

JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

TRAUMATIC EVENTS:
A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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2021

I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

České Budějovice 26. 7. 2021

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mgr. Jana Kozubíková Šandová, Ph.D., for her guidance, support, and immense knowledge.

Abstract

The goal of the thesis is to examine traumatic events from a linguistic perspective in detail. People who talk about their traumatic experiences use language in a specific way, and others who are a part of the conversation should adapt their expectations accordingly. Therefore, the thesis will mainly focus on what the discourse of traumatic events looks like and how we use narrative and other linguistic phenomena when it comes to this area. This information will be used to describe how we should try to perceive people with traumatic experiences and how to interpret their utterances. Both theoretical and applied linguistics will be used to achieve this goal, as well as interdisciplinary fields such as psycholinguistics. The thesis will then also work with sources from the areas of law and psychology. It will examine court cases connected to witness accounts of traumatic events and also psychological handbooks which deal with this phenomenon.

Key words: trauma, linguistics, psycholinguistics, narrative, coherence

Anotace

Cílem práce je podrobné prozkoumání traumatických zážitků z lingvistického hlediska. Lidé, kteří hovoří o svých traumatických zkušenostech, užívají jazyk specifickým způsobem a ostatní, kteří se této konverzace účastní, by tomuto měli uzpůsobit svá očekávání. Práce se tedy zejména zaměří na to, jak vypadá diskurz traumatických zážitků a jak je v jeho rámci pracováno s narativem a s dalšími lingvistickými jevy. Tyto informace pomohou popsat, jak by se mělo k jedincům s traumatickými zážitky přistupovat a jak jejich výpovědi interpretovat. Pro dosažení tohoto cíle budou použity poznatky jak z teoretické a aplikované lingvistiky, tak i z interdisciplinárních oborů jako je psycholingvistika. Konkrétně pak bude tato práce čerpat z právních a psychologických zdrojů. Budou zkoumány soudní případy související s výpověďmi obětí traumatických zážitků a zároveň také psychologické příručky, které se danou problematikou zabývají.

Klíčová slova: trauma, lingvistika, psycholingvistika, narativ, koherence

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1. Introduction

There is no doubt that individuals who have gone through traumatic events are affected by such experiences in numerous ways, especially when they have to relive it. Talking about this event is a very difficult process for these people, and we, as onlookers, might often recognize that they are uncomfortable doing so based on various visual or vocal cues. Moreover, there are professionals, such as psychologists and psychiatrists, who are trained to pick up on those cues and react accordingly. That, however, is only scratching the surface because those are the most obvious indicators to look for. What might go unnoticed or get overlooked is the way those individuals use language to communicate their experience to other people, which actually goes beyond simple word choices. While those professionals mentioned above certainly can be qualified enough to detect that as well, there is no better field to address this issue than linguistics.

In other words, using a linguistic perspective while looking at the manner in which people talk about traumatic events can provide us with a lot of insight. Primarily, it can show us that the way people use language in these communicative situations differs from other instances in a significant way. Therefore, we must keep that in mind when interpreting their utterances and be very careful because we simply cannot apply the same standards as we normally do in ordinary communication. This thesis focuses exactly on that, and it highlights the linguistic issues which we need to consider and pay attention to when we communicate with people who have experienced traumatic events. Furthermore, the thesis also points out real-life implications of these issues, specifically in the areas of law and psychology.

Since there are various kinds of traumatic events individuals might go through, the thesis firstly specifies what exactly is meant by a traumatic event as it is examined throughout the rest of the text. Secondly, the thesis recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of the issue it deals with and, therefore, explores the psycholinguistic aspects of traumatic events, namely memory and emotions, which can greatly contribute towards the overall idea of how we express ourselves when it comes to our traumas. The next chapter then deals with the relevant linguistic phenomena we need to consider in the discourse of traumatic events, such as narrative, coherence, and conversational maxims, since all of these significantly affect the way we interpret utterances related to traumatic experiences. Finally, the thesis focuses on the specific features of children's discourse in relation to

traumatic events – children’s discourse is quite different as it is, and therefore we need to acknowledge that these specifics combined with the particular phenomena connected to traumatic events create a very distinct communicative situation. Overall, it is important to note that all of the chapters dealing with the features of the discourse of traumatic events include real-life situations commented on from a linguistic perspective.

The thesis mainly works with linguistic publications. Some of them focus on general issues of psycholinguistics or linguistics, which is used to establish and support the theoretical basis of the thesis, while others specifically consider the unique nature of the discourse of traumatic events, drawing both from theory and practice. As for the application in practice part of the thesis, the text works both with legal cases from the European Court of Human Rights, which will be referred to as the ECHR in the thesis, and handbooks of psychology.

Last but not least, it should be emphasised that the main goal of the thesis is to highlight how the discourse of traumatic events differs from other common types of discourse because it is important to approach our communication with individuals who are affected by traumatic experiences in a specific way, which is particularly true about the court and therapy setting. In court, it should not be held against the individuals that they cannot relate their trauma to other people as they would with any other event. On the other hand, in therapy, it should be remembered that even though on the surface of word choice it might seem that the individual can talk about a traumatic event like about any other situation, there are more linguistic aspects to consider, which are also much more telling than word choice. Therefore, this thesis tries to provide a linguistic perspective we can rely on to make sure that we do not misinterpret individuals affected by trauma.

2. Methodology

The thesis looks at traumatic events from a linguistic perspective, i.e. it tries to highlight and describe how individuals use language when talking about these events. Therefore, one of the main aims of the thesis is to establish the most relevant linguistic phenomena which we have to focus on because they are central to how the discourse of traumatic events differs from our everyday discourse. The other main aim is then to show how the linguistic phenomena present themselves in real-life conversation, which is done by applying the established theoretical basis in examinations of chosen sources from the areas of law and psychology.

