

University of Groningen

## 'My recovery is in English'

Verkerk, Leila; Fuller, Janet M.; Huiskes, Mike; Schüppert, Anja

*Published in:*  
Counselling and Psychotherapy Research

*DOI:*  
[10.1002/capr.12769](https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12769)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2024

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Verkerk, L., Fuller, J. M., Huiskes, M., & Schüppert, A. (2024). 'My recovery is in English': Clients' language choices in multilingual psychotherapy. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 24(3), 949-961. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12769>

### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.*

# 'My recovery is in English': Clients' language choices in multilingual psychotherapy

Leila Verkerk  | Janet M. Fuller | Mike Huiskes | Anja Schüppert

Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

## Correspondence

Leila Verkerk, Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen, Oude Kijk in't Jatstraat 26, Room 1311.302, 9712 EK Groningen, The Netherlands.

Email: [l.h.verkerk@rug.nl](mailto:l.h.verkerk@rug.nl)

## Abstract

**Background:** Psychotherapy is constituted through language. Due to voluntary migration or forced mobility, many people do not have access to therapy in their first language (L1). How multilingual clients manage their languages in therapy is an issue many therapists need to address in their practice. Psychotherapy is about trauma, emotions and identity, and when a multilingual client chooses a particular language, it may influence their emotional expression, cause a cultural misunderstanding, and a distorted presentation of who they are.

**Aims:** In this study, we investigated how clients perceive psychotherapy in a foreign language (LX). We also aimed to provide psychotherapists with more insights into the effect of language choices on the course and outcome of therapy.

**Methods:** We conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with multilingual clients who had experience with therapy in LX. The data were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Findings:** The data revealed that there is not one correlation between language and emotion, and that different backgrounds may lead to different preferences for the language of therapy; for some, LX may be preferred because it provides emotional distance necessary for discussing past trauma; for others, LX feels inadequate for expressing themselves fully.

**Conclusions:** Our data suggest that there is a need for multilingual psychotherapists to learn more about their clients' linguistic and cultural profiles and how they play a role in emotion communication to facilitate a smoother therapeutic process and a more beneficial outcome.

## KEYWORDS

emotion, identity, language choice, multilingualism, psychotherapy

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The field of multilingual psychotherapy has attracted increased interest of scholars over the past few decades. Psychotherapy in itself is a dynamic and constantly developing area, possibly even more so

when more than one language is involved. Forced migration and displacement of a large number of people (e.g., Ukrainian, Syrian and other refugees) has led to an influx of individuals in need of psychological support, who do not speak the language(s) of the host country. When the number of clients with diverse linguistic profiles

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2024 The Authors. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

increases, it becomes crucial for specialists treating them to understand how their clients' language(s) may impact the course and the outcome of psychotherapy.

For a therapist, being unprepared to treat multilingual clients may present a great challenge. Even though there is a chance to develop personally and professionally, not all psychotherapists that speak more than one language are willing to work in a language other than their first language (LX instead of L1). In psychotherapy, language serves as an essential tool to convey and perceive one's thoughts, concerns and emotions. Since the focus of many psychotherapeutic needs of a client lies in emotional resolution and healing, it is vital to ensure that language issues do not become an obstacle.

Emotions and multiple languages in a therapeutic setting have been mostly studied from the point of view of therapists (e.g., Gulina & Dobrolioubova, 2018; Or-Gordon, 2021), with only a little research on clients' views and perceptions (e.g., Costa & Dewaele, 2012). In accordance with the findings of these studies, along with a recent review by Verkerk et al. (2023), one of the main subjects in the area of multilingual psychotherapy remains code-switching, followed by emotional charge of L1/LX, and the influence of L1/LX on a person's sense of self. These subjects, however, are mostly represented in the studies that involve psychotherapists. The articles that focus on clients' views often present trauma cases (e.g., Cook & Dewaele, 2022) and language awareness in the room (e.g., Rolland et al., 2017). The studies mentioned above proposed that this intersectional research may benefit from learning more about the client's position in multilingual psychotherapy, the dynamic nature of multilingualism, and factors that can influence the course and the outcome of multilingual psychotherapy.

The study reported on in this paper was initially prompted by a pilot study that focused on experiences of multilingual and multicultural therapists (Verkerk et al., 2021). The results of that study showed that language choice in therapy influenced its course and outcome as regards to emotional expression, therapeutic alliance, and cultural and linguistic similarities/differences. Since there have been only a few accounts of the perceptions of clients, we felt it important to investigate them. Therefore, the main purpose of the current study was as follows:

- a. to investigate clients' perceptions of whether and how multilingualism influences the therapeutic process and
- b. to offer therapists some insights into how their clients' language choices may influence emotion communication during therapy.

In addition to demonstrating the latest views of the users of psychotherapeutic services, we aimed for a relatively large sample, which we hope will ensure higher trustworthiness of the information for all interested parties.

After the traditional description of the methodology used in this study, the results section combines the theoretical background and the main findings obtained in the course of the study. The headings therein correspond to the main themes found in the data. In the final

### Implications for practice and policy

- Knowing how emotional expression may differ due to the dynamic nature of linguistic and cultural acquisition may allow psychotherapists gain a better perspective of their multilingual clients' narratives.
- The potential relationship between identity shift and cultural frame switching could be investigated in more depth in order to map out how different personality traits may get activated when a multilingual client changes the language.
- The findings of the current study may provide therapists and clients with more tools to ensure a better rapport and even prevent misdiagnoses. No matter how challenging it may be to work with people that have been through highly emotional events overall, taking into account their linguistic and cultural profiles appears to be increasingly valuable for all interested parties to achieve the best results possible. This study could be utilised by providing new insights into the fluidity of multilinguals' language profiles, sociocultural perceptions and their sense of self. These insights could be included in courses and trainings for current and future specialists in the field of multilingual psychotherapy.

sections of the paper, the main findings are discussed, and propositions for future research are put forward.

## 2 | METHOD

In order to capture individuals' own perceptions of their experience with multilingual psychotherapy, we applied a qualitative research method. According to Brinkmann (2014, p. 426), qualitative methods suit the research goals the most 'when one is interested in qualitative features of human experience, talk, and interaction'. The empirical design was focused on participating in psychotherapy in LX and/or L1.

