

**Talk as therapy. The discursive construction of therapeutic effect in the context of Integrative Psychotherapy sessions.**

Joanna Pawelczyk (School of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań)

The discourse of psychotherapy – traditionally referred to as ‘the talking cure’ – remains a relatively under-researched area in the social study of language. In 1977, Labov and Fanshel produced an analysis of the therapeutic interview in terms of dynamics of disorder and as a communicative event, while Ferrara, in 1994, discussed some aspects of therapeutic use of language. Recently, however, with the number of people attending various psychotherapy and counseling sessions ever mounting, as well as with the global commodification of therapeutic discourse, it is becoming increasingly imperative that the communicative patterns that make an interaction therapeutic be identified (cf. Giddens 1991). Not insignificantly – and of particular interest for the study of language in the social context – latter-day psychotherapy relies more heavily than ever on interaction, more precisely: on the socially-constructive nature of that interaction (Gerhardt and Stinson 1995, Arlow 2004), while contemporary therapeutic discourse also emphasizes the relationship with oneself rather than overt moralizing (Hodges 2002).

In this paper I will refer to the therapeutic effect as the client’s reflective subjectivity brought out by the therapist’s (careful) selection of specific communicative strategies and context-sensitive use of language. Although the analysis will focus on the therapist’s discourse strategies, in accordance with the concept of reciprocal expectations (cf. Gumperz 1982, Schiffrin 1996), the client’s contributions must also be considered. It will be demonstrated that the therapeutic effect, i.e., the client’s self-reflective stance, is far from pre-ordained but rather interactionally achieved. Foremost, the use of specific discourse markers, minimal responses, questions, repetition, reformulation and aspects of active listening will be examined. I will introduce the terms *transparency* and *verbalization*, which, according to my analysis, characterize the discourse of therapy. These will be applied in order to account for the therapeutic function of specific language forms. The data at my disposal is chiefly comprised of recordings of actual therapy sessions I witnessed in August 2004 in the USA and in October 2004 in Sweden. These recordings document the practical application of the Integrative Psychotherapy approach – based on such categories of

methods as, among others, attunement, involvement and inquiry – as pioneered, developed, and practiced by Richard Erskine, PhD.

## References

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