Simona Theoharova (Universität Potsdam)

A summary of German youth commitment language: frequency of use and DARN-C categories of commitment utterances

Commitment is one of the central constructs in behavioral theory, which is intended to lead to change in behavior. Not only in Motivational Interviewing, it is crucial that the therapist recognizes his client's state of commitment. Depending on its strength and the way it is used, commitment often reveals subliminal signs for ambivalence which plays a big part in therapy. In the theoretical background, it still lacks a concrete link to language itself: which expressions concerning motivated behavior and the motivation to go for action are used in everyday life? Do the expressions differ in age, gender and wealth of people? In this preparatory study, commitment in German youth language was examined. One hundred and two teenagers and young adults (12-21 years old) where asked how often they use different commitment expressions in everyday life. They had to mark 129 expressions, e.g. 'I intend to do it'; 'I have to do it'; 'I am able to do it', on a 5-point Lickert-scale from 'never' to 'very often' used.

Of the utterances (usage Mean= 2.635; SD= 0.585; Min= 1.59; Max= 4.07), 39 revealed to be 'never' to 'rare' used by more than 60% of the participants. Only 17% where used 'very often' by more than 20% of the participants.

Concerning the frequency of using certain expressions, gender-specific significant differences appeared. Also younger participants used certain words less often than older ones. However, no significance was found regarding wealth and psychological impact (depression and eating disorders).

Additionally, all expressions where categorized into the DARN-C system, giving every expression one main category: either Desire, Ability, Reason, Readiness, Need or Commitment. Referring to the examples of commitment terms given before, the allotment would be as follows: to intend (Commitment); to have to (Need); to be able to (Ability). A cut-off was set to reduce the number of expressions for further studies. With the cut-off 'more than 50 % of the participants use this utterance less than sometimes' the set of expressions was reduced to 61. A notice to the expression's category was taken to avoid an uneven selection of expressions belonging mostly to one category. Having these limitations in mind, a new reduced set of 65 variables was formed.

Based on this variable set, a second study will be conducted in which the link between the strengths of commitment expressions to the stages of change will be examined.

Secondary literature:


