg, 1997).

Over the course of the observations and initial analysis it became evident that participants constructed different stories about themselves. These stories were told on the basis of multiple events in which the participants took: reaching the field of
semiotics, interacting with the community or sharing a position as member of the community. Even though the characters were well aligned to events in time and space, there was a *shift* from events to experience, while also accounting for the involvement of both respondent and audience in interactive co-construction. In the interactional structures provided by the interview, respondents worked in interaction with myself as an interviewer, and that affordance created the possibility of multiple positionings that helped to construct different identities in a community of research.

Participants reported diverse stories of success and failure that were depicted alongside their anxieties and expectations. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3), there is a struggle to have semiotics recognised as an independent field of inquiry and for it to be accepted by other peers. As I will show in the subsequent sections, this can be seen when respondents navigate between locally constructed claims and capital D-discourses (Gee, 1999). These D-discourses, in the context of this thesis, refer to the ways and conventions in which working in the field of semiotics is talked about, a shared framework of beliefs that include ways of thinking, interacting and evaluating which are characteristic of concrete identities. Respondents construct identities that reflect the way they want to see the field of semiotics in order to maintain their role within it, as they identify as particular types of people. This could also include how respondents negotiate difficulties in taking up particular positions with reference to how certain academic struggles are understood and the contraposition between seeking to remain in semiotics or to work in other fields.

D-discourses of semiotics are enacted when respondents make sense of the semiotics world by drawing on their knowledge of it as an academic field. They draw on their ‘ways of being in the world’ (Gee, 2015: 22) of semiotics, thereby evoking and reproducing its Discourses (with a capital ‘D’). These Discourses involve discursive practices that also incorporate higher education issues in the form of institutional constraints affecting their field and their professional identities.
Moreover, a positioning approach gives coherence to the investigation of the affordances for academic identity construction available to semioticians and local orientations towards surrounding dominant discourses. In this manner, the analysis intends to illustrate how respondents negotiate and construct their own sense of membership within the field of semiotics (and sometimes in additional fields) using the narrative mode, and what this reveals about dominant beliefs of the field and its practitioners. Addressing the identification of semioticians is methodologically relevant, since it was clear in the interviews that some participants sought to show how they wanted to be seen, as they told a particular version of themselves when displaying alignment (or disengagement) with the field. Furthermore, narratives are the main foci in which the construction of characters and events take place, as well as the way in which these emerge and are presented and evaluated in the story. Their emergence can also be related to larger sociocultural processes and identity construction beyond the local interaction of the interview. Thus, working with narratives permits us to examine the relationship between narrative telling and participants’ identification with the field of semiotics.

Henceforth, the analysis in the upcoming sections is informed by the analysis of the three levels of positioning (Bamberg, 1997; Deppermann, 2015) and the main linguistic resources mobilised in the interaction. As discussed in Chapter 2, Level 1 positioning looks for how characters are positioned in the narrative, while Level 2 positioning considers available positionings offered to the respondent, how the story is embedded within the activity and whether the recipient is positioned to take a particular perspective by the respondent. Level 3 positioning explores the relevance of wider discourses to the interactional positioning. The main linguistic features that were analysed for their connections to social meaning at these levels include how characters represented themselves and others in discourse performing actions, reporting feelings and beliefs as well as displaying themselves as persons who come across as strong, and self-determined –active agents (see below in Section 4.5.2.1).
This is also seen in the interaction with other characters, when they explicitly, or implicitly, evoke their voices outside of the interview through *reported speech*.

Respondents also resorted to *membership categorisation* as a resource for ascribing categories that are associated with the actions, activities and features of particular social collectivities. By means of this membership categorisation, respondents enacted their choice of discursive devices in order to being positioned as a world-to-person direction of fit (Bamberg, 2011). This resulted in being constructed as less powerful and, sometimes, less responsible and powerless – passive agents.

On the local level, researchers position themselves in their desired manner by the representations they provided about the academic practice of semiotics and the discourses they counter or are complicit in. It is also appreciated in how respondents compare and ponder their beliefs and opinions about semiotics vis-à-vis others. In trying to account for and understanding their struggles, both interview participants reinforce certain discourses about the field of semiotics. Lastly, participants also positioned themselves and others through *indexical means*, i.e. semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings.

Using positioning as a methodology of analysis also implies approaching the three dimensions of identity construction: a) the balance between passive and active agency, b) differentiation between self and others and a sense of belonging to a group, and c) moving between sameness and change in one’s biography (Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin, 2011).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positioning levels</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representation of characters and their relationships</td>
<td>Self-representations arisen in the interaction</td>
<td>Representation of dominant discourses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyworld</td>
<td>Interactional world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistic resources mobilised</strong></td>
<td>· Assignation of categories</td>
<td>· Lexical choice (pronouns)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Pronominal choice</td>
<td>· Self-description categories</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Reported speech</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Evaluative indexicals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>·Modalisation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative features</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Narrative design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Metanarrative activities</td>
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<td>· Self-reflexive activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Interactional narrative design</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identity generation</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Passive and active agency</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>· Membership negotiation in a community of researchers and des-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Dynamism of identities (including contradiction)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Positioning as a model of analysis

Figure 6 above intends to represent the iterative process in the interaction between participants, whereby they mobilise certain linguistic resources when positioning
themselves vis-à-vis others and themselves. Identity generation happens in a tension that arises between the interviewees’ positioning within a community of researchers, the interaction with certain audiences and, to some degree, in the reproduction of dominant discourses about the field of semiotics.

In the next sections (4.5.2 to 4.5.6) I will discuss how positioning takes place. I will first present how self-positioning is achieved.

4.5.2 Respondents’ self-positioning

The stories told by my respondents narrate their biographies as academics and implicitly, or openly, presuppose something about them and their surrounding world, including transitions in their lives. Not only do respondents talk about actions and events in their stories, but they are also telling experiences, practices, ways of speaking and interacting. Thus, there are different moments throughout the interaction in which respondents take up a position vis-à-vis an entity (colleagues, other semioticians, the field of semiotics and so forth).

Let’s not forget that positions are multifaceted and can occur at different moments of the interaction. Positions, as Deppermann argues, ‘are potentially contradictory, and they may be fleeting and contested’ (Deppermann, 2015: 370). In this way, positions do not provide the account of a coherent self but, rather, reveal the different ways in which people want to be perceived.

In terms of Bamberg’s model regarding the three levels of positioning, I start from the second level, which makes reference to the interactional world where respondents characterise themselves vis-à-vis an audience. In our context, this corresponds to respondents’ positioning vis-à-vis the interviewer.
4.5.2.1 Agency and evaluation

In this section, I will discuss how respondents position themselves through agency and evaluation. Agency is embodied in tellers when they presuppose a certain degree of intentionality; that is to say, a motivated, volitive activity (Brandt, 2004). In this thesis, I follow a social constructionist stance, which regards the individual as active, i.e. having the capacity to act in the world and in her/his positioning. According to Paris and Hall (2020), creating agents means placing blame. Agents can be protagonists or antagonists; they can act either in ways that the interpreter believes were right and correct or in ways the interpreter condemns. Let’s not forget that agency is the basis for enacting and creating subject positions, insofar as they enable people to reinstate themselves as active agents rather than mere passive recipients.

Moreover, agency is the first identification dilemma that positioning intends to solve. Agency ‘involves two directions of fit’ (Bamberg et al., 2011). For instance, if we regard agency as a continuum, individuals on one side of the continuum view themselves as recipients, i.e., positioned at the receiving end of a world-to-subject direction of fit. In this manner, people choose from discursive repertoires that result in low-agency marking and the construction of less influential, responsible positions, and when actions are negatively evaluated, agents are positioned as less blame-worthy. Conversely, when people pick linguistic devices from the other side of this continuum, they present themselves as agent self-constructers (Bamberg, 2011), positioned at the start of a subject-to-world direction of fit. Being constructed in this manner enables them to construct a strong, in-control and self-determined person. Now, let’s see an example of active agency.

(I06)
B: I was interested in (demonym) literature and in translation studies (.) and also I knew the name of (name) when I was seventeen years old and it was some motivation
to me to go to the university to learn (demonym) philology and after graduating (1.0)
I worked immediately (.) I worked in university.

In the fragment above we can see that this respondent characterises himself as an
active *agent*, someone who performs actions or reporting feelings and beliefs. We
notice the recurrent use of the personal deictic ‘I’ as well as different actions in which
the respondent engages.

Now, let’s examine an instance of *passive agency*:

(I22)

Semiotics don’t have a high status (.) they’re not very estimated because they are
not very, because they are interdisciplinary, they don’t have an institute behind it

In this sequence, I22 makes reference to the community of semioticians through the
use of the personal deictic ‘they’. The use of repeated structures helps to construct
the negation of agency: ‘they’re not’... ‘they don’t have’. In addition, I22 makes
reference to their interdisciplinarity and the lack of institutionalisation to stress it.
Other positionings are deployed when respondents tell extended stretches of
narrative discourse in which they also display higher levels of active agency.

Agency is also accompanied by *evaluation*. An evaluation, as explained before
(Section 2.6), provides evaluative comments on events, justification of its narration,
or the meaning the narrator ascribes to an event (Labov, 1972). Another form of
evaluation is made vis-à-vis the characters of the telling. Both types of evaluations
are usually constructed with regard to the audience, implying that speakers have to
establish a link between the *told world* and the *interactional world* (*Level 2*). With
regard to autobiographical telling, we need to keep in mind that this type of telling
entails the reconstruction of different events that models how respondents are now.

In my interviews, the prototypical type of stories told by respondents is an *academic
trajectory*. This narrative unfolds a chain of factual events in which interviewees aim
at summarising the most relevant aspects of their academic lives and their impact on themselves in a certain chronological order.

The importance of examining both dimensions (active and passive agency) when semioticians present themselves lies in the fact that, at different moments in the interviews, passive and active agency run parallel. For instance, at some moments within the interactions, respondents claimed active agency in the actions they performed or in the abilities they have to make decisions for themselves (as academics working on the boundary of two academic fields). At other moments, they told of different ways in which they are positioned by others as passive agents: as less powerful or as those being ‘blamed’ (Parish & Hall, 2020), particularly when they are accused by their academic peers as performing incorrect actions or of following an old, unfashionable field (see Section 4.7.3).

In the next fragment, I will show how this respondent reflects on an agentive stance in a series of events in which he participated once he became a professor.

**Extract 4.3 (I34)**

1 B: And I became a full professor in (year) (.) and at that time, that kind of personal history, I thought on I had to have a survey on what happens in the humanities at the moment (.) at least in the (demonym) countries, So I organised an international congress, in (city), in (date), and there we had the whole (.) congress at the type of processes of science yeah?
2 I: Yes
3 B: and it was quite successful, because (.) we decided to go and to have a society analysing (.) what is being done as or what was regarded as science process and that (.) was then realised that plan, so that in (year), the semiotics association was founded (.)

This extract tells the ‘arrival’ of a fundamental point in all academics’ careers: becoming a professor (line 1). The main purpose of this extract is to convey an evaluation from the point of view of the respondent’s past self in which he is casting
himself as a successful character in the world of narrative. The constant employment of the personal deictic ‘I’ indicates the speakers’ higher degree of commitment in the performance of certain activities, such as ‘organising a congress’ or ‘founding an association’.

4.5.3. Positioning characters in the story: reference and deictics

When telling stories, respondents also position themselves in the told world or storyworld, which in Bamberg’s terms corresponds to Level 1, as characters, by making reference to a series of past events in which they participated.

Additional forms of positioning take place when respondents linguistically position characters and represent them with regard to one another in the story. When positioning characters, respondents make reference to other people who play or have played different roles in their lives. Firstly, through reference, characters are portrayed as protagonists or antagonists in the storyworld and certain actions and characteristics are attributed to them. This contributes to depict the relationships intertwined between narrator and characters. Moreover, respondents can also construct themselves as characters in the storyworld (as the told self) and the interactional world (as the teller self). Ways of referring to characters include the use of nouns and pronouns, lexical choices of individual words to indicate, or name someone, as well as sequential patterns of third-person references (Schiffrin, 2001). The most common way to establish reference in both the narrated and narrating event is by means of deictics, i.e. particles whose referential value depends on the context of the utterance, ranging from participants (you, she), to spatiotemporal information (there, now) or discursive topics (this, that) (Wortham & Reyes, 2015: 47). In my analysis I use four types of deictics: spatial, temporal, person and discourse.
*Person deictics* refer to speakers and those spoken to and about. They include *I, you, she, or them* but also inclusive and exclusive terms like *we and you.* ‘We’ could refer *inclusively* to me and all of the interviewees in my study. ‘We’ might also refer *exclusively* to me and a few respondents in the study. *Spatial deictics* presuppose information about location and include words and phrases like *here or around the corner.* *Temporal deictics* address past, present and future time and include words like *now, then,* or phrases like *last month.* Both spatial and temporal deictics can set boundaries for the events they demarcate, since they can determine where now ends and then begins. Lastly, *discourse deictics* refer exophorically to objects in contexts, namely they stand in for prior or future discourse, including *this or that.*

There is a great deal of characters in my respondents’ stories, ranging from relatives and friends to academic peers, students or mentors. Even though respondents might introduce characters with a low level of reference in the story, they are also made relevant interactionally in the narrating event of the interview. Let’s examine the following fragment:

**Extract 4.4 – (I39)**

1. So, how is my research (. ) perceived by others? Well, probably perhaps it is a good idea that you ask them ((Laughter)) However, I don’t want to be (. ) sort of not answering your question here (. ) Judging and assessing different feedback and the sort of the comment that I received after presenting my work (. ) I would say I am delighted that others value my work (. ) and encouraged by my effort to connect semiotic discourse and design practice or design thinking.

In this short account, the respondent is positioning vis-à-vis a collective other in the telling. Notice the presence of the discourse marker ‘well’ (line 1) pointing the need to provide an accurate response, and two hedgers, ‘probably’ and ‘perhaps’, which introduce a small joke which is marked by laughter. The purpose of these hedgers is to reduce the speaker’s degree of commitment with regard to the content of the proposition. In addition, in the joke, the respondent sends the recipient to ask other
people (see the use of the third person deictic ‘them’) the opinion they have of this person (lines 1–2).

Next, the interviewee presupposes a hedged positive evaluation the others vis-à-vis his work – the modal marker ‘would’ helps to calibrate the respondent’s attitude towards the content of the sentence. In the interactional world (Level 2, in Bamberg’s terms), the respondent positions himself in terms of higher agency and presents himself as an esteemed researcher by his colleagues when saying that ‘I would say I am delighted that others value my work (.) and encouraged’ (lines 4–5). This evaluation presupposes I39’s perspective from his present viewpoint. Interestingly, in this small account, I39 does not really give more hints about the ‘others’ invoked in the storyworld (line 5).

4.5.4 Positioning characters in the story II: reported speech and indexical positioning

Now that we have seen how characters are introduced in the storyworld and made relevant at the interaction level, we can explore other ways in which characters are positioned in the story. This occurs either by means of a linguistic resource known as reported speech which is used by tellers to quote their characters, or via indexical means.

Apart from voicing others, reported speech (direct, indirect or free style) is a resource that also divides the narrating and the narrated event in the interaction: the speaker who is voicing the speech is located in the here-and-now of the telling, whilst the speaker whose speech is being reported is placed in a narrated event (Wortham & Reyes, 2015). Reported speech often displays metapragmatic verbs, or verbs of
saying (Silverstein, 1993), which help to position narrated characters in the narrating event:

(I06)

So, and I was invited to (country) and (name) told me before leaving that I have to defend there a dissertation because we had (. ) some problem of future because we didn’t have PhD people here.

Prior to this sequence, the respondent is explaining a chain of events regarding I06’s academic journey. The respondent uses indirect reported speech in the utterance ‘(name) told me [.] that...’ to fully position this character in the telling as ‘a cautious professor’ who advised the respondent to complete a doctorate while abroad in order to prevent future problems.

On the other hand, indexical positioning happens when respondents are evoking certain events that happened in the past, making reference to semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings (Silverstein, 2003). In the sequence below I show an instance of positioning via indexical means:

(I24)

But you know how things are in (country) (. ) I had changed my address, so it took some time before they found me.

This utterance has been produced when the respondent was telling an event regarding his first academic position. ‘But you know how things are in (country)’. The country I24 referred to happens to be my country of origin. This utterance thus positions the interviewer as a character in the telling through indexical means. That is to say, I24 addresses me by formulating an assumption about my home country. Formulating these types of assumptions is what Deppermann calls a metanarrative activities (Deppermann, 2015). In this way, I24 is firstly recognising the co-presence of the interviewer as an addressee. Secondly, under these interactional conditions,
the respondent is also entailing something in the context of its use: mutual understanding with regard to how things work in the respondent’s country.

4.5.5 Positioning salient characters from the past: reported speech and modalisation

Some characters were ascribed a more salient role in certain trajectories. These are specialised figures who helped respondents to ‘enter’ the semiotics community. In these stories, participants also prioritised how the referential world is put together by stressing the relationships interwoven between them and these characters.

A resource to position these characters is reported speech, which I just discussed in the previous sub-section. Another resource of positioning characters in the past is when speakers also draw upon modalisation. This resource contributes to connote the degree of certainty or evidence a speaker has in an utterance.

Let’s see how a significant figure from the past is positioned by the speaker in the following fragment through both reported speech and modalisation:

Extract 5 – (I03)

1 B: So, yeah, I consider myself to be very lucky, but I think everyone needs a (name) to help them along. He was incredible (1.0) You could introduce him to a PhD student in (region) and he said ‘Oh, yes I know you, you’re (.) X PhD student, or you’re working on’ You know? It was just fabulous, he had an idea of what everybody was doing, so a mental map of all things that were going on and if he could it would encourage those people.

The transcript starts at a point in which the speaker makes an evaluation of himself as a very lucky person (line 1). I need to say that this positioning as ‘a lucky individual’ was present in a few cases, particularly in the cases of respondents who had a mentor, or an important figure to look up to.
Then, he introduces a character in the telling: a scholar who was an influential figure in IO3’s career, and whose name is inflected as a noun: ‘everybody needs a (name)’. Deontic modality, which implies the speakers’ assessment, is found in the past tense form of the verb ‘can’.

However, as Palmer (1986) suggests, it is a dynamic aspect of this modality since the verb can is related to the speaker’s ability to perform an activity. IO3 is thus positioning the respondent as having the ability to know many PhD students’ work (line 2). Furthermore, a second way of positioning this character is by quoting him by dint of direct reported speech: ‘he said Oh, yes I know you, you’re (.) X PhD student, or you’re working on’ (line 3). In doing so, IO3 uses the metapragmatic verb ‘to say’ that helps to portray this character in the narrated event as a ‘versed researcher who had an up-to-date knowledge of people’. This animation of the story positions the story-characters in relation to each other: as professor and student or mentor-mentee. Further evaluations of the speaker’s professor are given in lines 4–5, via predications, in which he is framed as ‘fabulous’ and ‘having a mental map of things that were going on’.

### 4.5.6 Positioning salient characters from the past II: evaluative indexicals and categories

There are two further ways in which respondents ascribe positions to salient characters from the past. That is to say, by means of two resources called evaluative indexicals and membership categories.

Firstly, evaluative indexicals presuppose something about characters’ social positions and help to frame the speaker with respect to those positions (Wortham & Reyes, 2015). Let’s examine the use of an evaluative indexical in the following extract:
B: Mais, tout cela a été rendu possible par le fait que j’étais soutenu, d’un point de vue institutionnel, par un professeur. Mon patron, comme on dit, hein, qui est le professeur, (name).

This short fragment starts with an event containing the *discourse deictic* ‘cela’ (that) which stands in for prior discourse: the previous telling of the respondent’s studies. The interviewee then introduces a character in the storyworld (Level 1): ‘a professor’ in the utterance ‘Mon patron, comme on dit’. This character is positioned in the storyworld by means of the *evaluative indexical* ‘mon patron’ (my supervisor). The term *patron de thèse* is an old term used in Francophone academic environments, which refers to the thesis supervisor as a ‘boss’ and, in this context, it is indexically presupposing two things. Firstly, it is presupposing something of the context of its use, i.e. the existence and co-presence of an addressee (the doctoral supervisor), and secondly, under these particular co-textual conditions, it entails something in the context of its use: ‘honourification’ to the addressee in metaphorical terms that suggest a hierarchical and power relationship between supervisor and supervisee. It is worth noticing that the appearance of the *autonymic modality* ‘comme on dit’ (*modalisation autonymique*, cf. Authier-Revuz, Doury and Reboul-Toure, 2003) alongside ‘mon patron’ in the same utterance indexes a non-standard use of the term ‘patron’.

I will now present another way of positioning characters and positioning the self, and these are *membership categories*. Apart from making available additional cultural information of others, this resource also displays traits of identification in terms of ethnicity, gender and membership within certain groups. In the next fragment, I will
address how the respondent positions characters in the story by dint of membership categories.

Extract 4.6 (118)

1 B : J’étais déjà en master je faisais du FLE master FLE et un DEA après didactologie des langues et des cultures à (city) (university) et c’est (name) qui est sociologue
2 I : oui ?
3 B : mais sémioticien (1.0) un peu cryptosémioticien pour le décrire
4 I ah-ah ? ((laughs))
5 B : qui m’a fait découvrir la discipline

Prior to this fragment, the transcript starts at a point where the respondent cites the discovering of structuralism while doing postgraduate studies as a reason for going over to semiotics (lines 1–2). Afterwards, the speaker positions a character in the told world (Level 1) in the figure of a professor who served as a figure who inspired the narrator to study semiotics. This character is positioned in the telling on the basis of a collection of membership categories that has been carefully designed by the teller to describe this inspirational figure. Categories, according to Schegloff, are mostly organised into collections (Schegloff, 2007a), so we can observe the use of three different categories that represent certain attributes: 1) sociologist as his primary academic identification (line 2); 2) semiotician, due to the use of semiotics in his

5FLE is the acronym for Français langue étrangère (French as a foreign language). The use is similar to EFL in English.
DEA stands for Diplôme d’études approfondies (Degree of Profound Studies). It was a doctoral programme degree delivered in France between 1964 and 2005 aimed to prepare for advanced doctoral studies and is the equivalent to a current master’s degree.
sociological research (line 4), and 3) a sort of ‘cryptosemiotician’. This last category is used to presuppose an identification of scholars who have ‘contributed directly or indirectly to the characterisation and development of semiotics’ (Petrilli & Ponzio, 2011: 316).

This section has attempted to illustrate how positioning as a method of analysing narratives in interaction works. The section below explains the identification of the most frequently used subject positions by respondents.

4.6 Most common subject positions

In this section, I will elaborate on the most common subject positions that were found at this stage of the analysis.

During the 40 interviews, respondents made references to a multitude of subject positions to stress different aspects of their understanding of themselves and their careers in the field of semiotics. These positions were achieved in the interactional level, as well as when respondents made references to larger discursive contexts at Level 3.

The positions most frequently taken up in the data were the ones which point to constructing more ‘powerful’ persons who are in control (active agents): ‘successful authors’, ‘specialists in the field’, ‘proud professors’ or ‘authorised speakers’. At some moments in the interviews, they chose to be positioned, themselves, as ‘old dissenters’, as ‘switching mechanisms between disciplines’, or as completely adopting positions from their own academic roles as ‘educators’, ‘founders of schools’ or ‘editors’, for example.

Notwithstanding this, at some other moments in the interviews, respondents also positioned themselves as powerless beings through low-agency subject positions; e.g. ‘unable to establish dialogue with other semioticians, ‘being divided’, ‘survivors
in academia’ or, more straightforwardly, as ‘outcasts’. Each of these positions permits the respondents to experience the world in certain way, and each position opens up a concrete view and simultaneously prevents other ways of experiencing and grasping the world (Davies & Harré, 2001).

Following Søreide (2006), I made an inventory of more than 130 positions to see whether multiple positions were constructed in a single narrator’s story and whether these positions oppose, overlap or merge. Despite the fact that it was useful to find some convergences and contradictions in respondents’ stories, Søreide’s approach is more focused on complicity or the rejection of subject positions in her small pool of respondents, a process that was not carried out in the process of this thesis. Still, I considered it suitable to create this list in order to show the diversity of positioning in my data. Of all the subject positions, 11 of them seem to be most relevant across all the interviews. They are presented in the following two figures. The first figure depicts positions in which respondents are presented as agentive-self constructers, whereas the second figure contains positions in which respondents view themselves as recipients (lower agency positioning):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject position</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The established researcher</strong></td>
<td>‘Already 21 years. I’m teaching there and I’m doing well because semiotics is important for university. Studies in semiotics were established and (department) was established and I’m the head’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The theoretician</strong></td>
<td>‘I’m not linked to a particular domain. I rather have a theoretical attitude, you know. And I take this theoretical activity towards epistemology’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The founder</strong></td>
<td>‘So, I claimed to create a paradigm in (branch) semiotics, the school of (location)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The concerned educator</strong></td>
<td>‘I think really everybody needs some kind of mentor, increasingly now with the academic landscape that we have now is very difficult to negotiate, I think, for people, I think for young scholars’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The disengaged scholar</strong></td>
<td>‘Semiotics, to me, it’s a methodology really. But then it’s an institutional discipline in (country) that is officially recognised by the ministry of research. So, it’s a discipline, but I don’t use it as such’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The dynamic researcher</strong></td>
<td>‘I don’t think of myself as really based in a discipline anymore’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: most common subject positions as active agents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject position</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A critical voice</strong></td>
<td>‘[semiotsicians] also need to open up. Because they don’t, we don’t necessarily have the field culture. We need to consume this field culture,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
be hungry for it, accept it, take a good look at it, recognise it’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The lonely interdisciplinary researcher</th>
<th>‘If you’re doing interdisciplinary research completely on your own, you’ll have to find your own way in the world and that is of course problematic’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A liminal position</td>
<td>‘I’m in a sort of liminal position between two chairs, the (field) and the (field) so colleagues are often very interested, but I think they are sceptical or even without being sceptical they are not accompanying me’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The marginal scholar</td>
<td>‘I never really had any sort of relationship with my colleagues that allowed a discussion of semiotics’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strange academic</td>
<td>‘I think I’m quite unusual in education cause I’m quite an abstract thinker. I don’t know what I’m doing in education at all’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: most common subject positions as passive agents

I will now discuss each of these subject positions and will try to present them as being in a continuum of agents–recipients. The first six positions are on one end of this continuum, since respondents made discursive choices that resulted in higher agency marking. In contrast, in the remaining five positions, speakers picked linguistic devices that positioned themselves as powerless and less determined.

- The *established researcher* is a position that conveys the speaker’s expression of success across her career by highlighting achievements and a current state.

- The *theoretician* positions the speaker as someone who consciously regards herself as someone whose remains in the theoretical domain and usually tends to dislike applied research.
• The *founder* is a position that casts the respondent as someone who has inaugurated a space for research and expression in the field of semiotics, either in the form of an outlet, a research centre or a theoretical approach.

• The *concerned educator* positions the speaker as a concerned teacher vis-à-vis the students’ development and future in the field of semiotics.

• The *disengaged scholar* is a position that conveys’ the participant’s relationship or sense of not being entirely connected to semiotics.

• The *dynamic researcher* attempts to articulate the researcher’s intentions to cast himself or herself as someone working in different fields by underscoring the performance of multiple activities.

• A *critical voice* is a more complex position, insofar as it intends to convey an expression of criticism towards the members of the community of semioticians. In this manner, the speaker presents himself as self-determined. Simultaneously, the speaker also positions semioticians as blame-worthy, due to their lack of self-criticism.

• A *liminal position* places the speaker as someone who finds herself on the border of two disciplines. Working in more than one field usually leads the speaker to be negatively evaluated by her/his peers.

• The *lonely interdisciplinary researcher* is similar to the previous position, since it presents the respondent as someone who has struggled with institutions or other academics due to the interdisciplinary character of their own research.

• The *marginal scholar* is a position that depicts’ some respondents’ feelings about marginalisation vis-à-vis some audiences they interact with. As such, it
incorporates other positions that similarly enact alienation: ‘survivors’, ‘outcasts’ or ‘someone who has not fitted into academia’.

- The *strange academic* is a position chosen to depict the respondent’s sense of being different from his colleagues, since s/he has not had a typical academic trajectory or because his/her academic practice is outside of the expected norms.

As we will see in the upcoming sections, the diversity of low-agency positioning will be displayed below (Sections 4.7.3 and 4.7.4). I will then show how respondents constructed a *membership categorisation device* through which they negatively evaluated themselves and/or their semiotician fellows. This categorisation will present how respondents ascribed negative attributes to themselves/semioticians in general, as well as the performance of ‘incorrect’ actions. Both of them sought to reduce semioticians’ agency levels.

This set of positions refer to their roles, moments, attributes, ideas, values, categories, achievements, actions and experiences as scholars working in this field. In addition, these positions should not be understood as ‘ready-made and sharply defined identities’ but as ‘flexible clusters’ (Søreide, 2006:536) that contribute to outline parts of respondents’ identities. In this manner, only when they constantly coalesce to some of these available subject positions can they manage to be understood in the way they want to be understood by others. This is what I will show in the upcoming analysis, in which I present how interviewees resorted to different identity affordances with regard to individual and relational identity.

