
WHY IS IT A GOOD IDEA TO LOOK AT THE SOUTH WHEN IT CONCERNS PSYCHOTHERAPY RESEARCH?

¿POR QUÉ ES UNA BUENA IDEA MIRAR AL SUR CUANDO DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN PSICOTERAPIA SE TRATA?

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Why is it a good idea to look at the South when it concerns psychotherapy research?

In the summer of 1982, Raffaella Carrá's hit "Hay que venir al Sur [You Must Come the South]" was playing on the radio. I, at the age of six, was singing and dancing with enthusiasm because a beautiful blonde Italian woman was teaching the world that "to make love well, you must come to the South" - and all of Chile joined the chorus at the Viña del Mar Song Festival, where she had been one of the star guests. Many of the Chileans who chanted "Hay que venir al Sur" for years thought that this excellent location for romance could be, for example, Puerto Varas, Chiloé, Patagonia, Aisén, or Magallanes. Proud to be Chilean and born in Latin America, I was disappointed when I realized Carrá's South was not under the Tropic of Capricorn but somewhere at the tip of the Italian boot. This was the first of many daily lessons of "our place."

I thought about this again 41 years later when I felt put back in my place - and I will not refer to the gender issue; that is another chapter. At the International Meeting of the Society for Psychotherapy Research (SPR) held in Dublin in 2023, the issue of diversity and the inclusion of "under-represented" groups was on fire. By this, I mean we went from almost nothing to a little more: two panels on sexual and gender diversity, a short presentation on racial diversity in psychotherapy...and a structured discussion entitled "How to promote the participation of individuals from under-represented groups in psychotherapy research?".

I want to dwell on this structured discussion in Dublin, at Trinity College, at the SPR Congress, where I put myself in my place again.

There was an assumption in the organization of this discussion, which all of us attending, by not questioning it, helped to uphold: the responsibility and interest to participate lies with those of us who belong to underrepresented groups. In answering the round of questions about barriers to participation, the outstanding woman Chilean researcher answered clearly and bluntly: the most critical obstacles were language, resources, and geographical distance. Regarding the first and the second, she exemplified her own experience of years of language classes -and their costs- to be able to participate in a structured discussion in English at that moment. As for the third point, I thought: "We are far from the global north, we are far from here [because we are in Toronto, Dublin, Bern, I don't know, we are always there], but we are not far from there." It seems a play on words, but it is less if we return to Raffaella Carrá and "You must come to the South".

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The language barrier. We know it, don't we?

Amanto and other researchers in environmental issues (2023) estimated the weight of the language barrier on different scientific activities: 91% more time spent reading an article, 51% more time spent writing an article, 2.5 times more rejections of papers for language reasons, 12.5 times more revisions for language issues, 94% more time to prepare and practice presentations at conferences, 30% desist from attending and 50% stop from making oral presentations. This would make sense if a minority of researchers faced this barrier, in the understanding that there is no universal language, and yet...

Taking global numbers as a reference, in the case of the sciences - for example, for the SPR journal *Psychotherapy Research* - except for about 4%, all of us are not "native English speakers"; this annoying word is composed of three terms that underline belonging and relevance. With it, we have been made to see more than once that our efforts and expenditures in scientific writing are not enough. This is, of course, a tremendous barrier that, in Chile or some other countries of Latin America, is mounted on the inequalities of access and quality of education.

In these lands, in this South, we look with admiration -sometimes with a bit of envy; why not? - to our colleagues who, because they have done their doctoral studies "abroad" or had access to an excellent bilingual education, have overcome this barrier or have managed to overcome it better. They have had the opportunity and learned -the merit issue is for another discussion. I am in the middle; I defend myself well. I usually say, and I am not the only one, that I am much more intelligent in Spanish because Vygotsky was right! But, until not long ago, I encouraged my students to learn to read and speak English with a seemingly robust argument that they could only surrender to: "English is the language of science." So much so, and so internalized - and internalized in the sense of embodied - that it happens to me when I send out to translate my manuscripts and then read it in a new language that sounds more "scientific," it sounds different (obviously), and it doesn't sound like me.

