



## Ego State Trip or Ego State Trap: Unlocking Change Through Language

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### Abstract

The article introduces a proposal for a linguistic model that combines the concepts of linguistic determinism from Sapir-Whorf, linguistic constructivism from Delia, and transactional analysis. Assuming that thinking and feeling are dependent on language structure, we can create a matrix representing our understanding of reality, distributed between ego states on an axis of time to which particular transactions refer. This matrix can be utilised to further work with clients, providing a direction for enquiry. Exploring transactions in this way promotes a movement to the meta-communication level, which, in turn, aids clients to develop their Integrating Adult. The article presented a brief analysis of work with clients in terms of the ego state timeline model (ESTM) with reflections on the significance of language in shaping one's frame of reference, illustrated with practical examples of application.

### Key Words

transactional analysis, ego states, Ego State Time Model, languages, multilingual, communication

### Introduction

Language serves as the foundation of the societies in which we live, shaping cultural frameworks and facilitating socialisation and communication. It is challenging to envision life and functioning among people without language. Despite this, there is no complete agreement on how language should be regarded. In broad terms, language can be considered as a derivative of our consciousness, primarily serving as a channel of communication; alternatively it can be viewed as the foundation of our consciousness. In the former understanding, the focus is solely on the instrumental value of language in facilitating the achievement of goals. In the latter understanding, the assumption is that the structure of language can influence our *understanding* of goals and *how* we accomplish them. Transactional

analysis (TA) pays particular attention to language through the classification of transactions based on the concept of ego states (Berne, 1966), which give rise to transactional patterns that can be described, challenged and redirected in order to create conditions for healing, growth, learning and development. This article is going to offer an exploration of the impact of language on facilitating change from a linguistic, psychological as well as pragmatic perspective in the context of broad practice of TA.

### The Significance of Language

In the realm of psychology, one of the most prominent concepts emphasising the importance of language is the Sapir-Whorf linguistic determinism hypothesis (Hussein, 2012; Cibelli, Xu, Austerweil, Griffiths and Regier, 2016; Kay and Kempton 1984). This concept posits that the language we use at a semantic level shapes or limits the way we conceptualise the world. The hypothesis suggests that individuals using different languages will perceive reality differently to a significant extent. While the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis originated from the analysis of Native American languages, its validity is debated, with arguments both supporting and challenging it, including observations of cultural differences (Engle, 2016) and neuroimaging studies (Siok, Kay, Wang and Tan, 2009).

An intriguing argument in favour of the hypothesis is evident in the deaf community, where individuals using sign language may have limited proficiency in their surrounding spoken language. Deaf individuals often do not consider deafness a disability, and deaf parents may be sometimes displeased when a hearing child is born to them. Therefore, languages shapes experience and its structure influences one's frame of reference, both at the individual (Schiff and Schiff, 1975) and cultural level (James, 1994).

Beyond psychology, George Herbert Mead (Mead, 1934; Puddephatt, 2017), the creator of symbolic

interactionism, explored the significance of language in the process of socialisation. In his book "Mind, Self, and Society" published by his students after his death, Mead proposed that language is the foundation of human consciousness, drawing from observations of children raised by animals and the communication processes among different animal species. Mead focused on the meaning attributed to communication, which can vary across cultures. In TA terms, it can be surmised that the meaning attributed to communication is determined through the interplay of ego states, the individual frame of reference, the cultural frame of reference, as well as stroking filters (Woollams, 1978) and the selective meanings that we create through the proclivities of our scripts (Newton, 2006).

In the realm of social communication, Marshall McLuhan (according to Euchner, 2021, and Jan, Khan, Naz, Khan and Khan, 2021) presents an interesting concept of technological determinism. According to McLuhan, changes in the dominant mode of communication for a culture or era influence thinking and perception of reality. McLuhan's analysis is based on historical transitions, especially between oral communication, written language, and the printing press. For instance, the observation of cultural and personality transformations accompanying the popularisation of electronic communication (Euchner, 2021; Jan et al, 2021) lead to reflecting on to what extent cultural changes observed post-Covid pandemic are a result of an actual fear of illness or the proliferation of Internet communication.

