

# Word-Analysis Technique in the Counselling Process: A Conceptual Exploration of its Role in Enhancing Counsellor Competence

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**Abstract-** Concept paper examines the possibility of word-analysis techniques as a tool for enhancing counsellor competence in current counselling practice. Drawing on psycholinguistic, cognitive-behavioural, and constructivist perspectives, it explores how linguistic indicators such as use of words, emotional tone, and cognitive-processing words can provide objective insights to counsellor in identifying the client's issue. Recent empirical findings demonstrate that these linguistic features correlate with therapeutic alliance, client engagement, and treatment outcomes. The paper proposes an integrative framework in which word analysis supports reflective practice and counsellor competence assessment. While highlighting the potential of linguistic data to deepen self-awareness and guide professional development, the paper also addresses ethical and interpretive limitations. Overall, word-analysis techniques offer a promising adjunct to traditional methods of counsellor training and evaluation

**Keywords –** Word Analysis, Counsellor Competence, Linguistic, English conversation, Counselling Technique

## I. INTRODUCTION

In a counselling session, the way a client speaks can mean a lot to the counsellor. Whatever said isn't just words, but are also reflections of their feelings, thoughts, and life experiences. Sometimes clients may not directly state the real problem experienced, but instead they communicate through the selection of certain words, a specific tone of voice, or style of language which reflects hidden emotions. Therefore, understanding how clients use words becomes crucial to understand the content of their conversation.

Therefore, in the field of counselling, analysis of the client's word choice is an important approach to help counsellors understand the true meaning of what is intended to be conveyed by the client. This approach evaluates how clients choose words, phrases, or expressions to describe their experiences. According to Juningsih and Syamsu (2021), every word used by a client can be an indicator of emotional states, negative thoughts, and the cause of the problem being faced. Consequently, the counsellor's sensitivity or skill in listening and evaluating the word choice is very important to identify the client's real issue.

Counselling is a linguistically mediated profession in which both the content and structure of language convey therapeutic meaning. Counsellor competence—the integration of knowledge, skills, and reflective capacity—is crucial for effective practice (Hill & Knox, 2021). Traditionally, competence has been assessed through supervisor observation, client feedback, or self-report. However, the increasing digitalization of counselling practice provides opportunities to employ linguistic data as an objective marker of communication patterns.

Word-analysis techniques—derived from computational linguistics and psycholinguistic inquiry—allow the systematic evaluation of word usage, emotional tone, and cognitive complexity within counsellor–client exchanges. Tools such as the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software quantify linguistic variables that have demonstrated associations with psychological processes (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). Integrating word-analysis into the counselling process can thus enhance counsellor competence through measurable feedback on empathy, attunement, and linguistic responsiveness.

## Language and Counsellor Competence

Language functions as both a therapeutic medium and a mirror of cognitive–emotional functioning. Competent counsellors exhibit linguistic markers of empathy, reflection, and flexibility (Hill & Knox, 2021). Studies have found that counsellors' choice of pronouns and emotion words influences perceived alliance and client disclosure (Qiu & Tay, 2023). Furthermore, linguistic attunement—the degree of synchrony between counsellor and client language—has been associated with therapeutic progress (Andersen et al., 2024).

## Word-Analysis in Counselling Research

Recent studies have extended linguistic inquiry from clients to counsellors. Jennings et al. (2022) demonstrated that therapists' use of cognitive-processing words (e.g., think, because) predicted symptom improvement among clients in cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). Similarly, Andersen et al. (2024) found that participants whose counsellors encouraged perceptual and causal word use in online CBT for prolonged grief showed greater reductions in symptomatology. Qiu and Tay (2023) compared therapist–client language across therapeutic approaches, identifying that counsellor analytical tone and emotional language varied systematically by modality (e.g., CBT vs. psychodynamic).