The language of science has predominantly been English; more than 90% of the journals indexed in Scopus and WoS use this language as their primary medium of publication. On the other hand, less than 3% of the journals indexed in these databases use Spanish as their main language. However, stating that English is the language of science is a mistake.

And why is this a mistake? A first issue to consider is that languages are neither scientific per se, philosophical, nor literary (e.g., English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, respectively), even though their structures facilitate the development of these disciplines or cultural practices and productions. In simple terms, languages are communicative systems in which grammatical rules organize the possible relationships between linguistic signs, i.e., signifiers and signified (De Saussure, 1916). The grammatical rules of English are not necessarily scientific; in fact, we have heard and read very well-formulated ideas grammatically in this language, which are far from what we would call scientific (e.g., Trump and climate change¹), this being true, obviously, for all languages.

The language of science, then, is the language of research, whose "grammar" organizes a series of practices that, even though they have been the object of consensus and interpretation in different disciplinary and sub-disciplinary fields, are easily recognizable: the problems and research questions; the conceptual frameworks; the objectives and the system of assumptions, hypotheses or guiding questions; the methodological designs with their different practices of participant recruitment, data, and information collection; analysis procedures; ethical considerations; reporting formats and discussion of results. In this language, which we can ultimately call the scientific method, we are all - global North, global South, Latin American chapter of the SPR - I mean all native speakers, or instead, we all are competent.

Back to the structured discussion in Dublin, the English issue is not an individual problem but rather a barrier, in this case, a barrier that affects, among others, our entire beloved SPR scientific community, that which I pronounce and understand very well: Society for Psychotherapy Research. At one point in the discussion, one of the panelists, I don't remember his name,

1 https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/11/27/estados_unidos/1543283242_634443.html

asked a question that perhaps triggered the impulse to write this text; he asked very honestly, who in the SPR cares about the inclusion of the "underrepresented"? And I thought, "You should care about it."

We "non-natives" have so far made, as the Chilean researcher said, an individual effort -of time and money- to share and nourish our society with relevant knowledge that would not otherwise "arrive" or would not be accessible to native speakers. For this reason alone, the language issue is a barrier to collective responsibility. It should matter to all of us, particularly those in the global North, to pay attention to what we are doing here in the South. As Raffaella Carrá sang, there are ways of researching psychotherapy that we do very well in the South.

Thus, for example, qualitative research in psychotherapy has shown remarkable developments in the Latin American context. A good part of this, and in contrast to the strong tradition of Randomized Clinical Trials (RCTs) developed in North America and Europe, is explained by the origins of psychotherapy research societies in Latin America, and this is also the case of the SPR, were an original effort of psychotherapists (Martínez and Tomicic, 2014), who inherited to many of the new generations the identity of psychotherapist-researchers (de la Parra, 2013). For decades, this has maintained the idea and practice of research that includes a qualitative dimension, which, among other things, allows for bridging the gap between research and practice (Castonguay and Muran, 2016). This, in what we have proficiency in Latin America, is fundamental, as Wolfgang Lutz stated in Dublin: The future of psychotherapy demands that research be part of clinical practice and clinical identity, as well as of the training of clinicians and scientific therapists (Lutz, 2023).

However, there is another reason to propose qualitative research in clinical and psychotherapy as a scientific practice of identity value and unique development in our continent, and that makes me insist that it is a good idea to look to the South. In Latin America, qualitative research is creative and generative and tends to adhere to principles rather than techniques (Energici et al., 2024). Moreover, when it comes to studying the complexity of the object we call psychotherapy (Orlinsky, 2009), the object or objects guide the creative process, often like clinical psychology and a psychotherapeutic process.

There are many ways of raising this and other barriers. However, I think the first action is to recognize them as such -that is, as barriers- and understand that it is sustained by structural conditions -which, in my opinion, we reproduce at different levels of aggregation, including the scientific societies-. Finally, it requires taking a position regarding our commitment and conviction -or not- that this requires a change. Overall, looking at these lands regarding psychotherapy research is a good idea.

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