

The Multilingual Talk in Therapy

How Might the Spoken Language Shape Narratives of Life Experiences

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INTRODUCTION

From a constructionist perspective, experiences are created through language, and they are stored in autobiographical memory bound to language (Wang & Ross, 2007). Thus, multilingual people might have diverse experiences of the world. For example, when asked about their experiences in therapy, multilinguals reflected on differences in expressing their emotions and their sense of self through the languages they speak (Verkerk et al., 2021). While interest is growing in this area of diversity, life narratives have not been explored from the perspective of language before.

METHODOLOGY

INTERVIEWS

Completed multiple life story interviews in English and Hungarian using the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf, 2001) with four Hungarian people who have lived in the UK for a considerable time.

Research was granted ethical approval by the Metanoia Institute Ethical Committee

ANALYSIS

Qualitative ~ Narrative analysis utilising Riessman's (2008) dialogic/performance approach.

Focusing on four elements relative to the language used:

- narrative structure
- narrative themes
- linguistic characteristics
- interactions with the listener

"I just really started thinking about, like, this felt more positive than the Hungarian version of it."

Erika (pseudonym), 26, in the UK for 8 years

LIMITATIONS

- Limited interview length
- Hungarian language is linguistically isolated
- Life stories were shared in a non-therapeutic context

QUESTIONS

This study explores the connection between multilingualism and personal life narrative formation.

1. How might the spoken language influence narratives of life experiences?
2. How might the shared languages between storyteller and listener impact the way narratives are told?

PRELIMINARY EMERGENT IDEAS



IMPLICATIONS

Language is a form of diversity and a fundamental part of multicultural counselling guidelines (APA, 2017), thus considering this aspect of communication is essential for therapeutic work. By gaining insight into narrative construction in various languages, it may be possible to build a deeper, more holistic understanding of people speaking multiple languages.

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