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## Counsellor Self-Reflection and Supervision

Word-analysis can also augment supervision by providing linguistic feedback on counsellor development. For instance, increases in counsellors' cognitive-mechanistic words across sessions may reflect growth in conceptual formulation skills, whereas balanced emotion word use may signal emotional regulation and empathy. Linguistic indicators can therefore support supervision dialogues by evidencing observable competence changes (Clark et al., 2023)

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In a counselling sessions, it is crucial to understand the real problem faced by the client. However, many counsellors still evaluate the client's speech only based on external or literal meaning. Therefore, implicit meanings such as hidden emotions, internal pressures, or unspoken desires are often overlooked. In the context of multicultural Malaysian culture, clients usually convey feelings through a figurative or symbolic language (Mirantisa et al., 2021; Rizkiani, 2021). If this matter is not examined in depth, the counsellor may fail to identify the actual cause of the problem faced by the client. Therefore, the counsellor's sensitivity to the client's choice of words becomes very important. Every word used can carry an implicit meaning about the client's emotions and life experiences. According to Alluza et al. (2021), when a client uses words such as "useless," "tired," or "no one understands," it may reflect feelings of inferiority, stress, or a deep disappointment. Therefore, counsellors need to evaluate not only what is said, but also how a word is used in the context of the client's emotions and experiences.

Consequently, the main problem that arises is the weakness in the counsellor's ability to identify the implicit meaning behind the words used by the client. When counsellors only focus on the content of the conversation and not on the style of delivery, they may miss important information which can help the intervention process.

Furthermore, not all counsellors have specific training or guidance to analyse the client's words in depth to identify the cause of the problem and hidden emotions (Khanifa et al., 2025). This causes the counselling sessions to be less effective as the intervention carried out may not be centred on the client's real problem. Therefore, the counsellor's ability to apply counselling theory in line with the words used by the client is very important. For example, when the client shows negative thought patterns through the words used, cognitive theory can help the counsellor identify these patterns and change them towards more positive thinking. Similarly, when the client shows feelings of disappointment or sadness, humanistic theory can be applied to provide emotional support and promote self-acceptance (Aulia et al., 2022). Therefore, the selection of theories and intervention strategies should be guided by a careful analysis of the client's words.

The stated problem becomes increasingly important as there is still a lack of research in Malaysia which examines how word analysis can assist counsellors in identifying the root cause of problems, understanding

implicit meanings, and implementing appropriate interventions. Most existing studies only focuses on the effectiveness of counselling in terms of outcomes, not on the communication process between counsellors and clients. Therefore, this study should be conducted to fill the said gap by focusing on how counsellors assess, understand, and use clients' words in the counselling process as the basis for counselling interventions.

This study will provide answers to questions such as, can counsellors identify the cause of the problem based on the client's choice of words, to what extent do they understand the implicit meaning behind the client's words, and how do they apply theory and implement interventions based on the analysis of the client's words. The findings from this study is expected to strengthen counsellors' skills in actively listening, thinking analytically, and acting more empathetically towards clients. This finding may also further propose a specific skill set and model for counsellors to be used as a skill and guide in conducting counselling sessions in a fast, accurate and up to date trend.

### *Objectives of the Study*

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the ability of counsellors to identify the cause of the client's problem based on the choice of words used by the client
2. Explore the Counsellor's sensitivity to understand the implicit meaning behind the words expressed by the client
3. Examine the ability of counsellors to apply counselling theories in line with the choice of words expressed by the client
4. Examine how counsellors implement counselling interventions based on theory and the choice of words used by the client

### *Study Questions*

1. Are counsellors able to identify the cause of the client's problem based on the choice of words used by the client
2. To what extent / are counsellors able to understand the implicit meaning behind the words expressed by the client
3. How counsellors apply theory in line with the choice of words expressed by the client
4. How counsellors implement counselling interventions based on theory and the choice of words used by the client

### *Significance of the Study*

This study is important as it provides a new contribution to the field of counselling by introducing the use of word analysis as an approach in understanding the implicit meaning from the client's communication. In the counselling practice, the ability to accurately interpret client words can help counsellors identify the true cause of problems and plan more effective interventions. Therefore,

this study can strengthen counsellors' basic skills in listening, interpreting, and acting on information conveyed by clients through their word choices.