Due to the research interest in collecting personal narratives from the users of psychotherapeutic services, we chose semi-structured interviews as the most suitable research method (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This method allows for enough flexibility within a predesigned theoretical framework and gives the researcher the possibility to go beyond the subject of the question, if necessary. The interview guide can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

Our own experience is that of being multilingual, and we conceptualise multilingualism as fluid, changing both situationally and potentially over time. We acknowledge that this view might have influenced how we chose our method in general and structured and conducted the interviews in particular. However, our awareness of our positionality, discussed and reflected upon throughout

the study, helped us make 'informed language-related choices' (Rolland et al., 2023, p. 645) when analysing and reporting our findings.

It should be mentioned that all of the interviews were conducted in English, which was an LX for the main researcher and most of the clients. This language choice may have influenced the manner of expression and presentation of some subjects. However, since we aimed for as heterogenous a sample as possible, within the scope of this project, it would not be physically possible to carry out the interviews in each participant's L1. The team had regular reflective discussions and worked on the coding and themes in a cooperative fashion.

## 2.1 | Participants

There were 31 participants (26 female and 5 male) aged 23–56 years ( $M=34.2$ ) involved in the study. The participants were found via references from the psychotherapists involved in the other stages of this project and via social media. The selection criteria for participating in the study were as follows: (1) being multilingual, (2) having experience with engaging in therapy in a foreign language and (3) participating in therapy with a certified therapist/counsellor. One of the participants was excluded from the sample due to their therapy experience not being with a certified therapist but with an intern. A more detailed description of the participants' languages is given in [Appendix 2](#).

We are aware that our sample of mostly female multilingual clients does not represent the general population. Therefore, our results must be interpreted with caution.

## 2.2 | Procedure

The interviews were conducted in English, which had been agreed on with each participant beforehand. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards by the first author. The anonymised transcripts were then rechecked against the audio-recording by a third party to ensure data accuracy. The resulting data were analysed using thematic analysis—a method widely used in this line of research (e.g., Johal, 2017; Nguyen, 2014) due to its versatility and consistent structure.

TABLE 1 Main themes and subthemes.

Theme	Subtheme
Multilingualism and emotion	Client's perception of their choice for their preferred language of emotion. Client's sense of emotional distance in L1/LX.
Language and culture	Client's view on connection between language and culture. Linguistic and cultural considerations in multilingual therapy.
Client's perceptions of their identity in L1/LX	

When applying thematic analysis, the six steps suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 87) were followed, namely:

1. familiarising yourself with the data;
2. generating initial codes;
3. searching for themes;
4. reviewing themes;
5. defining and naming themes; and
6. producing the report.

## 2.3 | Coding

The coding process was facilitated by the MaxQDA software. However, the main annotations and re-evaluation of the themes were mostly performed manually in accordance with the main principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the process of forming a code book, we constantly reviewed the emerging themes and subthemes, which contributed to increasing coding validity.

## 2.4 | Ethical considerations

This research received ethics approval from the University of Groningen (project number: 83879863, 2021). All participants submitted their full consent before the interviews.

## 3 | RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the data yielded three main themes and four subthemes. The themes included *multilingualism and emotion*, *language and culture*, and *client's perceptions of their identity*. [Table 1](#) below shows the full list of the themes and subthemes.

Below, we will discuss each of the themes and their subthemes, illustrating them with quotes from the interviews and embedding them within the theoretical framework on the subject. The quotes of the participants are presented in their original form. For privacy reasons, all quotes were anonymised and pseudonymised. By L1, we mean a language/languages acquired before the age of 3, while LX is used to refer to a language learnt later in life.

### 3.1 | Multilingualism and emotion

The participants in our sample reflected on the connection between the language they speak and the emotion they experience. In particular, they spoke about how they make a language choice when expressing emotions, and the emotional distance they felt when L1 or LX was used in therapy. This theme therefore covers the clients' emotional language choices for therapy, and their perceptions of emotional distance in L1/LX.

#### 3.1.1 | Client's perception of their choices for their preferred language(s) of emotion

Strong emotion (e.g., anger and frustration) is often reported to be expressed in one's L1. As an example, one participant said, '...I had a reaction because [...] I had an appointment and I was like, oh, I was stuck somewhere, yeah, and I will say things [swear] in Creole [L1]' (P3). Choosing L1 for a strong emotion even occurs when the participants considered LX as their preferred language for therapy. In the literature, such a language choice is sometimes attributed to a stronger emotional intensity in L1 (e.g., Burck, 2011), different sociocultural norms in L1/LX (e.g., Dewaele, 2008) or differences in how L1/LX was acquired (e.g., Pavlenko, 2003). In the studies on emotional language preference, there is a prevalent view that multilinguals choose the language(s) they acquired earlier chronologically (e.g., Dewaele, 2008, 2013). Indeed, retrieving certain affective states (e.g., when hearing childhood songs) or memories (e.g., talking about a family conflict when one was younger) is often reported to be easier in L1 (e.g., Verkerk et al., 2021). Sometimes, such a preference is ascribed to a lower proficiency (e.g., Johal, 2017); however, this is not always the case. As Dewaele (2011) showed in his study, which included 386 multilinguals with a reported similar proficiency in their L1 and LX, the participants still preferred L1 for their emotion communication. In line with this, our participants explained their language preference for L1 for strong emotion was because expressing a strong emotion was not common in their culture, they were more emotionally close to their L1, or because they acquired their LX later in life.

However, LX can also become a preferred language for emotional expression. One reason for that, according to our participants' perceptions, was the increased *frequency of use* of their LX English. As one of the interviewees said, 'I'm used to speaking English, so I have more uh it's it's easier for me to express myself uhm in these days in English' (P2). Preference for LX English can go as far as it becoming one's language of a new beginning. Two of the participants mentioned that their 'recovery is in English' (P11) and that it 'reminds me more of my (<<) therapy sessions and of the things that I want to work on' (P4). In his study with 1459 multilinguals, Dewaele (2008) showed that, for some participants, emotional weight of an emotional phrase ('I love you') was stronger in LX. The author attributed it to a participant's 'stronger socialisation in LX, which implies frequent use of the LX over a prolonged

period with multiple interlocutors' (p. 1774). Adding to these data, our results may suggest the possibility of an LX becoming one's preferred language of emotion over time.

