

The effect of foreign language in emotion regulation

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The incipient increase in mobility between countries is giving rise to situations in which it is necessary to resort to therapy in a non-native language. In turn, there is evidence that the use of a foreign language can affect how we modulate and regulate our emotions in comparison to a native language. The question remains whether psychotherapy could be equally effective in a second language or if it would be affected by a different language in some way. The foreign language effect shows that emotional reactivity is reduced when we use a second language instead of our native one to address different situations, such as making a decision, solving a conflict or in psychotherapy. An important strategy in the field of psychotherapy is exposure therapy, widely used to confront unpleasant stimuli (Hofmann & Smits, 2008). In this line of research we assess whether the use of a second language modulates the emotion regulation in a brief course of exposure to negative and neutral stimuli. The studies follow the work of García-Palacios et al. (2018) on acquisition of fear, and focus on the process of extinction of fear based on an instructed fear paradigm with verbal and written instructions, and in the emotion regulation strategy of reappraisal. Pupil dilation and electrodermal activity were collected as physiological measures in order to have an objective measure of the level of arousal, as well as self-reports of their subjective experience. Our findings show that exposure, fear extinction and reappraisal occur regardless of the linguistic context, having the exposure to an aversive stimulus through verbal instructions not influenced by the language context. This line of research constitutes an example that a foreign linguistic context is not an impediment to conduct psychotherapy.

References

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