From a practical perspective, this study contributes to increasing the efficiency and sensitivity of counsellors in conducting counselling sessions. Through word analysis, counsellors are able to identify emotional cues and clients' thought patterns more quickly without relying solely on behavioural observation. As a result, counsellors can provide more accurate and immediate responses to clients' needs, making counselling sessions more productive and effective. This approach can also be used as an additional guide in the training of new counsellors, enabling them to become more sensitive to the implicit meanings in verbal communication.

Furthermore, this study supports the need to reassess existing counselling models such as the Egan Model of the Skilled Helper and Carkhuff's Model of Counselling Skills. Both models emphasise basic skills such as active listening, empathy, and exploration of client issues. However, these models place relatively little emphasis on word analysis as a tool to understand implicit meanings within the local cultural context. Therefore, this study helps fill that gap by adapting word analysis approaches to the Malaysian societal context, where indirect and figurative language is commonly used.

From an academic standpoint, this study strengthens existing literature by integrating counselling, linguistics, and communication psychology within a more contextual and practical research framework. It also contributes to the development of local guidelines for professional counsellor training to ensure that word analysis skills can be applied systematically during counselling sessions. Consequently, the findings of this study have the potential to become the basis for developing training modules or working guidelines for counsellors in educational institutions, counselling agencies, and community centres.

Thus, the significance of this study lies not only in generating new knowledge but also in enhancing counsellor competence in delivering counselling sessions that are fast, accurate, and effective. By understanding the implicit meanings behind each of the client's words, counsellors can provide interventions that are more empathetic and relevant to the client's actual needs. Overall, this study is expected to strengthen counselling practice in Malaysia by establishing word analysis as an essential skill in improving the effectiveness of therapy and clients' psychological well-being.

### ***Foundational Theory and Conceptual Framework***

This study is based on two major theories in the field of counselling which is the Egan Model (The Skilled Helper Model) and the Carkhuff Model (The Art of Helping Model). Both theories emphasise the counsellor's competence in building rapport, understanding the client's message deeply, and implementing effective interventions. These theories were chosen because they provide a solid foundation for assessing how counsellors use word analysis to understand implicit meanings in client communication.

The Egan Model (1975, 2018) emphasises three main stages in the counselling process: Exploration, Understanding, and Action. In the context of this study, the Exploration stage refers to the counsellor's ability to identify the root of the problem based on the client's word choices. The Understanding stage evaluates the counsellor's sensitivity in interpreting implicit meanings behind the client's words. Finally, the Action stage assesses how counsellors apply theory and implement appropriate interventions based on the results of word analysis. Therefore, the Egan Model provides systematic guidance for counsellors to move from understanding to action within the counselling process.

Meanwhile, the Carkhuff Model (2000) emphasises basic counselling skills such as empathy, exploration, reflection, and constructive confrontation. In this model, a counsellor's competence depends on how well they understand the true message the client intends to convey. Therefore, word analysis plays an important role in improving the accuracy of a counsellor's interpretation of the client's emotions, values, and beliefs expressed implicitly in conversation. Thus, the Carkhuff Model is used in this study to assess interpersonal counselling skills in identifying implicit meanings and building effective therapeutic relationships.

The conceptual framework of this study integrates counselling theories and word analysis to assess four key abilities of counsellors:

1. The ability to identify the root of the problem based on the client's word choices.
2. Sensitivity in understanding implicit meanings behind spoken words.
3. The ability to apply theory in alignment with the client's message.
4. The ability to carry out interventions based on the findings of word analysis.

Therefore, this approach not only assesses the content of communication but also how clients convey their emotions. It combines linguistic aspects (word choice, language style, tone) with psychological aspects (emotion, beliefs, self-perception). As a result, word analysis is used as a tool to understand clients more deeply and help counsellors respond more quickly, accurately, and empathetically during counselling sessions.

Although the Egan and Carkhuff Models have long been used internationally, their application in local contexts remains limited. Hence, this study has the potential to bridge this gap by adapting both models to the communication culture of Malaysian society, which often uses indirect and symbolic language. This study is expected to contribute to developing localised guidelines to enhance counsellors' competence in understanding implicit meanings through word analysis.

In summary, the foundational theories and conceptual framework emphasise that counselling effectiveness does not depend solely on theoretical knowledge but also on the ability to understand the client's language deeply. Therefore, the integration of counselling theories and word analysis in this study is expected to

strengthen professional counselling practice and produce more meaningful and effective interventions for clients.

