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UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE AND SPEECH IN THE VOICE OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

Розуміння мови і мовлення як голосу колективної травми

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Abstract

The study aims to examine lexicon of collective trauma and compare it with concepts of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), moral injury and continuous traumatic stress (CTS). The role of language and speech in disintegrating and constructing meaning as a result of collective trauma has been explored.

Key words: *collective trauma, moral injury, continuous traumatic stress, psycholinguistic meaningful categories.*

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that recognises the importance of collective trauma in terms of transgenerational nature, mental health, identity and construction of

meaning. Central to the entire discipline of psycholinguistics is the concept of meaning which leads to understanding the voice of all participants in collective trauma, particularly perpetrators, bystanders and rescues. Vygotsky (2014) points out that meaning is the act of cognitive generalization and communication, therefore, the meaning of collective trauma is an act of understanding the horrified traumatic event through narrating it in collective life story. It is now well established that collective trauma can impair the meaning of self for national or ethnic group and is one of the main obstacles in developing national and ethnic identity (Kira et al., 2008). Moreover, collective trauma is associated with historic trauma, trauma of identity and genocide, moral injury and conditions of CTS (Coady, Carney, Frankfurt & Litz, 2020). Findings from recent research indicate transgenerational mechanisms of collective trauma, manifesting in PTSD symptoms in direct descendants of collective trauma (Bezo & Maggi, 2015).

Despite the importance of collective trauma in terms of individual and social safety, there remains a paucity of evidence on how language and speech in collective trauma contribute to constructing meaning. One of the main obstacles is expanded lexicon for collective trauma, in particular post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), moral injury, and CTS continuous traumatic stress (CTS). The purpose of this paper is to review recent research of collective trauma and explore expanded scope of its lexicon, in particular *PTSD*, *CTS* and *moral injury* in terms of *constructing meaning* aligned with traumatic event.

Research Methods and Techniques

One of the most well-known tools for exploring the borders of the concept is conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis was prepared according to the procedure used by Zasiékina (2005). The procedure includes searching for the main notions in lexicon of *collective trauma*, *PTSD*, *CTS* and *moral injury* considering category of *meaning* as an act of interpreting and understanding traumatic event. The study applies a descriptive approach to examine *collective trauma*, *PTSD*, *CTS* and *moral injury* from the perspective of constructing meaning. The structural literature review encompasses articles in peer-reviewed journals from 2008 to 2020. The databases Psyc-Info and PubMed were searched using an inclusion criterion for the articles, notably articles, exploring *collective trauma*, *PTSD*, *CTS* and *moral injury* from the perspective of *constructing meaning*. The initial corpus contained 57 articles, after the selection procedure considering an inclusion criterion 18 articles were chosen. The results are summarized in Table 1.

PTSD is an anxiety disorder arising as a delayed and protracted response after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury to self or others (Guha, 2006). Evidence consistently suggests that making a certain

meaning of traumatic event in PTSD, indexed in post-traumatic conditions, has a strong effect on developing or preventing PTSD after experiencing trauma. Therefore, the main factor of PTSD is rather more aligned with constructing meaning of traumatic event than with event itself (Cromer & Smyth, 2010).

Moral injury, on the contrary of PTSD, is not defined as an anxiety disorder and relates to disintegrating meaning considering morality, notably moral standards, moral reasoning, moral behaviour, and moral emotions (Zasiekina & Zasiekin, 2020). Barnes, Hurley, & Taber (2019) argue that witnessing morally traumatic situation does not always lead to PTSD. The main predictor of developing PTSD in potentially morally injurious events is constructing meaning of the event, which expresses the dissonance between moral standards and real behavior resulting in moral emotions of shame and guilt (Griffin et al., 2019). In addition, McDonald (2017) expands moral emotions to disgust, anger, and embarrassment.

CTS similar to moral injury is not defined as an anxiety disorder, it is a living condition, which is characterized by permanent threat. Eagle and Kaminer (2013) define CTS considering the context of the stressor conditions, the temporal location of the stressor conditions, the complexity of discriminating between real and perceived threat, and the absence of external protective systems. Nuttman-Shwartz and Shoval-Zuckerman (2016) defines CTS as patterns of emotions, behaviors, and perceptions among individuals, families, communities, and societies. The most important idea for our study is that developing the most efficient coping strategy for CTS depends on past and future constructing meaning of threat, which determines the patterns of emotions and behaviours.

Results

In summary, the results of structural literature review and conceptual analysis of *collective trauma, PTSD, CTS* and *moral injury* considering category of *meaning* are shown in Table 1.

Table1. *Results of structural literature review and conceptual analysis of lexicon of collective trauma, PTSD, CTS and moral injury*

	Concepts and authors	Main notions	Reference for meaning
1.	PTSD (Cromer & Smyth, 2010)	Anxiety disorder, response, traumatic event	Constructing <i>meaning</i> of traumatic event and self in traumatic situation
2.	Collective trauma (Baum, 2008; Bezo & Maggi, 2015; Coady, Carney, Frankfurt, & Litz, 2020; Kira et al., 2008)	Traumatic events, group identity, historic trauma, trauma of identity, genocide, transgenerational PTSD, moral injury, experiencing CTS.	Disintegrating and constructing <i>meaning</i> of group self

3.	Moral Injury (Antal & Winings, 2015; Barnes, Hurley, & Taber Coady, Carney, Frankfurt, & Litz, 2020; Drescher et al., 2011; Farnsworth et al., 2014; Griffin, 2019; Litz et al., 2019; McDonald, 2017; Zasiiekina & Zasiiekin, 2020).	Disintegrating meaning morality, moral standards, moral reasoning, moral behaviour, and moral emotions.	Dissonance between <i>meanings</i> of moral beliefs and behaviour
4.	CTS (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013; Nuttman-Shwartz & Shoval-Zuckerman, 2016)	Permenant strees in terms of stressor conditions, the complexity of discriminating between real and perceived or threat, and the absence of external protective systems.	Past and future <i>meaning</i> of threat which determines the patterns of emotions and behaviours.

Conclusions

This study has raised important questions about the nature of collective trauma, and disintegrating and constructing meaning aligned with its experience. The result has a strong practical application in developing treatment plan for *collective trauma*, *PTSD*, *CTS* and *moral injury*, which is based on constructing a new meaning in the case of disintegrating meaning towards self, others and the world. Since constructing meaning is closely connected with language and individual speech as a result of cognitive generalization and communication, these findings provide insights for future psycholinguistic research and practice in clinical settings.

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