2.1 Relevant Linguistic Framework

The relevant linguistic framework which is included in the thesis is chosen to point out the particular nature of the discourse of traumatic events. Firstly, the thesis starts by describing the psycholinguistic background of this issue – psycholinguistic aspects are rather significant in this case because the language we use when talking about traumatic events is heavily influenced by our own perspective of these events. This perspective then mainly consists of how we organize these events in our mind and what kind of emotional stance we adopt towards them.

After the significance of psycholinguistics is established, the thesis pays attention to the purely linguistic phenomena. The criterion that is used for selecting relevant linguistic phenomena is that they are realised in a very specific way in the discourse of traumatic events and because of that they are central to the interpretation of the discourse. In other words, the use of these phenomena differs from the usual manner, and we need to become aware of that if we want to avoid misinterpretation. The thesis also aims to point out the issues of interpretation that might not be that obvious and might require a careful approach since those are usually the ones which cause breakdowns in communication that are not that easily repairable. For all the reasons above, the selected phenomena are narrative, coherence, and conversational maxims.

Last but not least, the thesis takes into consideration that the linguistic framework that is relevant to the discourse of traumatic events must be specified in relation to children. Therefore, there is a chapter dedicated to elaborating on the previously

established issues and highlighting their specific realisation when combined with children's communicative competence, which of course differs from what we are used to as adults.

2.2 Sources from Law and Psychology

The areas of law and psychology are the ones that are selected because they represent settings in which it is immensely important not to misinterpret the utterances of individuals who have been affected by a traumatic event. In the case of law, the thesis works with legal cases from the database of the European Court of Human Rights in which there are applicants whose testimonies include descriptions of their personal traumatic experiences. The ECHR is chosen mainly because its large database offers full text search of detailed legal cases from various countries and areas of law in the English language, which provides for a lot of data that can be examined.

As for psychology, the thesis uses handbooks of psychology which deal with the issue of providing therapy to people with traumatic experiences and therefore include crisis intervention and case studies. The aim is to select and comment on, using a linguistic perspective, the parts of the handbooks that include insights into traumatised individuals' issues.

2.3 Application in Practice

Each examination of a real-life text focuses on a specific aspect of a linguistic perspective on traumatic events. It includes a summary of the real-life text it deals with, whether it is a legal case or an excerpt from a publication related to psychology, and then it describes how the text relates to the linguistic phenomenon in question. The main objective is then to highlight how what we can find in the text can be examined and explained using psycholinguistics or linguistics and through that provide a way how to approach the utterances of traumatised individuals.

3. Traumatic Events

Before we take on the challenge of looking at traumatic events from a linguistic perspective, it is necessary to establish what we mean by a traumatic event in the context of this thesis. First of all, it must be emphasised that there are critical differences between the ways people experience and later recall traumatic events compared to other significant events in their lives. This stems mainly from the fact that a traumatic event represents an extreme shock caused by a threat to the self and a loss of trust in the world (Matei 519). In other words, individuals who have experienced trauma are in a state of shock because their sense of identity, as well as the way they see and experience things around them, has been disturbed. Moreover, their perception of the world as a safe space has suffered as well, which greatly affects their general outlook. Therefore, as a result of this major upheaval of the normal state that feels rather threatening in many ways, these people tend to have quite a dissociated idea of the traumatic event in question that often lacks coherent components, which can be seen as their own way of dealing with such a distressing and invasive experience (Kolk, Fisler 12).

Second of all, we need to recognise the fact that there are two basic types of psychological trauma: individual trauma and collective trauma. While individual trauma constitutes an emotional response to a terrible event that an individual has gone through, collective trauma refers to an emotional response that is shared by a group of people who have all experienced the same traumatic event (Matei 518). The group can be quite small, for example we can look at trauma of a particular family, but more often than not we focus on collective trauma of bigger groups, such as nations or the entire society. That kind of collective trauma might then lead to what we call cultural traumas, i.e. psychological responses to horrific events that change how people collectively perceive themselves as a culture (Zasiekina 119).

Since the thesis aims to use a linguistic perspective to show how to interpret utterances of individuals affected by traumatic events, its focus is mainly on individual trauma, particularly on traumatic events as experienced by individuals. That means that this thesis does not exclude traumatic events in which more than one person has been affected by the trauma, but it simply focuses on the events from an individual perspective. In other words, it does not try to specify or differentiate the characteristics of the discourse of traumatic events as experienced in groups. As for the individual traumatic events,

the thesis does not highlight any specific kind – what is said throughout the text can be applied to any event that represents a shock to the psyche of an individual in such a sudden and severe way that it prevents them from reacting to it regularly and effectively (Mateil 518). Those events might, therefore, range from psychological traumas such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, or rape to traumatic events like a car accident, a combat experience, or a natural disaster.

Last but not least, we should address the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder, which will be referred to as PTSD in the thesis. PTSD is a mental health condition which is caused by a traumatic event – as for the symptoms, it often leads to severe anxiety and mainly affects people's memories of the event (Kolk, Fislser 4). That means that individuals suffering from PTSD might either remember the event very distinctly (which can also only be true of a certain aspect of the event) or their mind might refuse to integrate such a memory. Nevertheless, as much as PTSD tends to be associated with trauma, the important fact is that not every traumatic event must inevitably lead to PTSD – whether an individual suffers from this condition or not depends on a number of factors, such as the nature of the traumatic event or the social support the individual receives. Moreover, people who do not experience PTSD are affected by similar symptoms, even though those might not be as severe (Zasiekina 120). Therefore, this thesis does not pay special attention to PTSD since it is more of an issue of how severe the effect on mental health is and the experience of individuals with or without PTSD does not necessarily differ in quality, but more so in quantity.

Overall, for the purpose of this thesis, it should be remembered that the linguistic perspective presented in the thesis relates to all kinds of traumatic events, which are all perceived in a very distinct way compared to other personal experiences. The only specifics are that the text focuses on traumatic events as experienced by individuals, not by groups, and it does not take into consideration whether those individuals suffer from PTSD or not since that is an issue of psychological diagnosis and it does not affect the psycholinguistic or linguistic aspects that are central to the text in a qualitative way.