### **Research Themes**

#### *Slips of the Tongue*

In counselling contexts, slips of the tongue are not merely considered speaking errors but can indicate emotional states or unclear thoughts. Sometimes, clients may utter certain words unconsciously, reflecting stress, confusion, or internal conflict. Understanding these slips helps counsellors identify the root of the client's issues. For instance, if a client unintentionally uses the word "tired" while speaking about their family, it may indicate emotional exhaustion or stress that has not been clearly expressed. In such situations, a counsellor who is sensitive to word choice may use the exploration skills in the Egan Model to probe deeper without making premature assumptions. This approach helps clients become aware of their true feelings hidden behind their utterances. Consequently, the counselling process becomes more meaningful as unacknowledged issues surface in a safe and empathetic manner.

Additionally, the Carkhuff Model highlights the importance of active listening and reflecting the client's message. When counsellors notice a slip of the tongue or a change in tone, they can use techniques such as reflection or paraphrasing to help clients reassess what they have said. Therefore, counsellors do not merely listen to the content of the conversation — they also evaluate how a word is used and what it means to the client emotionally.

Thus, slips of the tongue in this study are viewed as key components of word analysis—not as signs of psychological disorder, but as opportunities to uncover implicit meanings in client communication. By being sensitive to the language used, counsellors can identify emotional cues, thought patterns, and psychological needs that have not been directly expressed. This increases their ability to provide interventions that are fast, precise, and grounded in a true understanding of the client's inner experience.

In essence, analysing slips of the tongue is not meant to judge the client's errors or weaknesses, but to strengthen counsellors' skills in understanding human experience deeply. By integrating skills from the Egan and Carkhuff Models, counsellors can treat each word uttered by the client as valuable information that supports their emotional healing and personal development.

#### *Contradictory Statements*

In counselling sessions, contradictory statements often indicate that clients are experiencing internal conflict or emotional confusion they are not yet fully aware of. For example, when a client says, "I'm okay, but I feel sad every night," it shows a discrepancy between what they feel and what they want to believe. This situation demonstrates that the client is trying to align their true emotions with an ideal self-image. Therefore, counsellors must be sensitive to such contradictions as they may point

to unspoken underlying issues.

According to Juningsih and Syamsu (2021), contradictory statements are not simply errors or confusion, but reflections of conflict between feelings, thoughts, and social realities. Sensitivity to contradictions helps counsellors assist clients in reassessing their true emotions. Within the Egan Model, such contradictions can be explored in the Exploration and Understanding stages, where counsellors help clients recognise and understand what they are saying and what they truly feel. This process leads to deeper self-awareness and encourages positive change.

The Carkhuff Model emphasises empathy and reflective skills in addressing contradictory statements. When counsellors hear a contradiction, they may use paraphrasing, summarising, or reflecting feelings to help clients reassess their statements. For example:

"You said you're okay, but at the same time you mentioned you cry often. Could you explain what you meant by okay earlier?"

This approach guides clients to think more deeply about their emotions and develop new awareness about themselves.

Therefore, contradictory statements should be seen as therapeutic opportunities rather than inconsistencies. Through systematic word analysis, counsellors can detect emotional tension, unmet needs, or hidden feelings. This enhances their ability to interpret client messages accurately and provide timely and effective interventions.

In this study, contradictory statements are viewed as important indicators of clients' need to be understood more deeply. Combining the Egan and Carkhuff Models allows counsellors to transform these contradictions into the starting point for self-reflection, emotional acceptance, and meaningful positive change.

#### *Defence Mechanisms*

In counselling sessions, expressions such as "I don't care" or "I was just joking" often indicate that the client is protecting themselves from emotions that are difficult to admit. This mechanism is known as a defence mechanism, or ego defence, which is a natural response when an individual faces a situation that causes shame, fear, or threat. According to Prastya et al. (2023), ego defences often appear through language when clients deny sadness, shift the topic, or use humour to hide disappointment. Therefore, understanding defensive language helps counsellors assess the emotional areas the client is trying to protect.

