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**Panel**

**Interpreter-mediated Psychotherapy: Dimensions of the Therapeutic Relationship**

(Anna Wamprechtshammer, University of Hamburg & Muhammed-Talha Topçu, University of Applied Sciences Magdeburg-Stendal)

Considering the current political and demographic developments, the necessity for multilingual psychotherapy for refugees and migrants is becoming increasingly apparent. Interpreters are often indispensable for bridging existing language barriers between therapists and patients. However, their presence is not without consequences: the dyadic relationship between therapists and patients becomes a triad, which has a direct impact on the development and maintenance of the therapeutic relationship (cf. Gryesten et al. 2021). Difficulties encountered by practitioners, interpreters and patients are often related to issues of trust as one of the key elements the therapeutic relationship is composed of (Muntigl & Scarvaglieri 2023).

In this panel, we aim to build upon previous findings from the project “Interpreting in psychotherapy” and contributions from experts in translation studies, linguistics and psychology to find out how the therapeutic relationship between therapists and patients is established and shaped in therapeutic interactions involving interpreters. Based on various methods, we analyze how therapists, patients and interpreters co-construct the therapeutic relationship and through which verbal and non-verbal communicative means participants deploy, gain and negotiate for example trust and empathy.

For a deeper insight into the essential building blocks of the therapeutic relationship, monolingual comparative data of psychotherapeutic conversations will also be considered.

**Key words:** interpreter-mediated psychotherapy, therapeutic relationship, trust, empathy, non-verbal communication.

**Literature**

Gryesten, J.R., Brodersen, K.J., Lindberg, L.G. et al. (2021). Interpreter-mediated psychotherapy – a qualitative analysis of the interprofessional collaboration between psychologists and interpreters. *Curr Psychol.*

Muntigl, Peter & Scarvaglieri, Claudio (2023) Discursive angles on the relationship in psychotherapy. *Front. Psychol.* 14.

## Overview of panelists

	Title of presentation	Panel member	Institutional address and Contact
1	Relationships in Therapeutic Discourse - Linguistic Impressions, Insights and Perspectives	Anna Wamprechtshammer*	University of Hamburg Max-Brauer-Allee 60 22765 Hamburg  anna.wamprechtshammer@uni-hamburg.de
2	Communicative ruptures in Interpreter-mediated therapy: Emergence, negotiation, repair	July de Wilde	Ghent University Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 33, 9000 Gent  July.DeWilde@UGent.be
		Claudio Scarvaglieri	Université de Lausanne Section d'allemand Bâtiment Anthropole 4063 CH-1015 Lausanne  claudio.scarvaglieri@unil.ch
		Peter Muntigl	Ghent University Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 33, 9000 Gent  Peter.muntigl@UGent.be
3	Perceptions of relational qualities in Interpreter-Mediated Psychotherapy: Qualitative Interviews with Therapists, Interpreters, and Patients	Muhammed-Talha Topçu*	University of Applied Sciences Magdeburg-Stendal Osterburger Straße 25, 39576 Stendal  Muhammed-talha.topcu@h2.de
		Mike Mösko	Mike-oliver.moesko@h2.de
4	Co-construction of the therapeutic alliance in interpreter-mediated psychotherapy	Anne Delizée	Mons University Bd Dolez 31 7000 Mons  Anne.DELIZEE@umons.ac.be
5	What is informal interpreting for migrants in (mental) health in South Africa?	Asithandile Nozewu	Stellenbosch University Stellenbosch Central  asienozewu2@gmail.com
6	Resistance against the therapeutic time frame	Carolina Fenner	Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache R 5, 6-13, Büro 3.17 D-68161 Mannheim  fenner@ids-mannheim.de

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## (Abstract 1)

### **Relationships in Therapeutic Discourse - Linguistic Impressions, Insights and Perspectives**

Anna Wamprechtshammer (University of Hamburg)

The involvement of interpreters in therapeutic discourse has been shown to result in a number of changes that directly affect the relationship between therapist and patient (cf. Jensen et al. 2017). It is widely accepted that the therapeutic relationship is the most significant factor influencing therapeutic success (cf. Schmitt-Traub 2003). However, the perception of the relationship in actu between the participants involved in the therapeutic interaction, which is mediated by an interpreter, remains largely unclear.