4. Psycholinguistic Aspects

Before we look at the central linguistic characteristics of the discourse of traumatic events, we need to establish which psycholinguistic aspects of language production explain the distinct nature of the discourse. Generally speaking, psycholinguistics is an interdisciplinary field which connects our knowledge of psychological and linguistic aspects related to the process of producing and comprehending communication (Tathhoglu 242). We often hear about psycholinguistics in the context of the study of language acquisition and development, which will be addressed later in the thesis as well, but there are many more significant findings we can derive from. Specifically, for the purpose of this text, psycholinguistics addresses the issue of how certain mental processes are related to how language is represented in the brain and how we later produce language. The two mental processes that are essential to consider in the case of traumatic events are then memory and emotions. The reason is that linguistic representation and production are certainly connected to how individuals store and retain their experience in their memory and what kind of emotional stance they adopt towards it.

4.1 Memory

Memory plays a big role in language production as it holds both information that is stored for long periods of time or permanently, which we call Long Term Memory, and information which is a part of a current operation, in this case ongoing communication, for which we use the term Working Memory (Field 109). From the psycholinguistic point of view, the most important pieces of information of course consist of aspects of our communicative competence. However, the way our memory processes other kinds of information is just as significant, especially in the case of traumatic events, since it affects our ability to produce utterances. To be more specific, how we store and later retrieve information about traumatic events influences the manner in which we talk about them.

Studies show that especially initially, compared to other life experiences, traumatic memories are dominated by sensorial, perceptual, and emotional aspects in the form of flashbacks, which do not form a uniform sense of a memory (Kolk, Fisler 12). Individuals, therefore, experience difficulties when trying to remember and relate the event in question as they do not have a complex recollection of it, and they particularly struggle with condensing it into a narrative. That is caused by the fact that traumatised

individuals' mental processes do not fully encode and integrate these painful memories in an act of self-preservation (Crespo, Fernández-Lansac 154). It is more than necessary for the day-to-day life of these individuals affected by trauma. Basically, they adopt this avoidant, repressive strategy of remembering their experience in a disorganised and fragmented way because they are fearful of and struggle with fully reflecting on the event, which is threatening to their sense of self and thus to their ability to perform other regular mental tasks (Zasiekina 121).

As it was mentioned, this disintegrated organisation of mainly somatosensory memories is especially true of the initial way of storing memories of traumatic events. However, trauma memory is a dynamic process, and over time as the trauma comes into consciousness with greater intensity, people become aware of more and more elements of the traumatic experience (Crespo, Fernández-Lansac 154). This kind of a change and its progress of course depend on many factors, such as the severity of the trauma, coping mechanisms these individuals use, or the support they receive, but there certainly comes a point when they start to get a more complex sense of their memory. Moreover, as this happens, they also begin to construct a narrative of what they went through. With that said, their ability of relating the event to others might be and usually still is quite lacking since the narrative remains disorganised, even though it is not as fragmented as it initially was (O'Keary et al. 723).

In conclusion, as we consider the discourse of traumatic events, we should be mindful of the fact that individuals affected by these events struggle with fully integrating them into their memory and even if they do, there is still some level of fragmentation or disorganisation. This then greatly impacts the individuals' ability to condense the events into complex narratives that can be easily related to others. The linguistic aspects of these issues of forming a narrative will be examined later in the text.

4.2 Emotions

The other psycholinguistic factor which influences the way we talk about traumatic events are emotions. Fundamentally, there is no doubt that the manner in which our mind deals with traumatic events is very emotionally charged. In other words, memory organisation is clearly intertwined with emotions. As it was already mentioned, the way we store these memories in our mind is, especially in the initial stages, very disorganised and

fragmented, but another important point is that the traumatic memories are highly emotional. Furthermore, as we try to reorganise these memories and create a complex recollection of the traumatic event in question, we also work on transforming their very emotional quality into a more emotionally neutral one (Zasiekina 120). This process allows us to reflect on the event and form a more complex, comprehensible narrative.

Another thing we need to recognise in relation to emotions is that emotions are mental processes which shed light on our language, and at the same time our language choices reflect our emotions (Tathhoglu 244). However, that relationship between emotions and language is definitely not as straightforward as it might seem at first. To be more specific, if we feel a certain kind of emotions, we do not necessarily project those into our language in a direct way. When we consider the threatening and shocking nature of traumatic events, it becomes more than obvious that individuals who have gone through them are overcome with negative emotions. From that we might infer that when talking about these events, people use negative emotion words and other linguistic strategies which reflect those emotions, but the opposite is often the case. Since those individuals tend to adopt repressive coping mechanisms, they also avoid letting their negative emotions show in their language, which results in them not using words evoking those emotions, particularly in combination with first person singular self-references (Pennebaker et al. 568). This strategy enables them to emotionally distance themselves from the distressing event, even if just seemingly and momentarily.

Thus, as we analyse a linguistic perspective on traumatic events, we should always keep in mind that while emotion words and other language strategies certainly reveal speakers' attitudes, it can be even more corresponding to their emotional state when speakers do not use language the way we generally expect them to (Koschut 486). Therefore, as for the discourse of traumatic events, we should not be surprised that we do not find emotion words which establish an explicit reference to the negative emotional feeling of the speaker in question. On the other hand, we should expect that the speaker might rather choose neutral terms or even avoid referring to any emotional state, and in extreme cases of denial and repression of a traumatic memory, they could even use positively charged emotion terms (Koschut 482). What we are also more likely to find are emotional metaphors, comparisons, and analogies since those provide a certain

distance from the difficult raw emotions the speaker is feeling, and therefore it is easier to use those compared to directly referencing the emotions.

In conclusion, we should recognize that emotions are closely interrelated with the organisation of our memory and therefore also with our ability to form a complex narrative as it was discussed in the previous chapter and will also be closely analysed from a linguistic perspective later in the text. Moreover, in relation to emotions, we need to remember that the fact that a speaker is unable to use negative emotion words and reflect negative emotions in their language in a direct way should not be taken as a lack of those emotions. On the contrary, this inability points to quite severe negative feelings, which the speaker tries to repress or avoid and wants to distance themselves from since they are understandably very distressing and also threatening to their self.