Within the Egan Model, defence mechanisms are considered communication barriers that must be explored carefully in the exploration stage. A sensitive counsellor will identify defensive words and use active listening skills to open space for deeper discussion. For example, if a client says, "I'm used to being abandoned," the counsellor may gently use probing or open-ended questions to help the client recognise their true feelings behind that statement.

The Carkhuff Model emphasises empathy and reflection when addressing clients' defensive behaviour.

When clients use defensive language, counsellors may respond with empathetic feedback such as, *“You said you don’t mind, but at the same time you look sad. Could you share what ‘not minding’ means for you?”*

This helps clients feel safe to express their true emotions without fear of judgment, strengthening the therapeutic relationship. Through word analysis, counsellors identify language patterns clients use in sensitive situations such as trauma, loss, or failure. Words like *“it’s okay,” “I’m used to it,”* or *“everyone does that”* often signal emotional denial or irrational rationalisation. Sensitivity to these patterns enables counsellors to plan appropriate interventions, whether through empathy, deeper exploration, or sustained emotional support.

Thus, defence mechanisms are not signs of communication weakness but important indicators of unmet emotional needs. While the Egan and Carkhuff Models assist in developing counselling skills and therapeutic presence, word analysis serves as an additional tool to uncover implicit client messages. This enhances counsellors’ ability to identify problems, plan interventions, and respond effectively to clients’ psychological needs.

### *Projection Through Language*

In counselling contexts, projection through language occurs when clients transfer unacceptable feelings or thoughts onto others. For example, phrases such as *“Everyone is selfish”* may reflect dissatisfaction or ego-related conflict within the client themselves. According to Sari (2022) and Khanifa et al. (2025), this phenomenon often occurs unconsciously and can be detected through communication patterns such as generalisations, accusations, or negative comparisons.

In the Egan Model, recognising projection occurs during the Exploration and Understanding stages. Counsellors examine how clients describe their relationships with others. If a client frequently blames external parties or attributes negative emotions to others, it may indicate denial or emotional displacement. Active listening and reflection help clients acknowledge and accept their true emotions.

The Carkhuff Model emphasises empathy, reflection, and constructive confrontation. When counsellors detect projection, they may ask gentle open-ended questions such as, *“Is it possible that the feeling you described also exists within you?”* or *“When you say others are selfish, do you mean you feel unappreciated?”*. These questions guide clients toward self-reflection without feeling attacked.

Word analysis enables counsellors to identify communication patterns showing emotional displacement, such as anger, guilt, or disappointment. Words like *“everyone,” “they don’t understand,”* or *“no one cares”* reveal a tendency to avoid responsibility for personal feelings. Sensitivity to such patterns allows counsellors to shift the client’s view from outward blame to internal awareness. Thus, projection through language is a therapeutic opportunity to deepen self-understanding. By combining the Egan and Carkhuff principles, counsellors can use word analysis to uncover hidden feelings,

strengthen self-awareness, select appropriate theories, and design more accurate and effective interventions.

### *Indirect Language*

In Malaysia’s counselling context, indirect language is commonly used due to cultural values emphasising politeness, respect, and emotional restraint. Clients often express feelings implicitly through sarcasm, metaphors, or rhetorical questions such as *“If I disappeared, who would care?”* (Salleh & Yusof, 2021). Thus, counsellors must be sensitive to indirect language, which may hold deeper meanings than the words themselves.

According to Rizkiani (2021), indirect language is often used by individuals who struggle to recognise or accept their true emotions. The client’s word choice and speech style provide clues to feelings such as loneliness, disappointment, or a sense of being unappreciated. Word analysis helps counsellors uncover these deeper meanings. Mirantisa et al. (2021) emphasise that implicit communication reflects complex psychological layers requiring careful interpretation.

In the Egan Model, exploration skills are crucial when dealing with indirect language. Counsellors use open-ended questions and active listening to help clients clarify their true meanings. For example, when a client says, *“I’m used to being alone,”* the counsellor may ask:

*“When you say you’re used to it; do you mean you feel comfortable or actually lonely?”*

The Carkhuff Model highlights empathy and reflection. Counsellors listen not only to words but also to tone, repetition, and expression. An empathetic response such as,

*“You said it’s fine, but your tone sounds like you’re holding something inside — is that true?”* helps clients feel understood and builds trust.

