

‘What type of person am I, Tess?’

The Complex Tale of Self in Psychotherapy

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the complex tales of self which emerge from conversations between psychotherapists and patients with borderline personality disorder. These patients struggle in establishing a border between themselves and significant others, which is itself fundamental to a deeper construal of their own existence. They are being treated within the Conversational Model of psychotherapy. The model is strongly oriented to techniques based on language and linguistic evidence and thus offers a linguistic site at which the study of the complex interaction of self and language can be made tractable.

Within a broad corpus of transcribed audio recordings of patient-therapist discourse, the principal focus of my linguistic study is the Conversational Model's claims about three conversational types-Scripts, Chronicles and Narratives. According to Meares, they present 'self as shifting state in the therapeutic conversation' (1998:876). The thesis investigates a selection of texts to represent these three conversational types, which I have chosen according to the claims in the Conversational Model literature. It tests the evidence of Meares' claims concerning the semantic characteristics which distinguish the three conversational types, as well as the linguistic evidence concerning the claims of change in the self in particular the presentation of 'self as shifting state' (1998:876).

To achieve the levels of complexity required for this linguistic study of self, this thesis uses Systemic Functional Linguistics, which has a social, interactional orientation and a multidimensional and in particular, multistratal approach. The research demonstrates that therapeutically relevant aspects of the self can be productively described, across linguistic strata, in a consistent and reproducible way as a construction of meaning. The meanings which speakers offer in wordings can provide a reliable index for evaluating the emergence and maintenance of self. The Conversational Model's 'conversations' are confirmed as linguistically distinguishable text types and the research further shows that key terms of the Conversational Model can be defended theoretically on the basis of linguistic evidence, for example, the contrastive *linear/non-linear*. Together the findings describe the complexity in the tale of self.

This investigation of the Conversational Model data also tests the claims of a functional linguistics at the same time that it evaluates the Conversational Model with respect to that model's consistent appeals to language as evidence. It establishes an opportunity to extend the dialogue between linguists and practitioners of the Conversational Model: the tools of the one group increase the reflective capabilities of the other.

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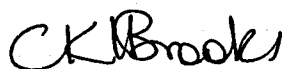
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted to any other university or institution.



Caroline K. Henderson-Brooks

Date

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