The first dimension will address the ways in which respondents construct a sense of continuity and/or development in their biographies.
4.7 Stage three: Agency, constancy-change and othering in positioning

In Sections 4.5.2 to 4.5.6 I focussed on the examination of different resources respondents engage in for conveying self-positioning acts in narratives. In this section, I will address one of the three identity dimensions put forward by Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin (2011): constancy and/or change across time. This dimension is oriented towards self-recognition and provides an overview of how respondents enact continuity and change, that is to say, how speakers convey identity maintenance, or underscore how they have changed. The most suitable spot to represent change is a biographical account because these stories tell lived experiences and perspectives about the past, present and future and contain chains of events and evaluations about their saliency in tellers’ lives. In our context, these narratives explore the multiple developments that shaped academic careers.

Now, I need to say that in my data, the respondents explicitly acknowledged change as well as experiencing identity refashioning, as in the case of the following sequence:

(I04)
My career here is being (.) you couldn’t call it a success. I’ve survived, that’s the best thing, so (.) On the other hand, I have completely and utterly changed everything that I ever thought. And (.) continued to do that and I do it through interaction with a small set of colleagues most of them are not in the department.

In this fragment, I04 attempts to summarise his academic career by evoking a total shift in his mentality as well as his interaction with a small number of people. It is of interest that, even though he evaluates his trajectory as not very successful, his language conveys certain agency in actions performed. This is conveyed through pronominal choice and the repetition of actions (I’ve survived...I’ve completely and utterly changed... continued to do that).
Let’s turn to the next example, in which the interviewee portrays a more visible sense of change when telling an anecdote:

**Extract 4.7 (I09)**

1. Bueno, del seminario de (name) yo no entendí gran cosa los cuatro primeros años. 
2. Captaba algunas intervenciones, entendía yo algunas cosas, veía yo procedimientos pero yo no entendía el meollo de las discusiones ¿por qué estaban discutiendo eso? 
3. El quid del asunto se me escapaba. Fue 4 años después y fue mágico y se lo cuento mucho a mis alumnos. Un buen día yo llegué al seminario, y estaba exponiendo (name), que es especialmente difícil lo que él expone. Y de repente me di cuenta ‘ah, sí, lo que él estaba diciendo, por qué lo decía y con quién se estaba peleando, sobre todo con quién se estaba peleando, y en las preguntas y en los comentarios me dí cuenta de quién le contestaba y por qué le contestaba y fue mágico. Desde entonces siempre se lo platico a los estudiantes y les digo, ‘también hay una cierta virtud de la incomprensión’. Me tomó 4 años prepararme para comprender ese seminario pero lo logré.

Well, from (name’s) seminar I didn’t understand that much in the first four years. I barely understood some participations, I understood some things, I distinguished some procedures, but I didn’t understand the core of discussions ‘Why were they discussing that? I missed the crux of the matter. 4 year later, it was magical, and I tell this to my students all the time. One day I went to the seminar, and (name) was talking, and what he does is particularly complicated. Suddenly, ‘oh yeah’ I realised that I understood what he was talking about, why was he saying it and, the person he was having an argument with. Especially the person he was fighting with. In the questions and comments, I figured out who was responding to him, why was he being rebuked, and it was magic. Ever since I always tell this to my students, I tell them that there’s certain virtue in incomprehension. It took me 4 years to prepare myself to understand [the contents of] that seminar but I finally managed.

In this anecdote, I09 constructs the referential world (Level 1) by locating himself in a particular moment: four years after his first session in the seminar, introducing a character in the telling: a researcher who was presenting his work in that session (lines 5–6). It is worth noticing that I09 depicts himself in the telling as a character as
well. He is represented by dint of the actions he performs: ‘barely/or not understanding much of the others’ interventions; missing the core of discussions’.

At the interactional level, the respondent tells a moment of enlightenment through which he finally understood the contents of the seminar (lines 4–8). We see that the performance of actions changes as well: ‘I realised...what and why was he talking about... I figured out who was responding... why was he’. Lastly, I09 adds a moral in the story by means of self-quotation, indexed by means of the metapragmatic verb ‘decir’ (to tell). By means of this moral, the speaker indexically positions himself vis-à-vis the recipient as an ‘accomplished researcher’ who successfully managed to transit from one state to another: from an unexperienced student to a young researcher.

In telling this anecdote, I09 wished to tell an important change in his academic trajectory. His story was used to reveal a change in the state of affairs when presenting himself as a different person with regard to his earlier status as naïve student, and then the change experienced as young researcher. Clearly, I09 delved into his past self, which would enable him to present his re-establishment of identity, which would contribute in shaping his current identity as an established researcher.

Another dimension in which identity is discursively accomplished is when respondents make a balance between the construction of membership in a group and the differentiation from that group. I will discuss both dimensions in the upcoming sections.

**4.7.1 Relational positioning: sameness and difference**

Identities are not constructed in isolation, they are rather created and continuously negotiated in relation to a diverse set of other identities. This is the place in which
multiple claims for identification, isolation or marginalisation happen. Furthermore, semioticians’ identity claims are constructed in what Van de Mieroop and Clifton (2012) considered to be ‘a tension between the individual and the collective level (Van de Mieroop & Clifton, 2012:1).

Respondents balanced different senses of othering in their stories. By ‘othering’ I mean the identification dilemma (Bamberg, 2010) through which they positioned themselves as same and different, that is to say, how they constructed communal senses of belonging in the group of semioticians (or in other groups) and how differentiation from this group was also conveyed.

This aspect of the analysis is salient for understanding semioticians since by showing this second identity dimension, we can account for the available affordances of identification semioticians chose. However, othering cannot be separated from the passive/active agency dimension since respondents reported to be constantly positioned as less powerful passive agents by members of the collectivities they interact with (peers at the workplace or members from other academic communities).

4.7.2 Constructing difference

Shedding light in the ways this community of scholars constructs difference is more complex than sameness. The portrayal of difference involves the agency dilemma (between passive and active agents) since, in the interviews, it was clear that some respondents actively chose to be detached from the larger group of semioticians. On the other hand, semioticians were positioned as passive recipients by means of two larger sets of representations in discourse.

Firstly, their field was negatively rendered through a set of depictions oriented to negativity. Secondly, practitioners were ascribed lack of agency, performance of
passive activities, and the attribution of certain actions and features that involved the development of a *membership categorisation*. This framework of representations about the field and practitioners is what I previously called a *D-discourse of semiotics*.

In this part of my analysis I incorporate Bucholtz and Hall’s *principle of relationality* as a tool which will help me to reveal insights that are relevant for the explanation of the discursive formation of identity in terms of sameness and difference. As discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.10), there are three relations composing the principle of similarity. I recall them here:

*Genuineness/artifice*: how speakers’ identification claims are perceived by others, and whether they are interpreted as being genuine or false; *similarity/difference*: how interlocutors generate similarities or divergences in relation to other individuals; *authority/delegitimacy*: how power and ideology might influence the production and enactment of identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

I will now turn to show how this D-discourse of semiotics was constructed.

### 4.7.3. Shaping the D-discourse: Negative orientations about semiotics

In this section, I will show how respondents themselves constructed a D-discourse of the field of semiotics through different representations that include explicit and implicit referents to diverse aspects of semiotics. Earlier, in Section 4.5.1, I made reference to a set of dominant discursive practices circling around my pool of respondents. Practices that emerged when they made sense of the semiotics world by dint of their knowledge and experience as one of the academic fields they were engaged in.
Across the interviews, several respondents were negatively oriented against the field of semiotics through a multiplicity of representations about it: as an old-fashioned, irrelevant, or esoteric field of knowledge. This orientation to negativity is displayed in the way they employ a range of discursive means, in particularly explicit formulations.

With regard to the frequency, I identified 24 individual depictions of semiotics across all the interviews in different stories. These representations were distributed in four larger groups: 1) use of age-related terms; 2) spatial expressions, 3) complexity-oriented terms, 4) evaluative indexicals and 5) other terms regarding negative features. The distribution of these representations is set out in Figure 9 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age-related</th>
<th>Spatial expressions</th>
<th>Complexity-oriented</th>
<th>Evaluative indexicals</th>
<th>Other terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>Peripherical</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Umberto Eco and that stuff</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old-fashioned</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Too complicated</td>
<td>Roland Barthes and all that</td>
<td>Vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fashionable anymore</td>
<td>A small island</td>
<td>Heavy</td>
<td>Peirce is complicated</td>
<td>Esoteric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the 60s</td>
<td>A battleground in which its members are fighting</td>
<td>Having a complex, self-referential metalanguage</td>
<td>Unnecessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a period of ebb rather than flow</td>
<td>Everywhere and nowhere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: Dimensions of the D-discourse
*Age-related* clusters different terms and expressions depicting semiotics through attributes associated with ‘older-age’, or as a field that is associated with the past – notably with the 1960s, a period in which different academic communities had high levels of interests in semiotics.

The second group, *spatial expressions*, incorporates a series of terms that represent semiotics beyond the speaker’s point of reference as a manner to convey its status vis-à-vis other disciplines and fields. Moreover, it includes a particular state: ‘being in isolation’.

Complexity-oriented terms are designed to evaluate a particular aspect of the field, or the entire field, as something that tends to be complex. Notice that it also includes the reference to the complexity of its metalanguage (full of terms regarding meaning process: symbols, indexes, arguments and so forth).

I borrowed Wortham and Reyes’ term *evaluative indexical* to name the fourth cluster (Wortham & Reyes, 2015). Evaluative indexicals are a resource that contributes to cue particular contexts of use. In this case, these terms are *doing referring* rather than *categorising* (Schegloff, 2007b). That is to say, they are indexically linking semiotics to the works of Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes or Charles Peirce, and in their particular contexts of appearance, semiotics is referred as an ancient field. In Section 4.8 below I will analyse a narrative with evaluative indexicals.

Lastly, the group *other terms* includes multiple representations attributed to semiotics in a pejorative sense.

I will now provide three contexts of appearance in order to show how this D-discourse was taking shape. A frequent representation was given in terms of the complexity of certain authors’ theory, as in the case of the works of Charles S. Peirce in the fragment below. Here, this representation was co-constructed when I posed the question ‘What is the current status of semiotics in (country of work)?’.
(I22)
B: That’s a difficult question (. ) philosophers don’t like it
I: Oh? ((laugh))
B: you know political philosophy (. ) all in phenomenology so (2.0) but no, not really
any philosophers in (country) have worked with Peirce, they try to avoid Peirce
because it’s so complicated
I: ((Laughs)) Really? Okay.

In this sequence, the respondent, interacting with philosophers himself, orients his
response to the representation that his colleagues have of semiotics. I22 positions
philosophers in his country of work as avoiding Peirce due to the complexity of his
theories.

Another case took place when one respondent, in an anecdote, constructed a feeling
of ‘otherness’ vis-à-vis his colleagues in the workplace. He associated this feeling in
relation to perceptions of the field of semiotics his colleagues had.

Extract 4.8 – (I04)
1 B: Quite often they’d say, ‘Well, why, (name)? What do you do? You know, what’s
2 your work?’ and I would say something about, ‘Well, I’m interested in English and
3 biology, Buddhism, and semiotics.’ And they’d say, ‘Oh, semiotics? What, you mean
4 (. ) Umberto Eco and stuff like that?’ I would say, ‘Well, there’s more.’ So, I gave a talk
5 on biosemiotics to try and explain, because I was writing something for well, I think I
6 wrote something for the festrichft for (name).
7 I: Oh, yeah, it’s in (name of publication), I think.
8 B: That’s it.
9 I: Yeah
10 (4 lines omitted in which the respondent regains the topic of the talk)
11 B: I don’t think anybody (. ) had any purchase on it at all. They didn't (2.0) know what
12 I was talking about. And they were in that rather (. ) awkward position when
13 somebody gives you a talk, you don’t understand a bullet, and sometimes you think,
14 it doesn’t matter because there wasn't anything to understand. There wasn't
15 anything there really.
At Level 1, the respondent locates himself as a character in the telling in order to convey an image as himself as ‘not popular’. The respondent thus draws on the enactment of two reported dialogues to position some characters in the telling. The metapragmatic verb to say’ is what opens the reported dialogue in which the discursive formulations of these characters in the narrated world give shape to the narration of this event: I04 being interpellated by his colleagues. Actually, the temporal adverb ‘often’ remarks the frequency of the quoted interpellation: ‘Well, why, (name)? What do you do? You know, what’s your work?’ (lines 1–2).

Then, in the second reported dialogue (lines 3–4), I04 attempts to enact the ironic tone of his colleagues as a positioning strategy: ‘Oh, semiotics? What, you mean (.) Umberto Eco and stuff like that?’ In this utterance, the evaluative indexical ‘stuff like that’ preceded by the name of Umberto Eco is presupposing something of the context of its use, i.e. the existence of a field called semiotics and, under these particular conditions, entailed something in the context of its use: I04’s engagement in this field. Interestingly, the evaluative indexical contributes to characterise the respondent as an ‘esoteric researcher’ vis-à-vis his colleagues, while they are positioned as ‘rigid researchers’ who reduce semiotics to the name of Umberto Eco.

At Level 2, by making reference to an event in which he failed to engage the audience (lines 11–14), he cast himself as a ‘non-understood researcher’ because of his work with semiotics. Here it is noticeable that the respondent draws on a high level of granularity of representation to implicitly depict his colleagues’ degree of incomprehensibility.

In the same way, this anecdote also emphasises the difference aspect of the similarity/difference relation in the principle of relationality when the respondent constructs himself as an outcast.

Not only does this anecdote show I04’s tense relationship vis-à-vis his colleagues (when enacting reporting dialogues), it also helps to illustrate the representation of
semiotics as related to the name of Umberto Eco, which can be interpreted as a link with something that is not fashionable anymore. Furthermore, this story gives us a glance of I04’s identity work with regard to the differentiation of others.

The last example I will provide in this section makes reference to two facts: first, I40’s representation of semiotics through a metaphor. Second, in this sequence he bridges two representations: the field of semiotics and that of practitioners.

**Extract 4.9 – I40**

1. So (.) I think it’s a vast partly cultivated, partly wild field in which desperate inquiries go on and all to the metaphor of something of the tower of Babel, right? Where people are speaking different languages and therefore cannot communicate with each other. And so, one of the ironies of course is that semioticians have such a hard time sometimes communicating with each other.

In this sequence, the evaluation of the field by the respondent is provided through predication in line 1 ‘it’s a vast partly cultivated, partly wild’. Afterwards, I40 draws upon a figure of speech to make a representation of semioticians: a metaphor in which semiotics is regarded as a ‘tower of Babel’, inhabited by scholars unable to communicate with each other (lines 2–4). Lastly, the speaker openly evokes the irony of this example which is grounded on the fact that one of the research objects is, among others, communication.

In these three examples I have offered some depictions of the field of semiotics that feed off this D-discourse of semiotics. However, there is an additional dimension of this Discourse which is grounded on the respondents’ construction of a membership categorisation. I will discuss this matter in the upcoming section.
4.7.4 Membership categorisation of semioticians as ‘different’

A categorisation of semioticians as ‘different’ emerged when respondents associated semioticians’ negative attributes and represented them in talk. Through this categorisation, semioticians are stripped of agency, since they are constructed as ‘less influential’, ‘weaker’ or even blame-worthy (Bamberg, 2011). Furthermore, the actions they perform are also negatively evaluated. This dimension is also salient for understanding respondents’ identity formation processes, since the low-agency (passive) dimension is more clearly appreciated here.

There are two ways whereby participants explicitly, or not-so-explicitly, produced their ‘different’ categorisations. These are: a) ascription of attributes and b) portrayal of semioticians as a ‘disconnected’ community.

The first attribute that group members were ascribed was ‘lacking knowledge’ with regard to other subjects:

(I17)

Je reproche souvent aux sémioticiens sous prétexte d'utiliser la sémiotique (1.0) ils se permettent de parler de n'importe quoi.

I often criticise semioticians under the pretext of using semiotics (1.0) that they allow themselves to talk about anything.

C'est un (1.0) des problèmes que j'ai avec la sémiotique, c'est-à-dire des gens qui fin je vais pas en citer mais qui s'autorisent à parler de tel objet alors qu'ils ne le connaissent pas quoi.

that’s one (.) of the issues I have with semiotics. I mean, people who, well, I’m not going to mention any of them, but they permit themselves to talk on a subject that they know nothing about, you know.
In these sequences, I17 positioned herself as a ‘critique’ against semioticians who allow themselves to talk about other subjects by stressing the performance of certain tasks: ‘ils se permettent de parler...s'autorisent à parler’. In addition, they are represented as ignorant and pretentious who allow themselves to make deceptive claims: ‘ils ne le connaissent pas’. It is worth noticing the pronominal reference in both sequences in which the respondent does not identify with them.

A second negative attribute they were assigned with was being discordant among themselves. This positioning was nuanced in the form of different representations. For instance, I08 enacted this attribute as a lack of dialogue among semiotics researchers:

Extract 4.10 – I08

1 B: Creo que eso le falta a la Semiótica (.) porque finalmente por mucho que se junten no hay diálogo entre los semiotistas (1.0) Tú ya verás ((laugh))
2 I: ((laugh))
3 B: No sacas a un greimasiano (.) que dialogue con un peirceano ¿no?
4 I: Mhm (.) claro
5 B: O un seguidor de la Escuela de Tartú no sale de sus de sus modelos ¿no?

B: I think that’s what semiotics lacks (.) because in the end even though they manage to get some link there’s no dialogue among semioticians (1.0) You’ll see ((laugh))
I: ((laugh))
B: You can’t establish a dialogue between a Greimasian (.) and a Peircean, right?
I: Mhm (.) sure
B: Or a follower of the Tartu School, they just can’t get out of their own models, right? (.)

At Level 2, the respondent highlighted the disputes among different semiotic traditions and constructed a ‘collective other’ to separate semioticians by theoretical orientations: Greimasians, Peirceans and Tartu-Moscow School followers (lines 3–6). At the same interactional level, this positioning was co-constructed when I08
indexically positioned himself by warning the interviewer about this lack of dialogue: ‘Tú ya verás ((laugh))’. In this utterance, I08 is making reference to his own context pertaining to his decades of experience in the field of semiotics. I must add that, to my surprise, the respondent showed himself as completely disengaged from semiotics across the interaction.

Lastly, the same attribute was represented twice. The first time, this was done through an evaluation regarding the incapacity of semioticians to accept transdisciplinary research in:

(I21)

‘Semioticians they are so compartmentalised, and don’t accept this transdisciplinary’.

Second, through an analogy and also by dint of indexical positioning as in the case of the next fragment:

Extract 4.11 (I38)

1 B: ‘Now in semiotics there are very heavy divisions just like in the socialist party
2 ((laughter)) you know’ you have the persons that cannot understand Saussure and
3 vice-versa
4 I: Okay yeah.
5 B: And I think (.) I’m the only trend that overcomes that distinction. So I don’t even see
6 a group (.) trying to institutionalise semiotics (.) or you will see the Saussureans trying
7 to institutionalise theirs, but they still can’t talk to each other because (2.0) they are
8 ontologically different. ((Laughter)).

In Level 1, apart from referring to the divisive character of semioticians, I38 is indexically positioning himself in the telling, since he is making reference to local context and his political views: making an analogy between the socialist party and the community of semioticians (lines 1–2). Furthermore, he enacts another division
in Saussurean followers: also depicted as unable to maintain a dialogue (lines 5–6). Notice that the presence of laughter intends to mitigate the severity of this attribute (lines 1 and 7).

At the interactional world we observe that he positions himself as ‘an only trend who can overcome this distinction’ – indicated through the mental verb ‘to think’. In a previous moment of the interview the respondent claimed to be the initiator of a paradigm in semiotics.

In all these sequences and narratives, respondents oriented themselves against the other members of the semiotics community (despite being fully aligned with the field of semiotics in other moments). This points to the ‘naturalisation’ or ‘acceptance’ of this status as if it was a taken-for-granted norm. Moreover, it points out to the existence of a shared belief. Since these are features of a capital D-discourse (Gee, 1999), it then becomes apparent that a D-discourse of the field of semiotics could exist.

The main components of this D-discourse of semiotics are five lower case ‘d’-discourses (Gee, 2008):

a) Age-related terms are pejorative representations of semiotics that depict semiotics as something from the past.

b) Spatial expressions are expressions used to imply that semiotics is separate from other disciplines.

c) Complexity-oriented terms make qualitative evaluations about the field or about one concrete aspect.

d) Evaluative indexicals comprise an aspect that includes an indexical connection between the names of famous semioticians (Barthes or Eco) and their context of use. In particular, contextual condition semiotics is linked to their works, and consequently, is no longer considered fashionable.
e) Reported speech is a pragmatic resource utilised by respondents to show how semiotics is ‘being talked about' by others in discourse.

In addition, there is an additional pragmatic resource supplying this Discourse: a membership categorisation of semioticians as being ‘different’. As such, this categorisation device is composed of representations regarding: 1) the performance of actions seeking to reduce semioticians’ agency levels; 2) ascribing negative attributes to members of the semiotics community.

This D-discourse also includes a larger macro-context of higher education regarding two main dimensions: 1) disciplinary boundaries and 2) institutional constraints affecting the field of semiotics. All the components of this D-discourse may have an impact upon the available affordances for semioticians’ identification within tensions between this socially determined system relation and their membership/disengagement feelings in the field.

Thus far, I have argued that respondents constructed a D-discourse of the field of semiotics and showed the ways through which it was enacted. Let us now consider the construction of difference by means of the triple identification dilemma in the next section.

4.7.5 Deconstructing membership from the field of semiotics

What follows is an account of how respondents openly constructed difference from the field of semiotics. In order to shape this sense of being different, speakers enacted different instances of the triple identity dilemma: continuity and change, self/other differentiation, and agency, thus generating identity in a tension between their individual identification and the collectivity. When constructing difference, respondents drew upon certain resources:
a) categorisation, b) performance of intentionally motivated actions, c) being complicit in the D-discourse of semiotics, and d) claiming membership in the field they are institutionally attached to.

4.7.5.1 Constructing difference as an active agent

In the next account, I will show the first instance, whereby I29 constructed a sense of being different from the larger in-group of semioticians by conveying a strong sense of active agency.

Extract 4.12 – (I29)

1  B : Je suis le seul du (research centre) qui fait vraiment de la sémiotique. Je suis un peu le spécialiste de sémiotique du labo, pour ça c’est un peu le positionnement. En ce moment, j’ai des projets avec deux ou trois, avec des membres de (research centre). Par contre, ici dans l’(university), j’ai, par contre, des collaboration avec des chercheurs d’autres universités et si je suis toujours le spécialiste de sémiotique qui travaille avec quelqu’un qu’a une autre approche. Je suis toujours de la complémentarité.
8  (9 lines omitted talking about his departmental colleagues)
9  B : Et par rapport à la communauté des sémioticiens, c’est vrai que moi, je suis un peu sorti, ça dire que j’ai participé depuis quelques années aux colloques de la, par exemple de l’(association) et ces types de rencontres, je participe plutôt aux colloques en communication, donc, par exemple la (association) et ces types de rencontres, donc depuis de quelques années je suis pas, je suis un peu sorti de le milieu vraiment des sémioticiens qui travaillent entre des lieux de rencontre des sémioticiens, donc je suis plutôt dans le réseau un peu des gens qui sont à l’information et la communication, notamment d’organisation. Voilà.
On the first level of positioning, I29’s depicts himself as a character and portrays himself as different in opposition to three audiences: members in his department, academic peers within his university and semioticians.

Firstly, in the workplace, I29 characterises himself as the only member at his research unit working with semiotics. The adverb ‘vraiment’ boosts this positioning as the ‘semiotics specialist in his research centre’ (line 2). Next, I29 shifts his positioning towards other audience in the utterance ‘ici dans l’(university)’ (lines 3–4). The spatial deictic ‘ici’ (here), as Wortham and Reyes (2015) suggest, is a radial deictic which presupposes an unspecified boundary around the speech event. I29’s also regards himself as someone ‘dynamic’ by being complementary (lines 5–6). Thirdly (line 8), I29 shifts to the larger community of semioticians. The use of the membership category ‘semioticians’ is used as a boundary to demarcate a distance between him and them.
At Level 2 positioning, the respondent actively enacts himself as an *agent*. Agency is conveyed when the interviewee tells two actions that imply intentionality and volition. Notice the pronominal choice ‘je’: 1) choosing to participate in communication events over semiotics events: ‘je suis un peu sorti... j’ai participé (lines 9–11) and 2) having a network of researchers within the information sciences, concretely in the area of organisation: ‘je suis plutôt dans le réseau’ (lines 13-15). The sense of disengagement and being different from semioticians is constructed via the *difference* relation in the *principle of relationality*.

At the beginning of the account, I29 characterised himself as a specialist in semiotics, but as having disengaged from this research community. In this manner, the speaker conveys a contradiction in his identity work. Once more, as Clifton and Van de Mieroop (2017) argue, respondents’ identity claims are not always consistent across the interviews and can be subject to contradictions at different points of the interview.

### 4.7.5.2 Constructing difference as an agent and through self/other differentiation

The second fragment exemplifies self/other differentiation by: 1) underscoring the *genuiness/artifice* relation of the *principle of relationality* and 2) choosing how the speaker wants to be characterised as a particular type of person when being complicit in the D-discourse of semiotics.

#### Extract 4.13 – I17

1 Moi, je suis une utilisatrice de la sémiotique et mon objet c'est (.) avant tout le
2 hittite, les écritures et je cherche les méthodologies qui sont les plus adéquates donc
3 je peux utiliser de l'anthropologie, de la sémiotique, donc pour moi, c'est une
4 méthodologie (2.0) vraiment. Mais après c'est une (. ) discipline institutionnelle en
5 (country) qui est reconnue officiellement par le ministère de la recherche donc c'est
6 une discipline, mais moi je l'utilise pas comme telle.
7 I : Mm mm
B : Moi, je me définis pas comme sémioticienne (1.0) je me définis comme hittitologue.
I : Aha
B : Pour moi quand on me demande ce que je suis (1.0.) je dis que je suis, en général je dis que je suis antiquesante (..) voilà. Mon cœur c’est souvent (1.0) si vous voulez, alors on a beaucoup, on discute beaucoup de ça (laughs) avec (name) moi je reproche souvent aux sémioticiens sous prétexte d’utiliser la sémiotique (1.0) ils se permettent de parler de n’importe quoi.
I : (laughs)
B : (laughs) c’est-à-dire, comme si le fait d’utiliser la sémiotique les autorisait à parler (.) y en a qui parlent d’écritures mais moi je hurle quoi, je dis mais (.) si on se permet de faire de la sémiotique de l’écriture, avant tout il faut connaître les écritures.

I’m a user of semiotics and my subject is (.) first and foremost Hittite, the scriptures and I look for the most appropriate methodologies. So, I can use anthropology, semiotics. To me, it’s a methodology (2.0) really. But then it’s an (.) institutional discipline in (country) that is officially recognised by the ministry of research. So, it’s a discipline, but I don’t use it as such.
I: Mmm
B: Me, I don’t define myself as a semiotician (1.0) I define myself as a hittitologist.
I: Aha
B: For my part, when I’m asked what I am (.) I generally say that I’m a classicist (.) That’s all. My heart is frequently (1.0) if you like. We have, indeed we still talk about it a lot ((laughs)) With (name) I often criticise semioticians under the pretext of using semiotics (1.0) that they allow themselves to talk about anything.
I: ((laughs))
B: ((laughs)) I mean, as if the fact that they use semiotics allowed them to speak (.) Some of them talk about the scriptures but I shout back you know, I say to them (.) if you’re going to apply semiotics to the scriptures, first and foremost you need to know the scriptures.

This account is a projection of the self, whereby the interviewee reveals an explicit stance against semiotics throughout the account. It also includes a previously analysed sequence (in Section 4.7.4).
At Level 1, I17 the respondent positions herself vis-à-vis semioticians by rebuking them and intending to deconstruct membership from this community. As previously mentioned, she makes an evaluation of semioticians as pretending to talk from a pure semiotic viewpoint (line 13). In this manner, I17 ascribes certain features to semioticians as ‘pretentious researchers making deceptive claims’. What this means in terms of identity construction is that the respondent is stressing the genuineness aspect in the genuineness/artifice relation of the principle of relationality. That is to say, the respondent displays her perception with regard to others’ claims.

At the level of interaction, I17 consciously uses a collection of categories (Schegloff, 2007a) to generate divergences in relation to semioticians: ‘classicist/ hittitologist/ semiotics user/ not a semiotician’. Thus, she positions herself as a semiotics user (lines 5–6), an hittitologist (someone who does research on the ethnic group known as the Hittites) who considers semiotics as a methodology serving her purposes and, hence, is not a semiotician (line 8). Moreover, just as Bucholtz and Hall (2005) maintain, some relations can happen simultaneously, as in the case of the similarity/difference. Namely, the interviewee constructs very different membership claims as an hittitologist and remarks the difference relation.

This account shows the respondent’s shift between the storyworld and the interactional world to construct her identity as an agent and as a particular type of person. Agency is constructed when the speaker reveals a sense of commitment (De Brabanter & Dendale, 2008) in her assertion ‘quand on me demande ce que je suis (1.0.) je dis que je suis, en général je dis que’ (line 10). I17 is conveying a sense of engagement in her home discipline and wants to be regarded as a ‘classicist’ (someone who is inspired by Greco-Roman antiquity). Furthermore, the presence of two metapragmatic verbs ‘demander’ (to ask) and ‘dire’ (to say) reinforce I17’s engagement in that discipline. Even though the teller remains in the here-and-now of the telling, her identity construction is also connected to a component of the D-
discourse of semiotics in the way she presents herself. More specifically, I17 resorts to the membership categorisation of semioticians as being ‘different’ in the ascription of negative attributes: ‘ils se permettent de parler de n’importe quoi’ (lines 13-14), and ‘comme si le fait d’utiliser la sémiotique les autorisait à parler’ (lines 17-18).