The major aspects of facilitating guided change, whether in coaching, counselling, group facilitation or learning, are based on the deliberate use of language in order to name the client's underlying conflicts, blocks, areas of vulnerability as well as strengths, talents and insights that contribute to positive shifts over time. As individuals and groups become more apt at describing their inner landscape, their functioning tends to improve. This view is supported by Delia (1976) who identifies the creation of language constructs as crucial to our functioning. His research demonstrates that individuals with cognitive complexity achieve better professional results (Griffin, 2003, p.141-143). Delia, based on Walter Crockett's Category Role Questionnaire (Burlison and Waltman, 1998; O'Keefe, Shepherd and Streeter, 1982), which, in its simplest form, measures the number of cognitive constructs in a written expression, developed three communication models differing in their effectiveness in achieving a change effect. The proposed models describe expressive communication, where emotions dominate; conventional communication, with a focus on adhering to social rules; and rhetorical

communication, which concentrates on achieving a set goal in a situation-appropriate manner (Behrens, 2021; Bodie and Jones, 2015). Delia considered sophisticated communication as one that allows achieving various goals simultaneously, i.e., cognitively complex communication. Delia's differentiation of the three major communication models, despite coming from a different theoretical field, can be loosely correlated to the concept of ego states. Expressive communication might be considered as corresponding to the Child, conventional communication related to the Parent and rhetorical communication as comparable to the Adult.

We propose that sophisticated communication is one of the aspects of the Integrating Adult (Tudor, 2003) enabling self-reflection, the integration of feeling and thinking as well as recognition and enhancement of resources (Fassbind-Kech, 2013). Crockett's questionnaire and Delia's constructivist model inspired the creation of the language model of change (Wieczorek, 2017, 2023), which will be further described and developed in the subsequent part of the article. For the purposes of the later part of this article, Jesse Delia's concept will be utilised.

## Multilingualism and Ego States

In the realm of psychology, the significance of language was experimentally explored. Nairan Ramirez-Esparza (Ramirez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martinez, Potter and Pennebaker, 2006; García-Sierra, Ramírez-Esparza, Silva-Pereyra, Siard and Champlin, 2012; Ramirez-Esparza and Garcia-Sierra, 2014) requested bilingual students to complete personality tests twice, using two different languages. The results of the tests conducted in English portrayed the participants as more extraverted, agreeable, and open compared to when they used the Spanish language (Ramirez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martinez, Potter and Pennebaker, 2006; Ramirez-Esparza and Garcia-Sierra, 2014).

A similar experiment involved making decisions in different languages (Hayakawa, Tannenbaum, Costa, Corey and Keysar, 2017; Liberman, Woodward, Keysar, and Kinzler, 2017). Participants were asked to make a hypothetical decision regarding sacrificing someone else's life in an emergency situation. The scenario was presented to different groups in their native language or in a language acquired later in life. Participants speaking a foreign language were more likely to make hypothetical decisions that resulted in the death of another person. Given these findings, the considerations around the role of language in shaping human experience can be logically extended to multilingualism.

In the ever increasing interactions of culturally diverse individuals and groups, it is not uncommon for clients, counsellors, coaches, therapist and organisational consultants to work in languages that are not their mother tongue. The combinations of languages spoken could include the following scenarios:

- **native language** – the client and the practitioner communicate in their native language, e.g. a French native speaker seeing a client born and raised in France;
- **non-native** – either the client or the practitioner or both communicate in their non-native language, e.g. a native English speaker who is very proficient in French providing counselling in French to a native or non-native French speaker;
- **multilingual** – there are many languages spoken simultaneously which opens various parallel channels of communication, e.g. a multicultural class in an international school taught in English with students supporting each other's understanding by drawing on the languages they speak, for instance Portuguese speaking pupils from Angola helping the Brazilian ones.

The variety of languages spoken in psychotherapy, counselling, coaching or organisational settings allude to the multilingual therapeutic frame: "The multilingual therapeutic frame introduces a linguistic perspective so that anxieties around language can be explored and contained actively, relationally and constructively in the clinical encounter – by clients and by practitioners in training and supervision." (Costa, 2020, p. 9). Although these words refer mainly to clinical applications, they can be extrapolated into broader areas of guided change. The key matter is about *actively* considering the role of the languages spoken and the anxieties that this might evoke because multilingual clients are different from monolingual clients. People do experience themselves differently and do feel differently when switching languages (Dewaele, 2015). Thus, it is important to account for the significance of languages spoken in a particular context of work not only to remove barriers to change but also to draw on the resources that come with this form of diversity.

A multilingual therapeutic frame has implications for the psychological contract (Berne, 1966) in a variety of ways. Some languages are perceived as having a higher status, which contributes to the distribution of power in the relationship with the practitioner. For instance someone speaking English as their native language has more linguistic privilege in comparison to a speaker of a language perceived as having a lower status (e.g. Hungarian). This set up requires

the practitioner to consciously and empathetically account for the impact of the languages spoken on the outcome of the work.

From a TA perspective, we can consider that speaking another language impacts all ego states, albeit in different ways. The Adult gets cathected alongside the cognitive structures that support problem solving and here and now processing if a person possess the required linguistic proficiency and complexity that enables them to access their full capacities. Then again, depending on what the foreign language represents, it will resonate with various aspects of Parent and Child. The Parent can be associated with culturally determined symbolism, as well as well as the etiquette and character, justified by the technicalities of a particular language, that get introjected as contents of the Cultural Parent (Drego, 1983).