Initial impressions of the individual perspectives of therapists and interpreters on the therapeutic relationship will be provided by topic-focused expert interviews. The expert interviews were conducted in accordance with the principles of episodic interviews (Flick 2011), which involved the use of a series of stimuli (e.g. questions, quotes) to encourage reflection on the interaction process within IMP. A deeper insight into the relationship development and management will be obtained from audio recordings of authentic interpreter-mediated therapeutic interactions.

Based on extracts from the transcribed data, we aim to investigate linguistically how the therapeutic relationship manifests itself verbally and non-verbally and is perceived by the participants in IMP.

### **Literature**

Flick, Uwe (2011) Das Episodische Interview. In: Oelerich, H.O. (Hg.) Empirische Forschung und Soziale Arbeit. Wiesbaden: Verlage für Sozialwissenschaften, 273-280.

Jensen, R.S., Norregaard, T.M., Carlsson, J. (2017) [Effect of using an interpreter in psychotherapy]. Ug. Laeger. 179 (21).

Schmidt-Traub, Sigrun (2003) "Therapeutische Beziehung - ein Überblick," *Forum Psychotherapeutische Praxis*, vol. 3, 111–129.

(Abstract 2)

**Communicative ruptures in Interpreter-mediated therapy: Emergence, negotiation, repair**

Claudio Scarvaglieri (Université de Lausanne), July de Wilde (Ghent University) and Peter Muntigl (Ghent University)

Increased processes of migration and mobility have enhanced the importance of healthcare in multiple languages. Since migrants suffer more frequently from psychological disorders like trauma or depression (e.g. Foo et al. 2018), there is a particularly strong need for them to receive multilingual mental healthcare. Interpreter-mediated psychotherapy (IMP) has been proven to be an effective tool to treat migrants suffering from mental health problems (Lambert and Alhassoon, 2015) and preliminary findings have shown that interpreters sometimes play a central role in ‘co-driving’ the therapeutic project forward (Muntigl et al. *subm.*). In this presentation, we investigate the therapeutic relationship within the therapist-interpreter-patient triad and particularly focus on ruptures or breakdowns in the speakers’ collaborative relationship (Safran et al. 2011: 224). We will use methods from discourse analysis, conversation analysis and grounded theory to examine the following questions:

1. How do ruptures in the therapeutic relationship emerge in IMP; how are they expressed and relayed in this setting?
2. How do the interactants deal with ruptures once they have become overt and how do they try to repair and re-establish the therapeutic relationship?
3. What is the unique role of the interpreter during the rupture-repair process?

The contribution is based on video-recordings of IMP in Belgium and on interviews with therapists and interpreters. We conclude by discussing implications for IMP practice.

(Abstract 3)

**Perceptions of relational qualities in Interpreter-Mediated Psychotherapy: Qualitative Interviews with Therapists, Interpreters, and Patients**

Muhammed-Talha Topçu and Mike Mösko  
(University of applied sciences Magdeburg-Stendal)

Language barriers significantly hinder migrants' access to psychotherapeutic care (Nohr et al. 2024). Interpreter-mediated psychotherapy has emerged as an effective method for overcoming these challenges but introduces a more complex relationship structure: the classical dyad evolves into a triad (Hanft-Robert et al., 2023). Despite its growing use, little research exists on the specific dynamics and relationship qualities within this triad. This study aims to explore the structure and quality of relationships in interpreter-mediated psychotherapy, focusing on trust-building, the role of nonverbal communication, and relationship development among all parties involved.

To address this, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with therapists (n=6), interpreters (n=6), Turkish- and Arabic-speaking patients (n=6), and experts in migration and mental health (n=1), relationship building (n=1), and translation studies (n=1). The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

The findings demonstrate that trust plays a central role for all participants. Clear information about confidentiality fosters patient openness, while patients particularly value nonverbal communication and the therapist's emotional presence. Interpreters emphasized the importance of accurate translations in building trust between therapists and patients.

The study highlights that trust is cultivated through clear communication about confidentiality, emotional engagement by therapists, and precise interpretation. Together, these factors create the foundation for successful relationship-building in the triadic setting. The patients' perspective offers valuable insights into their experiences and underscores the importance of interpreter-mediated psychotherapy as a crucial form of support for migrants.

Nohr, L., Dumke, L., Klein, E. M. & Wilker, S. (2024). Current Outpatient Psychotherapeutic Care for People with Migration and Refugee Experience in Germany - An Overview. *PPmP - Psychotherapie · Psychosomatik · Medizinische Psychologie*, 74(6), 205–213.