On the third level of positioning I17 characterises herself as a particular type of person: an hittitologist and a classicist who only works and interacts with semioticians, and hence looks to disengage from this community. Paradoxically, I17 holds an administrative position in a semiotics research centre.

4.7.5.3 Constructing difference from the triple identification dilemma

The last fragment in this section clearly illustrates the three dimensions of identity construction, since: 1) the respondents account for change over time, 2) they construct a sense of being that is different from semioticians (by orienting themselves within the D-discourse of semiotics) and 3) they claim membership in other fields by constructing a sense of active agency.

Extract 4.14 – (I23)

So, in 2000, I was back in (country) after spending a few years in (continent). I did some research projects on language reposition with some new data. And then I kind of stumbled onto semiotics properly first hand. And my relationship the last 17 years with semiotics is then (.) well, let’s be honest and say a bit ambiguous. On the one hand, it's fascinating because it's even broader. On the other hand, it's often very frustrating because the levels of explicitness are lower than linguistics and cognitive science. And it’s still frustrating by, you know fuzzy writing, (.) fuzzy argumentation or non-argumentation. The levels of some of the pure semiotics conferences that I've attended have been, let’s say not satisfactory. So, I decided to not go to this one in (city) to kind of save my energy because of that. And, but again, I never and still don’t consider myself a semiotician proper. So, the real reason is that as you know, we have established this percentage of (branch of) semiotics and now we have a division for (branch of) semiotics. And it's my colleague (name) who’s a semiotician proper. And we have some people who would call themselves as cognitive scientist
proper. And I avoid calling myself a linguist proper because I know (branch of) semiotics is now the field that I identify with.

In this biographical account, we see the copresence of the triple identity dilemma. Firstly, I23 accounted for his relationship with semiotics from a temporal point of view in the way the referential world is put together and orienting to an ambiguous relationship ambiguity (lines 4–5). Through a series of evaluations of the field, I23 tells his relationship and enacts a sense of change.

Secondly, at Level 1, I23 constructs a sense of difference by opposing himself to other characters that involves the use of a collection of membership categories. At first, by introducing a character in the told world and framing him as ‘a proper semiotician’ (line 12). Besides, he distances himself from those people who choose to be known as ‘cognitive scientists’ (line 13). Lastly, he rejects the label of being ‘a proper linguist’ (line 14).

Thirdly, at Level 2, I23 adopts a very explicit position in order to negotiate the boundaries of his disciplinary identity as an agent. Notice the display of two frequency adverbs (‘never’ and ‘still’) to underscore his positioning as ‘not being a semiotician proper’ (line 10). Afterwards, he accounts for this condition of what he is not by indexing his allegiance to another branch of semiotics through pronominal choice: the first-person deictic ‘we’ and his characterisation of himself as a ‘developer of this field’ (lines 11–12). Moreover, the type of actions he performed are endowed with volition too: ‘I decided to not go to this [conference]’ in line 9.

By means of a complex set of positionings, the respondent leaps between local and macro contexts in order to show the particular type of person he wants to display: ‘a special type of semiotician standing up for the field he contributed to inaugurate’. We should not forget that I23 made relevant an aspect of the D-discourse of semiotics to orient himself against semiotics – stressing some negative aspects of the field: unsatisfactory results, ambiguous research. On positioning Level 3, the
respondent casts himself as someone who is not a linguist, nor a prototypical semiotician but a concrete type of semiotician, hence showing commitment to this field that he opened. Simultaneously, in Bucholtz and Hall’s terms, the respondent is constructing his identity in terms of difference rather than sameness in the principle of relationality.

In this section, I have analysed how three researchers chose to deconstruct their membership from the in-group. I will now turn to show how respondents established several links to their membership in a collectivity of semioticians and constructed a sense of being equal.

4.7.6 Constructing sameness

As mentioned before, identities are never isolated nor autonomous, but conjointly emerge in relation to other people and groups.

There are two ways in which respondents linguistically construct a sense of identity as members of the community of semioticians. Firstly, by using the narrative resources narrative design and retrospective comments (Deppermann, 2015), respondents are able to enact a set of common attributes that is associated to belonging in the academic community of semioticians: speaking the same metalanguage and performing a number of academic tasks (attending the same conferences, editing semiotics journals/books, or being an active participant of a semiotics association). Secondly, this sameness is constructed by emphasising the relational ties that link people through the similarity aspect of the principle of relationality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) (mainly by dint of pronominal choice).
4.7.7 Constructing sameness through narrative resources

The first instance through which respondents convey membership feelings in the community of semiotics is what Deppermann (2015) considered as interactional positioning by narrative design or level 2b, i.e. narrative activities that lead respondents to display evaluations, epistemic stances as well as co-membership and solidarity with characters from the subjective perspective of the teller’s self.

Extract 15 – (I32)

B: I think I’m (. ) well recognised in the very limited field of semioticians (. ) in (region) because our research group is particularly present in (3 countries) (2.0) so my international research context is quite totally in these three countries. And my work I think is well-attested with frequentation in congresses and with publications and so on in this (. ) very little world.

At Level 2, I32 is aiming at conveying a status of himself as a ‘well recognised’ researcher in an international context (lines 2–3). Notice the evaluation of the field of semiotics as a ‘very limited field’ (lines 1–2). We can then appreciate how I32 evokes the performance of academic activities like publishing and presenting papers in semiotics conferences. The structure is similar to the one of line 1: a mental verb plus an evaluation: ‘I think’/ ‘well-attested’. This fragment, thus, portrays I32’s positive sense of co-membership and a self-evaluation as a recognised researcher.

A second manner to show sameness in the semiotics community is through narrative retrospective comments in the interactional world. This includes evaluations or argumentations of the participants’ narrated selves from the present viewpoint.

(I27)

Il me semble que dans la communauté sémiotique (. ) Je ne suis pas accueilli avec opposition, mes recherches sont acceptées, elles sont bien reçues, au sens, enfin (. ) Je veux pas de me faire d’auto-éloge, hein, d’autocélébration, mais il n’y a pas de
I think that in the semiotics community (. ) I’m not received with opposition. My research is accepted and well-received, okay. (. ) I don’t want to praise myself, to celebrate myself, but there’s no sense of dissension by my side. There’s the impression that I am on the same wavelength that my semioticians interlocutors.

In this sequence, I27 makes a series of reflexive comments oriented to evaluate his relationship with his fellow semioticians. This fragment clearly shows how the respondent aligns himself with the community. Plus, he highlights the fact that his research is welcomed.

Lastly, we can also notice that in both sequences the respondents convey a quick, yet positive sense of being framed as passive recipients by other semioticians.

4.7.8 Enacting membership through pronominal choice

So far, we have seen how two respondents constructed a sense of being the same in the semiotics community through narrative means. Notwithstanding this, there is another instance of deploying co-membership in a community. For instance, some respondents achieved this when consistently using the first person inclusive deictic ‘we’ with a stable referent to indicate a common quality. I thus evoke here the similarity dimension of Bucholtz and Hall’s principle of relationality. This dimension focuses on how interlocutors generate similarities (or differences as mentioned in the previous sections) in relation to other individuals. More concretely, it stresses the shared ground with the larger collectivity of semioticians. The linguistic resource whereby similarity claims are enacted is pronominal choice.
(I36)

B: Other semioticians, we do great together because we’re actively engaged in a common language where we can discuss the kind of things that we’re discussing here and it’s meaningful.
I: Yeah.

In this sequence, I36 explicitly highlights the good terms of his relationship with other semioticians by dint of an evaluation. In the same line (line 1), I36 stresses a set of shared traits (a common language), to display alignment in this community of inquiry: ‘we’re actively engaged in a common language’. The constant use (thrice) of the inclusive personal deictic ‘we’ indexes membership feelings in relation to other individuals since it conveys ‘empathy’ due to a particular property of encoding meaning between speaker and the addressee (De Fina, 1995). This empathy is an index of similarity.

In the following fragment, I will show how I05 correlates the performance of certain tasks with pronominal choice. Furthermore, the fragment will also show another common trait whereby sameness is constructed: a network of researchers.

Extract 4.16 – I05

1 B: We, of course, had more people, we had, we felt we could do more and then we started with this (.) editing project also to continue with (name of journal), and starting to prepare some materials and translations into (language) of semiotics classics (.) Plus, of course, conferences, organisation of conferences (.) And, then, of course, very important part here, very important role, for me, and I think for the whole (university) people was direct contacts to, well, just talk to people in the semiotics world (.).

At the beginning of this fragment, the respondent displays alignment with his semiotics colleagues and enacts sameness through pronominal choice (notice the repetitive use of the inclusive deictic ‘we’). Then I05 makes relevant the performance of certain tasks that contribute to reinforce co-membership feelings as a semiotician: the edition of materials, translations or conference organisation (lines 3–4). Lastly,
the mental verb ‘to think’ helps to cue another important feature that constructs sameness: developing a network of semiotics researchers (lines 5–6).

In this section, I have presented how speakers constructed sameness by evoking a set of relational ties and common attributes. In the section that follows, it will be argued that some participants built a more complex sense of being the same by negatively orienting themselves to a component of the D-discourse of semiotics: membership categorisation of semioticians as being ‘different’.

4.8 Countering the D-discourse as a positioning strategy to construct sameness

In this section, I will explore and analyse different ways in which three respondents contested the dominant D-discourse as an alternative positioning strategy to construct sameness in the community of semioticians. This counter-positioning is unique to understand respondents’ identity formation because when doing so, they also displayed how they wanted to be perceived—as engaged researchers in the field of semiotics

In the first account, I25 orients to the indexical dimension of the D-discourse by means of evaluative indexicals and constructs himself as a particular type of editor.

Extract 4.17 – (I25)

1 Quand la sémiotique, bon, qui n’est pas très connue comme discipline, il faut le dire.
2 Donc, la sémiotique est partout et nulle part. c’est-à-dire, à la fois tout le monde (.)
3 que ce soit la littérature, que ce soit la géographie. Voilà, tout le monde connaît un
4 peu, un petit peu de sémiotique et qu’est-ce que c’est et, finalement si je retrouvais
5 des articles de sémiotique il n’y a pas de revues non plus. Voilà, c’est un problème,
6 voilà, et surtout on voulait déclarer avec cette revue que la sémiotique est actuelle,
7 qu’elle fait des choses aujourd’hui parce qu’on a une image une peu vieille de la
8 sémiotique, un air des anciens, des sémioticiens, vous savez ? On pense que la
9 sémiotique c’est des années soixante, c’est Roland Barthes et tout ça. Donc, voilà, on
10 voulait montrer que la sémiotique avance, que la sémiotique n’arrête pas de cette (.)
11 que se confronte avec d’autres disciplines et qu’il y a un échange, voilà.

145
In this generic narrative of tasks, the respondent is explaining some of his motivations for inaugurating a semiotics journal. Prior to this fragment, the respondent tells how he mobilised other colleagues to start the edition of this journal. The transcript starts at a point in which I25 is explaining that semiotics is not well-known as a discipline. There is an explicit reference to the spatial aspect of the D-discourse of semiotics when representing the field as ‘everywhere and nowhere’ (line 2): ‘la sémiotique est partout et nulle part’. Next, in lines 4–5, the respondent engages in an inconsistent telling in which he argues an absence of semiotics journals as one of the reasons to open a new periodical ‘il n’y a pas de revues non plus’. The respondent engages in this inconsistency despite the fact that there is a written comprehensive list that shows the number of outlets which are currently published in the world (Kull & Maran, 2013).

In the last part of the account, I25 utters three evaluative indexicals in order to explain a collective representation of semiotics as a field stuck in the past: ‘des années soixante/ [the name of] Roland Barthes/ tout ça’. The three terms evaluate and depict semiotics as an old field from the 1960s which still remains connected to structuralism and the work of Roland Barthes. In this way, at Level 3, I25 is orienting
himself towards the dominant discourse, yet he is not complicit in it and characterises himself as a semiotician committed to the diffusion of the field. The sense of commitment is actually expressed in the utterances ‘on voulait déclarer... on voulait montrer’. Both utterances express a commitment on part of the speaker and how he endorses the propositional content. Notice the double use of the modal marker ‘vouloir’ (‘want’), in which he intends to show a stronger degree of commitment in his assertions regarding his intention to counter these representations. Hence, I25 intends to offer a counternarrative, i.e. a narrative designed to resist dominant Discourses (Bamberg, 2004) in his work as journal editor.

In the next fragment, I will present how the speaker intends to counter the dominant discourse by displaying herself as a concerned educator. In this account, the respondent also draws on the principle of relationality as a resource to claim membership in the in-group of semioticians.

Extract 4.18 – (I12)

B : Alors souvent on me dit que la sémiotique est difficile, mais vous avez dû déjà entendre ça, non ? Que c’est difficile, qu’on n’a pas besoin de tout ça, que c’est lourd (. . .) Oui, bon. J’essaie d’être un peu fataliste là-dessus. J’essaie de pas utiliser de jargon, j’essaie d’être simple et claire, mais c’est très difficile, d’être simple et clair.
I : Oui.

(9 lines omitted talking about her students)

B : Voilà, donc moi j’essaie d’inoculer un tout petit peu la sémiotique comme ça, si je peux dire et de faire inoculer mes doctorants pour qu’ils aient des postes aussi, c’est ça bien sûr. Je ne suis pas sûre qu’il y aura beaucoup à l’avenir de postes de sémioticiens, d’enseignants qui ne feraient que de la sémiotique, mais je pense que, heureusement ou malheureusement, il y a des possibilités dans ces différentes filières. Sur l’image scientifique, sur le journalisme, etc. Je pense que les sémioticiens ont beaucoup de choses à dire dans ces domaines-là.
I : Oui.

B : Oui. Mais il faut aussi qu’ils s’ouvrent. Et qu’ils aient, parce qu’ils n’ont, on n’a pas forcément la culture du domaine. Il faut qu’on mange cette culture de domaine, qu’on en soit gourmands, qu’on l’accepte, qu’on la regarde, qu’on la reconnaîsse, non ? C’est vrai, on n’a pas la science infuse, on n’est pas (. . .) On est un peu trop insulaires, quelquefois, non ?
I : Oui, oui
This is a projection of the self account and has both explanatory and justificatory character. The respondent also tries to negotiate a positioning with the recipient. In addition, it navigates local and macro contexts of discourse. At the very beginning, the presence of the discourse marker, ‘alors’ points to uncertainty and the need to provide a structured response (Bergen & Plauché, 2001).

At Level 1, I12 positions herself in relation to her PhD students. With regard to them, the speaker also relates to wider frames regarding higher education and the scarce posts for semioticians in the respondent’s country of work (lines 8–11). At this same level, I12 performs volitional tasks to cast herself as an active agent vis-à-vis her students and to show her commitment to the field: ‘J’essaie de pas utiliser de jargon, j’essaie d’être simple et claire... j’essaie d’inoculer un tout petit peu la sémiotique si je peux dire’. In this utterance, the modal marker ‘pouvoir’ contributes to show the respondent’s engagement in her work as educator.
At Level 2, we can appreciate how I12 addresses the recipient when trying to seek agreement twice. First, when asking his opinion she utilises the negation adverb ‘non’ with interrogative intentions: ‘mais vous avez dû, déjà entendre ça, non?’ (lines 1–2) and at the close of the account ‘non?’. Notice the epistemic modal marker inflected in compound past (passé composé) ‘du’ (devoir, equivalent ‘to must’ in English) indicates the respondent’s question oriented to possibility. This interactively positions me in the telling and, in the last part, my positive response aligns with the interviewer’s expectations.

At Level 3, I12 enacts three actions in discourse. First, she invokes the dimension of the D-discourse of semiotics that represent the field as ‘difficult, heavy or unnecessary’ (lines 2–3). Next, in the last part of the account, I12 openly demands semioticians’ openness and self-criticism (lines 16–18). Lastly, the respondent draws on pronominal choice as a way to claim membership in the in-group of semioticians: she shifts from the 3rd plural person deictic ‘ils’ to the inclusive pronoun ‘on’ (line 22). As Blanche-Benveniste (2003) maintain, the semantic potential of the pronoun on provides it with a large degree of flexibility in discourse to dissociate the referents. Thus, by performing this shift in pronouns, I12 is indexing membership feelings in the community of semioticians through the relationship of similarity in the principle of relationality.

In this manner, the respondent constructs an identity as ‘a concerned educator’ who, by drawing on a medical metaphor, seeks to ‘inoculate’ semiotics to her students and to counter this series of dominant Discourses.

The last fragment of this section shows another way of countering the D-discourse when the respondent acknowledges the limitations of semiotics and portrays herself as a critical voice.
**Extract 4.19 – (I26)**

B : Je trouve que la sémiotique a été assez isolée hein (.) pour des raisons diverses, institutionnelles, mais non seulement, théoriques, la complication de la théorie, la complexité de la théorie (.) qui se réfère à elle-même, bien sûr on est critiqués pour différentes raisons (.) et je pense que beaucoup de raisons sont effectivement valables, c’est-à-dire je pense que la sémiotique a (.) fait pendant de longues années un discours sur elle-même qui n’a pas permis le dialogue ni avec les chercheurs en infocom ni avec (.) l’analyse du discours ni avec d’autres champs de recherche (.) je suis très critique hein vis-à-vis de ma communauté, vis-à-vis de mes maîtres aussi j’essayerai dans ((laugh)) pour ce qui m’est possible de faire (.) de rendre la sémiotique (.) non pas forcément plus accessible mais d’essayer de montrer aux autres ce qu’on peut y gagner (.) en prenant en considération la méthode

I find that semiotics has been pretty isolated, eh (.) for institutional reasons but not only that, theoretical ones too, the difficulty of the theory, the complexity of the theory (.) which is self-referential. For sure we’re criticised for many reasons (.) and I think that many of those reasons are actually valid, that is to say I think that semiotics (.) has for many years been a discourse on itself that hasn’t allowed for dialogue between infocom researchers or with (.) discourse analysis, or other fields

I: Mmm

B: of research either (.) I’m very critical, eh, vis-à-vis my community, vis-à-vis my professors too. I’d try ((laugh)) as far as I could (.) to make semiotics (.) not necessarily more accessible but try to show others what can be gained from it (.) taking into consideration the semiotics method.

The type of account to which this fragment belongs is a projection of the self. The respondent starts the account by orienting to the same dimension (as in the case of the previous extract) of the D-discourse of semiotics regarding its complex character: an ‘isolated field’, ‘theoretically complicated’ (lines 1–2).

In lines 3–4, the respondent takes up a first positioning by means of pronominal choice. That is to say, the pronoun ‘on’ fulfils the function of the first plural person inclusive form ‘nous’. This choice of pronouns indicates I26’s membership claims
within the community of semiotics scholars: ‘on est critiqués pour différentes raisons’. Here, the principle of relationality becomes manifest in terms of similarity.

At Level 2, I26 explicitly positions herself as a ‘critical voice in her community’ by displaying her epistemic stance: ‘je suis très critique hein vis-à-vis de ma communauté, vis-à-vis de mes maîtres aussi’ (lines 7-8). A first glance of her agent self is conveyed in this utterance: ‘je suis très critique’.

Lastly, at Level 3, I26 reacts to the D-discourse by countering it and demonstrating what can others gain by using a semiotics method: ‘d’essayer de montrer aux autres ce qu’on peut y gagner (. ) en prenant en considération la méthode sémiotique’ (line 10). In terms of identity work, I26 constructs an identity as a ‘critical researcher’ who consciously acknowledges the limitations of semiotics and tries to spread semiotics to other scholars.

So far, the discussion has centred around the claim that respondents can also orient themselves against the D-discourse of semiotics as a positioning strategy and to construct sameness in the larger group of semioticians. The section below describes how semioticians constructed their identity when they realised that it was challenged by other groups.

4.9 Interacting with other groups: students, peers and institutions

Now that I have described how semioticians construct themselves as equal or different, I will now discuss some instances in which respondents reported that their identity was put at stake. Three main moments were reported when: 1) facing other audiences; 2) having semiotics recognised in national academic systems; 3) trying to be recognised as interdisciplinary researchers.
4.9.1 Seeking membership in other groups

I will show a particular case of a respondent who struggles to define identity boundaries by looking to construct membership in other communities. In this narrative, the respondent displays membership feelings in a different community of inquiry.

Extract 4.20 – (I09)

Now, when I say that researchers ignore me, I have to say that actually there are significant exceptions (.) after many years flirting with my cognitive linguist friends they finally understood that we work with very similar things and we provide similar answers, right? (4 lines omitted giving information and names of colleagues).
they have the same problem about their disciplinary boundaries, they have a triple issue, they are cognitive scientists, they’re linguists and they also do semiotics, they’re semioticians, right? So, I don’t have to persuade them, they already know what I’m doing ((laugh)).
I: ((laugh))
B: However, this has allowed for (demonym) cognitive linguists to have a dialogue since there’s more bibliographical [references] now, there are more common topics for discussion
At Level 1 I09 positions himself vis-à-vis another group: cognitive linguists by means of an attribution of actions: having disciplinary borders issues. In addition, three categories aim to represent their main scientific orientation: cognitivists, linguists and semioticians (line 7). This collectivity is thus positioned as ‘idealised companions’ whom with the respondent shares a sense of having a ‘border identity’ since they are also at the fringes of more than two disciplines.

At the interactional level (Level 2), the aligning laughter on both parts acknowledge a connection between both speakers and contributes to negotiate the last positioning in this account. In the utterance at lines 12–13, I09 intends to display membership feelings in another collectivity by means of pronominal choice: inflecting the verb *entrar* ‘to enter’, in first-plural person: ‘entremos (we enter)’, referring to the community of cognitive linguists. A careful glance at the utterance suggests that I09 firstly uses a third-person reference marker ‘entren’ (they enter) when talking about cognitive linguists, but immediately shifts to an inclusive structure: ‘entremos’ (we enter) in order to characterise himself as part of this group. In this way, I09 intends to negotiate the boundaries of his own identity by displaying similarity in another collectivity (cognitive linguists). This positioning also needs to be understood in the light of a previous moment of the interview in which he told how his linguistics colleagues at the workplace negatively evaluated his actions and positioned him as lacking agency, as a ‘madman’. In that moment, the respondent disengaged himself from his colleagues at the workplace and reported how they ignored his work due to its semiotic character. The respondent then sought membership in other external research groups, as we have seen in this extract in which he intends to position himself within a group of cognitive linguists.
4.9.2 Interacting with students

In this section, I will briefly discuss the ways through which a couple of respondents reported their interactions with their students in their accounts (projections of the self). In both fragments, the two respondents coalesced around a subject position in which they cast themselves as ‘cautious educators’ since they had to confront their younger interlocutors’ ideological constraints.

Extract 4.21 – (I36)

1 B: And the students as well when I can provide real examples that they can relate to, they are meaningful, they enjoy it. But when I made reference earlier to the range of students that I teach (.) many of them don’t have a capacity to confront their own belief systems with information that directly contradicts their belief systems. And so, I have to be very cautious. I don’t want to offend people (2.0) but there are lots of belief systems that are purely ideological that events in the world don’t necessarily support (2.0) the things they interpret in a political sense.

At Level 1, I36 positions the characters in the storyworld (students) by means of the ascription of actions and attributes: ‘enjoying meaningful things in I36’s lectures’ (lines 1–2) as well as ‘incredulous students who are unable to confront their belief systems’ (lines 3–4).

At the interactional level, I36 addresses the recipient to make reference to a previous moment of the interview ‘when I made reference earlier to the range of students that I teach’ (line 2), in order to describe the challenges he faces vis-à-vis his students. We can see how through the modal markers ‘can’ in the utterance ‘when I can provide real examples that they can relate to’, I36 displays an attitude regarding the content of the sentence. Thus, the dynamic modal ‘can’ is related to the respondent’s ability to engage his students and cues his positioning as a concerned educator.
This ‘challenge’ in the interaction with students was also reported by another interviewee which will be illustrated in the following fragment:

Extract 4.22 – (I10)

B: I have relatively big number of PhDs and tutor presently four doctoral students, all their research is directed towards the digital cultures and markets in big data, in the new interactive corporate communication, the back market and the new opportunities for this kind of branch. So, the field I have opened is very attractive. The major challenge is nevertheless to keep in mind that it is about semiotics and that semiotics should be in the core of this research because sometimes young people are attracted by some fashionable phenomena, some fashionable languages going on. And they totally ignore the theoretical part, the contribution which the semiotic theory can and should bring to their research.

This extract is embedded at the similar framework to that depicted by I35 in the previous account. At Level 1, the doctoral students are ascribed two actions: 1) being allured by fashionable issues and 2) completely forgetting semiotics.

At the interactional level, I10 gives a hint of his self-perception as an accepted teacher: ‘the field I have opened is very attractive’ (line 4). However, he also decides to represent the interaction with an audience as a challenge to deal with by also taking up the position of ‘cautious educator’.

In the next section I will address another case in which respondents felt their identity was put in risk.

4.9.3 Having semiotics recognised in national academic systems

Another manifest case in respondents’ stories where identity was at stake was when they oriented themselves towards certain issues that arise when their field is not fully recognised by the academic systems of their countries of work. This issue was more openly discussed in the cases of researchers working in Italy and France, and this also
implies identity work, insofar as it demands the conceptualisation of relationality claims in terms of sameness and difference. In most cases, this conflict was evoked by respondents themselves, with no further elicitation from the interviewer. Lastly, by examining the cases of these scholars we can have a grasp of the problems and anxieties semioticians face vis-à-vis the institutions in their national academic systems.

4.9.3.1 Italian philosophers of language

The following two extracts are from researchers working in Italy. In both accounts, respondents made reference to the situation of semiotics in this country vis-à-vis the institutions. Both respondents framed the situation as a bureaucratic issue, but still they nuanced their positioning in regard to the peers they share the code with. When telling this issue, respondents do identity work in a tension between how they want to differentiate themselves from other communities and their choice of being perceived as semioticians.

In the first fragment, I32 evoked this problem when talking about the negotiation of disciplinary boundaries for semioticians in this country.

**Extract 4.23 – (I32)**

1 So and I think that for semiotics another very difficult border of confrontation is with philosophers especially with the analytic philosophers because, and this is due to academic questions, because we are in the same concourse, well group (2.0) so we have a same code M-FIL/05 in Italy that is the group of researchers that should be united by common interests but we are very different and really, we share very few things (.) so it is bureaucratic problem I think for us because we are few and I think philosophers are many so ((Chuckles)) (2.0) So this is the (.) sort of say, the field of confrontation.
This extract was obtained from the set of accounts that I called projections of the self. At the beginning of the account, I32 reveals the identity issue and firstly frames it as a ‘difficult confrontation’ between semioticians and analytic philosophers (line 1). Secondly, I32 represents it as a bureaucratic issue in two occasions: ‘this is due to academic questions’ (line 2) and ‘it is bureaucratic problem’ (line 6). This framing was aimed at showing how the respondent is orienting to a threat to semioticians’ academic identity.

At the interactional level, I32 draws on pronominal choice (first person deictic ‘we’) to claim similarity in the in-group, and immediately seeks to differentiate vis-à-vis philosophers of language by emphasising the divergences between philosophers (who are ascribed the feature of being better organised, therefore potential resources competitors): ‘we are very different and really, we share very few things’ (line 5). Here, I32 underscores the difference aspect of the principle of relationality.

In the next fragment, I30 addresses the same situation of semiotics in Italy and also enacts it as an identity struggle. Nevertheless, the respondent intends to provide a ‘solution’ for this issue.

**Extract 4.24 – (I30)**

1. B : Et donc le problème c’est que on est, on se sent inférieurs aux philosophes. (2.0)
2. Mais c’est une erreur parce qu’en fait la sémiotique peut aider la philosophie.
3. I : Mm mm
4. B : faire mieux et mais le problème c’est aussi que les philosophes sont mieux
5. organisés, sont, en plus sont numériquement plus forts et mais aussi certains (.)
6. sémioticiens tendent (. ) ou ont la tendance à se ( .) mettre au service de la
7. philosophie. Et là c’est une erreur. Parce qu’il faut dialoguer
8. (8 lines omitted talking about philosophers of language)
9. B : Et en Italie c’est un problème de bien sûr de bureaucratie de et le risque est celui
10. de devenir un les (1.0) de se mettre au service de la philosophie et de disparaître.
This account was elicited from the question: What is the situation of semiotics in Italy? It is respondent-oriented and has an explanatory mode.

As I32 did in the previous account, the respondent constructs the identity struggle when making emphasis in the conflict faced vis-à-vis philosophers of language for the recognition of their field. However, in the storyworld (Level 1) the respondent displays her ‘critical voice’ against fellow semioticians who are in service of philosophy and makes an evaluation: ‘a mistake’ (lines 1-2). In line 1, I30 looks for enacting a sense of sameness in the semiotics community through pronominal choice, i.e. the pronoun ‘on’ fulfils the function of the first plural person inclusive form nous. This choice of pronoun indicates I30’s sameness claims within the community of semiotics scholars: ‘on est/on se sent and the principle of relationality becomes manifest in terms of similarity.

Notice that I30 also ascribes the same attributes to philosophers of language: having a better organisation and being stronger in number (lines 4–5).

