

Language Use in Autobiographical Memory Transcripts as a Window into Attachment Style and Personality

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Abstract : If language reveals internal psychological processing, then it is also likely that language use in autobiographical memory transcripts may be used as a window into attachment style and related personality features. The current study, therefore, examined the possible associations between attachment style, negative affectivity, social inhibition, and linguistic features extracted from autobiographical memory transcripts. Young adult participants ($n = 61$) filled out attachment and personality questionnaires, and orally reported a relationship-related memory. Memories were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Using a computerized linguistic extraction tool, positive affect words, negative affect words, and cognition words were extracted. Spearman's rank correlation coefficients revealed that attachment anxiety was negatively correlated with cognition words ($r^2 = -0.26$, $p = 0.047$) and that negative affectivity was negatively correlated with positive affect words ($r^2 = -0.32$, $p = 0.012$). The findings suggest that attachment style and personality are associated with speech styles indicative of both emotionality and depth of processing. Because attachment styles, negative affectivity, and social inhibition are associated with poor mental health outcomes, analyses of key linguistics features in autobiographical memory narratives may provide reliable screening tools for mental wellbeing.

Keywords : attachment style, autobiographical memory, language, negative affectivity, social inhibition

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