Another curious finding of our study is that one's preference for LX as a language of emotion can be dictated by *linguistic properties of a language*. Such a language choice could stem not from one's personal experience, or experience in therapy, but from specific systemic properties of L1 or LX. For instance, one's LX English may be grammatically simpler than their L1, or speaking LX in therapy can offer an opportunity to practise it. When it comes to linguistic properties of a language, speaking LX in therapy might actually be helpful in terms of a client's clarity of expression. According to one participant, the fact that they were forced to speak LX English in therapy allowed them to express themselves in a more structured way. In their words, 'I mean, in French, I'm using very complicated structures and sentences and sometimes I just may lose the message more than in English where I have to be really basic and, you know' (P20).

As for speaking LX in therapy in order to practise that particular language, for one of the participants, the 'benefit outweighs potential risk of maybe misunderstanding that that usually does not affect the the the outcomes...' (P5). However, it is important for the therapist to understand the potential risks of using LX for this reason. In the case when a therapist suggested that one participant should speak LX Dutch in therapy, the participant felt their needs were not heard:

...that's not place and time to practise a language. So this already was for me a signal that she [therapist]'s on a different page. Like, I'm here really falling apart and she's suggesting practicing my Dutch skills.  
(P11)

In line with other research (e.g., Burck, 2011; Rolland et al., 2021), it is often the therapist who can influence the language choice and use in their work with multilingual clients. Bager-Charleson et al. (2017) demonstrated in their study with therapists that listening to the client's language needs in their narrative may promote better work on some emotional memories and cultural concerns.

To sum up our findings in this section, even though lower proficiency remains a strong factor for emotional language choice, it does not always predict opting for the L1 in emotional expression. Additionally, even if the L1 is often a language of the most intense emotions, resorting to LX may happen if one was raised in an environment which disapproves of, for example, cursing in general or cursing among girls. Finally, even if one acquired LX later in life, one can get used to expressing emotions in it over time.

#### 3.1.2 | Client's sense of emotional distance in L1/LX

In their language choice for emotional expression, a client's perception of feeling more emotionally distant to their L1 or LX was mentioned often enough to make it another subtheme in this section.

Based on our clients' views, how close they feel to the language of therapy was an important factor that influenced the clients' language choices for emotional expression. It is not only linguistic, but also emotional fluency in the language of therapy that allows a client to express their emotions the way they need. To illustrate this, one participant said, 'I find very important in therapy to be able to make yourself clear and navigate through your own emotions, uh I would not have been able to sufficiently well do in Dutch' (P7). Indeed, feeling emotionally close to the language used to resolve certain emotional issues in therapy seems to be crucial. For one of the clients in our study, lack of emotional connection with LX may even have contributed to a misdiagnosis:

...she [therapist] was trying to find out how did I feel about things and I came with very superficial Dutch words, yeah, and I didn't have the more nuanced Dutch words to describe emotion. That's what I think happened in that case [misdiagnosis].

(P29)

Talking about one's feelings and emotions in L1 may not be easy, and it may be even more difficult when one is forced to do it in a foreign language. There have been multiple reports that speaking LX in therapy may create emotional distance (e.g., Burck, 2011; Kokaliari et al., 2013), which may be regarded as an obstacle to the desired therapeutic outcome. Ortigosa-Beltrán et al. (2023), for instance, investigated the relationship between post-traumatic symptoms and emotional reactivity among 115 participants who spoke Spanish as their L1 and had a high level of English LX proficiency. All of the participants had a traumatic or a highly negative childhood event that they had to describe and then rate the levels of painfulness and interference on a scale from 0 to 10. The results demonstrated that the language influenced the intensity of traumatic symptoms and their emotional load for the client. Therefore, being aware of how emotional intensity of the language of therapy might influence its course and outcome is undoubtedly useful.

Having a rich vocabulary and the proficiency to describe feelings with high fidelity in a nuanced way is one of the affordances of L1. However, this might also come with a cost in traumatic settings. LX can then be used to provide a buffer. In the words of one of the participants, when the conversation with the therapist became too emotional, 'I would use that kind of a little cushion [LX] to get to the point and [...] protect myself' (P7). Another participant spoke in a similar vein:

I have, I mean, a not very nice family past, which is very related to Dutch [L1], uhm which sometimes makes expressing myself in Dutch harder. [...] And it isn't that I can't say the same in Dutch, it just has a different emotional load for me, uh which for some reason makes having therapy in English [LX] easier than in Dutch.

(P12)

These statements reflect what one of the therapists interviewed by Verkerk et al. (2021) mentioned. That therapist noticed that their clients sometimes found it easier to speak LX in therapy since their L1 was connected with negative experience or a trauma.

However, speaking a less emotionally fluent language in therapy could also prove beneficial by prompting therapist and client to pay attention to other modes besides language. Like one of our participants stated, despite not using as rich a vocabulary as in their L1, they are 'able to tell the feeling uh to to be transferred to the person in front of' them through non-verbal channels (e.g., facial expression) (P30). This is also something that some therapists said in the study by Verkerk et al. (2021). They reported that low fluency did not always become an obstacle, but rather gave them and their client an opportunity to be more aware of non-verbal signs.

Thus, if a client of multilingual psychotherapy chooses a particular language to talk about sensitive topics, or switches to L1/LX when discussing a particular subject, it might be useful to be aware of the possible reasons for this. Perhaps a client wants to create a distance between their experience and its high emotional load. On the contrary, some clients might use some encouragement to use their L1 to achieve emotional resolution through eliminating emotional distance. Lastly, correct assessment of a client's emotional fluency may help contribute to a better understanding of their condition, and even to a higher accuracy of diagnosis.

## 3.2 | Language and culture

When discussing language choices, we cannot talk about language alone. Sometimes, when a multilingual client expresses an emotion in their LX, a therapist might not necessarily interpret its conceptual meaning correctly. For instance, the word 'angry' in Russian has two equivalents, which convey different emotional states. Additionally, some emotional concepts (e.g., shame) may entail different cultural connotations. For most of our participants, language and culture are intrinsically intertwined, influencing their perceptions of the therapeutic process. Therefore, this section covers another significant factor that influences clients' language choices in therapy, namely their language and culture. We will discuss the participants' views on the connection between language and culture, as well as what cultural considerations were important for our clients for therapy.