The main difference with I32’s narrative emerges when, at the interactional world, I30 clearly conveys the intention to defend the field by providing a solution to the identity issue. Thus, she argues that semiotics and philosophy could establish a dialogue and be mutually helpful. So, rather than looking for differentiation from the other group, the speaker assumes a ‘mediating’ positioning between both fields.
The problem of the French CNU sections pertaining the situation of semiotics in France is approached in the following section.

4.9.3.2 The French sections

Now, with regard to France-based respondents, most of them made reference to the institutional situation of semiotics in this country. As I have mentioned before, in France semiotics is institutionally divided in two CNU sections: 07 – Language Sciences, and 71 – Information and Communication. Respondents openly oriented to this issue in different stories and moments of the interview. Just as in the next sequence:

I14

Et le problème en France c’est que les sections CNU sont assez fermées et assez rigides. On ne peut pas aller dans d’autres (.) filières que celles qui appartiennent à la section onze en anglais.

And the problem in (country) is that the CNU sections are rather closed and inflexible. You can’t change to other (.) subjects other than those in English in section eleven.

In this small sequence, I14 explains the situation of the CNU sections in France and the impossibility to shift sections. In I14’s case, this respondent is attached to the 11th section (English language and Anglo-Saxon literature)

However, this issue was better represented when respondents conceptualised it as an identity issue and they even drew on it as a positioning strategy. This is the case of the next speaker:
Évidemment il y a plusieurs écoles il y a plusieurs (.) moi je n'aime pas les écoles donc j'ai toujours eu une sorte de position (.) libre et c'est difficile. Garder une position comment dire (.) démarquée qui ne veut pas entrer dans l'esprit d'école (.) donc dans la défense d'une théorie particulière (.) je préfère construire des ponts ou des passerelles des formes de traduction. Mais donc la perception des collègues est une perception un peu instable (.) c'est-à-dire la difficulté à me classer dans une école ou dans une autre. Et après finalement ma présence en France pose aussi des problèmes par à mon passé parce qu’en Italie la sémiotique est liée plutôt à la philosophie du langage pour des questions (.) on va dire universitaires, les concours on citera les sections (.) où il y a une section qui est philosophie du langage et sémiotique (.) et en revanche ici en France c’est plutôt la sémiotique dans les sciences du langage. Et dans les sciences de la communication Infocom il n’y a pas de lien entre la philosophie et la sémiotique et en revanche moi j’ai aussi une formation philosophique (.) une tendance aussi à la philosophie de la signification, donc bon (.) il y a en même temps des opportunités, de dialogue mais aussi de résistance.

Obviously, there are several schools, there are several (.) I don’t like schools, so I’ve always had a kind of (. ) free position and that’s difficult. Held a position how can I put this (.) that sits apart, that doesn’t want to enter the school spirit (.) So in defence of a particular theory (.) I prefer building bridges or gateways from forms of translation. But then the perception of colleagues is a little unstable (.) meaning the difficulty of classifying me in one school or another. And after all, my presence in France implies some issues with regard to my past because in Italy semiotics is rather linked to the philosophy of language due to (.) let’s say academic reasons. the examinations list sections (.) including a philosophy of language and semiotics section (.) On the other hand, here in France semiotics is found more in language sciences. And in infocom communications science there is no link between philosophy and semiotics, and on the other hand, I am also trained in philosophy (.) a tendency towards philosophy of meaning too. So (.) at one and the same time, there are opportunities, dialogue but also resistance.

The type of story this fragment belongs to is a ‘projection of the self’. Having worked in both countries (Italy and France), the speaker tells his own experience to enact the institutional situation of semiotics and uses it as a positioning strategy.
At Level 1, I11 positions himself as a character in the told world as a ‘difficult researcher to classify’, since he has opted to not be encased within any particular semiotics trend.

At the interactional level, the respondent acknowledged himself as a problematic case for the academic system he works in (lines 5–9), simultaneously hinting at his own personal situation – being trained and having worked in Italy, and his current position as professor in France.

Here, I11 conveys a sense of active agency on the basis of the volition and intentionality of the actions performed: ‘j’ai toujours eu une sorte de position (.) libre...je préfère construire des ponts ou des passerelles’. Hence, he frames himself as a ‘free’ and ‘distanced’ researcher (lines 2-3). As well as a ‘bridge constructor, or a ‘translator’ (lines 4-5) who does not wish to be linked to a particular semiotic trend. In this way, I11’s identity work does not show the construction of sameness/difference, but it rather presents his epistemic stance and how he addressed the institutional conflict between his background and research orientations in philosophy, against his qualification in language sciences.

The last case that I will show in this section differs from the previous accounts and briefly alludes to the CNU sections. Instead, I19 told another aspect of the situation of semiotics in France when associated the absence of institutional recognition of the field to a general lack of leadership. In addition, I19 used this another aspect of the situation of semiotics in France as a positioning strategy.

**Extract 4.26 – (I19)**

1 B : On est- nous sommes (.) c'est un métier très marginal au niveau du CNU. C'est pas
2 la faute du CNU, c'est le fait que comme (.) toutes les disciplines qui veulent exister
3 (.) on a besoin de leaders. On a vraiment besoin d'un leader et depuis la mort de
4 Greimas on n'a pas eu beaucoup de leaders. On a eu des (.) leaders scientifiques
5 comme (name) (1.0) mais au niveau de la reconnaissance institutionnelle, on n'a pas
6 eu grand monde. Et c'est un vrai problème (2.0) je crois que la sémiotique peut
B: We are (.) it’s a very marginal profession as regards the CNU. It’s not the CNU’s fault. It’s the fact that since (.) all disciplines want the right to exist (.) we need leaders. We really need a leader and since the death of Greimas we haven’t had many leaders. We have had (.) scientific leaders like (name) (1.0) but at the institutional recognition level, we haven’t had many people. And that’s a real problem (2.0) I think that semiotics can settle for small scientific debates between semioticians (xxx) and nobody has ever taken charge of these studies in France, at least (2.0) of developing semiotics as a discipline. This is not the case in other countries.

B: And that (.) I’m pretty hard on this because (.) I think nobody has really taken on the task of dealing with this question, which is fundamental, because (.) from the moment it is recognised as a discipline (2.0) we’ll have students who want to do semiotics.

The transcript starts with the respondent’s representation of semiotics in the context of the CNU (lines 1–3). In this account, I19 unveils what he considers an identity issue, since it affects semioticians’ status and identity in the French context. This conflict is framed in terms of lacking a leadership figure in the domestic community of semioticians: ‘on a besoin de leaders’ (lines 3–5). This absence of leadership came after Greimas’ death in 1992, when French semioticians lost their pivotal figure and remained uninterested about the field’s lack of organisation in the local institutions. Interestingly, at Level 1, I19 takes issue against semioticians and firstly position them as marginal with regard to the CNU. Secondly, he frames them as incompetent since they have not managed to find a leading figure for the field in France (lines 3–4).
At Level 3, I19 navigates local and macro contexts by going beyond the interactional positioning in which he constructs himself as a critical voice vis-à-vis his fellow semioticians. At this level, he makes relevant the D-discourse of semiotics – as being a marginal field in academic institutions, and he also mentions the fact that there is a lack of students in France. Hence, I19 draws on the institutional status of semiotics in France to construct himself as a particular person: a concerned and reflexive researcher.

In the past two sub-sections, with examples from researchers based in France and Italy, I have illustrated how respondents took issue with having semiotics recognised by the institutions in those two countries. The analysis of the narratives from semioticians in both countries shows the researchers’ concerns with regard to the current status of semiotics in their domestic academic systems. Even though the French and Italian semiotics communities are the largest in Europe, we cannot say they are completely consolidated.

Both cases differ due to the divergences in these two academic systems, and there are different tensions within them. On the one hand, Italian semioticians showed concern because they face the danger of being ‘consumed’ by philosophers of language – a research community whom with they share the same disciplinary code (M-FIL/05) and have to compete for funding resources.

The main anxiety of French semioticians, on the other hand, was the compartmentalisation of semiotics in two sections at the CNU level (07 and 71). This brings about inherent constraints for them, such as not being able to properly organise semiotics as a fully fledged discipline in the French academic system. In both instances, however, respondents treated these issues as a threat, since they are connected to issues of precarity and a lack of fixed positions, thus rendering their academic identities insecure.
Respondents used different positioning strategies, either by balancing their sense of being the same/different in a research community, or by deploying epistemic stances as ‘mediators’ or ‘critical voices’ towards their fellow semioticians or to the field.

In the section that follows, I will discuss how semioticians feel that their identities are at risk when facing interdisciplinary-related issues.

4.10 Handling interdisciplinarity

In the last section of this chapter, I will present another issue whereby respondents reported that their identity was challenged: the fact of having an interdisciplinary research stance put them in conflict with other researchers, or institutions. In this section I will make the case that interdisciplinarity is a latent and relevant issue for several semioticians due to its conceptualisation as a sensitive yet pervasive issue affecting both the field and respondents’ identities.

This issue was discursively constructed mainly in those narratives in which speakers were talking about their research objects, or about the situation of the field in their countries of work.

However, this issue was sometimes openly co-constructed with me through meta-narrative activities of the teller (Deppermann, 2015):

Extract 4.27 – I36

1 B: I’ve been wanting to talk to you to be supportive in your research (2.0) because I think it’s important (.) there’s so much competition that exists when the stakes are very low.
2 I: Mmm
B: so for example (..) linguistics has made its claim that it’s a science whereas even
Umberto Eco has rejected the idea that semiotics is a discipline in and of itself
because he says (..) it’s interdisciplinary
I: Mm-hmm
B and that’s very true (..) I wouldn’t argue too much with Umberto Eco
I: ((laughs))
B: at the same time (..) I think that it is its own discipline in spite of the fact that it
contributes to those of others.

In this co-constructed sequence, taken from the biographical account, I36 directly
explains me his wish to contribute to this research (lines 1–2). Besides this, he makes
reference to Eco’s denial of semiotics as a fully-fledged discipline due to its
interdisciplinary character (lines 4–5). Still, the respondent, in the same interactional
world, conveys his epistemic stance vis-à-vis semiotics by considering it as a
discipline.

In a couple of you-generic narratives, two respondents constructed it as a problem
that affects academic life. For instance, in the sequence below I22 associated to
loneliness and with the necessity of holding a professorship:

(I22)
if you’re doing interdisciplinary research you’re also completely on your own, you’ll
have to find your own way in the world (2.0) and that is of course problematic and to
get that own subject areas you need to get a professorship.

In the second you-generic narrative, I40 openly constructed the fact of being an
interdisciplinary researcher as an issue in which semioticians’ identification is put at
stake. In addition, he drew on higher education contexts to construct it:
Extract 4.28 – (I40)

B: So, one of the difficulties is that (.) the funding for conferences has been diminished and there are actually several things. So, you have that and then you also have the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity and the reality of increasing disciplinarity. And so, to make it academically you need to have a strong disciplinary identity. You need to be a philosopher, a historian, or a literary scholar. And so, but everybody’s talking (.) interdisciplinarity and administrations are reboarding disciplinarity. And so that obviously hurts semioticians, right? Who were going to be genuine in the interdisciplinary sense.

In this narrative, I40 navigates local and macro contexts when making relevant certain issues in higher education which are pertinent for semiotics: reduction in conferences funding (line 1), the necessity academics have to hold a strong disciplinary identity in order to be successful (line 4), or disciplinary reboarding (lines 5–6).

At Level 1, semioticians are positioned as powerless passive agents whose identity is ‘affected’ by these macro-contexts I40 resorted to.

The last account summarises respondents’ concern pertaining interdisciplinarity. Moreover, it shows how I02 conveyed some aspects of her academic identity, enacted in locally-situated claims, and macro contexts on higher education.

Extract 4.29 – (I02)

I: So, I think of myself as a sort of switching mechanism for, you know, taking stuff from there and switching it through a biosemiotics perspective (.) into the (research fields) in particular, that’s clearly where other people identify me so, you know, (fields of research) (2.0) all that sort of things but I don’t think of myself as really based in a discipline anymore, I think that’s quite hard.

(15 lines omitted talking about a conference)

And I think that if you work in semiotics your life is going to be very interdisciplinary (.) I mean how many (.) you may know the answers better than me, but I mean how many posts of semioticians as such, my guess should be not many?

I: Not many

B: No, and schools of semiotics? Not many?
At the interactional level, I02 reveals her identity work by different means. Firstly, I02 enacts herself by means of a metaphor: ‘a switching mechanism’ and elaborates a presentation of herself as doing interdisciplinary work between biosemiotics and some key research areas (lines 2–4). Interestingly, in line 3, I02 mentions that this is the image people had constructed of her: ‘that’s clearly where other people identify me’. The booster ‘clearly’ is used to emphasise this image.

Secondly, the interviewee frames herself as not based in a discipline anymore and provides an evaluative comment about remaining in a monodisciplinary state as ‘difficult’ (lines 4–5). Thirdly, in line 13, the respondent navigates towards macro contexts when invoking the interdisciplinary character of semiotics and making an evaluative comment of the field as affected due to its interdisciplinary character (lines 13–15).

This narrative also illustrates how the respondent co-constructed this issue by dint of *epistemic modal markers* that convey a sense of probability: ‘you may know the answers better than me / my guess should be not many?’ (lines 8–9). In both utterances, ‘may’ and ‘should’ are indexing the respondent’s presupposition about the recipient’s knowledge.

In this section, I accounted for the struggle that participants face when having interdisciplinary research objects. The construction of this struggle alluded to personal experiences, self-characterisation as interdisciplinary researchers, as well as the ways in which institutions frame interdisciplinary research. Furthermore, some
respondents made clear statements about the impact this has on the field of semiotics and its practitioners’ identities.

The fact that interdisciplinary research is still not well-accepted by both institutions and scholars affects an inherently interdisciplinary field like semiotics and makes that respondents discursively construct this in their narratives. Furthermore, the fact that several participants conceptualised this problem, and oriented to them, indicates the fact that these capital D discourses about interdisciplinarity and higher education ‘feed off’ the D-discourse of semiotics since it becomes normalised as a shared framework of beliefs – a feature of D-discourses, according to Gee (1999). I will elaborate on this issue in the discussion chapter.

I will now conclude this section by showing the following figure in which I aim at depicting the D-discourse of semiotics as shaped by its different components:

Figure 10: Representation of the D-discourse of semiotics
In this figure I intend to represent the contents of this Discourse. This representation includes four dimensions: 1) a set of representations of the field (semiotics as heavy, difficult, unnecessary, isolated, fuzzy, irrelevant, old-fashioned, etc.); 2) membership categorisation of semioticians as ‘different’; 3) d-discourses including mobilisation of pragmatic resources (reported speech, lexical choice); 4) Discourses of higher education on interdisciplinarity. The existence and composition of this dominant discourse will be discussed in the findings chapter (Chapter 6).

4.11 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have provided a substantial analysis of my respondents’ multiple positionings in their interactions with me as an interviewer. By analysing multiple narratives, I have tried to shed light on different aspects of their identification mechanisms as part of a not-so-well established field. In addition, I responded to the following research question: How do semiotics scholars identify themselves and how are they identified by others through narratives and representations in research interviews?

The analysis has addressed this research question in the following ways: firstly, the analysis examined the type of narratives respondents constructed across the interviews. More concretely, in the first part of the chapter, I presented the recurrent events talked about by participants, as well as the stories elicited from the pool of interviews and their structural features.

Secondly, the analysis accounted for the ways in which respondents identify themselves when approaching a first dimension of relational positioning, i.e. identity negotiation, in relation to a diverse set of identities. On the one hand, I showed how respondents constructed sameness in the larger group of semioticians or other
groups by locally claiming senses of identification vis-à-vis: the interviewer, themselves as characters, or, more globally, in relation to larger discursive contexts.

Thirdly, the analysis also approached how respondents are identified by others when they looked for differentiation from them, or from the community of semioticians, and displayed how they wanted to be known. Just as with the question of sameness, this also included local and global identification claims. Lastly, additional instances of identity negotiation claims were examined when respondents felt their identity claims were challenged in three particular situations: 1) when meeting other audiences, 2) having their field recognised by national academic systems and 3) dealing with interdisciplinarity issues.

Throughout this chapter, I have accounted for the existence of a dominant (capital ‘D’) discourse that is persistent in the community of semioticians. I called it the D-discourse of semiotics, which was re-constructed and fed off of by participants themselves in the form of a discourse that conveys the subjective experience of dwelling a marginal field. As such, it gathers multiple ways of talking about the experience of being a semiotician and working and living in this field. This D-discourse is made up of four dimensions: 1) a set of representations of the field, 2) membership categorisation of semioticians as ‘different’, 3) d-discourses including mobilisation of pragmatic resources (reported speech or pronominal choice) and 4) lower case d-discourses of higher education on interdisciplinarity. All different dimensions of this D-discourse were constantly represented in semioticians’ discursive practices.

Thus, it was evident that there is a shared framework which includes beliefs and conventions and which is grounded on locally relevant identification claims in connection to macro contexts of higher education.
In the next chapter, I will show the analysis conducted in three case studies to show how certain respondents coalesced more coherently with a subject position and articulated it as an identity affordance.
Chapter 5. (De)constructing a self in semiotics. The case studies of three respondents

In Chapter Four, I globally discussed how respondents constructed different senses of their identity in the narratives they told in our interactions, and how positioning allowed them to choose among different identity affordances in their narratives.

In this chapter, I will present and discuss another instance of the analysis of my data: three case studies of representative interviewees. In this way, I intend to shed further light on aspects of identification that range between full commitment and disengagement from the field of semiotics by providing a more in-depth focus in the identity work they perform in their narratives.

I will show how each respondent, on the basis of their own personal stories (clearly working in the borders of two fields), and by drawing on additional identification traits consistently designed a particular type of identity when orientating to a particular subject position and chose a possibility of identification: 1) disengaging from semiotics; 2) a twofold construction between marginality in the workplace and acceptance in the community of semioticians, as well as 3) full membership in the field of semiotics through the combination of self-identification facets: semiotician and politician.

Moreover, I will try to enrich the understanding of my data when trying to uncover certain factors that are inseparable elements of the studied phenomena (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007).
5.1 ‘Decomplexed semiotics’: The case study of I13

In the first example, I will present the case study of I13. This respondent is involved in semiotics-oriented research and interacts with members of this community in Francophone environments. However, she openly chose to disengage from the larger group of semioticians. In this case study I will focus on the discussion of three issues: 1) the respondent’s alignment towards a particular subject position in the local level as ‘disengaged researcher’, 2) how she constructed a sense of being different from the group in a more coherent way at different moments of the interaction, and 3) her engagement with the home field of communication.

In order to provide a better overview of the interaction, I will provide the context of this interview and the conditions of production. I13 is a full professor working in France and institutionally attached to the information and communication sciences. I need to mention that I only got acquainted with I13’s work until the beginning of this study. When I invited this interviewee to participate, I got a quick, positive answer but did not respond my emails for a while. Some months later, I13’s assistant contacted me and asked whether I still wanted to have this interview. Our entire communication and the whole interaction were completely in the medium of French. On the day of the interview, we had our conversation via videoconference and there were no real communication issues. In the middle of the interview we missed the connection for a few minutes, and I had to call them back. Once we regained the thread of the conversation, I13 mentioned that this was a typical issue in French higher education institutions due to the governmental banning of VoIP software in public buildings. Overall, we had a long and pleasant chat. Despite I13 is the president of her research centre (a Grande École⁶), I never felt that there was an asymmetrical position regarding power relationships across the interview.

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⁶ The Grandes Écoles are higher education institutions that differ from public universities in France. They are dependent upon different French Ministries.
An agentive researcher

The very first aspect that I will discuss is related to the sense of agency that is constructed in respondents’ biographies. As we discussed earlier, agency has to do with volition and the performance of controlled actions and self-determination by the speakers. To Bamberg (2010), agency implies a double direction of fit since it goes from a person-to-world perspective versus a world-to-person directionality.

As in the case of the other respondents, upon my request, I13 began the interview by telling a biographical account about the beginnings of her academic life. This story includes a series of events and experiences about the past in which she enlisted a number of steps that took her to the place she is today. For instance, choosing literature and language sciences as study subjects were evaluated as ‘a classic trajectory’ by her (in the sense of typicality). Interestingly, I13’s narrative also positions her past self in the told world as someone who was not a semiotician until that moment:

J’ai une formation littéraire tout à fait classique, j’ai fait des lettres modernes, j’ai fait des sciences du langage, (.) j’étais pas sémioticienne jusqu’à ce moment-là enfin (.) pas à proprement parler.

| I have a literary formation, completely classic, I did modern literature, I did language sciences, (.) I wasn’t a semiotician until then. Well (.) not properly speaking. |

Then, responding to a need for ‘finding’ an approach in the courses she had to teach, I13 constructs herself as an agent as she ‘reached’, ‘integrated’ and ‘became conscious’ of the semiotic approach on her own research. Here, she maintains centrality as a self-taught scholar. Put other way, she depicts a conscious recognition of her work as ‘semiotic’. Notice that the epistemic modal marker ‘pouvoir’ (can in English) expresses a sense of necessity in ‘Pour pouvoir faire cours’.
En fait je suis arrivée à la sémiotique par l’enseignement. Pour pouvoir faire cours. Et au fur et à mesure en fait, je l’ai intégré dans mes (. ) recherches où j’ai plutôt conscientisé qu’une partie de mes approches (. ) relevait (. ) en fait d’approches que je pouvais après qualifier de sémiotique.

I actually reached semiotics via teaching. So that I can teach and gradually I integrated it in my (. ) research in which I rather became conscious that a part of my approach (. ) fell (. ) in fact, in approaches that I will later qualify as semiotics.

When talking about a book she co-wrote with a colleague of hers, I13 consciously tells that she has her own semiotic approach. This somehow forecasts her upcoming positioning in which she will seek for differentiation of others.

Et en fait dedans ce que j’expose c’est une méthode que j’appelle (. ) socio-sémiocommunicationnelle (. ) d’analyse sémiotique sachant que la sémiotique que je pratique (1.0) moi je dis que c’est l’énorme avantage de mon parcours.

B: And in fact, within what I propose there’s a method that I call socio-semio-communicational (. ) of semiotic analysis, knowing that the semiotics that I practice. practice (1.0) I say is the great advantage of my career path.

These sequences illustrate how the sense of constructing an identity as active agent is conveyed through the performance of certain activities, choices and acknowledging certain attributes of the self: having an own semiotic approach. However, a better way to gauge how identity is constructed is when the respondent faces relationality through othering, i.e. relationships between individual and collective identity.
5.3 Not a semiotician like that

A second analytical dimension that I wish to approach here takes me to present narratives in which I13 sought to compare herself with others in order to convey her epistemic position and to negotiate an aspect of her identity: constructing her own sense of being different from the larger community.

Extract 5.1

1 B : Je pense que (.) même bien que la discipline n’existe pas, c’est une vraie discipline 
2 théorique avec une visée épistémologique par exemple on la retrouve beaucoup 
3 chez (name) je sais pas si vous connaissez qui c’est 
4 I : Mm, oui 
5 B : voilà (.) donc (name) moi je le connais bien, on l’a invité ici comme professeur 
6 pendant un mois y a quelque temps (.) donc lui il est vraiment très théorique et c’est 
7 vrai qu’on est (.) pour lui on est parfois un peu (1.0) exotiques on va dire 
8 I : ((laugh)) 
9 B : mais lui il est vraiment sémioticien (.) nous on prétend pas être des sémioticiens 
10 comme ça, c’est-à-dire que c’est la (.) troisième version 
11 I : ((laugh)) 
12 B : c’est la version où la sémiotique est un outil d’analyse (.) au service d’une pensée 
13 théorique (.) autre qui pour nous est la pensée communicationnelle donc là pour 
14 nous (.) la sémiotique est (.) un outil au sens noble du terme mais un outil parmi 
15 d’autres. 
16 I : (5 lines omitted talking about semioticians in other research centre) 
17 B : moi j’appelle ça la (.) avec (name) on a décidé d’appeler ça la sémiotique 
18 décomplexée ((laugh))
In this account (a projection of the self) we can see that the respondent interactionally co-constructs (with the interviewer) the moment in which she wants to compare herself with other character. I13 thus positions the recipient in the telling by asking about his knowledge regarding a character: a semiotician (lines 3-5). Next, she positions this character in the told world by ascribing him an attribute: being ‘a theoretically-oriented researcher’ (line 6). At this part of the telling, I13 draws a boundary between what she considers ‘real’ semioticians vs a ‘not-so-true’ semiotician –being real semioticians only those who follow a more theoretically-oriented approach. Interestingly, ‘being very theoretical’ was an emergent feature with ambiguous meaning in some interviews. On one hand, this feature of being theoretical was framed as a negative attribute, shaped as a representation that contributed to the construction of the membership categorisation of ‘semiotician as different’. On the other hand, some respondents made an explicit effort to position
themselves as theoretical researchers, especially when making an argument about
the approaches or authors they are epistemologically attached to.

Now, coming back to the analysis of this narrative, we can notice how I13 explicitly
draws upon an explicit comparison of herself and the aforementioned character.
Here, I13 openly intends to present herself as someone who is not a theoretical
semiotician ‘nous on prétend pas être des sémioticiens comme ça’ (line 9-10), and
semiotics is framed as a tool: ‘pour nous (..) la sémiotique est (..) un outil [...] parmi
d’autres’ (lines 13-14).

At the end of the account, the respondent introduces another character in the telling
and jokingly tells how both of them decided to name their own approach as
‘décomplexée’ (decomplexed) (line 16). Not only does this word game suggest I33’s
epistemic position, but it is also presupposing that she and her colleague dare to say
that they are not real semioticians. There is an indexical association of this term
suggesting a link to the French political context –where this term has been used
before. In this particular case, ‘décomplexée’ refers to the quandaries of saying that
they are no real semioticians insofar as this field is regarded as a closed, purist field.
And it also may be interpreted as an allusion to the diverse set of representations
that feed off the D-discourse of semiotics; a representation in which it is regarded as
a ‘complicated field’.

Once that I have shown how the respondent aimed at distancing herself of the larger
group of semioticians through ‘othering’, I will present the way in which I13 wanted
to be recognised as a particular type of person.
5.4 A dissenting researcher

Across the interview, I13 coherently maintained the subject position that distanced her from the field of semiotics. Moreover, she made efforts in highlighting the advantages of her own semiotic approach. Then, she conveyed a sense of engagement within her home discipline. This is when she constructed what Bamberg (1997) considers as a more enduring sense of identity by casting herself as a particular type of person at positioning Level 3.

Extract 5.2

Moi je dis que c’est l’énorme avantage de mon parcours et du fait d’être en sciences de l’information et de la communication c’est que je ne suis pas empêtrée dans les querelles de chapelle (.) parce qu’en [country] la sémiotique y a ceux qui sont peirciens, ceux qui sont greimassiens, ceux qui sont barthésiens (.) et c’est la ((laugh)))
I : (laugh))
B : c’est la guerre entre tout le monde (.) quand on est dans une discipline autre comme moi en fait on fait ce qu’on veut (1.0) et on peut à un moment donné sans que tout le monde m’assassine dire que finalement (.) dans la perspective de Barthes y a déjà des choses qui sont proches de ce qu’on va retrouver chez Umberto Eco plus tard et ça c’est impossible de le dire quand on est (.) étiqueté pour uniquement sémioticien ou sémioticienne.
B : Mmm
I : Donc ça me donne une grande liberté d’approche et une sorte de d’œcuménisme.

I say is the great advantage of my career path, plus the fact of being in information and communication sciences, means that I’m not entangled in parish squabbles (.) because in semiotics in (country) there are those who are peirceans, those who are greimasians, those who are barthesians (.) and it’s ((laugh)))
I: (laugh))
B: it’s war between everyone (.) When you are in another discipline like me in fact, you can do whatever you want (1.0) and at any given moment (.) without everyone trying to kill me. The thing is, in the end (.) in Barthes’ perspective, there are already things that are closer to what you come across later in Umberto Eco and that’s impossible to say when you are (.) labelled exclusively as a semiotician.
B: Mmm
I: So that gives me great freedom of approach and a sort of ecumenicism.
At Level 1, in the told world of the narrative, the speaker positions her actions in terms of taking distance from the local community of semioticians, as well as showing alignment in another field: information and communication sciences. (lines 1–2). Notice that in the storyworld I13 frames semioticians in her country of work as being immersed in factional squabbles: ‘les querelles de chapelle’ and a war between everyone (line 7). By pointing to these disputes (lines 2–4), the respondent disengages from ‘peirceans, greimasians and barthesians’. In this expression of disengagement, the principle of relationality—which shows how interlocutors generate divergences in relation to other individuals (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), arises from the dimension of difference.

We can also see how the humour displayed can be interpreted as a further evaluation of semioticians while the situation is recounted in the story (lines 4–5). In the interactional world (Level 2), I13 takes up an explicit act of positioning, i.e. she places herself within other discipline and positively evaluates her present situation in terms of freedom ‘quand on est dans une discipline autre comme moi en fait on fait ce qu’on veut’ (lines 6–7). A similar claim is also stressed at the end of the account when she frames herself as ecumenical: ‘une grande liberté d’approche et une sorte de d’œcuménisme’ (line 13).