4.3 Application in Practice

How we should approach traumatic events from a psycholinguistic perspective will be demonstrated on symptoms of war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which are described in the handbook of psychology called *Crisis Intervention and Trauma*. Although the handbook specifically mentions PTSD, these symptoms and especially their psycholinguistic consequences can be also applied to war veterans who have not been diagnosed with PTSD – the only difference is that veterans with PTSD will be even more impaired in their language production as their trauma is always combined with certain mental health issues.

Firstly, the handbook points out that these war veterans experience their memories sensorimotorically without much access to language. In other words, they recall their memories of combat in the form of visual and auditory flashbacks and bodily sensations (such as the feeling of pressure or stiffness). From a linguistic perspective, this is then reflected in their inability to produce a coherent narrative. If we were to compare it to everyday memories, the most readily accessible representation of them in our minds is verbal, which means that if we want to talk about them, it is not that difficult to transform our thoughts into spoken language. On the other hand, trauma resists this transformation based on the nature of its mental representation. Furthermore, there are two other symptoms of war veterans' PTSD that contribute to challenging language production: poor concentration and narrowing of attention. Thus, not only are the veterans' memories

fragmented, but they also struggle with concentrating on trying to piece them together, and the fact that their attention span is narrowed means that their mind resists looking at their combat trauma as a whole. Therefore, it becomes quite clear that we cannot expect war veterans to provide us with a coherent and logically structured narrative, which would be ready for our interpretation. We, as listeners, will naturally struggle with comprehension and interpretation as the narrative of traumatic war experiences does not meet the standards we have for other narratives. It is necessary to anticipate the struggle, otherwise we will experience a complete breakdown in communication.

Moreover, we should keep in mind another syndrome of veterans' PTSD – they tend to avoid any stimuli that remind them of their combat trauma and force them to relive it. For instance, the handbook provides an example of a Vietnam veteran who spent most of his days locked in his basement and went out only if it was unavoidable because even the smallest stimulus, such as a loud sound, could trigger his traumatic memories. If we take that into consideration, it becomes quite obvious that being asked to produce a narrative of combat trauma is a task which brings about many unpleasant stimuli, and it is thus more than understandable to try to avoid it. However, it is talking about the trauma that can help these veterans process and make sense of what happened to them during combat, which is an unfortunate paradox. What it means for language production is that listeners need to be extremely patient with war veterans who, if they decide to attempt to produce narratives of their traumatic experiences, will need to take pauses at unexpected places, often hesitate, or even give up production completely if it becomes too much. None of that should then greatly influence the interpretation of their narratives, other than in the sense of how traumatising their war experience was.

Last but not least, there is a group of symptoms of PTSD that is related to emotions and to their expression. To name the most significant ones, they include a subjective sense of numbing, depersonalisation, dissociation, and a lack of emotional expressiveness. The lack of emotional expressiveness then speaks for itself – war veterans battle with expressing their emotions, whether it is verbally or nonverbally. Moreover, they often do not feel like they possess emotions due to the sense of numbing. What it means is that we should expect their narratives to be more neutral and not to contain many emotion words, although their trauma was a very emotionally charged experience. Hence, this should not influence listeners' interpretations in the sense that they would feel like the veterans are

not invested in the combat experience or like they were not negatively affected by it. Similarly, listeners should not feel that way due to the fact that war veterans experience depersonalisation (disconnectedness from oneself), which results in preferring passive structures to first-person singular reference in their discourse (because of that, they can almost seem like an objective observer). Depersonalisation in the case of war veterans is then also related to dissociation, in particular to the effort to disconnect oneself from one's memories and emotions. If the veterans fully dissociate themselves, we can even expect to come across positively charged narratives – for instance, war veterans tend to disregard any traumatising events and focus on what they appreciate about their military service, which is a form of defence mechanism. If the dissociation is only partial, we are then more likely to encounter metaphors and analogies in relation to emotions, specifically emotions tend to be expressed by the veterans through analogies with bodily functions, such as anxiety through shortness of breath. In any case, narratives of traumatic combat experience will likely not live up to expectations of an unprepared and unaware listener in terms of their emotional expressiveness.

4.4 Conclusion to Psycholinguistic Aspects

Psycholinguistic aspects play a big role in how we look at trauma from a linguistic perspective because mental processes are related to how language is represented in our brains and how we later produce language. The two mental processes that affect language in relation to trauma are then memory and emotions. With memory, the fact that traumatised individuals grapple with integrating traumatic events into memory significantly influences language production, mainly because this struggle results in memories that are fragmented and disorganised, which negatively affects narratives of traumatic events. The character of the memories is also impaired by how much emotionally charged trauma is. Moreover, intense emotions in relation to trauma bring about avoidance and distancing. These defence mechanisms result, for instance, in a lack of negative emotion words. Finally, those psycholinguistic aspects can then be illustrated with the example of war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which was provided in this chapter.

5. Relevant Linguistic Phenomena

After we have established the psycholinguistic background of traumatic events in the previous chapter, we need to look at the linguistic aspects which characterise the manner in which individuals talk about the traumatic events that they have experienced. Firstly, this chapter deals with the general nature of the discourse of traumatic events, which is important to characterise before we move on to the specific linguistic phenomena that are central to the interpretation of the discourse. Those phenomena include narrative, coherence, and conversational maxims. All of them are analysed in their respective subchapters with the focus on what kinds of deviations from general language use we need to consider and keep in mind in order to avoid misinterpreting utterances of individuals affected by trauma. This theoretical basis is then used in subchapters dedicated to application in practice to further emphasise the importance of recognising the distinct character of the discourse of traumatic events.