### 3.2.1 | Client's view on connection between language and culture

Most of the participants expressed a strong belief that language and culture are intertwined. Clients' views of culture and language often reflected the socio-constructivist stance. This means that they viewed multilingualism as a fluid concept that can change over time, while their cultural background could also undergo certain transformations due to travelling and staying in other countries for a longer



period. As one participant put it, 'I always see language as a social [...] construct in a lot of ways, and it's always tied to some kind of culture' (P31). According to another participant, '...language (<) is a vehicle of culture' (P18). A common theme among the participants' comments is that language and culture are difficult, if not impossible, to separate. Additionally, one participant stated that 'people who can speak a couple of languages, uhm has uh an understanding and uh knowledge of the different seas of uh expressing your feelings and emotions between the cultures' (P30).

The way the clients spoke about their languages, especially about acquiring LX English, resonates with the notion of 'translanguaging' described by Wei (2018). In this work, performing a language is a multimodal process which also involves participation in the culture the language is a 'vehicle' of. As the author defines it, translanguaging is 'transcending the traditional divides between linguistic and non-linguistic cognitive and semiotic systems' (Wei, 2018, p. 20), which was what our participants described in their own words.

One interesting finding in our study is that sometimes participants felt sorry or even ashamed that their LX had taken over L1. Sometimes, such an attitude was only connected with code-switching (i.e., using words or sentences of one language within another), and at other times, it was related to a general attitude to emotional expression in LX. For instance, in terms of code-switching, one participant reported that:

in Polish, it's rather uh frowned upon or it's uh (<) uhm interpreted as you're being a bit (<) showing off or bragging off, it's it's it has a negative connotation to it. That's, oh, come on, you lived for a second abroad and now you cannot find Polish words, in that sense.  
(P11)

When it comes to emotional expression overall, another participant said, '...it's just sad that within, let's say, my relationship, even though I can speak in Arabic [L1], it doesn't come naturally to me [...] when I wanna express myself with love or or a certain strong emotion' (P9). Attitudes towards code-switching among multilinguals have been studied within the field of linguistics (e.g., Diaz, 2004), and there have been sufficient data on how certain monoglossic ideologies prevalent in some cultures may (negatively) influence one's perception of code-switching (e.g., Dewaele & Wei, 2014). Our data support this research by showing how the clients may choose their language of emotion in therapy under the influence of the culture they were brought up in. On the contrary, some of the data also expand on the language attitudes in connection with emotional expression in multilingual psychotherapy.

The last point our participants made in relation to language and culture was how stereotypes and cultural differences may play out in therapy. For one participant, it would be difficult to imagine having therapy in L1 due to cultural differences. This participant has lived abroad long enough for their attitudes and values to change. In their words:

...culturally speaking, uhm Russia and the United States are uhm very, very different on (!every!) single level, like parents relate parents-children relationships, uhm romantic relationships, uhm expectations, norms, uhm its values, everything is just so different. And I think it would definitely affect uhm therapy.  
(P6)

Another participant described how a potential challenge of a cultural clash may reveal itself through language:

...in English, if someone doesn't want to do something, they wouldn't say, I don't want to do it. They'll just say, mmm, not so sure about that. Whereas a Dutch person is more likely to say, *oh nee, dat wil ik niet*, I don't want to do that. And in in in English, there's this idea that if you refuse something to somebody, then they lose face, it's uh it's embarrassing. Whereas even the word like 'embarrassing,' there's no complete translation of that in Dutch, because they're much less likely to uh to feel it, I think.  
(P18)

Apparently, for some multilingual clients, the linguistic and cultural influences in therapy and their dynamic nature are especially salient. Such fluidity of notions of language and culture is predominantly mentioned in studies on linguistics and education (e.g., Koyama & Kasper, 2022). However, in the field of multilingual psychotherapy, in which language and culture also play a significant role, this fluidity remains understudied. Our data add valuable insights to this area.

### 3.2.2 | Linguistic and cultural considerations in multilingual therapy

Multilingual clients seem to benefit from therapy with multilingual psychotherapists. Clients who speak more than one language believe that a multilingual therapist will understand them better not only in terms of the language, but also experience and knowledge. That is why some clients deliberately search for a multilingual therapist. For instance, one participant reported the following:

So I would rather my therapist to speak a couple of languages, not because we will speak all of them there, but in the background, just knowledge-wise, then she would be more able to grasp the feeling of uh of uh what I just explained.  
(P30)

Apparently, it is important for the client to know that their therapist understands what it is like to operate different languages in their mind. How multilingual clients manage their languages in a

therapeutic context is described in a paper by Iannaco (2009). The author described how her clients and she herself experience some linguistic challenges when it comes to symbolisation and its transformation through the process of translation. The author concludes that multilingualism is a relevant element in a therapeutic room, and that becoming more aware of a multilingual's internal linguistic processes is important for a fruitful communication.

Besides seeking a therapist who can understand their linguistic peculiarities, multilingual clients also find it important to take a therapist's cultural profile into account. A cultural match is what mattered in our accounts. What the clients mostly meant by this was finding a therapist who could understand their customs and had similar life experience. As an example, one of the participants said, '...most of, like, my uh anxiety uh comes also from living in Poland. [...] So, for example, when speaking with the therapy therapists in Polish, that they can immediately uh get what I mean' (P16). Another quote illustrates the importance of shared experience:

I think because of my therapist and she was born in, like, army family, she had travel, like, often. So like she [...] no, sorry, he he told me, look, he understand, like like, different hardship in, like, living in foreign country.

(P8)

Indeed, as some research (e.g., Nguyen, 2014; Owen et al., 2011) shows, cultural match can frequently promote better therapeutic alliance (i.e., understanding and trust between therapist and client).

However, having therapy with a psychotherapist from the same culture does not always prove to be the best choice for the client. Multilingual clients may become apprehensive about the stereotypes that a therapist of the same cultural background might bring to the sessions. Additionally, cultural assumptions and bias could come to the surface. For example, according to one participant:

...I kind of expect maybe Russian-speaking therapists to be more judgmental than English-speaking therapists. Uh so I think that kind of (<) prejudice or bias makes it kind of uh more comfortable for me to, to express these things in English than in Russian, for example.

(P5)

Sometimes, a therapist's knowledge about the client's culture might go a little too far. As two of the participants in our study noted, when a therapist is familiar with their client's culture, it may lead to quick assumptions and generalisations. One participant said:

...with my uh Dutch therapist, I think sometimes uh her knowing cultural background sometimes, actually, is it not a so positive thing, because she kind of, I feel

like she's boxing me sometimes. Like, okay, but I don't fit in that box...

