

# Speaking Across Divides

## Power, Language and Subjectivity in Multilingual Psychotherapy Practice



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### Introduction

In an increasingly multilingual and global world, many psychotherapists now practise in languages other than their mother tongue and work across multiple linguistic contexts. However, counselling in the UK still operates largely within a monolingual, English-dominant framework (1). While research shows that different languages evoke distinct emotional responses, cultural associations, and senses of self (2, 3, 4), less attention has been given to the power relations and socio-political histories that shape these experiences and have implications for culturally and linguistically inclusive practice.

### Research Questions

- What shapes multilingual counsellors' relationships with their languages?
- How do multilingual counsellors navigate language-related decisions in their therapeutic work?

### Design

#### Participants

- 11 multilingual counsellors practising in English and at least one additional language
- Recruited from counselling services across the UK
- Diverse linguistic backgrounds

#### Interview

- One-to-one and semi-structured interview

#### Methodology

- Foucauldian-informed discourse analysis

#### Analytic Method

- Reflexive Thematic Analysis

### Preliminary Results 1

#### Multilingual counsellors described their languages as...

- A source of belonging, care, and home
- A marker of migrant identity
- A carrier of cultural values and histories
- A site where colonial and Euro-Oriental histories continue to shape experience
- A marker of linguistic competence and legitimacy
- An economic resource
- A means of accessing knowledge
- A professional register that shapes therapeutic communication
- A site through which social justice concerns are negotiated
- An expression of multicultural identities
- A resource to be preserved

### Preliminary Results 2

#### Multilingual counsellors drew upon the following discourses when navigating language-related decision-making:

- Person-centred Counselling Discourse
- Client-centred Counselling Discourse
- Psychodynamic Counselling Discourse
- Humanistic Discourse
- Humanistic Counselling Discourse
- Professionalism Discourse
- Therapeutic Discourse

These discourses were drawn upon by multilingual counsellors to explain, justify, and negotiate their linguistic decision-making in therapeutic encounters.

### Conclusion

- Multilingual counsellors' linguistic selves are shaped by personal, relational, cultural, and socio-political histories.
- Multilingual therapeutic practice raises complex ethical considerations spanning linguistic decision-making and power relations embedded in language.
- Multilingual counsellors navigate language-related decision-making through the interplay of personal values, therapeutic orientations, professional and institutional expectations.
- Critical awareness of one's relationship with language and the discourses that shape it is an important component of multilingual therapeutic practice.

### References

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