Notably, one can take on board cultural beliefs that shape the perception of a particular language. For example, in some indigenous communities in Guatemala parents discourage their children from learning their native tongues, such as Kaqchiquel, Tzutujil or Quiché because they see little value in them and they are associated with lower social status as determined by post-colonial white supremacy that favours the Spanish language. Thus, from an indigenous perspective the Spanish language is seen as the aspirational norm in the etiquette, with technicalities associated with a lack of consistent schooling in Mayan languages that lead to people being incapable of writing in their native tongues, with the character echoing centuries of oppression, exclusion, shame and terror.

For some people learning a second language invites at times responses from Child associated with feelings of inadequacy as one moves from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence (Howells, 1982) that activate the limiting aspects of one's script (Barrow, 2011). Depending on the age of foreign language acquisition as well as the perception of it, the attitude towards it may range from P<sub>1</sub> idealisation ("Speaking English makes me a better person"), P<sub>1</sub> demonisation and avoidance ("Why should I learn to speak like a gringo!?" to Adult appraisal of reality ("I will have more opportunities speaking more than one language.")). Lastly, given that cultural scripting at C<sub>1</sub> level "includes important sensory experiences of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch." (Vago, 1977, p. 303), the language spoken will also have a somatic component with corresponding bodily sensations. For instance, many people find that cursing in their first language feels more emotionally and physically charged than swearing in a language they are not familiar with.

Furthermore, an individual's linguistic repertoire (Busch, 2015), meaning the lived experience of the languages spoken by an individual, impacts one's sense of agency and the availability of their Adult Ego State. In some cases, speaking another language provides additional resources to mediate, express and process various life experiences, including trauma. Due to the creative distance and the detachment that comes with it, a client can access a wider array of emotional and cognitive processing tools that enable them to have mastery over their experience. Then again, there are instances whereby a particular language, in which the traumatic event happened, decreases an individual's sense of agency. Anecdotal evidence of TA practitioners suggests that learning TA in another language provides them with a greater felt sense of freedom from the limiting aspects of their scripts. Selecting the medium of communication is not a simple choice because in some cases speaking a foreign language might also be an unconscious way of avoiding the changes needed to move into autonomy. A thoughtful TA practitioner can account for these deep-seated factors by raising awareness of the impact of the linguistic repertoire on a client's perceived sense of agency.

As a modality of guided change TA encourages clients to acquire some of its accessible terminology, which echoes some aspects of learning a second language. Thus, the process explicitly expands individuals' linguistic repertoire with corresponding cognitive structures that shape their awareness and invite personal change according to the philosophical assumptions shared by TA practitioners. TA examination processes worldwide could be considered as a development of a personal linguistic repertoire of facilitating change.

It is therefore worth exploring what kind of TA language practitioners introduce to their clients. What are the subsequent dispositions getting promoted? What is the tone, structure, symbolism and the felt sense of the language introduced? Seasoned practitioners might recognise these questions as an exploration of ulterior transactions. Then again, a particular linguistic repertoire hints to the existence of a coherent, subjective and embodied sense of language that emerges in a specific culture. Thus, there may be various linguistic repertoires around the world which contextualise TA locally, giving rise to particular regional, cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies. There are also some views that discourage the introduction of TA terms to clients, which may lead to "The game of TA" with the participants using jargon to alienate or label each other. Notably, many trainers emphasise the importance of experiencing, feeling and embodying

TA concepts rather than just intellectualising about them. When it comes to multilingualism, there are many considerations at play and it is crucial to stay sensitive to the impact of the multilingual frame, especially taking account of how the linguistic repertoire helps or hinders the change process.

### Case Vignette 1

Martin, a 53 year old Dutch speaking man, lived in the USA for over 25 years. For the last 7 years he has been living in Central America and working seasonally in the USA. As a young boy he suffered sexual abuse from his mother between the ages of 8 – 11. He moved out of his parent's house at the age of 17 and after graduating from university moved to New York in his early twenties. Martin received prior psychotherapy in Dutch over the years (e.g. family therapy and individual therapy) and at his current level of functioning he could address archaic experiences in his Child through his Adult. Martin presented with low consideration of his physical and psychological needs and wanted to enhance his capacity for self-care. His symptoms included weight gain caused by poor dietary choices as well as insufficient rest. In session 4 Martin acknowledged that in his opinion he worked through his past and no longer felt the need to address directly the issues related to his family of origin. He was now well aware of his relentless and unsuccessful pursuits of a romantic relationship. He said that he really understood what made him unhappy and now he sought counselling to know what would make him happy. His overall contract was to identify and meet his needs related to his current international lifestyle, including gaining awareness of the triggers for his lack of self-care and identifying and acting on options that would enhance his physical and psychological wellbeing. When further asked what needed to happen in order for him to feel satisfied with the outcome of counselling, he stated "I will make smart choices by thinking about how much energy I have and saying no when needed." The counselling sessions were conducted in English, which for neither of the parties was a native tongue.

