The Use of Spanish Language in Psychotherapy by Non-Latinx Mental Health Clinicians
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**Statement of Problem**

- As of 2016, approximately 57 million Latinx persons were living in the U.S. (CPS, U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). More than half of these persons are of first- or second-generation status; that is, foreign born or with one or both parents being U.S. citizens, respectively (CPS, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Latinx people who are first- and second-generation are more likely to speak primarily Spanish compared to third- or higher generations living in the U.S. (Alba et al., 2002), who are bilingual or speak primarily English.
- According to the American Psychological Association (Hamp et al., 2016), only 5.5% of psychologists in the U.S. are able to provide mental health services in Spanish.
- The inability of clinicians to communicate in Spanish, with Spanish-speaking clientele, remains a largely unaddressed issue in terms of making effective mental health services available to the Latinx population.

*Language defines how we identify and express ourselves within a cultural context* (Santiago, 1995).

**Purpose of Review**

We explored various clinical contexts within which clinician language use could affect Spanish-speaking Latinx clientele; how client acculturation impacts the communication process in psychotherapy; and, how therapy process and outcomes may improve given the strategic use of the Spanish language by clinicians.

**Cultural Factors Involved in Language Use**

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<tr>
<th>EMOTIONALITY</th>
<th>IDENTIFY</th>
<th>VALUES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish learned informally at home, it may be tied to emotion, comfort, and relationships (Biever, 2011)</td>
<td>Bilingual clients may experience two separate identities depending on the context and language utilized (Santiago, 1995)</td>
<td>Respeto</td>
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<td>Client may be able to better distance themselves and more easily discuss painful or powerful past experiences when speaking in the a native language (Pitta, Marcos &amp; Alpert, 1978)</td>
<td>It may be important to establish Spanish/English-speaking contexts of bilingual clients and their language background (Biever et al., 2011)</td>
<td>Personalismo</td>
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<td>Use of Interpreters</td>
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<td>- Difficulty maintaining and describing emotion of the client (Oquendo, 1996).</td>
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<td>- Some phrases cannot be directly translated (Tribe, 2005).</td>
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<td>- Client may not disclose as they normally would with only the therapist in the room (Biever et al., 2002).</td>
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<td>- Family members who translate may relay information through their perception of the client’s concerns (Biever et al., 2002).</td>
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**Clinical Context & Interview Language**

- **Language use:** Code-switching (transitioning between languages) to establish emotionality for bilingual Latinx clients (Pitta, Marcos, & Alpert, 1978).
- **Indirect language use:** Value placed on non-verbal cues (Smith & Montilla, 2009).
- **Description of symptoms:** Language can provide a barrier to interpretation of symptoms (Santiago, 1995; Malgady & Constantino, 1998).
- **Assessment norms:** MMPI & MMPI-2 not well normed on Latinx population, however people of color were included in normative sample (University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

**Therapy Process & Outcome for Strategic Language Use**

- **Dichos:** Use of culturally salient proverbs in therapy (Aviera, 1996)
- **Cuentos:** Traditional folklore similar to parables and grounded in Latinx culture may strengthen therapeutic alliance (Smith & Montilla, 2009)
- **Structured Motivational Interviewing:** Less informally discussion and strong structure in psychotherapy yields better outcomes for substance abuse treatment with Spanish-speaking clients (Bamatter et al., 2010)

**Discipline & Direction for Clinicians**

- Bilingual therapists should utilize and initiate code-switching during therapy sessions.
- The use of dichos and cuentos could help establish personalismo (warmth) while maintaining formalismo (professionalism) in the therapy process.
- In the intake session, it may be important to establish the level of proficiency and contexts of client language use to better grasp their identity and emotionality linked to each language.
- It is critical for professionals to learn therapy techniques in the Spanish language rather than rely on conversational proficiency.
- Develop and utilize psychological assessments using a norm sample representative of the Latinx population.

**References**