An additional positioning act of disengagement takes place in the utterance at lines 14–15: I13 rejects to be categorised under the name ‘semiotician’. The respondent is thus presupposing that being categorised under this etiquette would mean a disadvantage inasmuch as she would not be allowed to talk about certain things. Let’s not forget that in a previous point of the biographical account she identified herself as a ‘semiotician’ (in Section 5.2). This prompts the dynamics of identity work, and how respondents are not obliged to be consistent with the identities they display throughout the interview as maintained by Clifton and Van de Mieroop (2017).
At Level 3, I13 draws on the relation between the storyworld and the interactional world to convey a more complex sense of identity as a disengaged scholar. Namely, she made reference to the dimension of D-discourse that depicts semioticians as constantly enmeshed in squabbles (lines 6-7) and enacted a deconstructive identity. In doing so, she chooses to remain in the information and communication sciences and to be identified as a communication scholar who practices semiotics, something that affords her interacting with member of the semiotics community in her country of work and have her own semiotic approach.

This case study raised an interesting question in relation to a complex identity possibility that is more oriented towards disidentification. I13 refused to be pigeonholed into the larger group of semioticians and to be categorised as a semiotician because of the burden it might imply in her academic life. Lastly, we may add the fact that communication is an established discipline in France (unlike semiotics). This would be strategically designed by the respondent: remaining in the home discipline while maintaining the interaction with Francophone semioticians and articulating her own semiotic approach.

5.5 ‘I was a very young engineer’. The case study of I21

The second example, the case of I21, features a case in which the speaker, in his narratives, makes relevant multiple changes in his biography to convey a sense of being an outcast. Then, by orienting himself to a subject position as a ‘marginal scholar’, he locally presents himself by means of a twofold identification: a marginalised academic at the workplace, but an accepted member of the community of semiotics.
I21, is associate professor in Denmark and is institutionally attached to the field of media. As in the previous case, I will start by providing the conditions of production of the interview and the context.

I met I21 at a conference in Estonia in 2015 and we established an empathetic relationship. That was the time when I became aware of his academic output. During the negotiation phase previous to the interview, I explained who I was and talked about my studies in Estonia. I have to say that this position that was assigned to my person, after telling my experience of being a semiotics master’s student in Estonia, somehow boosted my position and helped me to get several interviews done.

On the day of the interview, which was conducted via videoconference, we had a long chat about the respondent’s life, career and a discussion regarding some higher education issues. The respondent was sympathetic towards my research and there was no communication issue. The recorded interaction was conducted in English.

5.6 A *restoried* researcher

In this section I will examine how the respondent constructed a part of his identity in telling different changes in his personal story. The type of narrative that I will present in this section is a biographical account obtained through Polkinghorne’s narrative mode of analysis called *restorying* (Polkinghorne, 1995). This technique consists in *emplotting* the data in order to analyse narrative data that consists of actions, places, events and happenings. The main objective of this technique is to produce a coherent biographical account aiming at showing the significance of the respondent’s lived experience.

In the following ‘re-storied’ fragment I intend to show some of the most relevant events and happenings in I21’s biography in order to show how agency and change contribute to construct and identity-generation process through recursive moments
from parts to the whole. I also ‘smoothed’ (Kim, 2016) the story by linking events as a way to avoid gaps between events and actions.

**Extract 5.3**

I have a very interdisciplinary education (.) Not always I have been in academia. I had some interest in ecology when I was young, when I was a teenager in ecology and biology. And that led me to study in the (country and university). I ended up in environmental engineering.

But then, when I came back to my birth country (country), after studying ecology in (university) I was a very young engineer.

I went to (country) and met a group of people in (country) that were very much engaged in an art/science movement around something that was called at that time (subject).

Then, I went back to (country), I was like upgrading myself with a master’s education in (subject) in order to fulfil this job better of (position).

I went and looked for a financing of this PhD project on starting my PhD in (location).

So, in (year), I started teaching a course on sustainability, bio safety and bioethics in (university).

I am actually moving a lot between and now, what I keep in my biosemiotic perspective is the psychophysiological methods that I’m using to characterise user experience and cognition in the use of multi modal media technology.

I have of course been linked also the new movement of cognitive semiotics.

As you can see, it’s not a (canonical) development.

In his very first interview utterance, I21 described himself as having a very interdisciplinary education. This is the departing point of this narrative and what will give shape to the plot (the abstract of the narrative in Labov’s terms): a combination of events and interests that took him to be a professor working in the field of semiotics. In the same utterance, the interviewee foretells the variegated character of his career as someone who has not always been an academic.

With regard to the construction of agency, I21’s language constantly constructs this agentive identity insofar as he ‘had some interest’ and ‘ended up [studying]’. In addition, there is an ongoing ‘need’ with motivation and targets for educational and labour achievements: ‘I went to country/went back to [home] country’, ‘I was upgrading myself’ and ‘looked for a financing of this PhD’.
In line 5, I21 provides an evaluation of his past self as a ‘young engineer’ something that could be interpreted as a hint to inexperience as a younger person.

Then, in line 10, we can see how I21 jumps to the present of the telling (marked by the use of present tense and the temporal deictic ‘now’). At this point of the narrative design, the respondent conveys his own epistemic stance: a theoretical approach in biosemiotics, and the intention to show connections with the semiotic world. Notice the link with cognitive semiotics. Finally, at the close of this narrative – which is also the last utterance of the whole biographical account, he provides another evaluation (acting as a coda) of his career by addressing the recipient: ‘as you can see it’s not a canonical development’.

By restorying I21’s biographical account, I intended to show how change in biography gives a glance to identity refashioning. That is to say, I21 radically transformed his identity several times insofar as he changed countries and moved from one field to the other (academic or not). All these developments made an impact on the shaping of his academic identity as an interdisciplinary researcher.

5.7 Struggling to belong

The second dimension of identity construction is othering. As I will show in the upcoming paragraphs, this dimension is formed when the respondent articulates a contrast between his own sense of passive agency, i.e. the characterisation of his self through positive and negative evaluations by his colleagues, and the display of affiliation feelings in a community of researchers.

Extract 5.4

1 B: I think (2.0) my colleagues, my near colleagues, they sort of appreciate my level of
2 articulation of my research. They can see the more technical parts are more
accessible to them. But I think more, most of my theoretical semiotic work is they
have no understanding at all. They probably don’t even know that I am doing some
of this stuff. (3.0) On the other hand, in the semiotic world, I think that I have been,
as I described to you when answering the first question, that I have been in so many
disciplines and places and so on, I have always felt an outsider in some of these
disciplines, be them scientific or artistic, academic or non-academic, I have always
been fighting to belong and feeling sometimes outside.

This extract was obtained from the respondent’s projection of the self. At Level 1, in
the world of narrative, I21 cautiously positions his departmental colleagues in the
telling and calibrates this positioning on the basis of his own experience. The use of
two hedgers ‘I think’ gives a cue of this carefulness (lines 1 and 3).
Then, I21 enacts a sense of being positioned as a passive agent by his workplace
colleagues: ‘They can see the more technical parts’, ‘they have no understanding at
all’, ‘They probably don’t even know that I am doing some of this stuff’ (lines 7–8).
These utterances show how I21 leans towards what Bamberg. (2010) consider as a
world-to-person direction of fit in which speakers regard themselves as recipients of
positioning.

In the world of the interaction (Level 2) the respondent draws on modalisation to give
a hint of his relationship with semiotics. As Palmer, maintains, modality can be
expressed ‘without the use of modal systems’ (Palmer, 1986: 64). Instead, speakers
resort to lexical verbs as in the case of ‘I think that I have been’ (line 5). In this
utterance, I21 is indexing a declaration that asserts his relationship with the field of
semiotics. Then, he positions himself as someone ‘who has been in different
disciplines and spaces’.
In addition, he locally co-constructs with the interviewer an aspect of his disciplinary
identity: ‘as I described to you’ (lines 5–6), and orients to the subject position of
‘marginal scholar’ through his own characterisation as an ‘outsider’ at the workplace
(line 8), as well as someone who has struggled to find a place ‘to belong’ (lines 8–9).
Nevertheless, the other side of the coin is presented when I21 displays alignment in the larger group of semioticians:

**Extract 5.5**

1. B: But the semiotic circles are the ones that have more spontaneously (2.0) accepted me, or actually (2.0) pulled me in, here in (country) and also internationally. Actually, I became the president of the (semiotics organisation). So, I think my semiotic colleagues have a good appreciation of my work in semiotics. I have been having very good feedbacks in the last three, four years about my work. (3.0) And I have been doing some key notes on things that are more related to this semiotic work than in any of the other work that I have done so far.

In this narrative, which belongs to the second part of the previous extract, we observe that the respondent’s positioning changes when consciously turning to the semiotics world. In Level 1, I21 equilibrates the previously enacted negative representations of his person vis-à-vis his workplace colleagues. Here, I21 positions his fellow semioticians on the basis of two actions that acknowledge him as member of the ingroup: ‘accepted me’ and ‘pulled me in’.

At the level of interaction (Level 2), the respondent constructs a sense of active agency by positioning a series of actions he has been performed: ‘I became the president of an association’, ‘I have been having very good feedbacks’ and ‘I have been doing some key notes’. This contributes to I21’s construal of a sense of affiliation by means of the principle of relationality. I21 does so from the viewpoint of similarity, unlike his previous positioning (regarding his departmental colleagues) which was grounded on difference (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

In this manner, I21 put efforts on displaying himself as a concrete type of researcher by making relevant the multiple changes in his biography, he locally constructed a characterisation as a very interdisciplinary researcher who has shifted between places and fields. In addition, he negotiated a twofold identification strategy: an outcast in his department but an accepted researcher in the community of semiotics.
5.8 ‘The new pope of semiotics’. The case study of I33

In the third and last case of this chapter I will focus on I33, a researcher who consistently intended to display full membership feelings in the community of semioticians across our interaction. A semiotician, trained by another semiotician, he also made reference to an additional facet of his identity: a social identity (De Fina, 2011) as politician. Furthermore, he evoked this social identity as a strategy whereby he enacted an alternative narrative (McLean et al., 2017) that served a double purpose: 1) reinforcing membership feelings in the group, and 2) countering the prevailing shared framework of beliefs among respondents that I have called D-discourse of semiotics.

At the time of this interview, I33 was a senior lecturer in Italy, and institutionally attached to Philosophy and theory of languages (section M-FIL 05). When I addressed I33 to participate in the study, he quickly answered and accepted to partake in the study. Interestingly, and as occurred with other participants, I33 stressed that my background in Estonian semiotics was ‘enough’ for him to framing my research as ‘interesting’. While we were negotiating the terms of the interview, the respondent also mentioned that he was going to be busy in a conference and that we would have to find a suitable date for the interview. Few weeks later, we scheduled a convenient date for both of us. On the day of the interview, we met via videoconference and had a friendly pre-interview exchange about our backgrounds as well as some common acquaintances that served us to generate further pre-positionings. Overall, the entire interaction was pleasant and fully conducted in English.
5.9 Developing membership in the in-group of semiotics

To begin with, I will firstly present an *anecdote* that shows how I33 constructed a sense of being the same with the larger group of semioticians. This co-membership feeling was enacted on the basis of being attributed a role and performing certain tasks, and through reported speech.

**Extract 5.6**

B: When I came back from (country) last week I told to some colleagues that were asking ‘how do you think things were in (country)?’ I said that was not good, was more than good ((laughs)) it was a very enthusiastic feedback to the work that I presented (. ) (name) that you probably know said at the end of the congress that I was the new pope of semiotics so ((Laughter)) (2 lines omitted talking about the presentation)

B: the intervention was really appreciated and (name) there was (3.0) the main scholar of the congress said that was a very () exemplary way of using semiotics and to spread semiotics to an audience that many times perceives semiotics as something cold, something abstract, something that isn’t useful or useless ((Laughter)) in respect to life. So () there is another article that is going to be published in (journal) that you know very well

I: Yeah

B: And (name) wrote me that they were evaluating to put the article at the opening of the number of the review. That was the number devoted to the anniversary of the birth of (author) so () having this recognition, having the chance to open the number of the review seems to me a very good sign (2.0) so I have good feedback in general

At Level 1, the respondent positions some characters in the telling through *indirect reported speech*. Even though there are three metapragmatic verbs around the events reported, ‘to ask’, ‘to tell’ and ‘to say’, it is the verb in the second indirect report at lines 3-4 (verb ‘to say’) ‘[name] said that at the end of the congress that I was the new pope of semiotics ((Laughter))’ which is actually presupposing socially-relevant features about the character (Silverstein, 2003). (lines 3-4). Thus, I33 is positioned in the told world as praised scholar.
At the same Level 1, I33 conveys a sense of being accepted by members of the larger group of semioticians on the basis of two facts in which the direction of fit is the world-to-character (as a *passive agent*): 1) he is assigned a role as ‘the new pope of semiotics’ (lines 4-5) and, 2) he is ‘allowed’ to open the special issue of this semiotics outlet (lines 13-14).

Moreover, this anecdote is an example of co-construction as well. At the level of the interaction (Level 2), I33 positions the interviewer twice in the story: ‘that you probably know’ (line 4) and ‘you know very well’ (line 12). The respondent positions me as an *acquainted interviewer* when formulating assumptions about my knowledge of people and outlets.

In this narrative it is worth noticing that the respondent starts to orient to, but not aligns to nor rejects, the D-discourse of semiotics. He enlists a series of negative features of the field: ‘semiotics as something cold, something abstract, something that isn’t useful or useless’ (lines 9-10). Even though I33 makes a reference to these representations, he does not make any identity claim regarding the D-discourse in this story.

Lastly, there is a further aspect to account for in this fragment: I33 draws upon humour to interpret further evaluations of the events recounted in the story (lines 3, 5 and 10).

### 5.10 Finding an alternative to the D-discourse

At different moments of the interaction, I33 consciously articulated the struggle semioticians face to have their field recognised by the others. In doing so, he resorted
to the two dimensions of the D-discourse (membership categorisation of semioticians as ‘different’, and the set of negative representations of the field).
It is interesting that I33, with no elicitation from the interviewer, revealed the issue of having semiotics recognised in the telling:

‘The problem is the recognition of semiotics outside its own field, its own net of researchers’

I33 framed this as an issue of getting recognition by researchers who are not semioticians.
Then, I33, interactionally alluded to the spatial dimension of this Discourse as evaluating semiotics in the periphery of the system. This implies an indexical co-construction since he is doing this representation with the interviewer. I33 refers to Juri Lotman’s semiotic theory of relationships between centre and periphery. The aligning laughter after the utterance can be interpreted as a token that indicates a connection between both speakers:

‘We are on the border we are at the periphery of the system ((chuckles)) not at the centre’

In other moment, I33 sought to make a comparison of the status of semiotics in South America and his country of work. Here, he made relevant one of the most common representations of semiotics, enacting it as an old field:

‘In South America semiotics is still something new in some way, while in Italy it’s something old, something that is already aged’

In a you-generic narrative, I33 also evoked the membership categorisation of semioticians as other. In this categorisation, semioticians are ascribed a role as aliens with rather passive activities seen in repeated structures that negate agency (you are
considered [...] a stranger... you seem always [...] a strange object). The action of using ‘strange words’ confuses the other actors in this narrative (many colleagues):

And generally, you are considered sort of a stranger because you speak this difficult language ((laughter)) these strange words that semiotics use, the same word semiotics (.) even many colleagues always ask, ‘what is semiotics? what does it mean?’ So ((laughter)) you seem always a sort of a strange object for the others.

Lastly, the interviewee performed more complex identity work when he provided his own personal solution to the identity issue at Level 3 positioning. Rather than aligning to the D-discourse, I33 evoked a social identity, i.e. ‘a large category of belonging such as those pertaining to race, gender, and political affiliation’ (De Fina, 2011: 268). Hence, when making relevant this second identity side as politician, I33 enacted what McLean et al. (2017) called an alternative narrative (narratives enacted to counter master narratives or D-discourses), and casted himself as the type of person he would like to be perceived.

Extract 5.7

1 B: It’s very difficult to (.) make semiotics relevant for the ones that are not already involved within semiotics (.) Semiotics is for semioticians so.
2 I: ((Chuckles)) Okay
3 B: It’s not for the others, not for the colleagues, they many times perceive semiotics as something esoteric as being too complex or too (2.0) bounded into a very specific space with specific concept, a specific language and it’s not perceived as a (.) something socially relevant from the people. So, what I did also with my engagement in politics was to demonstrate that semiotics can be useful, can be still a part of everyday life not just something closed inside the university, inside the world of academic debate.
On the third level of positioning, he ascribes semiotics negative features that compose the dominant D-discourse, and semiotics is represented as ‘esoteric, too complicated, limited, having a complex metalanguage, or socially irrelevant’ (lines 4-7).

Furthermore, at line 7, the interviewee evokes another feature of his identity as politician when displaying his degree of commitment in the field: ‘What I did with my engagement in politics’. Here, when countering the discourse and formulating an alternative narrative, I33 expresses his commitment by means of modal markers. Firstly, I33 produces an assertion and shows his attitude towards that propositional content. Secondly, he draws on epistemic modality in the utterance ‘that semiotics can be useful, can be still a part of everyday life’ (lines 7-9). In this utterance, he ascribes a possibility for semiotics as a useful resource in the everyday life. When proposing this alternative narrative, I33 constructed an identity as a committed academic who vindicates the social usefulness of semiotics through politics, and the type of identity conveyed is more durable.

5.11 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have analysed the cases of three researchers who work at the borders of three fields: communications, media and philosophy.

Each case study, individually speaking, shows a more comprehensive picture of the identity work each respondent carries out and how they coalesced around a particular subject position that is developed across the interview. These respondents’ identity claims were more coherent, and they managed to show a concrete identity affordance: disidentification from the semiotics community in the case of I13, marginalisation at the workplace in the case of I21, and full engagement in the field of semiotics in the case of I33.
The first case shows the story of I13, a well-established professor in the field of communication in France. This interviewee clearly constructed a sense of being different from the larger community of semiotics by dint of: 1) coherently orienting herself to a particular subject position as disengaged researcher, 2) rejecting the category of semiotician and 3) deploying commitment in her home field of communications. In this manner, I13 distanced herself from certain kinds of behaviours, ideas and activities that semioticians perform, so that she was able to position herself as a particular type of person: a communications scholar who is openly disengaged from semiotics. And yet, she is someone who strategically maintains interactions with certain members of this community in Francophone environments, and has even managed to produce her own semiotic approach.

The second case focuses on I21, a professor working in Denmark in the field of media. An experienced interdisciplinary researcher, he constructed a sense of both continuity and change when telling his story of moving between locations and shifting between fields and disciplines. I21 balanced a sense of passive and active agency by means of a twofold identification affordance: he represented himself as an outcast at the workplace, but constructed co-membership feelings in the community of semioticians when underscoring the common ground shared with members of this group, as well as a sense of active agency based on the activities he performs (giving lectures or chairing a semiotics association).

The third and last case tells the story of I33, a researcher who was trained in semiotics by semioticians and decided to remain in that field. Throughout the interview, I33 openly constructed a sense of being a part of a larger group of semioticians by evoking his feelings of membership and his commitment to the field. Firstly, I33 stressed a sense of commonality vis-à-vis the larger community through reported speech. Secondly, he referenced the struggle to have semiotics recognised,
thirdly, he enacted an alternative narrative (when making relevant an additional facet of his identity) in order to counter the D-discourse of semiotics and construct himself as a particular type of person.

The collection of these case studies shows in a more coherent way the dynamics of identity work in this group. It also displays a common ground for some respondents; that is to say, the struggle to have semiotics recognised as a field of knowledge, either at the workplace or even in non-academic environments. Furthermore, we can openly see how the respondents draw on the D-discourse of semiotics as a positioning strategy to construct their academic identity.

A summary of the main findings, alongside the discussion regarding their implications, is provided in the next chapter.
Chapter 6. Discussion of findings

In chapter 4, I gave a general overview of my analysis on the respondents’ narratives in interaction and the mechanisms whereby they constructed different identities in regard to the field of semiotics and other members of the group.

In this chapter, I will show the findings I obtained in the analysis of different stories and will discuss them in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter 2. Furthermore, these findings will also be discussed in the light of two of the three research questions I raised.

Summary of findings

I will briefly summarise my findings here:

- France and Italy-based respondents were more prone to orient to national issues in the field of semiotics by remarking the problems they face in the individual academic system they are embedded in.
- France-based respondents enacted a collective positioning since eight out of ten respondents had been oriented to three main issues in French semiotics regarding the recognition of the field in the national academic system.
- A prevailing dominant discourse of semiotics (which I called a D-discourse of semiotics) emerged across respondents. This discourse conveys the respondents’ subjective experience of dwelling a marginal field.
- Semioticians do not present a single and stable type of identification. Instead they select from an inventory of identity affordances that may even be contradictory in different moments of the interaction. Those respondents showing more durable identities are those who have a clear sense of juggling between different fields.
- Unexpectedly, a group of respondents openly deconstructed membership
from the larger group of semioticians by claiming membership in other fields.

- Another group of respondents expressly stated their willingness to counter the dominant D-discourse of semiotics.

6.1 National issues in semiotics

In this section I will discuss two findings. Firstly, France and Italy-based respondents were more prone to orient to national issues in the field of semiotics by remarking the problems they face in the individual academic system they are embedded in. Secondly, France-based respondents enacted a collective positioning vis-à-vis the semiotics’ state of affairs in France.

The third question in this study sought to determine the extent to which the concerns made relevant in the interviews could shed light on the current status of semiotics in the respondents’ countries. The answer to this question is relative since the current status of the field is context-dependent, changing from one country to another and can provide proper examples in some countries.

In my data, several researchers accounted for the general situation of semiotics in their countries of work, so it was clear that certain tensions were going to rise. Given that semiotics’ organisation degree is contextually contingent, we can claim that there were well-demarcated national semiotics orientations.

In this manner, France-based researchers reported multiple tensions in their national academic system. In fact, respondents enacted a collective positioning when eight out of ten individuals oriented to a main issue in current French semiotics: the recognition of the field vis-à-vis the national academic system. Furthermore, they also stressed two additional issues framed as: 1) A generational gap between...
Greimas’ students and younger researchers; 2) A tendency to frame semiotics theory in the Greimas-oriented strand solely.

All three tensions are inseparable from Greimas’ figure, so I will address them in inverse order, starting by what one of my respondents considered as ‘greimasianism’ (greimassisme in French).

This ‘greimasianism’, or the tendency of many France-based scholars to remain in the zone of influence of Greimasian thought, harkens back to the work and figure of Algirdas Julien Greimas, who was the main pivotal figure of French semiotics in the twentieth century. Most of French semiotics theory has been dominated by greimasian, or ‘post-greimasian’ research, i.e. problematics in Greimas’ theory that have been developed after his death in 1992 (Broden, 2017).

Greimas’ framework modelled French semiotics at different levels. For instance, the only French semiotics research centre (located at the University of Limoges) was founded by a former student of Greimas. Moreover, this laboratoire follows a heavily-oriented greimasian model and still publishes the outlet Actes Sémiotiques (founded and edited by Greimas and his collaborators in the 1980s). Lastly, a Paris-based seminar intending to recreate the old Greimas’ seminar held at the university is still convened every year. This event either gathers Greimas’ surviving students or an audience that is mainly interested in post-greimasian approaches.

‘Greimasianism’ thus points to the reproduction of a continuous self-referential discourse around this author’s figure.

Now, I will briefly discuss the second issue in French semiotics pointed out by my respondents: the generational gap between Greimas’ students and younger researchers. With regard to this matter, I also need to draw on Greimas’ persona. After his death, French semioticians lost their ‘lodestar’ and remained uninterested about a possible federation of the field and the organisation in the local institutions. In this way, no leadership model emerged, a factor that contributed to the
consolidation of this Greimasianism. Furthermore, the current situation is insecure (in terms of having a stable academic position) for young researchers in semiotics either since most prominent French semioticians are already retired or are about to retire and their chairs are being closed. Therefore, there is a gap in the renovation of academics and the transmission of knowledge that could affect the maintaining of semiotics in France in the future.

This somehow concurs with Beacco and Moirand’s claim with regard to how personalities do not constitute scientific domains. To them, personalities’ role is purely reduced to a role as ‘influence’ and the members of a certain discursive community are the ones who control the norms of ‘textual production and its perpetuation’ (Beacco & Moirand, 1995: 32). Yet, French semioticians still need to determine the impact of Greimas’ influence in the upcoming state of their field.

Lastly, I will touch upon the main issue that pertains to the institutional organisation of this field in France in two academic sections at the National Council of Universities (CNU), as well as how researchers are constrained by these sections. In the literature, this subject has been addressed by Ablali (2007) when explaining how semiotics was compartmentalised in two disciplinary sections at the CNU level (sections 07 language sciences and, 71 information and communication sciences). In fact, Ablali simultaneously frames it as an historical and epistemological problem in which Greimas played a main role. That is, while Greimas was intending to define semiotics as a comprehensive scientific project beyond disciplinary boundaries (Greimas, 1976), he found another theoretical and methodological niche in communication sciences (Infocom) for anchoring semiotics beyond the realm of the language sciences (discipline he was institutionally attached to).

On the other hand, Jeanneret (2007) suggests that several scholars who had been interested in semiotics have turned to the section 71 in order to find a theoretical or
methodological refuge due to the interdisciplinary character of their research objects—which no longer fits in the disciplinary constraints of the seventh section.

Having scholars institutionally attached to both sections in my pool of respondents (plus another researcher who is attached to section 11 (Anglo-Saxon languages and literatures) gave an overview of the situation of semioticians in France. Interestingly, those eight respondents, out of the ten respondents, enacted this institutional separation as a drawback for the French community since they are not able to compete for funding on domestic levels and cannot be evaluated by semiotics experts when competing for grants. Instead, they are evaluated by non-specialised peers who disregard it as a competitive and reliable field. Thus, they are framed as not having an ‘authentic’ position.

All these tensions cast a recognition issue from the institutions that can be framed as unrecognised identity (Ricoeur, 2004) insofar as practitioners are not able to be acknowledged by the institutions of their own domestic academic system. Interestingly, the ways to cope with these issues was enacted as a particular identity affordance: countering the D-discourse (as in the case of I12), disengagement from semiotics (I13) or adopting a position as ‘mediator’ (I11).

I will turn now to the case of Italy.

The institutional organisation of the field is slightly better in the Italian case. As discussed earlier (Section 3.2), semiotics is an institutionally recognised discipline by the national academic system and unlike France, every communications department in Italy offers a mandatory semiotics course at the BA level (Pozzato, 2009), something that contributes to the transmission of the field to young students.

Nevertheless, as the analysis of Italian respondents’ stories showed, three out of four Italian respondents were troubled about being under the risk of getting absorbed by philosophy. In this country, both disciplines share the same disciplinary code: M-
FIL/05 Philosophy and Theory of Language. The implications of sharing the same section is that the community of philosophers, larger in dimension and better organised than the semiotics community, would eventually ‘swallow’ the semiotics section and would overcome them in terms of funding opportunities. The existing local tensions in the Italian context affect respondents’ performance expectations insofar as this tension renders their academic identity as insecure and uncertain. Something that was suggested by Archer (2008) in her discussion on internal institutional factors that affect the modelling of academic identities.

Finally, the fact that both communities oriented to these problems may find a possible explanation in the size and relationships held by the Italian and French community of semioticians.

Both communities are the most numerous in Europe and share a structuralist common ground in the early theories of Eco and those of Greimas. Furthermore, they have kept historical strong bonds (Dittus, 2017), i.e. Eco’s students visiting Greimas’ seminar, or both scholars lecturing in the other’s country. An outcome of these relationships is visible in the great deal of Italian semioticians working in Francophone environments in France, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Now that I have showed the situation of semiotics in these two countries, I would like to orient the discussion to whether or not respondents have developed ways of coping with national issues.

There are ten France-based scholars in my pool of respondents. They are attached in one of the two sections in which semiotics is present (7 and 71). With the exception of I14 –attached to the 11 section. I have discussed the global positioning of these respondents. However, regarding to individual identity-construction, two respondents chose to disengage from the field and to remain in their own field (either in infocom or in language sciences). Three more displayed co-membership feelings,
two cast themselves as critical voices. One more wanted to be engaged in semiotics despite being constrained by the boundaries of section 11, and one more chose a position of mediation. Lastly, two more respondents are Emeriti, which implies that their retirement has taken place. Yet, they showed full commitment to the field.

In the case of Italy, four out of four respondents from Italy displayed co-membership feelings in the group. Particularly, I33 who countered the Discourse and enacted an alternative narrative, and I30 who adopted a critical stance.

In relation to the remaining countries, I will briefly discuss each country’s situation and whether or not respondents found a solution to cope with the national issues.

Another particular case is Great Britain, where the situation for semiotics is completely marginal. Paradoxically, the structures of the British higher education system, favouring a model of ‘entrepreneurial governance’ (Angermuller, 2013), is less restrictive and allows researchers to shift between fields. Since semiotics is not organised in the national academic system of this country, the few semioticians who positioned as such mentioned that there is no interaction on the domestic level. This means that their own alternative was to seek encounters abroad to interact with other semioticians.

This study confirms the previous observations in other countries regarding the current situation of semiotics. Consistent with my observations and the literature (Kull, 2008; Kull et al., 2011), this research found that Estonia holds the higher degree of organisation in semiotics. In this country, it is a well-established discipline with an established department, journals, study programmes and two main theoretical orientations: cultural semiotics and biosemiotics. Unlike France, Estonian researchers found their own way after Lotman’s death (who was the main semiotics figure in the
Soviet Union) and have made considerable efforts to anchor it as a fully-established discipline in the national academic system.