5.1 Discourse of Traumatic Events

First of all, we should recognise that identity is an important element which inevitably emerges from discourse (Matei 518). What we do through discourse is both shape our identity and relate it to others. Yet, in the case of traumatic events, our identity feels threatened, and we tend to distance ourselves from those horrible experiences, as it was examined in more detail in the previous chapter. In other words, individuals affected by trauma do not want it to be a part of their identity, or more precisely, they repress or try to hide that it indeed is a part of them. That is why those individuals might and often do use the power of discourse, which lies in creating and maintaining self and identity, to shape a different version of themselves (Fasulo 326), though this does not mean that they try to become someone else. What it actually indicates is that they seek to create an identity that does not include the traumatic event in question. Not in the sense that they completely avoid mentioning the event (though that might be the case as well), but in the sense that their discourse reflects their need not to see themselves as participants in it. Which then, for instance, manifests itself linguistically in a lack of first-person self-reference or emotion words (Pennebaker et al. 564).

However, while individuals who have experienced traumatic events try to distance themselves from them when they use language, we cannot deny that discourse acts as a tool for transcending the incoherence and disorganisation of our lives (Bamberg, De Fina, Schiffrin 5), and as previously discussed, this incoherent, fragmented, and disorganised nature is then particularly true of traumatic events. Therefore, to put it simply, in order to make sense of traumatic events, we need to talk about them. Discourse allows us to bring order into our experience and to try to surpass the negative effects trauma has had upon us, which ultimately helps restore a sense of meaning that was previously lacking due to the disorganised nature of our mind in relation to the traumatic event in question (Matei 518).

Hence, here we have a discourse that is particularly important because it helps individuals deal with their traumatic experiences, which can only lead to a conclusion that, for their own good, those individuals should be able to communicate with others effectively. Yet, another typical feature of the discourse is that it reflects that people shift in the ways they think and expresses themselves in relation to a traumatic experience (Pennebaker et al. 564), which happens both because they want to distance themselves from the event and because their mind has great difficulty organising it. Fundamentally, this presents a complex problem considering that what people normally expect when they try to comprehend discourse is an integrated linguistic representation of the events in question (Zwaan, Rapp 726). However, that is exactly what speakers struggle with the most in relation to the discourse of traumatic events. They cannot easily make sense of the events, and although discourse provides assistance with that, the nature of the discourse is still far from integrated, and it often lacks other linguistic qualities we tend to expect as comprehenders.

In other words, the discourse of traumatic events is quite uniquely marked from the point of view of linguistic mechanisms, and this specific markedness often hinders comprehension and might lead to misunderstandings as it departs from what is normally expected in communication (Matei 521). As for the specific linguistic mechanisms, those range from various linguistic strategies to individual linguistic cues. What we should then expect in the discourse of traumatic events are many linguistic elements which interfere with integrating information and creating a complex, comprehensible discourse, such as a high degree of ambiguity and indirectness or a lack of cohesion or its ineffective use

(Zwaan, Rapp 730). We can also often encounter issues with structural cues, especially with positioning phrases or sentences in an effective way. All of these specific issues then play a role in the more general linguistic phenomena which need to be taken into consideration in relation to the discourse of traumatic events and which are therefore examined in more detail in the upcoming chapters.

5.2 Narrative

The first linguistic phenomenon which has been selected as integral to understanding the discourse of traumatic events is narrative. Narrative is a discourse genre which stems from one of the fundamental parts of humanity – we, as humans, have a tendency to make sense of our own lives and the world around us through rationality and sequentiality (De Fina, Johnstone 152). Essentially, we create stories to talk about things, and we expect these stories to make sense and to be in some sort of a temporal order.

5.2.1 Fundamental Differences in Narratives

Unfortunately, when it comes to the discourse of traumatic events, this basic definition and essence of narratives is where we start to encounter significant issues. First of all, as it was previously mentioned, it takes a lot of mental effort to construct and integrate traumatic memories (Crespo, Fernández-Lansac 154). People who have gone through traumatic events do not, and most importantly cannot, process those similarly as they would have processed other everyday events. Thus, the event is mentally constructed and remembered as very fragmented and incoherent (O’Kearney, Perrott 81), and it is also not fully integrated into their current cognitive schemata (Luno et al. 2956). This results in the fact that the narrative of the event in question cannot display the typical quality of temporal order and rationality which we usually look for in other narratives. Second of all, this also influences the language used in the formation of narratives. Since the way the trauma is represented in our memory is less articulated (less concrete and clear), we can expect it to be reflected by simpler language, in contrast to how the particular person usually expresses themselves (Amir et al. 391).

Apart from rationality and temporal order, there is another critical criterion we often use when we judge and place value on narratives: consistency. To put it simply, when someone tells us a story about themselves or something else, we expect it to be

the same or at least very similar once we hear it being recounted again. While that is a legitimate expectation and demand, it overlooks the fact that the past is not set in stone, though we might often think of it as such. The content and meaning of our experiences are constantly being reframed in our minds as we come into contact with other events and ideas in our ongoing lives (Mishler 36), and this happens to any kind of a memory or cognitive schema, regardless of their nature. However, it is particularly true about trauma narratives. We have already established that traumatic memories are fragmented – this fragmentation then makes them more susceptible to being revised and redefined. Therefore, we can say that narratives of traumatic events truly develop over time, more so than it is the case for others, perhaps less emotionally charged and life altering, experiences (Kolk, Fislser 12). After all, these traumatic narratives are reinterpreted in terms of later information, events, consequences, and even reactions from other people. Particularly, it often happens that some unforeseen event leads people who have experienced traumatic events to recontextualise and perhaps even problematise their memories and consequently narratives (Mishler 40). This event can even help them to make sense of the trauma, but usually only to a degree, we cannot expect that the person in question will suddenly develop a fully integrated and complex narrative.

