

Therapy Across Linguistic Borderlands

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Outline

- Bilingualism and the effects it has on emotional development
- Relevance of this to bilingual education for all teaching staff including pastoral support, mentors, refugee support staff etc
- The role of languages in relation to feelings
- Language switching as :

Defence

Protection

Expression

The communication – direct and indirect model

Individual world view : Coping Strategies

Assertiveness, expressing emotions, goal orientated, confrontational

Individual world view: Communication Style

direct communication style – verbal communication mainly

Collective world view - Coping Strategies

Avoidance, forbearance, social support,

Collective world view: Communication style

indirect communication style – context important

Native language and emotions

- Learning a language early promotes heightened emotionality of native language compared to additional language *because*:
 - Family context of learning
 - First language learning co-evolves with emotional regulation systems
 - Native language has greater connections with subcortical brain structures which mediate arousal (including amygdala-mediated learning)

A Young Asylum Seekers' view

It is very hard to a person who leaves everything, his country, language, food, clothes, people, and family we know that if they haven't got problem they would never leave them because these things can be the loved once ever in their life but unfortunately they have to, to save their life and live calmly

The neurobiological perspective

- The amygdala judge emotion expressed in voices very fast
- They are the brain's emotional sentinel
- The prefrontal lobes(the decision-taking centres) control the amygdala and can reduce emotional intensity by allowing the individual to reappraise a situation and adapt their reaction(LeDoux,2002)

- The autonomic nervous system responds to signs of threat by preparing the body to take action – hence sweating of hands etc.
- Skin conductance experiments (compare lie detectors) can measure the transient , time specific increase in the skin’ s electrical conductivity so it can be linked to a specific stimulus e.g. the language in which a word is spoken – results show that specific languages (L1 or LX) can be experienced as highly emotional

*Catherine Harris(2006) When is a First Language More Emotional? Bilingual Minds , Anna Pavlenko **Publisher:** Multilingual Matters Ltd*

Anything else?

- In a sample of black and minority ethnic minority patients interviewed about mental health services: “*All cited lack of interpreters as a barrier to accessing services*” Bernardes, D. 2010
- People vary in their ability and speed at learning a new language
- Some people will have a block towards learning the new language because of issues of attachment and loss. How will you know, if you can't speak with them?
- Whether or not you subscribe to OLON (*one language only -as discussed in Li Wei and Wu 2009*) the unconscious processes, with which mental health therapy engages, will not be controlled by a national policy about language. To access those processes we need to be able to engage in the language in which those processes have been encoded

Splitting that can occur in bi/multilingualism

“When we change languages, both our worldview and our identities get transformed. We need to become new selves to speak a language that does not come from our core self, a language that does not reflect our inner-connectedness with the culture it represents.”

- “As an immigrant.... familiarity with the official language, that immensely valuable and essential tool of communication, has been a determining factor in the process of acculturation.”
- *Imberti P. Exploring and understanding the Language Experience of the Non- English-Speaking Immigrant. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services; 2007: 71*

- “bilingual self” with an internal life, which is comprised of “*a delicate duet of voices emanating from two different symbolic worlds.*”
- Perez Foster, R (1996). The bilingual self: duet in two voices. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 3:69-121.

- “doubleness” experienced by bilinguals : *“that of a neither/nor identity, rather than a both/and identity, which had also been referenced as “outsider-ness” in each of her contexts.”*
- *“ adults ...constructed their multi/bilingualism as advantageous, creative, even radical.”*
- Burck, C. (2004). Living in several languages: implications for therapy; *Journal of Family Therapy*; 26(p323)

- “cultural borderlands”

Rosaldo R. Culture and truth: The remaking of social analysis. Boston Beacon Press; 1989

defined as:

- “the overlapping zones of difference and similarity within and between different cultures. Borderlands give rise to internal inconsistencies and conflicts, but also offer many potential points of human connectedness with others.” *Falicov C.J. Training to Think Culturally: A multidimensional Comparative Framework in Family Process New York; 1995*

Berry's (1998, 2001) model of acculturation

Separation may occur when people place a high value on maintaining their own culture without any external influence and low value on the culture they have migrated to.

Assimilation may occur when people place high value only or mainly on the new culture to which they have migrated.

Marginalisation may occur when people feel alienated both from their heritage culture and the culture in which they are living.

Integration occurs when people find a way to integrate, incorporate and live out their varying experiences of culture.

Integrating Factors

- Finding a point of balance and integration
- Including integration of experiences of migration and tensions of straddling cultures.
- Using more than one language in a session can reinforce this sense of accommodation of tensions between differences.
- *“In some cases when people can't find any similar words in English they may use phrases or words from their language which I may not be able to understand but allows them to express the emotion.”*
- Moving between languages can validate and incorporate original culture and the country in which one lives.
- This links with ideas of translanguaging, code switching and the creativity which arises from multicompetence (Li Wei 2011)

DEFENCE

Not all therapists regard the ability to switch languages in therapy as necessarily positive

- Kraph, E. E. (1955) considered that the choice of the languages to work in (for polyglot clients) was not always therapeutically beneficial – the patient might choose the language that caused the least amount of emotional arousal.