According to Berne, an impactful intervention needs to be received by the 8 year old part of the client. The counsellor, aware of the pitfalls of intellectualising, deliberately asked the client to use simpler language to contact their Child through their Adult and activate the resources available in this ego state. Additionally, Martin was encouraged to use his keen interest in painting to bridge his verbal insights with visual representations. Notably, his paintings included motifs of shattered pieces of glass, echoing not only his international lifestyle and the "Don't Belong" injunction (Goulding and Goulding, 1976) but also his deep need for integration and wholeness of his self.

It took some time and eventually in session 56 Martin became fully aware of the pressure he put on himself when setting himself unachievable goals to maintain his sense of helplessness. The use of simple language as well as his ongoing artistic work became a vehicle for strengthening the alliance between his Adult and Child. By becoming aware of his patterns of setting unachievable goals he started to cultivate a positive identity and no longer had to habitually discount his needs. He expanded his Adult through the awareness that by getting upset at himself and others he pushed other people away and did not allow others to be close and offer him support. Instead, he made a contract with himself to "get to know and like myself" and to "figure out and clearly tell others what I need". The counsellor facilitated Martin's growth by challenging his intellectualising language and inviting a linguistic repertoire of self-care ("It's good for me when I know that I did my best")

Martin completed his sessions successfully and decided to move back to the USA. At some point he returned for a course of 6 additional sessions due to a bereavement of a beloved pet. The counsellor employed the PHQ9 questionnaire (Kroenke, Spitzer and Williams, 2001) to rule out a depressive episode. Indeed, the scores were in the mild range (5-9) indicating no severe depression and confirming that the previous script obstacles to autonomy had been overcome. The current bereavement also triggered the client to recount the episode of sexual abuse, because in both cases he experienced a loss of agency. Mindful of the impact of language, the counsellor asked the client to say in his native language the words that his mother needed to hear from him. Mustering his Adult, the client spoke out loud in Dutch with calmness, clarity, gravitas and potency (Crossman, 1966). There had to be enough relational contact (Erskine and Trautman; 1996) to build up protection in order for the client to feel safe enough to share his traumatic memories in his first language. The counsellor encouraged Martin to find his voice, facilitating an expansion of his Adult and the processing and integration of his Child experiences that resulted in him giving himself new permissions that renewed his sense of agency.

## Language Model of Change in Transactional Analysis

Given that language impacts our meaning making, including our feelings and thoughts, the authors drew upon the Sapir-Whorf linguistic determinism hypothesis and Jesse Delia's communication models as well as TA to consider the temporal aspects of communication. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis posits that the structure of language translates into thought patterns. In their text "The Model of the Hopi

Universe," most likely written in 1936, they argued that the use of verbs in the Hopi language influences the Hopi Indians' perception of time and space. They particularly denied the existence of a universal notion of time and space. They described the Hopi language as a "timeless language" and contrasted it with "temporal" languages. The structure of the language we use is significant for our way of thinking, and time holds essential meaning in this context. Sapir and Whorf examined differences between languages and realised that even within one language, significant variations in structure would occur. Philipsen (Philipsen and Hart, 2015, 4-27) conducted intriguing research on this matter by introducing the concept of language codes, each possessing its own psychology and rhetoric. This constitutes the final element required for the language model of change.

In TA, humans are perceived as systems striving for internal autonomy, consisting of a specific structure distributed over time and actively interacting with the environment. This perspective arises from key elements of TA theory and its fundamental philosophy, based on the assumptions that people are OK, capable of thinking, decide their destiny, and can change it through communication and decision-making processes. The notion of script assumes the presence of a predetermined life plan originating in the past, a specific mode of functioning in current reality, and a more or less defined vision of the future. Every transaction can be considered related to these three temporal areas so meets the criteria of cognitive constructs described by Delia. In TA 'proper' (Berne, 1966) transactions are linked to ego states of the Parent-Adult-Child (PAC) model. Thus, adopting Crockett's analysis concept, one could analyse written and oral expressions, searching for cognitive constructs and categorising them based on two main criteria: alignment with ego states and the location of cognitive constructs on the timeline.