<https://doi.org/10.1055/a-2304-8902>

Hanft-Robert, S., Lindberg, L. G., Mösko, M. & Carlsson, J. (2023). A balancing act: how interpreters affect the therapeutic alliance in psychotherapy with trauma-affected refugees-a qualitative study with therapists. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1175597.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1175597>

(Abstract 4)

**Co-construction of the therapeutic alliance in interpreter-mediated psychotherapy**

Anne Delizée (University of Mons)

In the migrant clinic, interpreters ensure linguistic transfer and may exercise cultural agency. Through their verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal actions, they may also co-construct the therapeutic alliance (TA), which is conducive to patients' self-expression (e.g. Goguikian Ratcliff et al. 2019). The aim of this communication is to help identify the structural, organisational, identity and interactional factors that either positively or negatively influence the TA in interpreter-mediated psychotherapy (IMP). In particular, the discursive elements that favour the establishment of a positive TA will be highlighted through the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with therapists, patients and interpreters, and through the discursive analysis of authentic interpreter-mediated therapeutic conversations (Brown and Levinson 1978; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1992). The results shed light on the type of speech acts and of paraverbal and non-verbal elements performed by the interpreter for the benefit of TA (Delizée and Michaux 2022). A better understanding of the procedural mechanisms that constitute TA in IMP is crucial for improving the quality of care.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1978). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Delizée, A., & Michaux, C. (2022). The mental health interpreter's relational agency and therapeutic alliance. *The Translator*, 28(2), 215–233.

Goguikian Ratcliff, B., & Pereira, C. (2019). L'alliance thérapeutique triadique dans une psychothérapie avec un interprète : un concept en quête de validation. *Pratiques Psychologiques*, 25(1), 63–77.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni, C. (1992). *Les interactions verbales*. Tome II. Armand Colin.

(Abstract 5)

**What is informal interpreting for migrants in (mental) health in South Africa?**

Asithandile Nozewu (Stellenbosch University)

South Africa has witnessed a dramatic rise from 1.35 million international migrants in 2005 to 4.22 million in 2019. This surge in migration shed light on challenges migrants from other African countries face in adapting to and accessing healthcare services, including mental health care services. Language discordances between healthcare providers and migrant patients are superimposed on a healthcare system that was already failing to serve the majority of its own citizens in their preferred languages.

South Africa has 12 official languages, but services are commonly not available in all languages, and informal interpreting forms an integral part of medical practice. We interviewed migrant patients, healthcare providers, supporters of migrant patients, stakeholders and those who act as informal interpreters for migrant patients in the South African healthcare system.

We found that people who act as informal interpreters for migrant patients can range from a family member or community leader to a stranger walking in the street. Informal interpreters may not be fully competent in the languages spoken by health care providers, and even when they are, they may struggle with medical terminology. Informal interpreters are creative in trying to bridge language gaps; reliance on this mixed cohort of informal and unpaid workers, however, raises serious ethical questions and has important consequences for health care quality.

(Abstract 6)

**Resistance against the therapeutic time frame**

Carolina Fenner (IDS Mannheim)

Psychotherapy as institutional interaction is bound in external factors, which influence the interaction, such as the type of psychotherapy or the scheduled time of sessions (Fitzgerald 2013:30). When patients question the time frame of their therapy, such behavior can be seen as resistance in psychodynamic psychotherapy, which can both impair and strengthen the therapeutic relationship (Abrahams & Rohleder 2021:75).

In analyzing video-recorded outpatient psychodynamic psychotherapies in German, I noticed that some patients frequently request alterations to the specified time frame during therapy. Such forms of possible resistance can manifest, e.g., in the (attempt) of shortening the session or can-celling the next session. Patients treat such attempts to be a peculiarity that must either be ap-proved or sanctioned by the therapist. Hence, they orient themselves to the asymmetrical epis-temic asymmetry between therapist and patient (cf. Weiste et al. 2016).

The conversation analytic study sheds light on the following questions: How do patients show that they consider such actions against the therapeutic time frame as delicate and what accounts do they use? How do therapists deal with such requests? How does this influence the therapeutic relationship?

Abrahams, D., & Rohleder, P. (2021). A clinical guide to psychodynamic psychotherapy. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Fitzgerald, P. E. (2013). Therapy talk: Conversation analysis in practice. Palgrave Macmillan.

Weiste, E., Voutilainen, L., & Peräkylä, A. (2016). Epistemic asymmetries in psychotherapy interaction: Therapists' practices for displaying access to clients' inner experiences. *Sociology of Health & Illness* 38(4): 645–661.