So far, we have established three important and essential qualities of narratives which are generally used when we assess other people's narratives (temporal order, rationality, consistency), and we have also shown that narratives of traumatic events do not fully display these qualities. Before we proceed to describe specific linguistic phenomena that go along with these discoveries, we should emphasise and explain why it is so important to pay attention to the difference between regular narratives and trauma narratives. First of all, similar to discourse in general, as it has been already established, narrative is a linguistic mode which helps us construct our identity and relate it to others because it is in narratives that our ongoing life story emerges (Georgakopoulou 83). This is significant mainly for two reasons: the way we see ourselves affects the way we manage the content and sequences of our narratives, and through narratives we tell others who we are. Therefore, since people who have experienced traumatic events struggle to put the narrative of these events together in a rational and integrated way, others might and unfortunately often do make judgements about them as people based on this fact (Georgakopoulou 85). Traumatized people are then seen as somewhat unreliable,

secretive, or even unstable, which is a wrong assumption based on the qualities of their narratives over which they have no power.

The second significant reason why we need to focus on the differences is that the main aim of a narrative is to recreate both the visual and emotional background of the traumatic experience in question (Matei 518). In other words, when we tell someone a story about something that happened to us, we want them to be able to imagine what it looked like and what it made us think or how it made us feel. There are two essential types of clauses in narratives that have these exact functions: referential clauses, which have to do with the setting and characters, and evaluative clauses, which are related to the thoughts and emotions of the author of the narrative and eventually point to the reason why they are telling the story (De Fina, Johnstone, 153). Both referential and evaluative clauses then have to work – they need to be able to help the listener of the narrative imagine the event from the point of view of the author. What it means for the author is that they need to ensure that the narrative is comprehensible and shows why it is worth recounting, i.e. the reason the author decided to tell it (De Fina, Johnstone 154). However, authors who create narratives of traumatic events they have gone through cannot easily do that. They are unable to create comprehensible referential clauses because of how fragmentedly and incompletely those events are stored in their mind. They also cannot fully express their own thoughts and emotions related to their traumatic experience because they naturally avoid them (Luno et al. 2956) and it is often too painful or shameful to directly talk about them (Slembrouck 247), which does not fully express and ultimately undermines the significance of their experience. This leads us to the conclusion that people affected by trauma struggle even with the basic types of clauses within their narratives and they are often unable to achieve the main aim of the narratives, to make the listener relate to their story and understand its importance.

Hence, to summarize why it is important to be aware of the differences in narratives of traumatic events, when we do not realise that these narratives differ from those we are used to, we can make incorrect and unfortunate judgements about the authors of the narratives, or we can dismiss narratives of traumatic events as nonsensical or irrelevant simply because we cannot see the story in our own minds and comprehend the thoughts and emotions related to the story.

5.2.2 Specific Differences in Narratives

As it was previously indicated, the fact that trauma narratives do not show the same qualities as other narratives we usually encounter means that there are certain specific phenomena inside of these narratives of traumatic events that should be described. These may be related to the qualities of temporal order, rationality, and consistency mentioned in the previous subchapter, or to other differences mentioned at other points in this thesis which also play an important role in relation to narrative, such as the psycholinguistic phenomenon of emotions or the general characteristics of the discourse of trauma narratives.

First of all, we can definitely expect that a narrative of a traumatic event will depart from the culturally normative structure found in accounts of other personal experiences (Mishler 45) – in other words, the narrative will not have the expected and also preferred shape and order of stories we look for in our everyday life. Ordinarily, the structure we anticipate as listeners of a narrative has five parts: abstract (a summary of the upcoming story), orientation (background information), complicating action (a sequence of events), evaluation, and coda/closure (De Fina, Johnstone 154). However, in the case of narratives of traumatic events, this structure is very rarely followed. We can most certainly expect it to be incomplete with the abstract part missing – it is incredibly difficult for people affected by traumatic events to create a clear summary, and they thus tend to opt to omit it completely instead of creating a piece of text they know will be confusing and hard to understand (Amir et al. 386). Evaluation might be missing as well if the traumatised person in question is trying to distance themselves completely from the event (Luno et al. 2959), but more often than not this part is simply not fully and freely expressed for the same reason. Nevertheless, perhaps the most significant is the middle section of the narrative which consists of orientation and complicating action. They tend to be intertwined together in a very disjointed manner, which creates the impression that the author is very confused and uncertain (Slembrouck 247). That might be true in a sense, however, we cannot perceive this as an unequivocal sign that we should doubt the person. Nor should we expect them to form a narrative according to our expectations if we point out the flaws we see in the original narrative. Overall, we should simply never expect someone affected by traumatic events to provide us with

a structurally sound narrative of those events – at least not structurally sound in the sense of what we are accustomed to.

Second of all, there is a number of phenomena that contributes to the incomprehensible and disorganised nature of narratives of traumatic events. The narratives are often incomprehensible simply because of the length of the narrative (Crespo, Fernández-Lansac 154): either they are too short because the author in question has repressed too much of the traumatic event or is too traumatised to talk about it, or they are too long because of repetition and speech fillers. No matter the length, however, repetition and speech fillers can be expected to appear in recounting of traumatic events together with unfinished utterances even more than in our everyday spoken communication (O’Kearney, Perrott 86). Therefore, even if we think we are used to those, the amount in trauma narratives still seems rather inappropriate and can even lead to breakdowns in communication. Those should then be expected and handled with understanding and patience. Similarly, we should also expect spontaneous shifts in verb tenses, especially from the past to the present tense (O’Kearney, Perrot 88). This phenomenon can then be ascribed to various causes, in the case of the shift from the past to the present tense mainly to the fact that a traumatic experience is very emotionally charged so it can often feel as if the person is experiencing it again while recounting it. On the other hand, in the case of shifting to the past tense from the present tense, it is caused by the fact that the person affected by trauma avoids talking about their own emotions and the consequences of the trauma in the present tense and prefers to think of it as all in the past as a form of a defence mechanism.