(P10)

The current literature on the subject of cultural match in the therapeutic setting (e.g., Bager-Charleson et al., 2017; Ibaraki & Hall, 2014) speaks about the importance of raising awareness about one's assumptions and biases. For instance, some multilingual therapists in Verkerk et al. (2021) emphasised the significance of being more aware of their own assumptions when not everything discussed in the room could be translated. Those therapists did their best to adapt their approach not only linguistically, but also culturally, in order to meet their clients' needs in the best way. They also stressed that their awareness and adaptations became more salient in the multilingual/multicultural context.

Looking at the general trends in clients' cultural and linguistic concerns in multilingual psychotherapy, it seems possible to draw a few tentative conclusions. First of all, when it comes to a cultural match, in many cases, clients seek therapists who have a similar cultural background and/or life experience. It makes them feel as if they are in the same boat with the therapist and that they are better heard and understood. For this reason, multilingual clients also often search for a multilingual therapist. It should be added, though, that cultural knowledge must be treated with caution in order to avoid quick assumptions and biases on both sides of multilingual psychotherapy. Overall, being more aware of cultural and linguistic dynamics in therapy with multilingual clients proves to be beneficial to all parties involved.

### 3.3 | Client's perceptions of their identity in L1/LX

We have seen by now how multilingual clients reflected upon their emotional expression in L1/LX in therapy, as well as what linguistic and cultural considerations they found important in multilingual psychotherapy. The final major theme that arose in the interviews was the relationship between a client's languages and their identity. In particular, how they constructed and performed different sides of their identity, depending on the language they spoke.

A common thread is that it *does* feel different for most of the clients to *be* in their L1 or LX. At least some part of our participants' identities changed when another language was involved. Sometimes such a change even felt as if the client had 'two characters in [their] head' depending on the language they were speaking (P8). One participant felt more free emotionally when using LX, 'because part of me is not really myself – I'm speaking a different language' (P21). This feeling like a different person was not perceived as related to the client's linguistic proficiency, since they were quite fluent in LX. Some parts of the client's identity still remained more authentic, nuanced and expressive in their L1.

Even when the participants were highly proficient in LX and considered it their preferred language, humour was something that



they could only fully express in their L1. In the words of one of such participants,

in Indonesian [L1], uh I feel like I'm more uh expressive, expressive and uh funnier. I'm funnier in Indonesian than in both uh English [LX] and Dutch [LX], or even Japanese [LX].

(P14)

Reports of feeling different in different languages among multilinguals have been present in previous research (e.g., Carmen Calvo-Rodríguez, 2021; Dewaele & Nakano, 2013) and our data speak in their support. Some participants (multilingual therapists) in a study by Gulina and Dobrolioubova (2018) talked about their identity changes when working with their clients in L1/LX. The therapists reflected on feeling more authentic and more free when working in their L1, but they also spoke about feeling more professional when speaking their LX because it gave them a sense of clearer boundaries. For one of the therapists, having less nuance in LX was an acceptable price for having everything 'clear and well defined' (p. 10). However, what might be acceptable for the therapist in the room is not necessarily what the client might need. For most of the clients in our sample, feeling authentic in their emotional expression was crucial in multilingual psychotherapy.

Clients' perceptions of how their identity had been constructed and shaped over time were curious to observe from the point of view of language and its role in this process. For instance, our participants have had some experience of living abroad and acquiring and improving their LX(s). Some of them stated that leading a life that involved moving across countries had a major impact on their identity. This point can be illustrated by the words of one participant: '...when you travel, I think people don't really realize how much your identity literally changes and you really connect your being with that. And that comes with your expression naturally, at least for me, that's how it has been' (P4). The dynamic nature of one's linguistic profile in the course of travelling and/or living abroad is what permeates clients' perceptions of their multilingualism. For instance, one participant said,

I feel languages have changed me. If I would only speak Dutch and been treated by a Dutch therapist, sure, but I'm not just solely Dutch anymore. These other languages are part of me, part of my identity.

(P12)

Apparently, for multilinguals, the dynamic changes that happen within one's identity in the course of life may become more salient due to the changes in their linguistic repertoire. In her explorative study, Fianco (2022, p. 145) asked herself the very questions that multilinguals are sometimes confronted with: 'After thirty years abroad, am I still Italian? Am I English? Am I both?'. Working as a multilingual therapist, the author reflected on the changes her beliefs might undergo over time and how, just like her sense of self, they

'also live and "become" through language' (p. 145). This may come to the surface more vividly if one's language surrounding changes: one's bubbly, expressive L1 side is not activated as often as before, being gradually replaced with a more controlled and emotionally distant LX. Nonetheless, these changes may balance out with time; they may just become more apparent for those whose life involves more than one language.

The question of why many multilinguals report feeling different depending on their language remains open in the corresponding research. However, if looking at the aforementioned view that language and culture are closely related, a theory of *cultural frame switching* (CFS) brought up in some studies (e.g., Paget, 2023) seems to be a plausible explanation. When one switches a language, they also 'switch' to a different set of linguistic and cultural devices, from metaphors and sayings to values and flexibility of emotional expression. For example, Koven (1998), in her seminal study on French-Portuguese bilinguals' sense of self, described how participants' narratives changed in terms of performing their identity. Through her ethnographic research that involved exploring the participants' narratives of their personal experience, the author illustrated in her analysis how 'in interaction with other bilingual peers who share these speakers' linguistically invocable cultural frames', the differences in identity performance arose (p. 436). Indeed, in accordance with the research and our data, when a certain language is used to perform one's identity, its linguistic peculiarities may be intertwined with cultural nuances, which may entail identity shifts or more or less subtle changes in how one presents their emotional side.

Overall, what we saw in our data is that changing language may lead to changing one's persona, to a varying degree. It may also bring certain cultural switches, both in one's linguistic and personal forms of expression. A general trend among our participants is their view of multilingualism as a dynamic, flexible and integral part of their identity.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of our study was to shed light on clients' perceptions of the role multilingualism might play in the therapeutic process. In addition to this, we aimed to offer psychotherapists some insights into factors that drive their clients' language choices for emotional expression during multilingual psychotherapy. The interview data revealed three major themes that participants found significant in relation to influencing their language choice in therapy. First of all, multilingual clients see a clear connection between their emotion communication and the language they speak. A perhaps curious finding was that participants' language choice was sometimes different for different emotions. Experiencing a strong emotion (e.g., anger) often happened in L1, even if LX was claimed to be a preferred language. Some studies in the area of multilingual psychotherapy (e.g., Burck, 2011; Dewaele, 2008) investigated multilinguals' language choice for emotional expression. The results may

explain some of our findings, such as opting for a language with a stronger emotional intensity. To our knowledge, though, there have been barely any studies in the field of multilingual psychotherapy which investigate multilingual clients' different language choices for different emotions. Therefore, our findings may be of particular interest.

