

Abstract

The accommodation of gestural and verbal metaphors in psychotherapeutic interaction: metaphoric adaptation-processes between patient and therapist, studied in long-term-therapies. (working title)

With pictures one can build bridges between the unconscious and consciousness. What seems inexpressible can become utterable and comprehensible as a metaphor. Research on metaphors often cites Lakoff and Johnson. They achieved their breakthrough in 1980 with their book „Metaphors we live by“. They assume that human thought and action is based on metaphorical concepts. Metaphors are a popular object of study in psychology and psychotherapy. According to Buchholz (2008, in Lakoff/Johnson 2008: 9), our whole psychotherapeutic theory, but indeed even to a greater extent the practical language used in therapeutic dialogues, consists of metaphors, and therapeutic work consists of replacing dogmatic metaphors through others. What does therapeutic work really look like? Do metaphors become adjusted – and if so – how? Through accommodation? Does the therapist stimulate the patient with new schemata, until the patient adapts to the therapist? Who adapts to whom? Adaptation, respectively accommodation is the subject of the accommodation theory developed by Giles and his co-researchers (1991). The main idea of this theory is that interlocutors adapt their speech-style to each other, in order to create or maintain a positive personal and social identity. The adaptation occurs verbally (grammar, form, lexis), paraverbally (intonation), and nonverbally (proxemics, gesture, mimicry). This raises the following question: Do the metaphorical concepts of the therapist and patient adapt to each other - and do they express this not only verbally but also gesturally? Concerning “gesture”, I relate to Adam Kendon (2004) who considers as a gesture everything that is perceived as a conscious, intentional act and replaces or accompanies an utterance. Concerning the very young field of research “metaphoric gesture”, I relate on Cienky and Müller (2008). The study of verbal and gestural metaphors and the adaptation between patient and therapist are relevant fields of research providing not only important insights for the science of psychology, but for the therapeutic practice as well. Ideally, the results of this research project will enhance the resources of therapists as well as the understanding of how conversations proceed, and therefore reveal the connections between communication and the course of therapy.