Cross-Linguistic Assessment and Treatment

Generally, it is not advisable to attempt cross-linguistic assessment and treatment if one is not fluent in the client's language. However, circumstances may arise where such is necessary. The following are some guidelines for such a situation.

I. The Week Before
   A. Determine client's language and culture.
   B. Inform yourself about the language and culture.
   C. Decide whether or not you feel competent to assess someone from the cultural/language group or if you need to consult with or refer to another worker.
   D. Search for professional literature concerning the language and culture (e.g., Dana, 1993; Figueroa, 1990; Paniagua, 1998, 2001).
   E. Determine if an interpreter is needed. Consider the following points:
      1. If acquisition of English was post-pubertal and/or less than five years ago, an interpreter is probably needed.
      2. If the client prefers to use a language other than English, an interpreter is needed.
      3. If speech or language disorders or aphasia are suspected, an interpreter is needed.
      4. If any family member/informant to be interviewed has limited English skills, an interpreter may be needed.
   F. If an interpreter is needed,
      1. Get a professional interpreter who speaks the language and dialect of the client, family members, and informants (do NOT use family members or untrained interpreters).
      2. Even if you speak the language, use an interpreter unless you are fluent.
   G. Set aside at least 50% more time for the evaluation than would be needed for a native English speaker.
   H. Review available sources of information about the client and determine if you need others.
   I. Make a preliminary assessment plan and gather necessary materials.
II. On the Day of the Meeting

A. If an interpreter is needed,
   1. Meet with the interpreter beforehand to prepare her/him for what you will be doing, what your expectations are, and to ask any questions you may have about the language and culture. As part of this process, special emphasis should be placed on confidentiality. (See Putsch (1985) for other recommendations for working with interpreters.)
   2. Get informed consent for the use of an interpreter and go over confidentiality in detail.

B. Take extra time to orient clients/family members/informants about process and expectations.

C. Attempt to determine the nature of the client's language use and acculturation by inquiring about or otherwise gathering information about
   1. acculturative stresses
   2. personal cultural identity
   3. languages spoken at home, school, church, etc.
   4. contacts with home country and local immigrant communities
   5. contacts with the host culture (e.g., food preferences, friends, media, values)
   6. age at immigration (or hearing loss for deaf clients)
   7. reasons for immigration
   8. educational history, including where, in what languages, quality of education, extent of education, etc.
   9. social class
   10. health care preferences and beliefs.
   A behavioral approach to the interview should be stressed, with particular attention to changes in habitual expression of emotions, interpersonal relationships, and other behaviors. Acculturation and bilingualism measures may be useful as well as interviews with family members and other informants.

D. Repeat questions in different forms to be sure the interviewee understands the question and you understand the answer.

E. Be prepared to explain concepts that would be taken for granted.

F. Be aware of the client's and family members'/informants' perceptions and beliefs about the causes of the problems and expectations of treatment.

G. Check alternative treatment resources (e.g., church, traditional healers).
III. Treatment

A. Refer to linguistically and culturally appropriate providers when possible.

B. Adapt interventions as possible.

C. If an interpreter is needed, arrange to use the same interpreter throughout treatment.

D. Be sensitive to cultural dimensions when involving family members in treatment. In many instances, it may be desirable to seek less or more involvement than is typical for North America. Similarly, the type of involvement may vary as a function of cultural dimensions.

References