Last but not least, it is the lack of personalisation that is often found in narratives created by people who have gone through traumatic events. Essentially, it reflects the inability to fully integrate the memory of the traumatic experience into other cognitive schemata, especially the ones related to one’s identity (Luno et al. 2959), and also the necessity to distance oneself from the trauma in order to avoid its threatening and disruptive nature. This lack of personalisation manifests itself mainly in the extent and quality of self-referential perspective – we can expect deficient or irregular use of first-person pronouns, which are frequently replaced by other personal pronouns or passive structures without a clear agent (O’Kearney, Perrott 84). This may result in the impression that the author of the narrative is not personally invested in the story, even though

the opposite is certainly true, or the author can seem secretive or untrustworthy, which would be an unfair assumption. Furthermore, the deficient personalisation is related to a lower amount and frequency of emotion words (Amir et al. 386). This is particularly true about complex emotions, such as anger or embarrassment (O’Kearney, Perrott 86), which require an explanation and detailed description in the narrative. More generally, we can find narratives devoid of any deep expression of emotions relevant to the traumatic event in question (Huemer et al. 2). Although, it is also reasonable to expect narratives that are emotionally charged, so much so that the intensity of emotions can be detrimental to the already fragmented quality of the narrative of traumatic events. However, these emotions do not express themselves purely linguistically, but mainly through paralinguistic means, such as crying or whispering. Thus, even if the individual affected by a traumatic experience shows their emotions in a paralinguistic manner, they are mostly unable to do so by using actual words and complete sentences as well.

5.2.3 The Significance of Interaction in Narratives

It is important to note and emphasise that stories about traumatic events certainly belong to the people who had to go through them (Shuman 51). That means that in an ideal situation no one should try to change or question the narratives those individuals create. However, the reality is quite different, and the listeners do affect the final version of the trauma narrative in question. In order to see the importance of the listener, we have to stop seeing narrative as an autonomous unit and start thinking about it as talk-in-interaction (Georgakopoulou 84). While narrative is generally seen as a genre of discourse that is largely produced by a single individual, we still cannot forget about the fact that the listener plays an important role as well.

Admittedly, various listeners contribute in varying degrees to the final version of a narrative. Some are more directly and obviously involved by asking questions and demanding clarification or explanation. On the other hand, others, who do not try to be actively a part of the construction of a narrative, might think they are not intervening, but they still are doing so simply by backchannelling or using paralinguistic cues, such as facial expressions and gestures, which the listeners basically cannot help as those communicative tools are often employed automatically and spontaneously.

Therefore, as listeners and ultimately interpreters of narratives of traumatic events, we should always be aware of our involvement and be cautious of how much we influence the author of the particular narrative. Principally, listeners generally significantly influence two parts of the typical structure of narratives: complicating action and evaluation (Georgakopoulou 85). As it has been already mentioned, these elements are more demanding for the author to produce in the case of a trauma narrative than they usually are in ordinary narratives, and it should be no surprise that interaction with another person adds to the demanding nature and complications. With evaluation, individuals who are producing narratives of traumatic events that they are personally involved in are already struggling with expressing their thoughts and emotions. Therefore, if they actually manage to do it, any sign of the listener questioning those thoughts and emotions, or even in worse cases dismissing them, can be detrimental to the evaluation (Shuman 51), even if it is just a hasty and paranoid reaction on the side of the author and not at all intended meaning and effect by the listener. In other words, the author of the narrative is already very vulnerable because of the nature of the traumatic event and anything that will even slightly suggest that their thoughts and emotions are not being respected will result in avoidance of the evaluation or even the narrative task altogether. As for complicating action, a similar situation can apply. The narrator can give up on the complicating action, but they can also try to appease the listener by revising or altering the narrative. This decision often only results in further confusion because the person affected by the traumatic event in question cannot simply suddenly produce a comprehensible and complex narrative even if they would like to. After all, they are still affected by the trauma they have experienced.

Finally, listeners who are more involved in the construction of a narrative also tend to affect (or at least try to affect) the coda of the narrative – in particular, they demand an ending that integrates and summarises the whole narrative, mainly because they hope it will help them better understand and decode the narrative in its entirety. This is, however, an extremely challenging task in the case of trauma narratives, one that seems basically impossible for the traumatised individual (Mishler 45). Unfortunately, if the individual is then unable to provide such a coda or they resist it, which happens more often than not, the listener automatically comes to the conclusion that this makes the person and consequently their story less credible or worthwhile (Shuman 51),

unaware that their demand and expectations are more than unfair to the traumatised person.

5.2.4 Application in Practice

How to approach real-life narratives of traumatic events based on the information gathered above will be demonstrated on the case of *I v. Sweden*. This ECHR case was submitted by two applicants, a husband and a wife, who had been denied asylum by the Migration Board in Sweden and felt that this was in violation of their human rights. The reason they were seeking asylum was because they were under threat in Russia. In the case of the husband, he documented executions of villagers and rebels committed by federal troops. During that time, he received news that his wife and child had been kidnapped by the Federal Security Services, and he was later detained himself and forced to provide information about rebels under torture. He was even supposed to be executed by the Federal Security Services but ended up being saved by the rebels. As for his wife, she was captured together with their child and tortured and raped for several days. Ultimately, she was able to escape thanks to the help of a stranger and later finally reunited with her husband. Both the husband and the wife recounted their experiences to the Migration Board in an interview in the presence of an interpreter and their legal counsel, but the members of the Migration Board questioned the validity of their experiences because of incoherence, vagueness, and inconsistency, which was in the end one of the reasons why their application for asylum was denied. With the case summarised, it is important to stress that the aim of this chapter is not to determine whether the decision to deny the applicants asylum was correct or not (or whether or not the applicants were telling the truth), it simply tries to look at the applicants' stories as narratives of traumatic events and comment on them from that perspective.