Respondents from Sweden and Denmark did not stress on particular issues in the situation of semiotics vis-à-vis the institutions. Instead, their own strategy to deal with the lack of organisation in the academic system was enacted as oriented to (or remaining in) the main research trends that are thriving in Northern Europe. Mainly, in biosemiotics (in Denmark) and cognitive semiotics (in Sweden).

Belgium and Luxembourg-based participants did not make any reference to institutional issues and these results matched with those which had been observed in the literature (Catellani & Versel, 2012) with regard to the regional status of the field. Semiotics in this country is anchored in the language sciences and in less degree in the communication sciences. The main research centre is found at the University of Liège. Respondents resorted to the connections they maintain with Francophone and Italian semioticians as a strategy to cope with the field’s lack of establishment in this country.

With regard to the US, participants aligned with my previous observations regarding the scattering of semiotics in this country and the lack of research centres after Sebeok’s death in 2001. Nevertheless, five out of six respondents coincided that the main spot for meeting other researchers is the annual meeting of the Semiotic Society of America – this association is currently to look for connections in Canada and Mexico as well.

Lastly, in the case of respondents from Mexico, Germany and Bulgaria, there were no attempts to talk about national orientations. Instead, they rather focussed on their personal individual stances, talking about themselves and intending to portray co-
membership in the larger group of semioticians (with the exception of I08 who openly showed disengagement from the community).

6.2 The dominant D-discourse of semiotics

A pervasive Discourse (with capital ‘D’ following Gee, 1999; 2008) emerged across the data which somehow conveys the respondents’ subjective experience of dwelling a marginal field. The character of this Discourse is ambivalent since it is enacted as a form of self-critique of the semiotics community from an inner viewpoint, on one hand. On the other hand, it articulates other social actors’ voices (academic peers mostly) pertaining the way the field is perceived. Negatively orienting to or being complicit in this Discourse is one of the motives whereby respondents developed sameness or difference in the group.

In the interviews, several respondents negatively positioned themselves against the field through a multiplicity of representations of its features: being positioned as reproducing a self-referential discourse or, having a character as a ‘complicated’ and ‘isolated field’ using a complex metalanguage, i.e. the terminology of standard terms and concepts which are used for defining characteristics of objects in the field (semiosis, symbols, iconicity, meaning-carrier and so forth). As has been discussed in the previous chapter (Section 4.7.3), twenty-four individual representations of semiotics were identified in my data.

This D-discourse is linguistically informed by d-discourses (lower case ‘d’; Gee, 2008) in which different types of resources are mobilised such as the following:

1) Age-related terms
2) Spatial expressions
3) Complexity-oriented terms
4) Evaluative indexicals
5) Reported speech.

Furthermore, it incorporates an additional resource shaped as a membership categorisation that also depicts semioticians as lacking positive qualities: ‘esoteric scholars who fail to leave their own borders, using a socially irrelevant thing’.

Age-related terms are representations that pejoratively design the field as something that harkens back to the past, presented as ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘non-fashionable’ anymore.

The spatial dimension concerns a series of expressions that depicts semiotics as being outside in regard to other disciplines as ‘peripherical’, ‘isolated’, ‘everywhere’ and ‘nowhere.’ Furthermore, it also stressed a particular state, as being ‘in isolation’.

With regard to complexity-oriented terms, they are either designed to make qualitative evaluations about the entire field, or about one particular aspect: ‘semiotics as too difficult’, ‘too heavy’ or ‘too complicated’; ‘a complex-metalanguage’ or too ‘self-referential’.

This D-discourse includes an indexical link that connects the names of scholars such as Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes with the context of their use. For instance, as two respondents (I04 and I29) put it: ‘Barthes and all that’, ‘Umberto Eco and that stuff’. These evaluative indexicals presuppose that in particular contextual conditions semiotics is closely related to the works of either of them, and that the field and the authors are considered as out of fashion.

At different moments of the interaction, different respondents, with no elicitation from the interviewer, oriented themselves towards this D-discourse. This fact points to the ‘naturalisation’ of this D-discourse of semiotics as if it was a taken-for-granted norm. As such, these features point out to the existence of a shared belief among the
community. Either as a norm, or as a belief, the two of them are characteristics of D-discourses (Gee, 2015)

Notwithstanding, this D-discourse is also constructed by others, and this was linguistically represented by dint of other voices’ reported speech – indirect reported speech, mostly. So, through this pragmatic resource, respondents discursively enacted what others think of the field and reconstructed ways in which semiotics is ‘being talked’ by others. As suggested by De Fina (2003), reported speech is useful to understand how collective experiences are constructed since the voice of characters’ is quoted in narrators’ tellings and to make evaluations about them.

The last linguistic device that feeds off this D-discourse is what I have called a membership categorisation of semioticians as being ‘different’. This categorisation marks a paradigmatic shift in the D-discourse since it focuses on practitioners and not on the field. This categorisation emerged when respondents repeatedly evoked some semioticians’ features and represented them in their conversations. It is composed of representations regarding:

1) The performance of actions that seek to reduce agency levels. For example, being at odds with other factions (Peirceans versus Saussureans), or lacking the capacity to establish dialogue with researchers from other fields.
2) The ascription of negative attributes: semioticians, as a disconnected community of inquiry.
3) Indexical links with respondents’ contexts that point to either of the two previous representations.

So far, the discussion has focused on the linguistic devices that contributed to constitute this Discourse (or the ways whereby it became ‘talked’, i.e. another feature of a D-discourse). However, as De Fina points out, even though D-discourses
may present ‘some kind of stable core’ (De Fina, 2009: 44), it is necessary to look at larger macro-contexts in order to determine how this D-discourse operate.

The fact that a D-discourse of semiotics is shared is an outcome of its naturalisation among the community members. Besides, it is grounded on larger discourses about higher education that includes three main aspects. Firstly, the institutionalisation of academic disciplines in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Secondly, issues regarding the acceptance of inter- and transdisciplinary research and thirdly, the lack of consensus among early practitioners to organise the institutionalisation of semiotics. All three aspects follow a continuum that starts with the first aspect.

The first dimension that I will briefly address now is related to the emergence of organised knowledge in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Globally speaking, the current state of semiotics needs to be understood in relation to the emergence of disciplines in modern sense at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. As pointed out in the literature (Foucault, 1966; Becher & Trowler, 2001, Weingart, 2010), this process, which contributed to the disciplinarisation and specialisation of different ‘forms of scientific knowledge’, left semiotics out. Mainly due to the absence of a collectivity of organised researchers who were able to develop valid criteria to get it recognised as a discipline and to integrate it into the university curricula (Rastier, 2001). Disciplines were thus a new mode of organisation and ordering of knowledge that was a direct outcome of the limitations of the classificatory systems of knowledge. In this manner, there was a gradually developing process of academic-disciplinary splitting from which have emerged natural sciences, social sciences, and what we currently know as disciplinarised humanities (Li, 2006).

However, at this moment and as Deely argues, modern science became so specialised that academics ‘felt threatened by the entry of semiotics upon the intellectual scene’
(Deely, 2015b: 84). Therefore, its holistic, boundary-crossing character did not contribute to its entrance in the disciplinary market.

As knowledge became more and more specialised, communities of scholars looked for additional disciplinary organisational modes of science. Thus, the original disciplines were compartmentalised and did not remain any more to be ‘the crucial frames for orientation for the delineation of subject matters and the formulation of research problems’ (Weingart, 2010: 12). This takes me to the second aspect of this discussion which addresses interdisciplinarity.

Broadly speaking, interdisciplinary research privileges the convergence between disciplines, fields or knowledge bodies, and features: a) the articulation of two disciplines with a simpler research object, as well as: b) its systematicity, i.e. more than two disciplines with a more complex research object (Haidar, 2006; Posner, 2003).

Inter- and transdisciplinary research objects emerge due to two main reasons according to Haidar (2006). First, the continuously growing epistemological developments in science obliges a more explicative progress of scientific theories, as well as the complexity of historical, social, cultural and political processes. Second, the continuous ‘flux’ of humanities and natural sciences oblige them to set a constructive dialogue.

Weingart (2010) adds a third motive that lies in the promotion by funding agencies in the interest of linking political goals with the development of certain types of inquiries. Consequently, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are responses to simultaneous epistemological and historical constraints.

A matter that needs to be added here pertains semiotics’ heterogeneity of research objects and epistemological shifts (as I have shown in Sections 2.2 to 2.2.5). To put it briefly, semiotics addresses all objects from the viewpoint of their functioning as a
meaning-process and as Posner argues, ‘it has a value-free perspective which also determines a domain that is studied in its totality’ (Posner, 2003: 2366). Nevertheless, this conceptualisation of semiotics may be at odds with a more rigid understanding of academic disciplines (and knowledge in general) that divides the world in concrete domains, and that encourages the regulation of academic practices in the humanities and social sciences in order to become rigid.

Currently, despite strong political pressure is put to cross disciplinary boundaries – backed by the commercial establishment (Archer, 2008), interdisciplinary research is still regarded as dubious due to a seeming lack of epistemological standards. This finds a response in the prevailing academic model in which excellence needs to be demonstrated. Ironically, as Huutoniemi has pointed out, there is still a need to develop further ways to evaluate the many phenomena of interdisciplinarity: ‘rigorous criteria for judging interdisciplinary quality are strongly needed’ (Huutoniemi, 2010:311). This means that interdisciplinary research is still being assessed on traditional standards of disciplinarity. Something that endangers fields like semiotics which intend to cross academic boundaries.

Now, I will discuss the last macro-context of the D-discourse of semiotics regarding the lack of consensus among semioticians to define the institutional organisation of the field. Early practitioners of semiotics in the late 1960s and 1970s were concerned with the endowment of an epistemological identity to the field (see: Greimas, 1976; Sebeok; 1976; Posner, Robering and Sebeok, 2003; Haidar, 2006). Yet, they disregarded the organisation of the field in the academic systems and did not take into consideration how the lack of organisation would affect the practitioners’ as well as the field’s identities.
As discussed earlier (in Section 2.1), Sebeok, going beyond Saussure’s attempt to establish ‘the study of life of signs within society’ (Saussure, 1916: 33) and heavily drawing upon both the medieval and Peirce’s conceptualisation of semiotics as a doctrine – ‘the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental variable of semiosis’ (CP 5.488), considered semiotics as a ‘doctrine of signs’ and refused to call it a science or a theory (Sebeok, 1976). By choosing this term, Sebeok intended to establish semiotics as a comprehensive, ‘global’ approach (see Deely, 2015 and Cobley et al., 2011) that was way beyond disciplinary constraints. In addition, it was supposed to fulfil the explicative and federative role of what later Posner would define as ‘a metadiscipline of all academic disciplines’ (Posner, 2003: 2366).

Similarly, Greimas conceived of semiotics as a scientific project that encompass all manifestations of meaning in the form of a ‘science of meaning’ whose main aim was supposed to provide a link between all the humanities and social sciences so that a scientific revolution could take place in humanities (Greimas, 1976; Greimas and Courtés, 1983).

At this point, and even though semiotics internally differentiated itself and became specialised in subdisciplines (as showed in Section 2.2), it was poorly organised in the national academic systems. In consequence, it was assigned a different status in each country that was far from the status of an institutionally recognised discipline.

Once that I have shown the larger contexts of this Discourse, I just want to conclude the discussion regarding the implications of this finding with regard to respondents’ identifications. I argue that this group of researchers constructed themselves this D-discourse as a way to convey multiple ways of talking about semiotics from a subjective perspective of inhabiting a marginal field. Those respondents who vindicated this Discourse were the ones who distanced themselves from the field,
whereas those who reject it cast themselves a more durable sense of engagement in the field.

6.3 Different identities for an heterogeneous group

In this section I will discuss the findings concerning this group of semioticians’ choice of identities. In this way, I will respond to the second part of question one which intends to account for the representations of the academic practice of semiotics. Interviewees do not possess a single identity. Instead, they constantly present and re-present themselves by selecting from an inventory of identities that either intersects or contradicts according to the moment of the interaction. In addition, a few respondents also showed more dynamic identities. Especially, those who have a clear sense of moving around in different fields, or the senior scholars who have participated in the development of this field since the 1970s. The first identity affordance to be discussed is when semioticians chose to construct a sense of being equal in the group.

6.3.1 Being an accepted member of the community

A group of twenty-one respondents conveyed positive perceptions vis-à-vis the community of semioticians. The representation of a sense of being equal among members of the group was constructed when speakers established the commonality between the members of the community. Put briefly, a set of common things and attributes contribute to convey co-membership. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 599) argue, group members do not need to be identical, but they rather need to feel as being ‘sufficiently similar for interactional purposes’.
This can be more operatively articulated through the notion coined by Brubakers & Cooper (2001: 20) called *groupness*, i.e. the sense of belonging to a distinctive group. However, groupness was only ‘engendered’ when respondents linked two features: *commonality* and *connectedness*. The former is related to the sharing of a common language (a semiotics metalanguage to talk about semiotics and their research objects), a set of theoretical discourses about the field and a positive sense of being an accepted academic: having good feedback by other members of the group, or performing certain activities in associations or journals that help to give consistency to the group. The latter includes relational ties that link people, for instance when making relevant a network of fellow researchers to interact with, to share ideas, and to discuss different aspects of research.

Linguistically, the sense of being the same within members of the community was constructed by means of two ways that imply the *similarity* dimension in Bucholtz and Hall’s principle of relationality: 1) through the consistent use of inclusive deictics (‘we’ in English, ‘nous/on’ in French and ‘nosotros’ in Spanish) with stable referents to display a position from the perspective of the community of semioticians. This indicates a higher degree of these speakers’ involvement with the field, as well as their relationship to other members of the community. 2) when respondents construct themselves from a-person-to-world perspective as active agents (Bamberg, De Fina & Schiffrin, 2011). This occurs when respondents draw on the *commitment modality* (De Brabanter & Dendalle, 2008) in their discourse and assert certain epistemic positions regarding their actions regarding the building, maintenance and legitimisation of the field of semiotics.

An additional strategy to enact a sense of being the same in the group was displayed by three respondents when highlighting a concrete subject position that contributed to cast themselves as particular type of persons (a concerned educator (I12), a committed journal editor (I25), and a critical voice (I26)). As I showed in the analysis,
these three researchers negotiated their identities by ‘carving out’ a space for resistance, particularly by enacting an *alternative narrative* (MacLean et al. 2017). Hence refashioning the existing frames about semiotics and emphasising its social salience as well as the usefulness of its research method. By challenging the complexity-oriented terms component of the D-discourse, they claimed a more durable sense of co-membership that goes beyond the interaction (Bamberg, 2010).

In the next section, I will show the second identity affordance that was constructed by some respondents.

### 6.3.2 Disengaging from the community of semioticians

One unanticipated finding was that a group of four respondents openly expressed disengagement feelings towards the field of semiotics. These respondents’ identity-negotiation and presentation was nuanced and contradictory.

In some narratives, they showed a few glimpses of their identification as *semioticians*, e.g. ‘I’m the only one [in the research centre] who really does semiotics’ in the case of I29. However, in other moments, respondents preferred to stick to their home field. This inconsistency may be due to the fact that respondents claim dissimilar identification feelings at different moments of the interview. This is in line with Potter and Wetherell’s claim (Wetherell & Potter, 1998) regarding identity as a set of non-fixed representations of the self, as well as featuring a dynamic character that can change according to a particular moment in the interaction (Clifton & Van de Mieroop, 2017).

The claims of being different from the members of the group emphasised the *difference* dimension in the *principle of relationality*. In this manner, these
interviewees fully disengaged from the field by establishing what differentiated from semioticians: participating in certain events over semiotics-related events, adopting eclectic theoretical approaches that challenge the tenets of some semiotics school or framing it as a toolbox/method to draw upon.

In discourse, these respondents displayed difference from the community of semioticians by dint of the following resources:

a) Categorisation

b) Pronominal choice

As has been argued by De Fina (2003), categorisation processes are paramount to the formation of identities since they are grounded in people’s individual sense of belonging to communities. For instance, I17 used two disciplinary categories which were designed to convey her own self, as well as a way to highlight difference vis-à-vis colleagues who cast themselves as semioticians: ‘Hittitologist’ and ‘Classicist’.

In the other case, rather than using a category for self-description, I13 negatively oriented towards the category ‘semiotician’ and refused to be ‘labelled’ under this category by stressing the negative implications this term has in her country of work. The implications behind I13’s action connects semioticians with the performance of certain activities that are rejected by the interviewee.

These respondents expressed their desire to distance themselves from the field of semiotics by means of a consistent use of the third plural personal deictic (‘they’ in English, ‘ils in French’ and ‘ellos’ in Spanish) which builds up a frontier between the enunciator and ‘them’. The use of these deictics can be regarded as linguistic markers of demarcation of the field. On one hand, speakers consciously—or unconsciously, emphasised roles and actions which semioticians perform and which suggest a clash with their norms and beliefs. The use of the deictic ‘they’ can be seen as encoding a contrast between semioticians and non-semioticians, as a delimitation of the field of
Moreover, pronominal shift is displayed when they veered towards *self-referencing* (De Fina, 1995), i.e. the constant use of the first person deictic ‘I’ (‘je’ in French or ‘yo’ in Spanish), to index their own lack of participation in the group, as well as the lack of commitment in the community through the performance of intentionally motivated actions such as claiming membership in the field they are institutionally attached to.

Lastly, this group of speakers also attributed these values to both pronouns on the basis of the parameters which are imposed by larger discourses, namely the D-discourse of semiotics. In this way, they displayed a positive orientation with this Discourse as a strategy to construct difference from the community of semioticians.

### 6.3.3. Mixed identities

The current study found that sometimes respondents tended to express their desire for versatility in their research trajectory by displaying additional identity claims. Respondents featuring more dynamic identities are those who have a clear sense of juggling between different fields.

This is related to the fact that multiple identities were made relevant and negotiated in the course of the interaction and expressed in diverse stories. For instance, one particular case arose when a respondent (I02) showed resistance towards being typecast in a singular discipline and rationalised this as going against the norm in academia. In doing so, this respondent also resorted to lexical choices including self-description categories (‘a cultural-biosemiotician’) or a metaphor (‘a switching mechanism’), both designed for self-presentation purposes so far as she decided to convey a particular type of identification.
The other example is about a respondent (I33) that made relevant another facet of his identity as politician. In fact, he exhibited a capacity to separate his political self from the academic self, as well as managing to blend both identities for the sake of each other: utilising semiotics to improve social reality on one hand and utilising politics to not be surpassed by theoretical abstraction, on the other hand. Both cases are examples of a diversification since these individuals were able to construct *hybrid identities* (Whitchurch, 2009). As we saw in the literature review (Section 2.5), a hybrid identity emerges in a third space between the academic and the professional domains. In this way, these respondents were able to cross academic boundaries to shift between fields as well as their theoretical orientations. This finding may also help us to understand the dynamism of positioning in different narratives and moments of the interaction. That is to say, how positioning affords the construction of a non-stable and constantly-changing self.

### 6.3.4 Representations of the academic practice of semiotics

One interesting finding is that along the three possibilities which identity respondents chose, they also enacted two further representations of individual identity which are closely connected with the perceptions of their academic practice. They are contingent on the audience they interact with in their everyday lives as academics as well as the type of ‘academic roles’ they perform (Barnett & Napoli, 2008) as researchers, teachers or professionals.

As presented in the analysis, semioticians meet identity struggles when confronting three particular audiences: a) fellow semioticians, b) peers in both the local and the global level at the same department or university and globally in other fields, universities or countries and c) their students.
In addition to previously discussed co-membership feelings displayed vis-à-vis fellow semioticians, a group of respondents recognised being accepted by their students and was explicitly expressed when respondents draw positive relationships with this audience. This contributed to show a side of respondents’ identity as educators. As one interviewee (I09) put it ‘the students approach me and ask for advice, they either ask me to give an introductory course or they attend my seminar’.

Conversely, the relationships with other academics can vary. At least five respondents recognised being at odds with their peers. The space in which this often happens is the workplace and was enacted as a struggle in which respondents reported being positioned as an external ‘other’ who is not part of the collectivity and is not aligned with the norms and practices of the group. Simultaneously, academic peers were portrayed as ‘being less receptive’, ‘rigid’ or ‘closed-minded’. Both directions of positioning prompted participants to frame their academic practice in terms of opposition. Opposition enacts marginality feelings either at the workplace or at the home field. In both environments, the difference aspect of the principle of relationality was present.

A sense of being marginal was openly expressed by means of two categories: ‘outsider’ (I21) and ‘outcast’ (I04). Such categories were designed to convey a sense of alienation as well as to remark the lack of interlocutors in the workplace: either in the home department, or at one’s own university, and the absence of interaction prompted interviewees to look for research networks abroad.

Besides categories, another resource through which this ‘marginal’ identity was constructed lies in indirect reported speech. Through reported speech, respondents represented their particular perspectives on the performance of certain events. On one hand, speakers stressed peers’ personality by endowing them with voice, and conveying evaluations about them as ‘sceptical’ towards semiotics (Carranza, 1998).
The analysis of reported speech attributed to academic peers shows that respondents intended to recreate their peers’ alignment towards one of the four main components of the D-discourse.

I will now turn to the conclusion of the thesis.
Chapter 7. Conclusions

In this thesis I have discussed the experiences narrated by of a group of forty researchers who work in the field of semiotics. Each respondent’s story was co-constructed with me as an interviewer in the context of a research interview. Throughout our interactions, they performed identity work by alluding to different academic roles, as well as making relevant different facets of their identity (as semioticians, professors, members of one ethnic group or another community) as well as conveying, through narratives, their subjective stance of working in a peripheral field.

7.1 Summary of the thesis

Chapters 2 and 3 laid a theoretical and methodological grounding for the investigation, firstly by articulating the research objectives, questions and an overarching discursive approach in this thesis. In Chapters 2-3, I explored the theoretical framework pertinent to semiotics’ epistemological foundations and the early practitioners’ concern to provide a theoretical identity to the field without underpinning semiotics in higher education institutions. I have argued that this gap in the field’s own structure makes an impact in practitioners’ identification in individual and collective terms. Furthermore, I made the case that this issue should be examined from a discursive perspective as situated in the interactional context afforded by narratives in interaction and in relation to the study participants’ negotiation of multiple facets of identity. In Chapter 3, I provided theoretical framework for doing research interviews and described the type of interviews I used in this thesis. Then, I elaborated on the details of my dataset.
In addressing the research question investigated in the analysis, Chapter 4 focused on my analytical approach to narratives and the structural features of the analysed stories.

In the analysis, I paid attention to linguistic mechanisms for achieving positioning in the world of narrative and in the world of interaction. I then moved to examine how respondents constructed membership in the group of semioticians, as well as the ways in which they distanced themselves from the group. When addressing how interviewees construct difference from the community, I argued for the existence of a predominant D-discourse in the community of semioticians that embodies different discursive practices about the experience of being a semiotician and working in this field.

In Chapter 5 I moved to analyse the cases of three researchers who work in the borders of two fields: communication, media and philosophy. I examined how each of them, based on their personal stories, clearly chose an identification possibility: a disengaged communication scholar, an outcast in the workplace, but a well-received semiotician, and someone who combined a second facet of professional identity with his academic identity as semiotician.

Turning to the discussion Chapter 6, I articulated the ways this thesis has responded to further research questions. By drawing on relevant literature on epistemological foundations of semiotics I established a link between the linguistic resources and the higher education macro contexts that feed off the D-discourse and describe how it is imposed.

I provided the different identification affordances which the respondents drew on and claimed that those scholars who have more dynamic identities are those who have a clear sense of belonging to two different fields. I then discussed the concerns that were made visible in respondents’ narratives and then oriented to whether or not they have enacted strategies to grapple with these issues in their country of work.
Finally, in this Chapter 7, I responded to the second question and discussed how positioning as a theoretical and methodological articulation cuts across the thesis insofar as it enables an explanatory model for negotiation and identification strategies for semioticians and how they are linguistically represented in discourse, in the context of an interaction with me as interviewer.

I will turn now to the contribution this thesis makes in positioning theory and the field of semiotics.

### 7.2. Contributions of this thesis

This thesis intends to contribute to knowledge in three main areas:

1) Studies of identity in interaction by applying positioning theory as a methodology to approach identity generation in a group.

2) General semiotics by providing a reflexive account of the field of semiotics through narratives and the identification mechanisms of a group of practitioners.

3) Understanding of academic labour in general by offering the perspective of a not-so-well established field of knowledge.

#### 7.2.1 Contribution to studies of identity in interaction

In this section, besides stating my contribution to positioning theory I will explicitly respond to my second research question: To what extent do narratives in interaction mobilise positioning to enable the construction and negotiation of the process of identification of participants and among participants?

This question cut across the whole analysis chapter (chapter 4). Positioning as a theory, intends to address the ever-changing facets of identification processes and
the ways in which they are performed through discourse. Positioning is done interactationally, to others and the self, in a continuous manner (Davies & Harré, 1990; Bamberg, 1997).

In this thesis, I showed how respondents made relevant different facets of their identity in narratives and across the interviews as well as how they coalesced around particular subject positions at the local level or, when making relevant larger macro-contexts to present themselves in the ways they want to be perceived. Put in another manner, positioning afforded a way to assess how the participants organised their world locally, against the discursively-ascribed identities that occur in the macro level.

In telling stories, participants “artfully pick and choose” from an available set of experiences to craft and construct the narratives as well as selecting things from what is culturally available as Holstein and Gubrium suggest (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000: 103). Participants put considerable work into staging particular versions of themselves, within the context of having previously available identities. Semioticians’ biographical accounts are distinct but sometimes remarkably similar. Semiotics scholars come from diverse backgrounds, so no two stories are the same and as Fraser (1999) points out, each academic believes they embody a non-typical and unique story.

In these stories, several aspects of their biographies are visible: studies, expectations, choices made, encounters and characters. In the world of narrative (level 1), respondents evoked different characters and sketched their characteristics and relationships to one another which turned out to be very significant. The relevance of this level is grounded in the fact that it showed the network of bonds and relationships respondents wove with the antagonist of their stories. The main characters in these stories were the respondents themselves.
and the audiences they regularly interact with: fellow semioticians, peers in both the local and the global level, and their students.

Respondents positioned themselves from past viewpoints as former students—or pupils, while simultaneously positioning figures from the past like supervisors, teachers or inspirational sources. At this level, respondents designed characters’ personalities when describing their features in terms of qualities and through the performance of activities, hence endowing them with agency. At this same level, through the multiple references to characters, associations or outlets, we can see how positioning was afforded among the group. Clearly, several respondents know each other since they have worked together, maintain the similar network and in some cases, had the same supervisor. Yet, this positionings were constantly renegotiated across the interviews.

At the interactional level (level 2), respondents carried out local, interactional work. At this level, positioning can be seen as a parallel to the macro ascriptions of identity in the field of semiotics and this work is accomplished through the course of their interactions with other semioticians when constructing sameness or difference. However, as much as this set of identities has been foregrounded in the data, some of them might also be resisted by other participants who openly disengaged from the field of semiotics.

In order to connect the interactional level to macro level discourses I drew on Bamberg’s construct regarding level 3. Thus, positioning level 3 is used to look across the data to pull together momentary acts of positioning as more durable locally-produced identities. Respondents construct identities that reflect the way they want to see the field of semiotics in order to maintain their role within it as they identify as a particular type of person. This could also include how respondents negotiate difficulties in taking up particular positions, with reference to how certain academic
struggles are understood and the contraposition between seeking to remain in semiotics or working in other fields.

Interviewees navigated between locally-constructed claims and what Gee (1999) called D-discourses. In this thesis a prevailing D-discourse emerged and was shaped as ways and shared conventions in which working in the field of semiotics (as a marginal field) is talked about. This Discourse involved discursive practices that also incorporate higher education issues in the form of institutional constraints affecting their field and their professional identities: 1) the lack of institutionalisation of semiotics as a discipline in the nineteenth century, 2) issues regarding the acceptance of inter- and transdisciplinary research and 3) the lack of consensus among early practitioners to anchor semiotics as a discipline in national academic systems.

Lastly, the main linguistic resources through which positioning was mobilised to afford the construction and negotiation of identities were categorisation and pronominal choice.

With regard to categorisation, respondents mobilised it (on the three levels of positioning) in order to presenting particular aspects of their selves. At level 1, the attribution of features to characters –or to themselves, was carried out by means of the lexical choice of individual terms to indicate membership. With regard to characters, some of the designed categories were ‘sociologist’, ‘semiotician’ or ‘cryptosemiotician’ (Petrilli & Ponzio, 2011).

At level 2, respondents displayed multiple claims of academic identity: epistemic positions ‘interdisciplinary researcher’, specialisation traits ‘Russian philologist/specialist in second half Russian literature’. Other categories included were ethnic categories. Interestingly, they were used as a way to correlate ethnicity with academic identity (as in the case of I06 and I18). The design and display of these
categories align with Schegloff’s claim: rather than appearing in isolation, categories are usually evoked in groups around the same semantic field (Schegloff, 2007).

Moreover, respondents constructed a ‘membership categorisation of semioticians as different’ in which they engaged in a range of embodied practices stereotypically associated with negative attributes (such as a depiction of strife and constriction in between each other and through terms and expressions designed to convey features of semiotics in terms of age, space and complexity: ‘an old field’, ‘peripherical’ or ‘heavy and complicated field’. This categorisation is also part of the D-discourse of semiotics.

