

The Harmonious Bilingualism Network (HaBilNet) is pleased to award Sally Rachel Cook with a HaBilNet Travel Award in order to attend the Georgetown University Round Table, GURT 2020, on “Multilingualism: Global South and Global North Perspectives” for her co-authored paper on **The healing role of a LX in survivors of sexuality-persecution** which contributes to HaBilNet's mission to support and stimulate scientific research into harmonious bilingualism.

ABSTRACT

The healing role of a LX in survivors of sexuality-persecution

Sally Rachel Cook & Jean-Marc Dewaele, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK

Interdisciplinary research (Costa & Dewaele, 2012, 2013, 2019; Rolland, Costa & Dewaele, 2017) shows the importance of considering multilingualism in the therapeutic context. Yet, there is a lack of research exploring the language experiences of refugees in psychotherapy (Dewaele & Costa, 2013) and none explore such experiences in group settings. To this end, this research explores the implications of multilingualism within a supportive community, in a vulnerable population. The ‘detachment effect’ (Marcos, 1976) of a later learned language or ‘disembodied cognition’ (Pavlenko, 2012) can be liberating for the individual, facilitating emotional expression and the recall of difficult, traumatic experiences. This has implications for psychotherapy with people who have been traumatised within a particular language context: acquiring and using another, foreign language, may offer a reparative and healing space (Byford, 2015; Iannaco, 2009). The micro-context of the study is a community-based therapeutic human rights charity in London, supporting torture survivors. Fifteen members of the community, all sequential multilinguals took part in semi-structured interviews conducted in English. The interview questions explored the interviewees language experiences, for example: how it felt to use a later-learned language (LX, Dewaele, 2010) when talking about traumatic experiences in therapy sessions and included questions about sense of self, i.e. if it differed or remained the same, depending on the language being used. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996) was used to describe, analyse and interpret the data. The findings reveal that in participants who had experienced sexuality-persecution and women who had experienced sex-trafficking, the LX helped free them from the shackles of shame embodied in their L1, enabled them to express previously unsaid things and helped liberate suppressed parts of the self. Findings speak to the value of bringing awareness of multilingualism into the therapeutic setting and support an embodied perspective of multilingualism.