In support of some recent findings (e.g., Verkerk et al., 2021), our data also suggest that language fluency does not always force a multilingual to choose a more proficient language as their preferred one. Such a choice might be driven by a higher emotional fluency due to building significant relations, a growing emotional bond or a sociocultural permittance.

Related to emotional fluency, a different degree of an emotional distance in L1/LX was another important factor underlying a client's language choice. Some researchers (e.g., Cook & Dewaele, 2022; Ibarra, 2021) have spoken about the importance of a closer or more distant emotional connection with the language in therapy due to its influence on emotional resolution of traumatic events. Creating an emotional distance by using LX in therapy to decrease the emotional load of a traumatic event might help some clients to start narrating their story. On the contrary, encouraging other multilingual clients to switch to their L1 might help them to achieve emotional release. Our data emphasise how important it may be for both therapist and client to be aware of the language the trauma occurred in.

Besides linguistic considerations, managing cultural ones is often necessary in multilingual psychotherapy. Our interviewees spoke about the significance of a cultural match with their therapist. Most of the participants in the sample mentioned a tight connection between culture and language, thus confirming the reports in other studies (e.g., Chang & Berk, 2009; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2009) in the field of multilingual psychotherapy. When a therapist had a similar cultural background and/or life experience, most of the clients reported feeling better heard and more understood. However, even though a cultural match was generally preferred among our participants, what might be of particular interest is that, for some of them, it was important to find a therapist of a different cultural background. These participants claimed that, in case of a cultural match, there might be more bias involved, and not only on the therapist's side, but on their own, too. Therefore, our data add to the current research that it is not only therapists that should trace their own assumptions and biases, but clients as well.

Furthermore, a complex relationship between culture and language also manifested itself in some participants' attitudes to their linguistic choice. For example, there was a negative attitude towards code-switching expressed in our interviews. The participants attributed their reluctance to switch languages to the culture connected with their L1. It is not uncommon in studies on monoglossic and polyglossic cultures to talk about a social disapproval of mixing and/or switching languages. To the best of our knowledge, however, such studies are predominantly performed in the areas of education (e.g., Fitriati & Wardani, 2020) and sociolinguistics (e.g., Albury, 2020). Our research adds another dimension to the studies on language attitudes by placing this subject within the context

of emotional expression in multilingual psychotherapy. As our data showed, cultural and linguistic stereotypes might change over time, making it uncomfortable or even impossible for a client to have therapy in L1.

Closely related to the notions of culture and language was clients' perceptions of their identity in L1/LX. Feeling like a different person depending on the language they speak was a common trend among those participants who spoke about their experience of their self. They often mentioned that they had felt more authentic, expressive and nuanced in their L1, which is consistent with what the data has shown in some other recent studies (e.g., Al-Mahroos & Di Braccio, 2022; Rolland et al., 2021). When placed in a psychotherapeutic context, feeling authentic in relation to emotional expression appears to be important in facilitating the healing process. The same could be applied when our participants spoke about the fluidity of their identity as a result of international experience. Not only did our clients express themselves differently because of the language change, but they also underwent certain sociocultural transformations that influenced their identity structure.

Finally, taking into account how tightly language is connected to culture, according to our participants and what the current science says (e.g., Paget, 2023), the changes one's identity experiences when changing the language may be due to CFS. In their study with 60 Persian-English bilinguals, Rezapour and Zanjirani (2020) demonstrated how levels of certain personality traits (e.g., agreeableness and openness) were different in each of the participants' languages. Their findings speak in support of language being an influential cue for CFS. Among our participants, we also observed some remarks on how different personality features were activated in a particular language. This finding certainly poses an interesting question for researchers in the field of multilingual psychotherapy.

In a world with forced mobility, in which many people with diverse language profiles seek urgent psychological support, it is vital for multilingual psychotherapists to attune to their clients' linguistic and cultural needs. Raising awareness of how clients choose their emotional language, how their languages reflect their culture and how their identity manifests itself in different languages will help facilitate a smoother therapeutic process and a more beneficial outcome.

#### 4.1 | Limitations

It should be noted that our study is not without some limitations. First of all, our participants were mostly found via targeted advertising on particular pages (e.g., expat communities) on Facebook, which makes our sample somewhat biased towards individuals with international experience. Therefore, our participants may have already been more aware of certain linguistic and cultural dynamics in multilingual psychotherapy.

Additionally, our study used the self-reported data from the multilingual clients. Interviewing therapist-client dyads might have brought more methodologically valid results.

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study demonstrated that multilingualism may have an impact on the process and the outcome of psychotherapy that involves more than one language in the room. Our participants' data on their perceptions of the intricate relationship between multilingualism and emotion, language and culture, as well as language and identity, have confirmed some findings in the area of multilingual psychotherapy. Furthermore, our study contributes to the field by showing some new insights into the fluidity of multilingual clients' language profiles, sociocultural perceptions and their sense of self.

Future research could benefit from investigating different language choice for different emotions. This may stimulate multilingual therapists to raise the question of language choice in the room with a multilingual client. In agreement with Verkerk et al. (2021), inviting a client to use other languages they speak during therapy may promote a better therapeutic alliance. Additionally, the concept of translanguaging, which is applied in education and sociolinguistics, may be investigated in a multilingual therapeutic setting. Knowing how emotional expression may differ due to the dynamic nature of linguistic and cultural acquisition may allow psychotherapists to gain a better perspective of their multilingual clients' narratives. Finally, a potential relationship between identity shift and CFS could be investigated in more depth in order to map out how different personality traits may get activated when a multilingual client changes the language.

In conclusion, both therapists' and clients' languages play an essential role in multilingual psychotherapy. The findings of the current study and recent research in the field may provide therapists and clients with more tools to ensure a better rapport and even prevent misdiagnoses. No matter how challenging it may be to work with people who have been through highly emotional events overall, taking into account their linguistic and cultural profiles appears to be increasingly more valuable for all interested parties to achieve the best results possible.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors report no conflict of interest.