The mobilisation of positioning among participants afforded distancing from the community or claims of membership that also incorporated the similarity/difference of Bucholtz and Hall’s principle of similarity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Respondents thus are positioned as part of the community of semioticians when consistently using inclusive deictics (‘we’ in English, ‘nous/on’ in French and ‘nosotros’ in Spanish) with stable referents. This use in pronouns indexed a higher degree of these speakers’ involvement with the field, as well as their relationship to other members of the community. Conversely, some respondents distanced themselves from the community through a coherent use of the third person plural deictic (‘they’ in English, ‘ils in French’ and ‘ellos’ in Spanish). The use of this deictic encoded a contrast between semioticians and non-semioticians. Lastly, when resorting to the first person deictic ‘I’ (‘je’ in French or ‘yo’ in Spanish), respondents intended to display subjective perspectives which include lack of participation in the group as well as dearth of commitment, i.e. self-referencing (De Fina, 1995).

I will now state my contribution to studies of identity in interaction, which is found in its attempt to apply and combine different perspectives of positioning theory. Bringing together the theoretical and empirical work has permitted me to explore the
research enquiry more deeply and to establish a synergy between these strands. Mainly those of Bamberg (1997), Søreide (2006) Deppermann (2015) and Wortham and Reyes (2000; 2001). Bamberg’s model of narrative positioning at levels one and two provides the main tenets for addressing and testing situatedness vis-à-vis the relationship between the teller and the audience in narratives. Søreide provides methodological grounding in regard to the identification of consistent subject positioning among the respondents. Deppermann’s approach to positioning theory is more focused on both level one and two. Hence, it was more operatively useful when analysing and explaining phenomena which were co-constructed. Moreover, I drew on Wortham and Reyes’ perspective to approach the indexical dimension of positioning through their notion of evaluative indexicals, which are linguistic markers which attest to account for social action in particular contexts.

These perspectives have been useful in conducting linguistically informed analysis on participant’s positioning in connection with larger macro-contexts. This adds to approaches in positioning level 3 (De Fina, 2013) which is an emerging area in narrative inquiry with particular reference to research in identities.

7.2.2 Contributions to the field of semiotics

Overall, this study addresses the stories of forty interdisciplinary scholars who work in the boundaries of a not-so-well established field. In semiotics, to the best of my knowledge, there is yet no existing scholarship which investigates how semioticians do identity work, and that considers practitioners as the main research object to determine their identification issues vis-à-vis the multiple problems that emerged when the recognition of the field is put at stake.
The contribution of this research to the general field of semiotics lies in the fact that it tries to understand how practitioners negotiate and construct multiple facets of identity (sometimes contradictory) in stories which tell about the struggles they face vis-à-vis the legitimation of the field. Furthermore, it produces insights in the ways in which these individuals experience and produce representations of the field by linguistically enacting them in discourse.

Another contribution of this thesis lies in its attempt to combine, from an interdisciplinary stance, different perspectives of narrative approaches to identity, discourse analysis and semiotics by making relevant interactional research and larger macro contexts that affects both the identity of the field and its practitioners. A linguistically informed methodology has been usefully drawn in conducting multi-layered analysis of interviewees positioning in connection with higher education contexts.

### 7.2.3 Contributions to academic labour in general

Semiotics, as I have maintained in this thesis, is an oft-neglected and ostracised field of knowledge. Studying this field and its practitioners is relevant because, by examining them, we can gain access to the lives, stories and experiences of academics who have had to dwell in the margins of several fields, due to semiotics’ dearth of recognition. Exploring the narratives of this group of people has revealed different aspects of their academic identity; namely, the difficulties they face regarding their working conditions, especially their insecurities vis-à-vis the lack of disciplinary organisation and their conflicts while working within departments that were not built for them, as well as concerns regarding their realities as scholars who are constrained by the academic institutions they work for.
That is why this thesis contributes to understanding academia and academics from the standpoint of marginalisation. Semiotics and its practitioners have been positioned as academic outcasts who have to struggle to get recognition for the work they do on both local and global levels. From a global viewpoint, this happens in the current context of neoliberal higher education, in which budgets are being cut, faculty and staff are being laid off, entire research centres are closing and the development of the field of semiotics, as a discipline, comes only at the expense of others. Locally speaking, semioticians experience both discrimination at the workplace and the institutional constraints of their domestic academic systems. Both factors render their academic identity insecure and unstable.

Lastly, the results obtained in this thesis reveal some aspects about academics and their work that studying other disciplines might not show, specifically scholars working in smaller, not-very-well-organised fields, as is the case in semiotics, which features more eclectic and flexible identities – mainly those who have to juggle between two or more fields in order to satisfy their institutional requirements and to secure a position in academia.

In terms of the language of their interactions, the results shed light on how the members of this academic group enacted, and became natural at, a set of discursive practices (a D-discourse of semiotics) that convey their own subjective experience of living in the margins of different disciplines.

Furthermore, they also show that fields having heterogenous research objects and epistemological shifts continue to be at odds with the prevailing academic model, which still favours more rigid models of academic disciplines and lacks clearly defined inter- and transdisciplinary evaluation criteria.
7.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research

Since this thesis was limited to oral data in interaction with regard to identity construction mechanisms, it was not possible to cover textual data regarding citations. A further study could address and overcome these limitations. I advance the preceding study in a further scholarly manner which involves bibliometric tools in order to determine the intertextual connections that this pool of respondents has interwoven. In my interviews, I elicited data regarding citation motivations which was filtered out in this research. Combined with bibliometrics, oral data from interviews, and textual analysis, can further our understanding of how semioticians establish citation networks with other authors. This would imply the identification of positioning acts in the citation-related interview data as well as testing whether they are consistent with textual citation patterns. In addition, the examination of mobilised linguistic resources, as linked to different aspects of identity generation, could provide new insights in the constitution of an academic discourse of semiotics.

To conclude, the scope of this study was limited in terms of the numbers of participants representing individual countries – as in the case of Germany, Luxembourg and Bulgaria (with only one participant per country). Despite the fact that these respondents’ participation was precious for the study, further work is needed in these countries to fully grasp a holistic view of the situation of semiotics there. Future research might be conducted with other scholars working in these countries, as well as carrying out interviews with semioticians from Latin America and China. This is because these regions are currently the world’s main spots where semiotics is more active and produces novel research outputs. These contexts could afford future research avenues to investigate the negotiation and production of identities in other communities of semioticians in order to reveal a global perspective of the field from the very stance of its practitioners.
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Consent form and information sheet in English

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Title: The discursive construction of semiotics through the eyes of its practitioners

Name of Researcher: Eduardo Chávez Herrera

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated (to be completed by participant)

For the above project which I may keep for my records and have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have.

I agree to take part in the above study and am willing to be interviewed and to have my interview audio-recorded.

I understand that my information will be held and processed for the following purposes: research carried out by the DISCONEX research team (including use in talks, quotations in papers, dissertations and other publications in an anonymous manner).

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

__________________________  ___________  __________________
Name of Participant          Date                Signature

__________________________  ___________  __________________
Name of person taking consent if different from Researcher Date                Signature

__________________________  ___________  __________________
Researcher                     Date                Signature
INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: The discursive construction of semiotics through the eyes of its practitioners

Name of Researcher: Eduardo Chávez Herrera

1. The aforementioned project will be carried out in years 2015-2018 as part of doctoral training at the Centre for Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick (UK) and in the framework of the ERC-funded DISCONEX project. This research project is supervised by Prof. Johannes Angermuller.

2. The aim of the research is to study the discursive practices of researchers in the social sciences and humanities. It is particularly interested in the practices of positioning, classifying, and evaluating amongst researchers from the field of semiotics.

3. Participants for this project were chosen based on their disciplinary backgrounds, career trajectories, fields of research, and publications. They would usually be active in the field of semiotics. They would usually be contacted via email.

4. All participants who are interviewed for the purpose of this study will do so on an entirely voluntary basis. They may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal will not affect future treatment or have any negative consequences.

5. The participant can request access to research findings resulting from the study in which he/she volunteered upon the completion of the project.

6. Participants may benefit from the research carried out by accessing its results (upon request) once the study has been completed.

7. Participants in this study may expect to be interviewed (the length of which should not normally exceed one hour), which is audio-recorded. Should further clarification be needed, the researcher may contact the participant subsequently.

8. The interview will remain anonymous – the identity of the participant will be known only to the researchers. The content of the interview will always be quoted in an anonymised way, rendering the identification of the participant impossible. The level of anonymity (e.g., concealing name, age, institutional affiliation etc.) can be discussed with the researcher and agreed upon before or after interview.

9. The recording of the interview and any other material related to the research, which the participant will provide will be stored on a safe disk to which only the researchers of the DISCONEX team can access.

10. The material resulting from the interview will be used for the purpose of research exclusively.

11. Queries or complaints concerning the study can be addressed to the researcher directly: Eduardo Chávez Herrera at [redacted] Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL
Formulaire de consentement

Titre du projet : The discursive construction of semiotics through the eyes of its practitioners

Nom du chercheur : Eduardo Chávez Herrera

Je confirme que j’ai lu et compris la fiche d’information datée (À remplir par le participant)

Pour le projet mentionné ci-dessus que je peux garder dans mes archives et pour lequel j’ai eu l’opportunité de poser toutes les questions possibles.

J’accepte de participer à cette étude et je suis d’accord d’être interviewé et que mon entretien soit enregistré.

Je comprends que les informations que j’aurai fournies seront stockées et traitées uniquement pour les objectifs suivants : la recherche conduite par l’équipe de recherche DISCONEX (incluant l’utilisation dans des conférences, citations dans des articles, thèses, et autres publications de façon anonyme).

Je comprends que ma participation est volontaire et que je suis libre de me retirer à tout moment sans avoir à donner aucune raison et sans être pénalisé d’aucune manière.

Nom du participant ___________________________ Date __________ Signature __________

Nom de la personne donnant le consentement si différent du chercheur ___________________________ Date __________ Signature __________

Chercheur ___________________________ Date __________ Signature __________
Fiche d’information

Titre du projet : The discursive construction of semiotics through the eyes of its practitioners

Nom du chercheur : Eduardo Chávez Herrera

1. Le projet susmentionné se réalisera entre 2013 et 2018 au Centre for Applied Linguistics de l’Université de Warwick (Royaume-Uni) pour le projet de thèse de doctorat dans le cadre du projet DISCONEX, financé par le Conseil Européen de la Recherche (ERC). Le projet de recherche est dirigé par le Professeur Johannes Angermuller.

2. L’objectif du projet DISCONEX est d’étudier les pratiques discursives des chercheurs en sciences humaines et sociales. Ce projet s’intéresse plus particulièrement aux pratiques de positionnement, à la classification et à l’évaluation des chercheurs dans le champs de la sémiotique.

3. Les participants au projet ont été choisis sur la base de leur expérience disciplinaire, de leur parcours académique, de leurs champs de recherche et de leurs publications. Ils seront habituellement contactés par courrier électronique.

4. La participation à cette étude est complètement volontaire et les participants peuvent se retirer à tout moment. La rétractation n’affectera pas les futurs accords ni n’aura de conséquences négatives.

5. Le participant pourra demander l’accès aux résultats de l’étude à laquelle il ou elle a participé après l’achèvement du projet.

6. Sur demande, les participants pourront bénéficier des résultats de la recherche une fois l’étude terminée.

7. Les participants à cette étude seront interviewés. L’entretien qui sera enregistré ne devrait pas durer plus d’une heure. Si plus d’information est requise, le chercheur pourra contacter le participant ultérieurement.

Les participants pourront se mettre d’accord avec le chercheur sur le niveau d’anonymat (par ex. cacher le nom, l’âge ou l’affiliation institutionnelle des participants) avant ou après l’entretien.

9. L’enregistrement de l’entretien ainsi que tout autre information liée à la recherche fournie par les participants seront conservés sur un disque sécurisé et seuls les chercheurs du projet DISCONEX pourront y accéder.

10. Les matériaux issus de l’entretien seront utilisés exclusivement dans un but de recherche.

11. Les questions ou réclamations concernant l’étude peuvent être adressées directement au chercheur : Eduardo Chávez Herrera sur [adresse email] Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL.
Appendix 3. Transcription key

(·) micropause, i.e. shorter than 0.5 seconds

(((laugh))) laughter and chuckles

(2.0) pauses in seconds

(***) inaudible word

I: Interviewer

B: Interviewee
Appendix 4. Full transcripts of extracts used in Chapters 4

Extract 4.1 – I35

B: Okay well (2.0) that’s a really broad question so I have to (2.0) think a little bit I knew some people (. . I was married to a person who had studied semiotics and I was introduced to several people and (. ) they invited me to a (semiotics association) meeting
I: Mm-hmm
B: and that was my first (. . this is before even when I back to get my doctorate, so I went to this meeting and met (. . a lot of wonderful people (. .) and so (4.0) (name) invited me to come to this meeting
I: Right
B: and so at the meeting I met some wonderful people (name) and (name) and (name) and I realized as an art teacher really that was when I was an art teacher (. . this was like the most perfect place to look at interdisciplinary studies and (. .) to find the theories and the words and the ideas that I was trying to discover and (2.0) during this conference (name) said ‘well you need to come back and get your doctorate’ and I (. .) didn’t know that was even possible because I had two little girls and (2.0) after a while I thought ‘yeah this is possible and yes this is what I want to do but I need to do it in art and semiotics’ so that I went to (name of university) (. .) went back to (name of university) and they accepted me and majored in art education and I minored in semiotics
I: Right
B: so I studied with (professor’s name) and (professor’s name) and (professor’s name) and (professor’s name) and at that time (town), (state) was the centre for semiotic studies (. .) and so I got to meet people from all over the world they would come from (xxx) or a week and I was really fortunate to be able to meet a lot of wonderful people (. .) so that was the beginning.

Extract 4.2 and sequences – I24

B: Well yeah, I actually started studying literature and then I wanted to start linguistics to understand language a little better. But that was in the (2.0) early ‘70s so I also had a sister who lived in (country) so I went to visit her, and I sort of read a lot of those linguists, also have read about semiotics and I bought books and that really (. .) brought me into semiotics. So I actually made officially a doctorate dissertation in general linguistics here in (country)
I: Yes
B: but I tried to (2.0) reconstruct language as a particular (.) semiotic system. But that is not very (.) well considered in (country) by the linguists=So (2.0) I stayed for long time in (country) and then in (country) (laughs) Does that answer also your question? I: Yes of course But (.) then, so you had your PhD in linguistics in (city)?
B: Yes
I: Then you did a PhD in (city)?
B: In semiotics yes yeah
I: With (name)?
B: With (name) yes.
I: So and then (.) you spent some time in (country) then in (country), and then what happened did you come back to (country)?
B: Well you know it’s very funny because in (country) (.) they had somehow various of these (.) research councils in (country) which thought ‘very strange we have no semiotics in (country), we have created a project and we’ve been sent (.) some person to study in (country) and then come back and tell everybody (.) about semiotics’. But I had a colleague from (.) linguistics in (city) who wrote to me about (.) ‘here is a position which is really is made for you and I asked for the professor who proposes this, and they have not seemed to think about anybody in particular’, so I applied from (country) (Laughter) by telegram (Laugh)
I: Okay
B: Because that was before the internet
I: Right
B: Then I went to a telegram station in the centre of (city) and sent the telegram (Laughter) telegrammed that all my papers will arrive later
I: Okay
B: Yeah. So (.) that’s funny. Now, and then of course they were very surprised to find about that about a (demonym) who had (.) studied and even made a doctorate with (demonym) semioticians. So obviously (.) they wanted me of course.
I: (Laughs)
B: But you know how things are in (country) (.) I had changed my address so it took some time before they found me.

Extract 4.3 – I34

B: My habilitation took place in 1973 (.) In 1974 and 5, I had already offers from other universities, and (.) so from 1974 onwards, (.) I had got official invitation (.) from the (name of university), to become a professor in the sense of (.) second level professor how is it called?
I: Okay
B: (2.0) associate professor. Yeah?
I: Okay
B: And I (.) became a full professor in 1975, (.) and at that time, that kind of personal history, (.) I thought on I had to have a survey on what happens in the humanities at the moment (.) at least in the (demonym) countries, So I organised an international congress, in (city), in (date), and there we had the whole (.) congress at the type of processes of science yeah?
I: Yes
B: and it was quite successful, because (.) we decided to go and to have a society analysing (.) what is being done as or what was regarded as science process and that (.) was then realised that plan, so that in (year), the semiotics association (.) was founded
I: Okay
B: it’s called (name of association)
I: Okay
B: Well that’s how it became (.) a case that I became professor, and had this position of planning, and criticising (.) academic life in the humanities and the social sciences.

Extract 4.4 – I39

So, how my research (.) perceived by others? Well, probably perhaps it is a good idea that you ask them. ((Laughter)) (.) however, I don’t want to be (.) sort of not answering your question here (.) Judging and assessing different feedback and the sort of the comment that I received after presenting my work (.) I would say I am delighted that others value my work (.) and encouraged by my effort to connect semiotic discourse and design practise or design thinking. So, this is (.) very important piece for me actually (.) connecting design and semiotics. I think that’s almost becoming sort of my destiny (.) to make the connection because there isn’t much really work between semiotics and design thinking. A lot of people actually wrote about semiotics and applied semiotics to architectural design (.) system design, fashion, clothes, building, et cetera, et cetera (.) but I have not seen, I have yet to see (.) anything done (.) that connected the way of thinking that we called design thinking which is different than the other kind of thinking (.) not (xxx) it’s just different in semiotics. So (.) this is really what I’m (2.0.) actually not just interested to them but I’m in love with this process. It’s just wonderful. It really is. (3.0) Yeah.

Extract 4.5 – I03

B: When I met (name) (.) you know? I kind of, it kind of took a leap and I missed a little bit of that stage of doing it by yourself cause other people, kind of, it seemed to me anyway that other people would be doing things for me and then, you know, certainly it became very easy. So, yeah, I consider myself to be very lucky, but I think
everyone needs a (name) to help them along. He was incredible, he (1.0) You could introduce him to a PhD student in (region) and he said ‘Oh, yes I know you, you’re (. ) X PhD student, or you’re working on’ You know, it was just fabulous, he had an idea of what everybody was doing, so a mental map of all things that were going on and if he could it would encourage those people, so when I first contacted him there was absolutely no reason why he should know me, you know, we must have met very briefly in (university) and I don’t think that he remembered that, but when I wrote to him you know? With, with almost zero publications, I published that (type of) book, from (date) or (date) yeah, it must’ve been (date), I published that (type of) book, so you know? You’d see that in the bookstores, but I wrote to (name) and he wrote back immediately and said I was wondering when we would be in touch?

Extract 4.6 –I18

B : C’est en fait c’était la découverte du structuralisme mais (. ) voilà de moi je l’ai découvert par (. ) en j’étais déjà en master je faisais du FLE (. ) master FLE et un DEA après didactologie des langues et des cultures (. ) à (city) (name) et c’est (name) qui est sociologue
I : oui ?
B : mais sémioticien (1.0) un peu cryptosémioticien (. ) pour le décrire
I ah-ah ? (laughs)
B : (. ) qui m’a fait découvrir la discipline donc lui y travaillait des objets très concrets quoi (. ) c’est vrai qu’y travaillait sur (. ) l’organisation des cimetières en (region) par exemple (. ) voyez des choses très (. ) assez originales mais et il utilisait la sémiotique pour pour travailler là-dessus voilà (. ) donc là c’était pas littéraire c’était plus sociologique parce que lui c’est un sociologue (1.0) mais voilà donc c’est la rencontre entre les objets très concrets ou littéraires et puis (. ) une dimension structurale en (1.0) donc voilà pour l’origine. Vous avez des questions après plus précises ? (laughs)

Extract 4.7 –I09

B: Llegué por primera vez al seminario de (name), me acuerdo muy bien de ese día. Me senté ahí en un mar de gente, había jóvenes, había viejos, casi todos se conocían entonces platicaban entre ellos y yo en un rinconcito y yo dije ‘bueno, pues entonces voy a empezar a tomar notas de lo que se diga, ¿no?’ Entonces llega (name) y dice ‘bueno, Okay, el seminario de este año es sobre el saber y el creer, pero yo quisiera que alguien me dijera en qué quedamos en la última sesión del año pasado’, que
había sido, me parece un seminario sobre las pasiones, y empezó a preguntarles y me di cuenta ahí de una primera cosa: que los chiquitos no hablábamos, estábamos callados. Porque inmediatamente los que tomaban la palabra eran investigadores y no los alumnos. Los alumnos estábamos ahí perdidos, apurados, entre un mar de gente.

Bueno, del seminario de (name) yo no entendí gran cosa los cuatro primeros años. Captaba algunas intervenciones, entendía yo algunas cosas, veía yo procedimientos pero yo no entendía el meollo de las discusiones ¿por qué estaban discutiendo eso? El quid del asunto se me escapaba. Fue 4 años después y fue mágico y se lo cuento mucho a mis alumnos. Un buen día yo llegué al seminario, y estaba exponiendo (name), que es especialmente difícil lo que él expone. Y de repente me di cuenta ‘ah, Sí, lo que él estaba diciendo, por qué lo decía y con quién se estaba peleando, sobre todo con quién se estaba peleando, y en las preguntas y en los comentarios me di cuenta de quién le contestaba y por qué le contestaba y fue mágico. Desde entonces siempre se lo platico a los estudiantes y les digo, también hay una cierta virtud de la incomprensión. Me tomó 4 años prepararme para comprender ese seminario pero lo logré.

Extract 4.8 – I04

B: (. ) Maybe a couple of years before I retired, I thought, you know, because people would often, (. ) you know, I wasn't then popular, I go on quite well, like go and (. ) I would often go to their talks, and I would show that I was interested in what they're saying, but I would make (. ) a friendly critical remarks, you know, about, “I think you know, do you really think you could've (. ) surely, there's more to the mind than this, where this might be you know? one of their clever experiments with people (. ) searching for things on screens or something like that. And, I think they were okay with that. I didn't alienate anyone, but quite often they’d say, “Well, why, (name)? What do you do? You know, what’s your work?” and I would say something about, “Well, I’m interested in English and biology, Buddhism, and semiotics.” And they’d say, “Oh, (. ) semiotics? What, you mean (. ) Umberto Eco and stuff like that?” I would say, “Well, there’s more.” So, I gave a talk on biosemiotics to try and explain, because I was writing something for well, I think I wrote something for the festrichft for (name).
I Oh, yeah yeah, it’s in (name of publication), I think.
B That’s it.
I Yeah
B Yeah, I contributed a short article and (. )
I Mm-hmm.
B I was writing it at that time, so I thought that I’d (.) you know, people saying, “What do you do, (name)?” “Well, this is what I do.” So, I gave a talk about that (..) you know.
B I don’t think anybody (..) had any purchase on it at all. They didn’t (2.0) know what I was talking about. And (.) they were in that rather (.) awkward position when somebody gives you a talk, you don’t understand a bullet, and sometimes you think, it doesn’t matter because there wasn’t anything to understand. There wasn’t anything there really. This guy is stupid or, whatever. I don’t need to bother to understand this. But sometimes you’re going to a talk, and (..) you realise there is something there, (..) but you don’t understand. And, you can sort of go one way or another. You can say, “Well, okay this subject and this person, are, (..) you know they’re working in good faith, there’s something really here, but I can’t understand it. I’m just going to leave it alone. Or they go in more aggressive route, and they would say “This is (.) if they haven’t been able to make me understand, then it’s a sign there isn’t really anything there.”
I Mm-hmm.
B And, I think most of my colleagues were actually in the more friendly camp. They think, “Oh, well, you know, (name) is doing stuff. I don’t know what it is (.) I don’t think I need to know much about this, but he’s obviously doing something.” There may be a couple who thought they were learning there, but they probably got to like, get the notion.

Extract 4.9. –I40

B: I think it’s a field in which various approaches, various methods (..) have been instituted, refined, abandoned, resurrected, I think some parts of semiotics (..) are amenable to becoming scientific in a sense. I think it’s a mistake to strive (..) to make the whole of semiotics into the science of science. So (..) I think it’s a vast partly cultivated partly wild field in which (..) desperate inquiries go on (..) and all to the metaphor of something of the tower of Babel right? Where people are speaking different languages and therefore cannot communicate with each other. And so, one of the irony of ironies of course is that semioticians have such a hard time (..) sometimes communicating with other. And I find it a very exciting field, and biosemiotics are really exciting (..) I mean and I think the work on plants in particular is quite fascinating (..) and I think that (..) on the surface it looks like (..) semiotics is out of fashion. But I think (..) part of it (..) is that we as academics had absorbed the lessons that with semioticians even if we don’t announce ourselves, many folks or semioticians even if they don’t announce themselves as such.
Extract 4.10 – I08

B: Hay que construir puentes diversos de naturaleza diversa para llegar a un punto ¿no? (1.5) creo que eso le falta a la Semiótica (.) porque finalmente por mucho que se junten no hay diálogo entre los semiotistas (1.0) Tú ya verás ((laugh))
I: ((laugh))
B: No sacas a un greimasiano (.) que dialogue con un peirceano ¿no?
I: Mhm (.) claro
B: O un seguidor de la Escuela de Tartú no sale de sus de sus modelos ¿no? (.) lo interesante es decir ‘bueno Okay vamos a ponderar el poder explicativo de tal modelo tal modelo en este problema ¿no?’
I: creo que la Semiótica se ha feudalizado mucho (.) en su práctica y en su conceptualización ¿no? (1.5) y si se busca un futuro para ella pues tendría que transitar en, creo yo en esta dirección y habría que discutirle, pero yo no le veo otra salida.

Extract 4.11 – (38)

B: Well I think (3.0) I discussed that with semioticians (2.0) for many years of course and the (demonym) semioticians are very concerned by the (.) fact that they can’t seem to get it institutionalised.
I: mm-hmm
B So it can be compared to psychoanalysis. Now the psychoanalysts in this country say they don’t want to be institutionalised because then they would have to (.) show qualifications and they want to be amateurs and the (xxx) ((laughs)) Okay so that’s their choice but semioticians (.) I think would like to be institutionalised. (2.0) Now in semiotics there are very heavy divisions just like in the socialist party ((laughter)) you know you have the persons that can now understand Saussure and vice-versa I: Okay yeah.
B And I think (.) I’m the only trend that overcomes that distinction. So I don’t even see a group (.) trying to institutionalise a person monist semiotics (.) or you will see the Saussureans trying to institutionalise theirs, but they still can’t talk to each other because (2.0) they are ontologically different. ((Laughter)) And I think that (.) it would take many years and more before you get (2.0) a systematic scientific institutionalisation. In the meantime it has to exist, semiotics exists as a sort of practical philosophy, practical in a sense that it’s used in (2.0) schools in the pedagogical institution of art history (.) of literary history, and in the humanities as such (.) as a practical philosophy based on a theoretical philosophy of sign which is again based on metaphysics of meaning.
**Extract 4.12 – I29**

B : Je suis le seul du (research centre) qui fait vraiment de la sémiotique. Je suis un peau le spécialiste de sémiotique du labo, pour ça c’est un peau le positionnement. En ce moment, j’ai de projets avec deux ou trois, avec des membres de (research centre). Par contre, ici dans l’university, j’ai, par contre, de collaboration avec des chercheurs d’autres universités et si je suis toujours le spécialiste de sémiotique qui travaille avec quelqu’un qu’a une autre approche. Je suis toujours de la complémentarité. (9 lines omitted talking about his departmental colleagues)

B : Et par rapport à la communauté des sémioticiens, c’est vrai que moi, je suis un peu sorti, ça dire que j’ai participais depuis quelques années au colloques de la, par exemple de l’association et ces types de rencontres, je participe plutôt aux colloques en communication, donc, par exemple la (association) et ces types de rencontres, donc depuis de quelques années je suis pas, je suis un peu sorti de le milieu vraiment des sémioticiens qui travaillent entre des lieux de rencontre des sémioticiens, donc je suis plutôt dans le réseau un peu de gens qui sont à l’information et la communication, notamment d’organisation. Voilà.

**Extract 4.13 – I17**

B : Alors (.) pour moi, ça c'est personnel, c'est une méthodologie (2.0) pour moi. Mais parce-que moi à titre personnel, puisque vous avez dit, on revient à moi (.) parce-que moi, je suis pas une théoricienne de la sémiotique.

I : Mm mm

B : Évidemment, le point de vue de (name) est complètement différent de ce point de vue-là. Moi, je suis une utilisatrice de la sémiotique et mon objet c'est (.) avant tout le hittite, les écritures et je cherche les méthodologies qui sont les plus adéquates donc je peux utiliser de l’anthropologie, de la sémiotique, donc pour moi, c'est une methodologies (2.0) vraiment. Mais après c'est une (.) discipline institutionnelle en (country) qui est reconnue officiellement par le ministère de la recherche donc c'est une discipline, mais moi je l'utilise pas comme telle.

I : Mm mm

B : Moi, je me définis pas comme sémioticienne (1.0) je me définis comme hittitologue.

I : Aha

B : Pour moi quand on me demande ce que je suis (1.0) je dis que je suis, en général je dis que je suis antiquisante (.) voilà. Mon cœur c’est souvent (1.0) si vous voulez, alors on a beaucoup, on discute beaucoup de ça (laughs) avec (name) moi je reproche souvent aux sémioticiens sous prétexte d'utiliser la sémiotique (1.0) ils se permettent de parler de n'importe quoi.