Hence, the ability to interpret indirect language enhances counselling effectiveness. Word analysis helps counsellors identify hidden issues and adapt theories and techniques to client needs, making counselling more culturally sensitive and emotionally accurate.

### *Cross-Cultural Studies and Indirect Language*

Culture plays an important role in shaping how individuals communicate, including during counselling sessions. In Eastern societies such as Malaysia, communication is often indirect, polite, and moderated (Ismail & Othman, 2022). Clients rarely express their feelings or opinions directly, as they may want to maintain social harmony and avoid conflict. For example, a client may say, *“I understand the decision,”* even though they actually feel hurt or disappointed. Therefore, counsellors must be attentive to implicit meanings to avoid misinterpreting the client’s true message.

According to Abdullah and Yusof (2020), cultural metaphors, ethnic backgrounds, and traditional values influence how clients choose words and construct narratives. In Malay culture, for instance, figurative language and proverbs are often used to express meaning without offending others. This poses a challenge for counsellors because the psychological message the client intends to convey is not expressed literally. Thus, word analysis becomes a crucial skill to interpret meaning beyond the client's chosen words, tone, or metaphors.

The Egan Model encourages counsellors to explore and consider cultural and indirect communication elements carefully during the exploration stage. Counsellors must show empathy and respect for the client's cultural values when questioning or providing feedback. For example, when a client uses polite and indirect expressions such as "I'm used to hardship," a counsellor may use soft probing like:

*"How do you feel when facing those hardships?"*

Such questions allow clients to express true emotions without feeling forced or threatened. As a result, communication becomes more open and a stronger therapeutic relationship can form.

The Carkhuff Model stresses empathy and reflection as essential skills in understanding clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Skilled counsellors adjust their communication style to match clients' cultural sensitivities — using gentle language, avoiding direct pressure, and allowing clients space to express themselves gradually. Word analysis complements Western-based models by enhancing cultural sensitivity within the Malaysian context, helping counsellors to identify the true emotions behind the client's indirect language. Therefore, applying word analysis not only strengthens the counselling relationship but also improves intervention effectiveness.

Consequently, cross-cultural studies in counselling are crucial for developing counsellor competence within Malaysia's multicultural society. Through word analysis, counsellors gain deeper insight into how culture influences clients' emotional expression and thought patterns. This study fills a gap in existing literature, which has yet to emphasise culturally informed communication in local counselling practice. By integrating the Egan and Carkhuff Models, this study aims to contribute towards more precise and relevant guidelines for counsellors in understanding indirect communication across cultural boundaries.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review shows that language in counselling is not merely a tool of communication but a reflection of clients' emotions, thoughts, and internal experiences. Through analysing word choices, speech styles, and self-expression, counsellors can understand implicit meanings not always stated directly. Studies by Salleh and Yusof (2021) and Rizkiani (2021) emphasise that every word used by clients contains psychological information relating to emotions, values, and underlying conflicts.

In this context, word analysis becomes an essential method for helping counsellors identify the real meanings behind clients' communication. Previous studies, such as

those by Mirantisa et al. (2021) and Khanifa et al. (2025), show that implicit messages can be identified through elements such as indirect language, contradictory statements, and defensive words. These elements reveal unacknowledged emotions or unresolved conflicts. Therefore, counsellors' sensitivity to linguistic and emotional aspects is crucial for understanding clients holistically.

Theories and models such as the Egan Model and the Carkhuff Model play vital roles in enhancing counsellors' ability to interpret implicit meanings. The Egan Model emphasises three main stages — Exploration, Understanding, and Action — which guide counsellors to explore client emotions systematically, interpret hidden messages, and design appropriate interventions. Meanwhile, the Carkhuff Model highlights empathy, reflection, and constructive confrontation to assess the true meaning behind clients' words and behaviours. Together, these models complement each other in forming a counselling framework that is responsive to linguistic cues and cultural contexts.