Script themes can be considered as entrenched and habitual personal constructs that shape our feelings, thoughts and actions in inflexible ways. They are built on our prior experiences, allowing us to anticipate the consequences of our actions. A dysfunctional construct can lead to unsatisfying behaviours and even pathological outcomes. Mere awareness of these constructs is insufficient; we must also understand *how* to deconstruct and modify them. The concept of a metamodel used in neurolinguistic programming (NLP) is most closely aligned with this thinking. The practitioner uses pertinent questions to uncover the essence of content at a deeper structural level, removing distortions, deletions, and generalisations. The deconstruction process allows us to understand, for instance, when our thinking patterns are unrealistic (Zhang, Davarpanah and

Izadpanah, 2023). Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication (Rosenberg, 2003) employs a similar pattern. The message is broken down into observations, feelings, needs, and requests during the communication and listening phases. This deconstruction helps to reduce biases and stereotypes, transforming communication into a more empathetic form (Adriani, Hino, Taminato, Okuno, Santos, Vieira and Fernandes, 2024). In TA, the deconstruction process could involve breaking down the Parent-Adult-Child model on the axis of time. Since we base our present actions and future plans on past experiences, gathering information about this should yield a similar effect to deconstruction using Milton's metamodel (Bandler and Grinder, 1975) or Rosenberg's (2003) procedure. Therefore, using Wieczorek's (2017, 2023) concept of the ego state timeline model (ESTM), the first order structural model of an individual would look as shown in Figure 1.

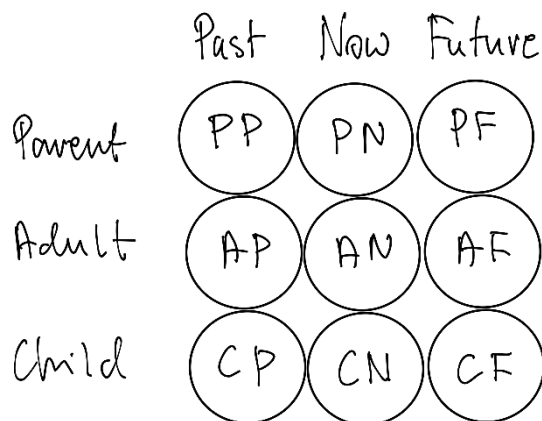


Figure 1: Ego-State Timeline Model (ESTM)

In view of the proposed model, analysis of spoken or written communication involves identifying indicators of time and ego states. Indicators may include statements related to what we think, feel, do, plan, remember, etc. The direction of the discourse appears crucial. In simplified terms, someone taking a path of first feeling a spontaneous urge and then planning actions follows a sequence where the Child-Self initiates, followed by the Adult-Self. In this scenario, actions directed towards the future become apparent. If we hear that a client intends to do something relevant to the here and now (Adult) because they felt a certain way (Child), we infer that the direction of action was initiated in the past, and there is no certainty that it will translate into practical steps. This line of thinking illustrates how language patterns reveal self – sabotage. For instance, the intention to start a diet (future) due to neglect (past) represents a direction that, as practical experience shows, lacks effectiveness. The transition into the future is vague, lacking connection to the present

moment, where currently no steps are taken towards the diet. Identifying the ego state as well as the temporal indicators in transactions pinpoints to the gaps, or areas of discounting (Mellor and Schiff 1975), and invites reflections that help to narrow them and account for the present moment actions. Highlighting the temporal incongruence (the empty space or the discount) enhances the effectiveness of actions and is similar to the therapeutic operation of confrontation (Berne, 1966).

All unsuccessful undertakings usually start "tomorrow," where tomorrow is unrealistically considered as a permanent state. For instance, if transactions only relate to the here and now, such as frustration of not having met one's goals (Child), expecting action and change becomes challenging. We can initiate a transition to the Adult by asking, for example, "What do you plan to do about it?" and looking towards the future with questions like "What will you do about it in the long run?" If the transactions only involve a future tense, for instance "I'll show him, he'll remember me, I'll make him pay!" we anticipate impulsive action or passivity (Schiff and Schiff, 1971). A statement suspended in the future may never progress beyond perpetual postponement. Questions we can pose include "How do you feel about it now?, What can you do about it now?" or anchoring the client in the past with questions such as "What do you think is the cause of this situation?, Where did it come from?, How did it develop?". We can envision our behaviour as a chessboard on which we move to fill in the missing squares. Instead of the nine circles of the ego structure, we can employ a nine-square chessboard on a regular sheet of paper. This is also a straightforward note-taking method that may be less intrusive for the client. Thus, we can consider that our decision making process is a result of a particular configuration of ego states and their temporal aspects, leading to effective or ineffective behaviours.

One way this is seen is in mediation services, where certain recurring patterns occur in transactions of clients getting stuck. For example, sample records of simple statements may appear as follows: "I cannot (PN) agree to this (AN), I don't trust him (CN), he misled me in the past (AP), and I suffered a lot because of him (CP)." As shown in Figure 2, this corresponds to the expressive communication described by Delia.