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

All participants were sent an information letter and consent form before agreeing to participate in this study. All participants gave their consent voluntarily.

### ORCID

Leila Verkerk  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1665-3906>

### REFERENCES

Albury, N. (2020). 18 Language attitudes and ideologies on linguistic diversity. In A. Schalley & S. Eisenclas (Eds.), *Handbook of home language maintenance and development: Social and affective factors* (pp. 357–376). De Gruyter Mouton.

Al-Mahroos, Z., & Di Braccio, M. (2022). Language as power in the therapy room: A study of bilingual (Arabic–English) therapists' experiences. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 24, 106–118.

Bager-Charleson, S., Dewaele, J. M., Costa, B., & Kasap, Z. (2017). A multilingual outlook: Can awareness-raising about multilingualism affect therapists' practice? A mixed-method evaluation. *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 6(2), 1–21.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

Brinkmann, S. (2014). Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2, 277–299.

Burck, C. (2011). Living in several languages: Language, gender and identities. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 18(4), 361–378.

Carmen Calvo-Rodríguez, M. (2021). Monolingual therapists' views and experiences of working with multilingual clients: An exploratory study. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 21, 739–750.

Chang, D. F., & Berk, A. (2009). Making cross-racial therapy work: A phenomenological study of clients' experiences of cross-racial therapy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(4), 521–536.

Cook, S. R., & Dewaele, J. M. (2022). "The English language enables me to visit my pain." Exploring experiences of using a later-learned language in the healing journey of survivors of sexuality persecution. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 26(2), 125–139.

Costa, B., & Dewaele, J. M. (2012). Psychotherapy across languages: Beliefs, attitudes and practices of monolingual and multilingual therapists with their multilingual patients. *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 1(1), 18–40.

Dewaele, J.-M. (2008). The emotional weight of I love you in multilinguals' languages. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40(10), 1753–1780.

Dewaele, J.-M. (2011). The differences in self-reported use and perception of the L1 and L2 of maximally proficient bi- and multilinguals: A quantitative and qualitative investigation. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 208, 25–51.

Dewaele, J.-M. (2013). Multilingualism and emotions. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 1–7). Wiley-Blackwell.

Dewaele, J. M., & Nakano, S. (2013). Multilinguals' perceptions of feeling different when switching languages. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34(2), 107–120.

Dewaele, J. M., & Wei, L. (2014). Attitudes towards code-switching among adult mono- and multilingual language users. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 35(3), 235–251.

Diaz, C. P. (2004). What do bilinguals think about their code-switching? *Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada*, 3, 146–157.

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), 314–321.

Fianco, S. (2022). Multilingualism and psychotherapy: Are meaning and identity hijacked by the structure of language? My personal experience. *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, 33(1), 138–149.

Fitriati, A., & Wardani, M. M. S. (2020). Language attitudes and language choice among students in Yogyakarta: A case study at Universitas Sanata Dharma. *International Journal of Humanity Studies*, 3(2), 239–250.

Gulina, M., & Dobrolioubova, V. (2018). One language and two mother tongues in the consulting room: Dilemmas of a bilingual psychotherapist. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 34(1), 3–24.

Iannaco, G. (2009). Wor(l)ds in translation – Mother tongue and foreign language in psychodynamic practice. *Psychodynamic Practice*, 15(3), 261–274.

Ibaraki, A. Y., & Hall, G. C. N. (2014). The components of cultural match in psychotherapy. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 33(10), 936–953.

Ibarra, N. R. (2021). A meeting of languages: English-based trauma and Spanish language variations. In *Bilingualism, culture, and social justice in family therapy* (pp. 55–60). Springer.

Johal, J. (2017). "No one ever speaks about it": A qualitative investigation exploring the experiences of multilingual counsellors in practice. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 17(4), 291–300.

- Kokaliari, E., Catanzarite, G., & Berzoff, J. (2013). It is called a mother tongue for a reason: A qualitative study of therapists' perspectives on bilingual psychotherapy – Treatment implications. *Smith College Studies In Social Work*, 83(1), 97–118.
- Koven, M. E. (1998). Two languages in the self/the self in two languages: French-Portuguese bilinguals' verbal enactments and experiences of self in narrative discourse. *Ethos*, 26(4), 410–455.
- Koyama, J., & Kasper, J. (2022). Transworlding and translanguaging: Negotiating and resisting monoglossic language ideologies, policies, and pedagogies. *Linguistics and Education*, 70, 101010. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2021.101010>
- Nguyen, B. P. (2014). Identification: A qualitative study of the experiences of bilingual therapists with their monolingual and bilingual clients. *Psychodynamic Practice*, 20(4), 340–355.
- Or-Gordon, E. (2021). Therapeutic mother tongue and its implications on the work of polyglot psychotherapists. *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 10(1), 1–26.
- Ortigosa-Beltrán, I., Jaén, I., & García-Palacios, A. (2023). Processing negative autobiographical memories in a foreign language. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1133915>
- Owen, J., Leach, M. M., Wampold, B., & Rodolfa, E. (2011). Client and therapist variability in clients' perceptions of their therapists' multicultural competencies. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(1), 1–9.
- Paget, A. (2023). Lost in translation: A look into multilingualism's effect on personality and identity. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5n91c5g4>
- Pavlenko, A. (2003). "I feel clumsy speaking Russian": L2 influence on L1 in narratives of Russian L2 users of English. In V. Cook (Ed.), *Effects of the second language on the first* (pp. 32–61). Multilingual Matters.
- Rezapour, R., & Zanjirani, S. (2020). Bilingualism and personality shifts: Different personality traits in Persian-English bilinguals shifting between two languages. *Iranian Journal of Learning & Memory*, 3(10), 25–32.
- Rolland, L., Costa, B., & Dewaele, J. M. (2021). Negotiating the language (s) for psychotherapy talk: A mixed methods study from the perspective of multilingual clients. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 21(1), 107–117.
- Rolland, L., Dewaele, J.-M., & Costa, B. (2017). Multilingualism and psychotherapy: Exploring multilingual clients' experiences of language practices in psychotherapy. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 14(1), 69–85.
- Rolland, L., King, H. M., & Lorette, P. (2023). Methodological implications of participant and researcher multilingualism: Making language dynamics visible. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 44(8), 645–656.
- Santiago-Rivera, A. L., Altarriba, J., Poll, N., Gonzalez-Miller, N., & Cragun, C. (2009). Therapists' views on working with bilingual Spanish-English speaking clients: A qualitative investigation. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 40, 436–443.
- Verkerk, L., Backus, A., Faro, L., Dewaele, J. M., & Das, E. (2021). Language choice in psychotherapy of multilingual clients. *Language and Psychoanalysis*, 10(2), 1–22.
- Verkerk, L., Fuller, J. M., Huiskes, M., & Schüppert, A. (2023). Expression and interpretation of emotions in multilingual psychotherapy: A literature review. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 23, 617–626.
- Wei, L. (2018). Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(1), 9–30.

**How to cite this article:** Verkerk, L., Fuller, J. M., Huiskes, M., & Schüppert, A. (2024). 'My recovery is in English': Clients' language choices in multilingual psychotherapy. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 24, 949–961. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12769>

## APPENDIX 1

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MULTILINGUAL CLIENTS

#### MAIN QUESTIONS

##### Language history

1. Which languages do you speak?
2. If to draw a timeline, at what age did you start learning/acquiring your languages? How did you acquire them (e.g., at school, at home)? Which one(s) can you call your preferred language(s) now? Why?
3. If you feel an intense emotion (anger, love), which language(s) come(s) to the surface? Which language would you call your language of emotion?
4. Which language(s) do you use to communicate with your family? And with friends? In other social situations, for example, at a shop?
5. Now, let me ask you about your experience with therapy in your LX. Which language(s) do/did you use to communicate with your therapist? Who decided which language to use in sessions?
6. Did you know about the language choice in advance? If yes, how did you know that?
7. How do/did you feel in therapy if you speak/spoke a foreign language (not the language you normally prefer) with your therapist?
8. Have you ever had any difficulties communicating with your therapist because of the language? If so, what do you think they were caused by? Did they influence your work with the therapist? How? How were they resolved?

##### Linguistic phenomena (code-switching in particular) in therapy and personal life

9. Do you ever switch languages in your speech? If so, in which situations does it mostly happen? How does it make you feel to switch languages, or when other people do it?
  10. Do/did you ever switch languages during your sessions? If so, can you tell me when it happens/happened? And why do you think it happens/happened?
- NaN. Does/did your therapist ever switch language during your sessions? If so, when did/does it happen? Can you think why they do/did it?
- NaN. Did you ever notice that some topics were more/less difficult for you to discuss in your preferred language? What do/did you do if you experienced that in your therapy session?
- NaN. Have you ever felt more or less distant to your therapist because of the language?

##### Being a multilingual client

14. In terms of language, do you think it is different to have therapy with a monolingual or a multilingual therapist? If so, how? And is it different for a mono- and multilingual client? If so, how?
  15. Do you think it helps/helped you in your therapy that you speak more than one language? Why/Why not?
- NaN. What, if anything, can be challenging about having therapy in multiple languages?

## APPENDIX 2

## LANGUAGE PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Participant #	Nationality	L1	LX <sup>a</sup>	Language(s) of therapy
1	Ukrainian	Russian	Vietnamese, Ukrainian, English	English
2	Portuguese	Portuguese	English, Spanish, Dutch	English
3	Dutch	Creole (Cape Verde)	Dutch, Portuguese, English, German, Spanish, Creole (the Antilles)	English
4	Greek	Greek	English, Dutch	English
5	Russian	Russian	English, German, Dutch, Chinese	Russian, English, Dutch
6	Russian	Russian	English, French, Spanish, Italian	English
7	Serbian	Serbian	English, Dutch, Italian, Spanish	English, Dutch
8	Japanese	Japanese	English, Dutch	English, Japanese
9	Bulgarian	Bulgarian/Arabic	English, French, Russian, Dutch	English
10	Arabic	Lebanese Arabic	English, French, Dutch	English
11	Polish	Polish	English, Spanish, Italian, French, Dutch	Spanish, Dutch, Polish
12	Dutch	Dutch	English, German	Dutch, English, German
13	German	German	English	English
14	Indonesian	Indonesian	English, Japanese, Dutch	English, Indonesian
15	German	German	English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch	German, English
16	Polish	Polish	English	Polish, English
17	Georgian	Georgian/Russian	English, German, French	English
18	English	English	French, German, Dutch, Chinese, Thai	Dutch, English
19	Russian	Russian	English, German, Tartar, Dutch	Russian, English
20	French	French	English	English
21	Chinese	Mandarin Chinese	English, Japanese, Dutch	English
22	Congolese	French	Lingala, English, Italian, Spanish, Dutch	English, French
23	Greek	Greek	English, Spanish	English
24	Malaysian	Mandarin Chinese/ Hokkien	English, Malay, Dutch	English
26	Colombian	Spanish	English, French, Dutch	English
27	American	English	Filipino Tagalog, Spanish, Dutch	English, Dutch
28	American	English	Dutch	English, Dutch
29	Dutch	Dutch (till 1.5 y. o.)/ Bahasa Indonesia/ English	Hindi, Dutch	Dutch
30	Turkish	Turkish	English, Mandarin Chinese, German, Spanish	English
31	Chinese	Mandarin Chinese	Cantonese, English, French, Dutch	English

<sup>a</sup> Order of acquisition.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Leila Verkerk** is a doctoral student at the Center for Language and Cognition at the University of Groningen. She holds a double-major bachelor's degree in psychology and English language and literature from Kyiv Slavonic University in Kyiv, Ukraine, and a research master's degree in linguistics and communication sciences from Tilburg University. She is currently working on her doctoral project on emotion communication in multilingual psychotherapy.

**Janet M. Fuller** is a professor of language and society at the University of Groningen Department of European Languages and Cultures. She is a sociolinguist, discourse analyst and linguistic anthropologist with research interests in language ideologies and social identities, in particular in multilingual contexts.

**Mike Huiskes** is an associate professor at the University of Groningen Department of Communication and Information Studies. He is an expert on discourse and conversation analysis, multimodal communication and health communication. He takes an active part in joint activities and learning in the operation theatre and the development of communication skills in medical communication.

**Anja Schüppert** is an associate professor at the Center for Language and Cognition and the Department of European Languages and Cultures at the University of Groningen. She is a psycholinguist with expertise in receptive multilingualism, phonetics and Scandinavian languages.