Interviewee (L1 Greek, L2 English) self report

- “I think when I talk about emotional topics I tend to code-switch to English a lot. I remember when I was seeing a psychologist in Greece for a while I kept code-switching from Greek to English. We never really talked about this (...) To my mind it may have been some distancing strategy.... (JM Dewaele, 2010)

Emotional Expression

- “Sometimes the acquisition of a new language can provide a person with the “right expression” for a particular sentiment, and thus can be used as a coping mechanism to express emotionally loaded experiences.a second language served as a vehicle to become more self regulated by finding ways to verbalise feelings that were once censored or restricted by external forces”
- *Imberti P. Exploring and understanding the Language Experience of the Non- English- Speaking Immigrant. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services; 2007: 71*
- **Loss or gain?**

Jean Marc Dewaele's research participants:

Estela, Romanian L1, German L2, French L3, English L4, Italian L5

“Romanian is more appropriate for hurting and insulting because it carries more weight and I can distinguish more nuances”

Maureen, English L1, Italian L2

“I prefer to express my anger in Italian because I do not hear the weight of my words so everything comes out quite easily. Which unfortunately means I probably hurt people more than I intend to!”

Protective function of second /subsequent language

- A language learned after the early childhood years can serve as a protective psychic defence, de Zulueta, F. (1984,1990).
- It can help people to talk about traumatic events. If, for example, trauma happened in one language an individual may be able to talk about it in one of their other languages with a lessening of the emotional intensity, which makes it bearable.

Language in which trauma is recalled

- The Tehrani, N. & Vaughan, S. (2009) article: Lost in translation- using bilingual differences to increase emotional mastery following bullying. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research. Vol.9. No.1*, explores the use of language switching in a bilingual patient in order to increase emotional mastery after a traumatic experience:
- “...where an individual is equally fluent in two languages the most significant factor in increasing the quality and emotional content of the recall is the language and context in which the incident was encoded.” p.11
- strategic use of bilingual identity for « repair »

- Separate processing areas keep the intensity of feelings in one language separate from the experience of retelling the events in the other language.
- This is partly explained by reference to Dufour and Kroll's (1995) identification of two separate language stores in the brain for first and other languages.

• **Code switching and using more than one language**

- Maltese colleague, Maud Muscat works with bilingual children therapeutically
- Choice of language at any given time – or language switching – a useful diagnostic tool in understanding a child’s anxieties/coping strategies
- *“ At times it is just a word, which can make all the difference. At other times adolescents and children find it easier to express themselves in one of the languages and not the other... it can express deeper emotions, can indicate the type of social background, communication carried out at home/ school etc. ”*

Significance and Meaning beyond the words

- Counsellors who were interviewed talked about the importance in therapy of being able to see meaning beyond the spoken words of the client when there is a language barrier. The spoken word is not taken for granted as the sole carrier of meaning.
- *“Once past this (initial) stage, we move to a deeper level where language just serves the purpose of getting the meaning”*
“I have found that mostly they (clients) can be very eloquent even when they don’t know the words.”
“Initially...I was very focused on the meanings of the words. Now...I am learning to read and see between lines of words.”

Some practical suggestions

1. Think about what language proficiency means to people. These questions may be useful initial prompts in an assessment session:

- *What have their experiences of learning a new language been like?*
- *What does the proficiency in the language represent for them?*
- *What do they think they might gain in achieving proficiency in the new language?*
- *What might they lose in the process?*
- *In which language is it easier to get angry /express affection /be professional?*

2. Think about the way in which you use English. Think about other languages. In some languages there is no pronoun for the word “I”. *What impact might that have on psychological formulations?*

3. Consider issues of power in the communication. Does the therapist speak the language used in therapy better or worse than the patient?

What about accent?

Are the therapist and /or the patient speaking in the language of an oppressive coloniser and if so, what are the implications for the therapeutic alliance?

4. Learn a language, or reflect on experiences of trying to learn a language and impact on e.g.: your sense of identity, your self esteem, your understanding of others.

Professor Jean- Marc Dewaele quotes a language teacher's comments on the lack of confidence we have in Britain about learning languages:

“I think that people still view learning other languages with a sense of fear. There seems to be this mystique about learning languages and many people decide early on in their lives that they can't do it.” Dewaele, J (2009).

IMPLICATIONS

- Increasingly, people are moving across borders in pursuit of, for example, work, safety and refuge. Many will have experienced trauma.
- What is the potential impact on us all if we decide not to think about the borders crossed when people learn a new language?
- What is the potential impact on multilingual people if they are left unable to speak and to be heard and understood?

- How are these ideas already applied in bilingual educational practice?
- Are there any new ideas here that could be applied in your context?

Questions to bear in mind when thinking about a client's acculturation process

1. What language do you speak?

2. What language do you prefer?

3. How do you self identify?

4. Which ethnic identification does (did) your mother and father use?

5. What was the ethnic origin of the friends/ peers you had as a child?

6. Whom do you now associate with in the outside community?

7. What is your music/television/movie preference?

8. Where were you born?

9. Where were you raised?

10. What is your food preference?

11. What language do you read/write/think in?

12. How much pride do you have in your ethnic group?

Some suggestions for reading

- *Imberti P. Exploring and understanding the Language Experience of the Non- English- Speaking Immigrant. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services; 2007: 71*
- *Rosaldo R. Culture and truth: The remaking of social analysis. Boston Beacon Press; 1989*
- *Falicov C.J.. Training to Think Culturally: A multidimensional Comparative Framework in Family Process New York ; 1995*
- *Dewaele JM. Emotions in Multiple Languages; Palgrave 2010*
- *Grosjean, F. (1982) Life with Two Languages, London:Harvard University Press*
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- *Perez Foster, R. (1998) The Power of Language in the Clinical Process: Assessing and treating the bilingual person, New Jersey: Aronson*
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- *Vygotsky L.S. Mind and Society. Cambridge, Mass Harvard University Press; 1978*
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- *Costa B. A working model of a community based, culturally sensitive counselling service, in Psychotherapy and Culture by Zack Eleftheriadou, Karnac Books 2010*