I : (laughs)

B : (laughs) c'est-à-dire, comme si le fait d'utiliser la sémiotique les autorisait à parler (.) y en a qui parlent d’écritures mais moi je hurle quoi, je dis mais (.) si on se permet
de faire de la sémiotique de l’écriture, avant tout il faut connaître les écritures. Donc vous voyez mon point de vue, il est très modeste parce-que moi, je ne suis pas du tout une théoricienne (.) je pense que j’ai été fin j’ai toujours fait de la recherche (.) pointue sur des domaines et c’est un (1.0) des problèmes que j’ai avec la sémiotique, c’est-à-dire des gens qui fin je vais pas en citer mais qui s’autorisent à parler de tel objet alors qu’ils ne le connaissent pas quoi. Et comme si le fait de faire de la sémiotique ça suffisait à parler d’un objet (.) je crois que c’est faux quoi. Voilà (1.0) mais ça c’est mon approche modeste (.) pour le coup à moi.

**Extract 4.14 – I23**

B: And then (.) I finished that in (year) and like Wittgenstein I had the opportunity to change the environment after I’ve done my book. I didn't go to the Alps to teach but I went to (country). And that was, really broadened my (.) well, world view as you can imagine. Apart from learning a very different language and culture, I got more and more interested into broader communication. So, I mean even before we had studied language in a broader sense but now, I think you know it's like a good gesture or became very important. In relation to that, I got interested into language evolution seriously. So yes, the body not just the, in the embodiment sense but in the expressive sense, using it to communicate. Ah, (name) was and still is a big inspiration, origin of the modern mind and the notion of mimesis that I kind of specified as bodily mimeses eventually. So, in 2000, I was back in (country) after spending a few years in (continent). I did some research projects on language reposition with some new data. And then I kind of stumbled onto semiotics properly first hand. And my relationship the last 17 years with semiotics is then (.) well, let's be honest and say a bit ambiguous. On the one hand, it's fascinating because it's even broader. On the other hand, it’s often very frustrating because the levels of explicitness are lower than linguistics and cognitive science. And it’s still frustrating by, you know fuzzy writing, (.) fuzzy argumentation or non-argumentation. The levels of some of the pure semiotics conference that I’ve attended have been, let's say not satisfactory. So, I decided to go this one in (city) to kind of save my energy because of that. And, but again, I never and still don’t consider myself a semiotician proper. So, the real reason is that as you know, we have established this percentage of (branch of) semiotics and now we have a division for (branch of) semiotics. And it's my colleague (name) who’s a semiotician proper. And we have some people who would call themselves as cognitive scientist proper. And I avoid calling myself a linguist proper because I know cognitive semiotics is now the field that I identify with.
Extract 4.15 – I32
B: I think different perceptions of what we do. I think I’m (.) well recognised in the very, very limited field of semioticians (. ) in (region) because our research group is particularly present in (3 countries) (2.0) so my international research context is quite totally in these three countries. And my work I think is well-attested with frequentation in congresses and with publications and so on in this (.) very little world. I think my work is also appreciated in the field of art theory. Especially in (country) (2.0) more than in (country of work) because in (country of work) art theory is quite totally a question of art history (. ) and traditional art historians, as I said, in my university don’t give very high attention to this kind of research that is not built on historical fundamentals. So, but I think it’s (2.0) a question that touches all the history of our discipline of semiotics due to the fact that we talk about images as art historians do, about the cinema as cinema historians do (. ) or literature as historians of literature do (. ) they often don’t recognise our competence in (. ) talking to the audiences. I think we have an easier confrontation with social scientists.
I: Okay, why?
B And in particular with anthropologist because we share a certain number of authors and the writings (. ) so we made that part of our anthropological researches. (3.0) So and we think that for semiotics another very difficult border of confrontation is with philosophers especially with the analytic philosophers because and this is due to academic questions because we are in the same concourse, well group (2.0) so we have a same code M-FIL 05 in (country of work) that is the group of researchers that should be united by common interests but we are very different and really, we share very few things (. ) so it is bureaucratic problem I think for us because we are few and I think philosophers are many so (Chuckles) (2.0) So this is the (. ) sort of say, the field of confrontation.

Extract 4.16 – I05
B: So, it was possible to join the department, since then I’m in semiotics, and then we, of course, had more people, we had, we felt we could do more and then we started with this (. ) editing project also to continue with (name of journal), and starting to prepare some materials and translations into (language) of semiotics classics (. ) Plus, of course, conferences, organisation of conferences (. ) And, then, of course, very important part here, very important role, for me, and I think for the whole (name of university) people was direct contacts to, well, just talk to people in the semiotics world (. ) How that happened? But, if you already have some of this, this was developed by itself, so I happened to meet, (name) in (year)? or (year)? (1.0) or three? don’t remember when, one of these years in (city), he came to (city) to a meeting (. ) and so since then, somehow, he helped, he was active in order to develop a network, so proposing invitations to some meetings and then also
speaking to others, just getting to contact and so it was the development (. ) (name) was other person important in this, at that time, but also, and then, of course, when starting to go to (city) meetings, to several others, smaller ones, bigger ones, that is another development because that was, that a sort of well, (city) (. ) in (. ) (name) times was, mainly, the main network was (country), plus of course a few, a few others but whom they almost didn’t meet personally, or very seldom, but then now it was possible to keep really this network developed and somehow we happened to be just in the, among the most interesting people, I think, in semiotics in the world.

Extract 4.17 – I25
I : D’un point de vue sémiotique et d’un point de vue des disciplines que sont proches, qui s’intéressent à la sémiotique et de découvrir, voilà, et pour aujourd’hui. Voilà, qu’est-ce que on fait aujourd’hui. À cette là. Voilà, c’est ça le projet de la revue. En sens c’est un numéro de (xx) c’est une revue, une revue peer review, voilà, avec le double aveugle
I : Oui
B : (2.0) Je veux dire que ça manquait quand on a décidé de faire ça. On trouvait que ça a manqué, qui il n’y ai pas des revues, presque déjà, voilà, à sémiotique. Quand la sémiotique, bon, que n’est pas très connue comme discipline, il faut le dire. Donc, la sémiotique est part tout à nulle parte. C’est à dire, à la fois tout le monde (. ) que soit la littérature, que c’est soit la géographie. Voilà, tout le monde connait une peau, un petit pas de sémiotique et qu’est-ce que c’est et, finalement si je retrouvais des articles de sémiotique il n’y a pas de revues non plus. Voilà, c’est un problème, voilà, et sur tout on voulait déclarer avec cette revue que la sémiotique est actuelle, qu’elle fait des choses aujourd’hui parce qu’on a une image une peau vieille de la sémiotique, un air des anciens, des sémioticiens, vous savez ? On pense que la sémiotique c’est des années soixante, c’est Roland Barthes et tout ça. Donc, voilà, on voulait montrer que la sémiotique avance, que la sémiotique n’arrête pas de cette (. ) que se confronte avec d’autres disciplines et qu’il y a un échange, voilà. C’est ça.

Extract 4.18 – I12
B : Voilà, alors comment c’est perçu, je sais pas (. ) Alors souvent on me dit que la sémiotique est difficile, mais vous avez dû, déjà entendre ça, non ? Que c’est difficile, qu’on n’a pas besoin de tout ça, que c’est lourd (. ) Oui, bon. J’essaie d’être un peu fataliste là-dessus. J’essaie de pas utiliser de jargon, j’essaie d’être simple et claire, mais c’est très difficile, d’être simple et clair.
I : Oui.
B : Mais je dois dire, quelques fois (. ) Donc, je suis un peu fataliste là-dessus, mais je vois par exemple qu’il y a tout le temps énormément d’étudiants en échanges
interculturels. C’est un très gros département ici, des étudiants (demonyms), etc. Et ils font un cours sur le vintage avec mon bouquin. Voilà, c’est, ça peut être pris dans des petits domaines, comme ça. Et souvent c’est intéressant. Vous demandiez comment c’est perçu (. ) Bon là, c’était étonnant.

B : Voilà, donc moi j’essaie d’inoculer un tout petit peu la sémiotique comme ça, si je peux dire et de faire inoculer mes doctorants pour qu’ils aient des postes aussi, c’est ça bien sûr. Je ne suis pas sûre qu’il y aura beaucoup à l’avenir de postes de sémioticiens, d’enseignants qui ne feraient que de la sémiotique, mais je pense que, heureusement ou malheureusement, il y a des possibilités dans ces différentes filières. Sur l’image scientifique, sur le journalisme, etc. Je pense que les sémioticiens ont beaucoup de choses à dire dans ces domaines-là.

I : Oui.

B : Oui. Mais il faut aussi qu’ils s’ouvrent. Et qu’ils aient, parce qu’ils n’ont, on n’a pas forcément la culture du domaine. Il faut qu’on mange cette culture de domaine, qu’on en soit gourmands, qu’on l’accepte, qu’on la regarde, qu’on la reconnaîse, non ? C’est vrai, on a pas la science infuse, on est pas (. ) On est un peu trop insulaires, quelques fois, non ?

I : Oui oui.

Extract 4.19 – I26

B : Alors comment est-ce que mes collègues perçoivent ma, recherche ? Bah là c’est plus difficile à dire. Je trouve que la sémiotique a été assez isolée hein ( . ) pour des raisons diverses, institutionnelles, mais non seulement, théoriques, la complication de la théorie, la complexité de la théorie ( . ) qui se réfère à elle-même, bien sûr on est critiqués pour différentes raisons ( ) et je pense que beaucoup de raisons sont effectivement valables, c’est-à-dire je pense que la sémiotique a ( ) fait pendant de longues années un discours sur elle-même qui n’a pas permis le dialogue ni avec ( . ) les chercheurs en infocom ni avec ( . ) l’analyse du discours ni avec d’autres ( . ) champs de recherche ( . ) je suis très critique hein vis-à-vis de ( . ) de ma communauté, vis-à-vis de mes maîtres aussi ( . ) j’essayerais dans ( laugh ) pour ce qui m’est possible de faire ( . ) de rendre la sémiotique ( . ) non pas forcément plus accessible mais d’essayer de montrer aux autres ce qu’on peut y gagner ( . ) en prenant en considération la méthode sémiotique. Je parle de la méthode sémiotique évidemment il y a plusieurs méthodes ( . ) au centre de la théorie sémiotique sont des instruments méthodologiques de la sémiotique bien sûr (. ) je parle au singulier pour faciliter les choses et ( . ) la recherche en sémiotique (. ) je veux dire de ceux qui se considèrent comme des sémioticiens autres que des historiens. Je veux dire on est toujours tous les ( . ) chaque sémioticien est aussi un peu autre chose

B : Oui

I : un peu ( . ) historien de l’art, un peu ( . ) historien des médias, un peu théoricien de l’art ( . ) forcément parce qu’il faut connaître ses corpus et faut connaître les débats
sur ses propres corpus et cætera. Mais je crois que c’est très important de se faire connaître et pour se faire connaître il faut aussi apprendre à lire les autres et à comprendre bien quels sont les besoins des autres champs de recherche.

Extract 4.20 – 109
Entonces los estudiantes en cambio se van acercando a mí y me van pidiendo asesorías, me van pidiendo que les de algún curso de iniciación o empiezan a asistir a mi seminario y poco a poco se van formando. Ahora, cuando digo que los investigadores no me hacen caso, debo mencionar que sí hay sus excepciones y notables (.) después de muchos años de andar coqueteando con mis amigos lingüistas cognitivistas por fin ya entendieron que estamos trabajando con problemas muy similares y dando respuestas muy similares ¿no? Esto, obviamente no fue obra nada más mía sino que de repente, esto se nota por ejemplo en todo lo que es el cognitivismo de (country) (three names). También está el grupo de estudios cognitivistas de (university) en donde está (name) pero también están (name), está (name), que tienen también ese problema de sus fronteras disciplinarias, ellos lo tienen triple, son cognitivistas, son lingüistas pero también hacen semiótica, son semiotistas ¿no? Entonces a ellos no hay que convencerlos, ellos ya saben lo que se está haciendo ¿no? ((laugh))
I: ((laugh))
B: Pero eso ha permitido que lingüistas cognitivistas (demonym) entren, entremos en diálogo porque empieza a haber más bibliografía, empieza a haber más temas de discusión en común.

Extract 4.21 – 136
B My colleagues and I have a very active lively exchange in that regard. My peers at the university and that other universities are less receptive to semiotic language but (3.0) I’m trying to remember the word (2.0) basically my colleagues at the university respect that my research is (.) I wish I could remember the word that this one colleague used. They respect the integrity of it. That’s not the word I’m looking for, but they respect the integrity of the type of research that I do.
I Okay
B And the students as well when I can provide real examples that they can relate to, they are meaningful, they enjoy it. But when I made reference earlier to the range of students that I teach (.) many of them don’t have a capacity to confront their own belief systems with information that directly contradicts their belief systems. And so I have to be very cautious. I don’t want to offend people (2.0) but there are lots of belief systems that are purely ideological that events in the world don’t necessarily support (2.0) the things they interpret in a political sense.
I Mm-hmm
B And that’s very difficult.

Extract 4.22 – 110
B: Ah. (.) I have relatively big number of PhD’s and tutor presently four doctoral students, all their research is directed towards the digital cultures and markets in big data, in the new interactive corporate communication, the back market and the new opportunities for this kind of branch. So, the field I have opened is very attractive. The major challenge is nevertheless to keep in mind that it is about semiotics and that semiotics should be in the core of this research because sometimes young people are attracted by some fashionable phenomena, some fashionable languages going on. And they totally ignore the theoretical part, the contribution which the semiotic theory can and should bring to their research. So, I try with this new modern PhD’s totally oriented towards pragmatic semiotics and applied semiotics to bring them back to the semiotics theory and to try to, ah, (.) convince and transform them into semioticians and convince them of the benefits of the purely semiotic, let’s say articulations which this phenomena represent.

Extract 4.24 – 130
B: Et donc le problème c’est que on est, on se sent inférieurs aux philosophes. (2.0) Mais c’est une erreur parce qu’en fait la sémiotique peut aider la philosophie.
I: Mm mm
B: faire mieux et mais le problème c’est aussi que les philosophes sont mieux organisés, sont en plus sont numériquement plus forts et mais aussi certains (.) sémioticiens tendent (.) ou ont la tendance à se (.) mettre au service de la philosophie. Et là c’est une erreur. Parce qu’il faut dialoguer
I: Mm mm
B: Il faut se confronter
I: Mm
B: avec les philosophes mais en explicitant sa propre provenance
I: Mm mm
B: là c’est un problème je crois qui est presque par exemple dans l’(region) (.) il y a le problème (.) c’est (.) plutôt de se distinguer par les gens qui font de la communication par exemple.
I: Oui
B: et alors là aussi il faut dire mais attention (.) la sémiotique est quand même une science et on peut pas dire ((laugh)) (.) tout ce qu’on veut donc il faut quand même suivre des règles qui sont les règles de la discipline et tout ça.
I: Oui
B Et en Italie c’est un problème de bien sûr de bureaucratie de et le risque est celui de devenir un les (1.0) de se mettre au service de la philosophie et de disparaître.

Extract 4.25 – I11
B : Évidemment il y a plusieurs écoles il y a plusieurs (.) moi je n’aime pas les écoles donc j’ai toujours eu une sorte de position (.) libre et c’est difficile. Garder une position comment dire (.) démarquée qui ne veut pas entrer dans l’esprit d’école (.) donc dans la défense d’une théorie particulière (.) je préfère construire des ponts ou des passerelles des formes de traduction. Mais donc la perception des collègues est une perception un peu instable (.) c’est-à-dire la difficulté à me classer dans une école ou dans une autre. Et après finalement ma présence en France pose aussi des problèmes par à mon passé parce qu’en Italie la sémiotique est liée plutôt à la philosophie du langage pour des questions (.) on va dire universitaires, les concours on citera les sections (.) où il y a une section qui est philosophie du langage et sémiotique (.) et en revanche ici en France c’est plutôt la sémiotique dans les sciences du langage. Et dans les sciences de la communication Infocom il n’y a pas de lien entre la philosophie et la sémiotique et en revanche moi j’ai aussi une formation philosophique (.) une tendance aussi à la philosophie de la signification, donc bon (.) il y a en même temps des opportunités, de dialogue mais aussi de résistance. C’est un peu ça la situation.

Extract 4.26 – I19
B : On est- nous sommes (.) c’est un métier très marginal au niveau du CNU. C’est pas la faute du CNU. C’est pas la faute du CNU, c’est le fait que comme (.) toutes les disciplines qui veulent exister (.) on a besoin de leaders. On a vraiment besoin d’un leader et depuis la mort de Greimas on n’a pas eu beaucoup de leaders. On a eu des (.) leaders scientifiques comme (name) (1.0) mais au niveau de la reconnaissance institutionnelle, on n’a pas eu grand monde. Et c’est un vrai problème (2.0) je crois que la sémiotique peut contenter de petits débats (.) scientifiques entre sémioticiens (xxx) et personne ne s’est jamais occupé d’études en France tout au moins (2.0) du développement de la sémiotique en tant que discipline. Ce n’est pas le cas ailleurs. Au (country) par exemple (.) la sémiotique est reconnue comme une discipline. En (country), moi je vous dis je peux citer cet exemple parce que ces exemples je connais très bien parce que j’y vais souvent. Elle est reconnue, elle est en train d’être fondée, d’occuper un vrai espace en tant que discipline. En France (1.0) on se pose encore la question (3.0) et ce qui est très étonnant parce que c’est quand même en France que la sémiotique greimasienne s’est le plus développée. En fait, a pris son essor avant d’être diffusée dans le monde entier. Ailleurs (.) elle est reconnue.
comme une discipline. En France, elle l’est moins. Par absence de leaders. Et ça (.) je suis assez dur avec ça parce que (.) je crois que personne ne s’est vraiment donné la tâche de s’occuper de cette question, qui est fondamentale, parce-que (.) à partir du moment où elle est reconnue comme une discipline (2.0) nous avons des étudiants qui veulent faire la sémiotique.

**Extract 4.27 – I36**

B: And-and I’m under a lot of pressure because I need to put together a study guide for my students (.) but I’ve been wanting to talk to you to be supportive in your research (2.0) um because I think it’s important (.) there’s so much competition that exists when the stakes are very low.

I: Mm

B: So for example (.) linguistics has made its claim that it’s a science whereas even Umberto Eco has rejected the idea that semiotics is a discipline in and of itself

I: Mm

B: because he says (.) it’s interdisciplinary

I: Mm-hmm

B: and that’s very true (.) um I wouldn’t argue too much with Umberto Eco

I: ((laughs))

B: at the same time (.) I think that it is its own discipline in spite of the fact that it contributes to those of others and the notion that we have to be fragmented between linguistics and anthropology and communication. And communication is fragmented between speech and media.

I: Mm

B: and linguistics

I: Mm

B: okay (.) and there’s even a tradition that speech departments came out of the theatre. So there are fragmentation is not (.) natural.

I: Mm

B: it’s a human construct

I: Mm-hmm

**Extract 4.28 – I.40**

B: I think it’s at a period of ebb rather than flow I think it’s relative I think (.) there are number of reasons here, right?

I: Yeah

B: So, I don’t think it’s at the high point, I don’t think it’s on a especially low point either. So one of the difficulties is that (.) the funding for conferences has been diminished and there are actually several things. So, you have that and then you also
have the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity and the reality of increasing disciplinarity. And so, to make it academically you need to have a strong disciplinary identity. You need to be a philosopher, a historian, or a literary scholar. And so, but everybody’s talking (.) interdisciplinarity and administrations are reboarding disciplinarity. And so that obviously hurts semioticians, right? Who were going to be genuine in the interdisciplinary sense.

**Extract 4.29 – IO2**

I: So, I think of myself as a sort of (.) switching mechanism for, you know, taking stuff from there and switching it through a biosemiotics perspective (.) into the (research fields) in particular, that’s clearly where other people identify me so, you know, (fields of research) (2.0) all that sort of things but I don’t think of myself as really (1.0) based in a discipline anymore, I think that’s quite hard, interestingly I was in a thing yesterday, and the day before, I was at this thing in (.) (city), I mean at the university, a council for uncertain human future it’s being set up and they are starting something in the (country), and this kind of set up around the place, and I was invited to that because the main kind of interest for people in the uncertainty are these people about this, uncertainty is clearly where other people (.) identify me but I was interested, but, virtually everybody who’s there or they’ve got disciplinary background in terms of their teaching, their research doesn’t necessarily fits exactly into that teaching, and as you are introducing to each other, every one of them said ‘it’s disciplinary, interdisciplinary, so it was quite a path (.) sort of, misfit between the kind of (.) grand fields, to say, at least in this country, it might be a bit better in the (region), you know, I haven’t looked for ages, or the last time I looked it wasn’t obviously any better, but it might be any better (.) somebody posted a thing, a couple of days ago, from an (demonym) university doing a, offering a PhD scholarship in (field), I think, from the humanities such a perspective. So, maybe a little kind of moves, but I think it’s really developed, I think quite a lot of people, their actual work is interdisciplinary but in terms of funding, and teaching posts and stuff like that, is a real problem. And I think that if you work in semiotics your life is going to be very interdisciplinary (.) I mean how many (.) you may know the answers better than me, but I mean how many (1.0) posts of semioticians as such, my guess should be not many?

I: Not many

B: No, and schools of semiotics? Not many?

I: No

B: No, so there’s a problem in the field (.) one of the most interesting fields in the entire, you know, scholarly community, scholarly and scientific community, and yet the possibility for development in it, is really hampered because it is (.) inevitably so interdisciplinary (1.0).
Appendix 5. Extracts in Chapter 5

Sequences for I13
B : J’ai une formation littéraire tout à fait classique, j’ai fait des lettres modernes, j’ai fait des sciences du langage, (.) j’étais pas sémioticienne jusqu’à ce moment-là enfin (.) pas à proprement parler (.) et j’ai décidé parce que j’aime bien aussi apprendre des enfin (.) vraiment (xxx) (1.0) aller au fond des choses (.) de prendre en charge les cours de sémiotique appliquée à la publicité.
I : OK
B : En fait je suis arrivée à la sémiotique par l’enseignement.
I : Mm mm
B : Pour pouvoir faire cours. Et au fur et à mesure en fait (.) je l’ai intégré (.) dans mes recherches où j’ai plutôt conscientisé (.) qu’une partie de mes approches relevait en fait d’approches que je pouvais après qualifier de sémiotique. Mais que j’aurais (.) mais j’avais pas cette conception-là (.) préalablement.
I : Oui
B : Donc ensuite (.) ça s’est fait très rapidement (.) j’ai vraiment (.) bah je suis vraiment (.) j’ai vraiment pris de la sémiotique et les approches sémio-linguistiques et sociosémiotiques (.) comme approche fondamentale de mes recherches.

Extract 5.1 – I13
B : Je pense que (.) même bien que la discipline n’existe pas, c’est une vraie discipline théorique avec une visée épistémologique par par exemple on la retrouve beaucoup chez (name) je sais pas si vous connaissez qui est
I : Mm, oui
B : voilà (.) donc (name) je (.) moi je le connais bien, il est (.) on l’a invité ici comme professeur pendant un mois y a quelque temps (.) donc lui il est vraiment très théorique et c’est vrai qu’on est (.) pour lui on est parfois un peu (1.0) exotiques on va dire
I : (laugh)
B : mais lui il est vraiment sémioticien (.) nous on prétend pas être des sémioticiens comme ça, c’est-à-dire que c’est la (.) troisième version
I : (laugh)
B : c’est la version où la sémiotique est un outil d’analyse (.) au service (.) d’une pensée (.) théorique (.) autre qui pour nous est la pensée communicationnelle.
I : Mm mm
B : donc là pour nous (.) la sémiotique est (.) un outil au sens noble du terme (.) mais un outil parmi d’autres.
I : Oui
B : Qu’on va convoquer et qu’on va éventuellement tordre (1.0) on va pas respecter les écoles, on va pas respecter ceux qui théoriquement (.) parfois ils vont nous dire (.) ‘oui non mais là épistémologiquement tu peux pas mettre ça avec ça’
I : Oui
B : enfin ceux qui sont du côté (city) très théoriciens (.) nous on part du enfin on est beaucoup moins (.) crispés (.) au niveau moi j’appelle ça la (.) avec (name) on a décidé d’appeler ça la sémiotique décomplexée ((laugh))
I : ((laugh))
B : (name) dit toujours que moi j’ai plus de chance que lui parce que lui (.) il a été formé vraiment par (name) et cætera au carré (.) et que moi comme je suis arrivée après je me permets plus de choses que lui n’ose même pas imaginer
I : Mm mm
B : parce que (.) d’entrée de jeu il se censure en disant non, non (.) c’est pas possible, voilà.

Extract 5.2 – 13
B : Et en fait dedans ce que j’expose c’est une méthode que j’appelle (.) socio-sémiocommunicationnelle (.) d’analyse sémiotique sachant que la sémiotique que je pratique (1.0) moi je dis que c’est l’énorme avantage de mon parcours et du fait d’être en sciences de l’information et de la communication c’est que je ne suis pas empêtrée dans les querelles de chapelle (.) parce qu’en (country) (.) la sémiotique y a ceux qui sont peirciens, (.) ceux qui sont greimassiens, ceux qui sont barthésiens et c’est la ((laugh))
I : ((laugh))
B : c’est la guerre entre tout le monde (.) quand on est dans une discipline autre comme moi (.) en fait on fait ce qu’on veut (1.0) et on peut me, on peut à un moment donné sans que tout le monde m’assassine dire que finalement (.) dans la perspective de Barthes y a déjà des choses qui sont proches de ce qu’on va retrouver chez Umberto Eco plus tard et ça c’est impossible de le dire quand on est (.) étiqueté pour uniquement sémioticien ou sémioticienne.
B : Mm
I : Donc ça me donne une grande liberté d’approche et (.) une sorte de d’œcuménisme et dans cet ouvrage je montre comment en fait quand on a un objet spécifique
Extract for I21: 5.4, 5.5 and sequences

B Well, it depends on the (. ) context. If you’re talking of my internal context, there is my work place, my department, the peers that I have, my colleagues around me in my work place, or my network, my international network, the peers that I relate to in conferences and in societies and stuff like that. So, I would say, two different things. I think (2.0) my colleagues, my near colleagues, they sort of appreciate my level of articulation of my research. They can see the more technical parts are more accessible to them. But I think more, most of my theoretical semiotic work is they have no understanding at all. They probably don’t even know that I am doing some of this stuff. (3.0) On the other hand, in the semiotic world, I think that I have been, as I described to you when answering the first question, that I have been in so many disciplines and places and so on, I have always felt an outsider in some of these disciplines, be them scientific or artistic, academic or non-academic, I have always been fighting to belong and feeling sometimes outside. This is not the case for semiotics which I didn’t have any actual formal education either in my bachelor or my master, or my PhD. Well, the PhD, you could say it was in semiotics, but a very particular kind of semiotics.
I Okay.
B But the semiotic circles are the ones that have more spontaneously (2.0) accepted me, or actually (2.0) pulled me in, here in (country) and also internationally. Actually, I became the president of the (semiotics organisation). So, I think my semiotic colleagues have a good appreciation of my work in semiotics. I have been having very good feedbacks in the last three, four years about my work. (3.0) And I have been doing some key notes on things that are more related to this semiotic work than in any of the other work that I have done so far. I don’t think that my colleagues in my work place are aware of this (. ) somehow. So, I relate with them in a different capacity, in a different- I pull out more scientific point from (3.0) my work to them. This can create some problems when we have to describe our research internally. Now, for example our department, which is a huge department. It has around a hundred staff (. ) has, the leadership have commissioned an external evaluation. So, they have hired a panel, an international panel to come and evaluate our research. So, we are, everyone now here trying to reassess how we present our research.

Extracts for I33 : 5.6

B: when I came back from (country) last week I told to some colleagues that were asking ‘how do you think things were in (country)? I said that was not good, was more than good (laughs) it was a very enthusiastic feedback to the work that I presented (. ) (name) that you probably know said that at the end of the congress that I was the new pope of semiotics so (Laughter) because I did an analysis of the poetics, I used the (. ) Lotman idea of poetics of everyday life, of everyday behaviour
to analyse the pope and the intervention was really appreciated and (scholar’s name) there was (3.0) the main scholar of the congress said that was a very (.) exemplary way of using semiotics and to spread semiotics to an audience that many times perceives semiotics as something cold, something abstract, something that isn’t useful or useless (Laughter) in respect to life so (.) I had this feeling that I had to stay in (country) (Laughter) So (.) there is another article that is going to be published in (journal) that you know very well
I: Yeah
B: And (name) wrote me that they were evaluating to put the article at the opening of the number of the review
I: Yeah
B That was the number devoted to the anniversary of the birth of (author) so (.) having this recognition, having the chance to open the number of the review seems to me a very good sign (2.0) so I have good feedback in general, maybe the only problem is that many of my friends and colleagues asked me to stop doing politics and do more semiotics (Laughter).

Extract 5.7 and sequences
B: The fathers of semiotics were generally-known in a wider space than academy than a university where generally strong personalities into the intellectual, more general intellectual debate and the problem nowadays is that it’s very difficult to (.) make semiotics relevant for the ones that are not already involved within semiotics
I Mm-hmm
Ws So the problem is (.) semiotics and more in particular structuralism is still something that fascinate, that attracts outside the university and even at the moment, we are on the border we are at the periphery of the system ((chuckles)) not at the centre but I think that we have very strong and effective weapons to analyse society, analyse culture, analyse politics, analyse everyday life so we could (.) take semiotics again at the centre of the debate.