For longer expressions and during a conversation, we can determine the saturation of cognitive constructs for individual ego states. An example record is presented below in Figure 3.

Again, by paying attention to the temporal and ego state patterns, it is possible to identify areas of

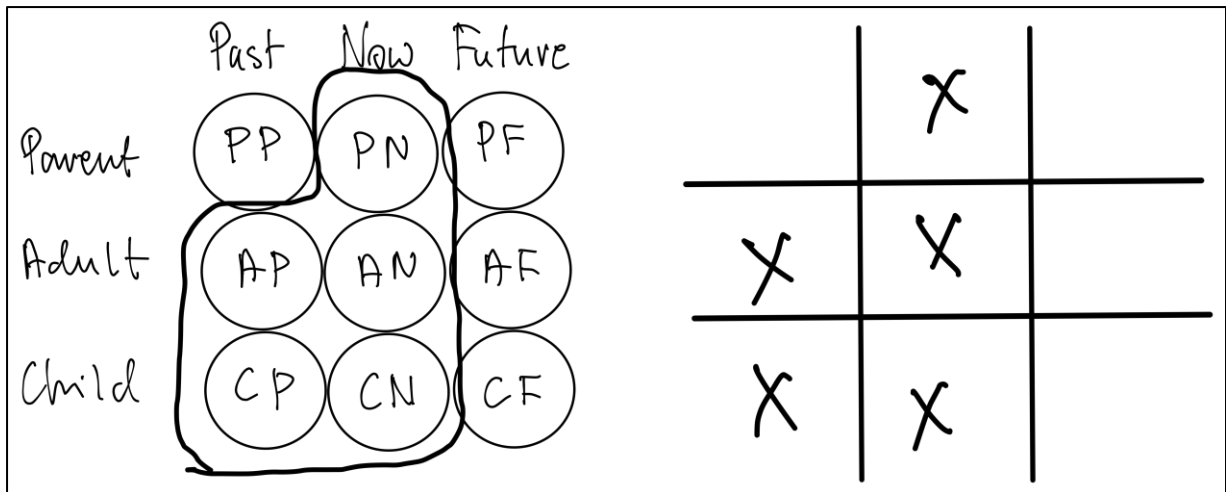


Figure 2: ESTM model applied to simple statements

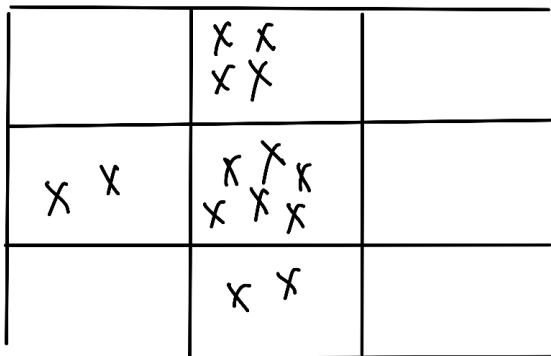


Figure 3: ESTM model for longer interactions

discounting or temporal incongruities that keep a client stuck. Looking at the record below it could be surmised that this person is present – focused in terms of Parent, Adult and Child, with the awareness of past and there and then appropriate responses. They are not accounting for the future, neither for fixated or introjected influences of the past. The line of enquiry could clearly be directed to the future with questions such as “How is this going to affect you in the future?” or to the past “How did you feel about similar situations in the past?; “What was your parent’s attitude when facing these kind of problems?”

However, optimal results can be achieved when we invite the client to work on a temporal ego map or timeline ego state map, utilising a sheet of paper and visual aids, such as playing cards or pieces of chess. We can also make notes on small cards representing situations crucial to the client, discuss them, and place them on the board. The client's involvement in working on the model can lead to gaining deeper insights into their own behaviours. It teaches TA language, which in this context becomes even more

significant and aids in strengthening the client's Integrating Adult.

During the process, we can inquire about the fields that are empty or establish the significance of fields where multiple statements appear. These can serve as resources or specific anchors that support a client's movement towards autonomy. Both in Delia's concept and in TA, we assume that effective functioning requires being in the here and now, with an awareness of the past, the ability to plan for the future and consider social principles while being aware of one's own emotions and desires. Delia refers to this as sophisticated communication, which corresponds to the Integrating Adult-Self in the language of TA.