However, the literature also reveals that studies on the relationship between word analysis, counsellor competency, and intervention effectiveness within the Malaysian cultural context remain limited. Many previous studies focus on theoretical frameworks or general practices without addressing how counsellors interpret clients' language as psychological cues. Thus, there is a noticeable gap regarding word analysis as a core skill for improving counsellor competence.

This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on counsellors' ability to identify root problems, understand implicit meanings, and implement interventions based on clients' word choices. It also evaluates counsellors' sensitivity in adapting counselling theories and skills to Malaysia's cultural communication style. Through this approach, the study is expected to strengthen professional counselling practice and produce new guidelines that are more relevant, timely, and effective in addressing clients' emotional needs.

#### **Research Gap**

The literature indicates that studies on language in counselling remain focused mostly on general communication and intervention techniques, with fewer studies examining clients' word choices in depth — especially within Malaysia. Most previous research evaluates counselling effectiveness from theoretical and strategic angles but pays less attention to how clients' words reveal implicit meanings, suppressed emotions, or root problems. This can lead to counsellors interpreting client messages literally without recognising psychological cues embedded in their speech (Ismail & Othman, 2022; Rizkiani, 2021).

Thus, a gap exists in counsellors' competency when interpreting linguistic messages, especially when clients use indirect or polite expressions, which are common in Eastern cultures such as Malaysia. This requires high levels of empathic listening and careful word analysis to identify the true source of the client's distress.

Furthermore, although the Egan and Carkhuff Models are widely used to develop skills such as exploration, empathy, and reflection, current studies show that these models have not been sufficiently adapted to local linguistic and cultural contexts (Abdullah & Yusof, 2020; Salleh & Yusof, 2021). Therefore, there is a need to strengthen counsellors' skills in using word analysis as a foundation for understanding client communication effectively.

This study addresses this gap by examining the extent to which counsellors can identify problem roots, understand implicit meanings, and implement interventions based on the client's word choices. It also evaluates how counsellors adapt existing theories and skills to suit Malaysian cultural communication practices. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to developing practical and effective local guidelines that enhance counsellors' competence in providing psychological support that is fast, accurate, and grounded in an understanding of clients' language and context.

### Research Design

This study uses a qualitative case study design to explore in greater depth how counsellors understand the implicit meanings in clients' speech. Through the analysis of counselling sessions conducted by counsellors, this design is suitable because it allows the researcher to examine real experiences and the interaction process between the counsellor and the client in a contextual manner. This approach enables comprehensive data collection through observation, interviews, and transcript analysis to identify patterns of word usage that reflect the client's emotions, thoughts, and internal conflicts.

### Population and Sampling

The study population consists of experienced counsellors and relevant counselling session transcripts. Purposive sampling is used to select participants and data rich in information related to therapeutic counselling sessions and implicit psychological expressions within real counselling contexts.

### Data Collection Methods

Data collection is carried out through observation and in-depth interviews with counsellors, as well as analysis of counselling session transcripts that have been acknowledged and granted permission. These methods allow the researcher to examine the structure of language, symbolism, and linguistic patterns that reflect the client's psychological conflicts.

### Expected Outcomes and Implications

Integrating word-analysis techniques into counsellor education and practice can:

1. Enhance reflective competence by offering objective feedback on communication style and emotional tone.

2. Support supervision and assessment, providing measurable indicators of counsellor growth.
3. Promote evidence-based practice by bridging linguistic research with clinical application.
4. Advance digital counselling evaluation in online or hybrid contexts where text data are readily available.

However, ethical concerns regarding confidentiality, contextual interpretation, and over-reliance on algorithmic measures must be carefully managed (Jennings et al., 2022). Word-analysis should thus complement—not replace—human judgment and empathic understanding in the counselling process.

### Conclusion

The word-analysis technique represents a promising innovation for advancing counsellor competence through linguistic insight and data-driven reflection. By quantifying dimensions of counsellor-client communication, it provides objective feedback that can deepen self-awareness, guide supervision, and inform continuous professional development. Continued research is required to refine linguistic indicators of competence, ensure cultural validity, and integrate ethical safeguards. Nonetheless, word-analysis stands as a valuable contribution to contemporary models of reflective, evidence-informed counselling practice.

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