### Case Vignette 2

Emma received long term counselling on and off over a period of ten years struggling with the aftermath of family conflict with her parents, misunderstandings and painful rejections, which led her to struggle with low self-esteem, emotional regulation and motivation. She lived outside of her home country and her sessions were conducted in her mother tongue. Over the years, Emma experienced incremental improvements, organising well her life abroad, creating a circle of friends and developing her business. Her main struggles resulted from the injunctions (Goulding and Goulding, 1976) Don't Be Important, Don't Be Well and Don't Be You; these were compensated by driver behaviours of Be Perfect and Please Others, which created significant blocks for the client. Over the years of counselling, Emma developed and integrated a number of resources, such as imagination, self-awareness and creativity. The counsellor employed the VIA character strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2004)

questionnaire and the following five signature strengths were identified:

1. capacity to love and be loved
2. kindness and generosity
3. curiosity
4. appreciation of beauty and excellence
5. optimism and hope

The awareness of these character strengths was woven into the counselling process through resource-oriented questions, such as:

1. "What would that feel like if you loved yourself in the same way as you love others?"
2. "What is it like to be you when you show kindness to others?"
3. "How do you satisfy your curiosity?"
4. "How can you see beauty in yourself?"
5. "What can you remind yourself of when facing challenges?"

In the last session, using visual aids, the counsellor applied the Ego State Timeline Model to help the client integrate their takeaways from the process. When asked about her perception of counselling, Emma provided the following statements:

1. I am free from the inner Merry-Go-Round.
2. I can take a bird's eye view on my life and separate rationally what is and isn't true.
3. I can very quickly identify company that is not good for me.
4. If I am open, I can tap into the love present in the Universe.
5. I am a worthy person.
6. I can let go of what I cannot control.
7. I can let go of my mother's negative influence.
8. I believe in myself professionally.
9. Remember to breathe.

The statements were organised by the client on ESTM grid as in Figure 4.

7	3	6
2	2 / 9	8
1	5	4

*Figure 4: Client statements organised on the ESTM grid*

Organising these statements on the grid might have been challenging for an external observer due to the model's validity within a constructivist approach that operates within an individual's frame of reference. Through this client-driven process, Emma was able to enhance her Integrating Adult based on her personal insights into the past, present, and future.

During problem-solving discussions, simple statements often surface, focusing on specific external or internal behaviours. Drawing from the first case vignette, examples of these statements include phrases like "get to know and like myself" and "figure out and clearly tell others what I need". Statements generated and arranged by the client on the grid tend to be more intricate. While they can be recorded straightforwardly - such as statement 7 "I can let go of my mother's negative influence" categorised under 'Parent from the past' in the table - they may also be proposed with a more detailed description, like: "I recognise how my mother's influence has shaped me, acknowledging it had negative impact at times. I am empowered to distance myself from this influence and foster self-appreciation." If a client were to gain a fraction of this insight, the model is worth applying.

## Conclusion

TA offers a valuable framework for enhancing cross-cultural encounters not only in counselling or psychotherapy, but also in the wider applications in education as well as organisational development. By adopting the language of TA, practitioners can negotiate and establish shared understanding of client issues and collaboratively formulate a change plan.

As shown in Figure 5, the Ego-State Timeline Model (ESTM) provides a structured approach for documenting client interviews in a manner that mirrors the formation of problematic behaviours. Every action stems from our past experiences and our anticipation of the consequences of our actions. When we are hungry, we draw upon our experiences to identify food items that we believe will satisfy our hunger. In cases where a behavioural cycle is dysfunctional, the ESTM interview allows for a deconstruction of the underlying construct along a timeline, fostering a deeper understanding of the entrenched dynamics. The subsequent step involves asking probing questions and exploring areas that remain relatively unexplored within the ESTM framework. It empowers clients to independently deconstruct their own behaviours. By adopting a metacommunicative stance, clients gain valuable insights into their patterns of behaviour. The use of ESTM for an initial assessment also captures a snapshot of a client's current reality as they are, without drawing on formal diagnostic models.



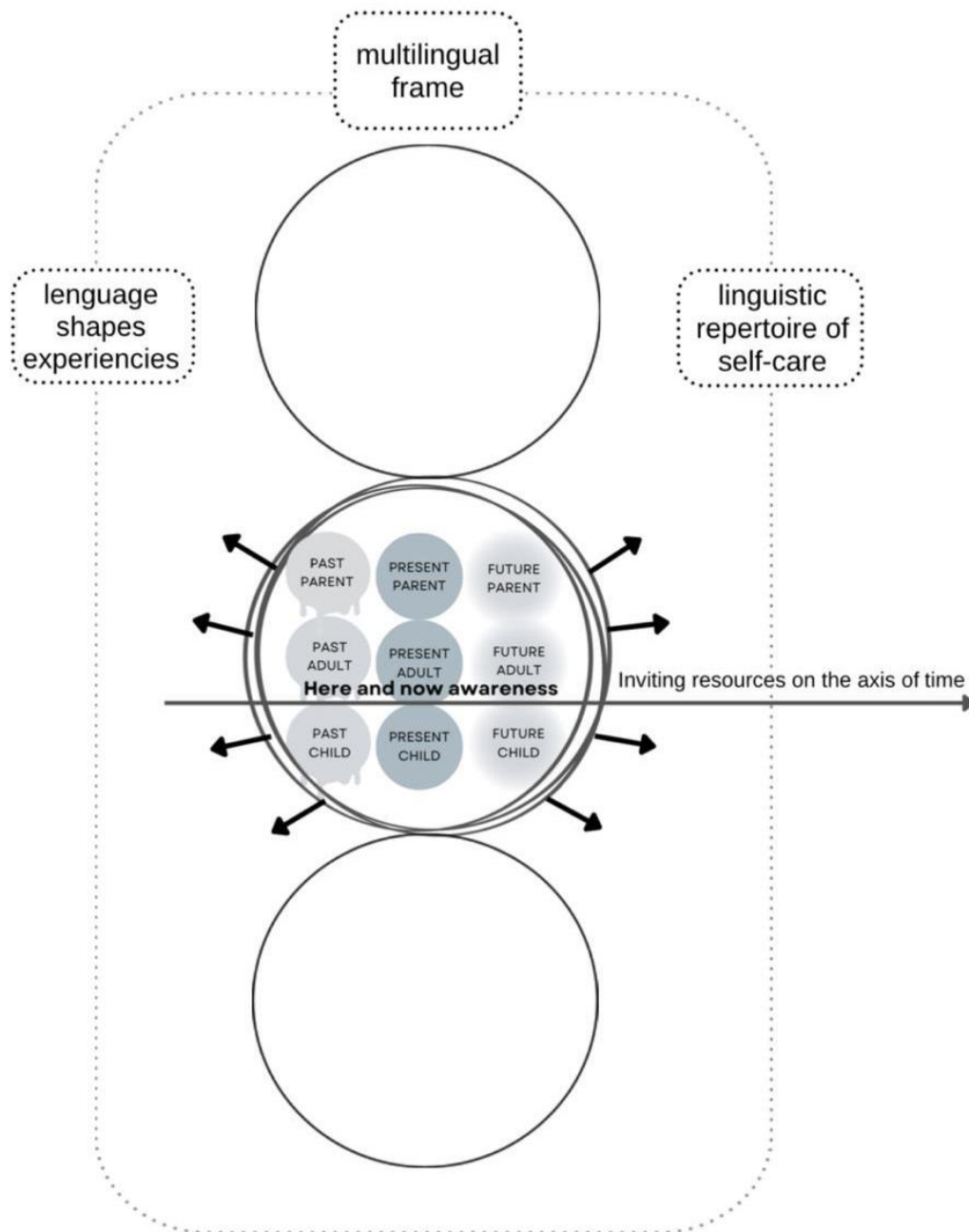


Figure 5: Integrating Adult in ESTM model

However, the effectiveness of this approach hinges to a significant extent on the assumption of shared linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the absence of sufficient commonalities, misinterpretations of cognitive constructs are more likely to arise, potentially leading to misguided interventions (Jusik, 2022). Furthermore, the ESTM framework leans towards a rather cognitive (Schlegel, 1998) approach within TA and does not take account of non-verbal, symbolic, sub-symbolic or somatic aspects of ego states (Cornell, 2003). It appears to be less useful when working with the transference-counter-

transference dynamics, projections and enactments (Stuthridge and Sills; 2016) The process of classifying client statements may contribute to diminishing relational contact. The analytical character of this framework which organises aspects of feelings, thoughts and behaviours could create a normative attitude in the practitioner, which would have less application with clients requiring relational holding, for example after immediate trauma. Thus, TA practitioners need to be mindful of how they apply the proposed model to ensure that they take account of what is needed for a particular client and to avoid

the pitfalls of indiscriminate application of the ESTM framework.

We posit that the ESTM proves particularly useful when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds and with varied linguistic repertoires because it introduces a common denominator of ego states distributed over time, while making space for idiosyncrasies. By providing a visual representation of behavioural patterns, the ESTM mitigates the risk of misinterpreting client behaviours and attitudes. Figure 5 shows visually the various elements that were touched on throughout this article. The ESTM framework is placed in the Integrating Adult, providing a range of directions for enquiry and interventions that foster expansive self-understanding. Notably, it rests upon here-and-now awareness and self-observation of a client and a practitioner, which enables categorisation of transactions within the ESTM model. The newly acquired awareness becomes a springboard for integrating resources on the axis of time. Adopting a multilingual frame in practice means taking account of the impact of language in shaping individual and group experiences. As a consequence, a new linguistic repertoire of self-care emerges, based on the philosophical underpinnings of TA. When applied correctly, the ESTM framework fosters growth and self-awareness that are beneficial in linguistically and culturally diverse environment. Then the client and the practitioner can set off on an ego state trip, rather than falling into an ego state trap.

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