Therefore, from a linguistic point of view, there are several points that should be considered: the characteristics of the applicants' narratives because of which the validity of their stories was questioned (incoherence, vagueness, inconsistency) and the matter of these narratives being uttered in the setting of an interview with a government agency. Firstly, the fact that the narratives were found to be incoherent will be addressed. One of the main issues in the case of the husband was that he could not give general circumstances about the torture he had experienced, and he also did not state why he had been subjected to that kind of abuse. In linguistic terms, he did not provide enough

referential and evaluative clauses that would result in sufficient abstract and orientation of his narrative. As for the abstract, it is a summary of the narrative that occurs at the beginning to prepare the listener for what is about to come and therefore help them orient themselves in the narrative. In this specific narrative of torture, the Migration Board obviously expected an abstract that would include evaluative clauses describing the reason for which the man was subjected to torture because this reason would form some kind of a guide through which all of the events in the narrative would be evaluated. It was not enough for them that during the complicating action of the narrative (in other words, while providing the sequence of the events in question), in which the torture was described, the man said that he was forced to provide information about the rebels whose executions he had been documenting.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that that type of abstract that was expected of the man is very difficult to form for a traumatised individual. People affected by trauma do not possess integrated memories that would allow them to fully form a narrative with rational connections, and therefore they struggle with coming up with a reason that would summarise their experience. Basically, it is very difficult for them to put all the fragmented pieces of various events together and find in them something that would explain their experience as a whole. All of what has been said about the abstract can then be applied to orientation as well. The orientation element of a narrative represents background information and therefore also helps with familiarisation in the discourse. It consists mainly of referential clauses having to do with the setting and the characters of the narrative in question. In our case, the husband was expected to provide general circumstances of the torture he had experienced, such as time, place, and people involved. However, once again, that must have been extremely difficult for him. Combining, ordering, and condensing the fragments of specific memories into a general orientation is not something that comes easily to traumatised individuals.

Similarly to the husband, the wife was also unable to provide general circumstances of the torture and rape she had gone through, but more importantly her statements about how she had been able to leave the place where she had been kept were not found credible because of their incoherence. In the framework of a narrative, this constitutes complicating action, i.e. a sequence of events, which is of course a central element of any narrative. To recapitulate what happened, the wife escaped the building in

which she had been tortured and raped for several days with the help of a stranger she had never met before. Given the traumatic nature of her experience in the building and the fact that she found herself in a completely unfamiliar situation, we can only assume that her memories of the experience were very fragmented and incoherent in themselves. That must have prevented her from forming the complicating action that was expected of her from the Migration Board. Not only did her escape appear incoherent to them because of the struggle to provide temporal order of the events, but also because there was a very little chance that she could piece those events together and connect them in a rational manner.

Furthermore, it is important to add two factors that contributed to the incoherence, both in the case of the wife and the husband. First of all, The Migration Board found their descriptions to be brief, but also disapproved of the fact that they were rather hesitant, which resulted in the extension of their narratives that was not welcome as it did not add to the factual content. However, it is very natural for traumatised individuals to produce short narratives that seem hesitant, mainly because of frequent unfinished utterances, repetition, and speech fillers. The reason for such narratives is that the individuals tend to repress their traumatic memories and they also feel the weight of the trauma very presently, which both prevents them from going into more detail or finishing their utterances and brings about faltering speech (they are very hesitant because of how disruptive the trauma is, and they buy time to try to collect themselves before they move on to upcoming important points by repetition of what has been said or speech fillers). The second additional factor related to incoherence is that the applicants talked a lot about their current situation and often related the past to it, almost distancing themselves at those moments from the traumatic events that were essential for the acceptance of their application for asylum. This distance is rather common for emotionally charged narratives, such as narratives of traumatic events (it helps traumatised people to take a break from the trauma itself), but if the shifts from the past to the present are too frequent, it certainly contributes to a great deal of incoherence if the listener does not expect it.

After incoherence, the next problem that was identified by the Migration Board was vagueness, which was mainly related to two specific issues. The first of those was that the terms used to describe the incidents of torture were general and very vague.

However, that is exactly what should be expected of narratives of traumatic events – since the memory of the trauma is less articulated (mainly comprising sensorial and emotional aspects), it is reflected in language production. People affected by trauma are very likely to use simpler and more general language compared to their everyday language use, even though they are describing very specific events, which ultimately results in a certain higher level of vagueness. The second factor that contributed to the perceived vagueness in the narratives was that there was not enough personalisation in them. From the linguistic point of view, we can say that the Migration Board did not think that the evaluation element of the narratives of the applicants was sufficient. Evaluation is principally about including one's emotions and assessments related to the events in the narrative, which essentially means incorporating one's own personality. Without it, any statement can seem rather vague and distant because it lacks immersion on the part of the listener, which can only be achieved through relating to someone's own thoughts and emotions. Specifically in our case, the Migration Board found it strange that the husband did not provide any explanation as to how his traumatising experiences related to each other and how he felt about them. Generally, this stems from the fact that as people try to distance themselves from the trauma they experienced, they use less first-person pronouns and phrases expressing their thoughts and emotions, such as "I think/believe" and "I feel like" to name a few. Unfortunately, this can often cause the impression on the part of the listener (in our case, it was the Migration Board) that the author of the narrative creates vague, impersonal stories on purpose, perhaps to try to hide something.

The third main issue, inconsistency, was mainly identified in the narratives of the husband when he recounted his work as a journalist and when he talked about how he had been told about his wife and child being kidnapped. As it has been established many times, memories of traumatic events lack integrity and continuity, and what the husband experienced can certainly be categorised as traumatic – witnessing multiple executions of people he was reporting on and then also finding out about his family being in danger, not to speak of the torture and sentence of death that took place thereafter, which must have affected his mind greatly as well. Furthermore, since traumatic memories are so fragmented, they get constantly reframed in a person's mind – that means they reinterpret them and recontextualise them. It is worth noting that these acts of reinterpretation and recontextualisation happen primarily when the person is forced to confront the traumatic

events in their memory again, which is exactly what happens when they are asked to produce a narrative comprised of those events. Therefore, this is where the inconsistency in narratives comes from – the language reflects the changing structure and connections of memories, and we end up with dissimilar utterances in formulation and content compared to what has been already said, even when it comes to central points of narratives, which is exactly what was held against the husband.

Last but not least, we need to address the fact that the Migration Board assessed the narratives of the applicants based on a number of interviews with them and that an interpreter and a legal counsel were present during those interviews. Essentially, there were parties present that could have significantly influenced the final form and content of the narratives – even if we disregard the alterations done to the narratives during the act of interpretation, the applicants were surrounded by a lot of either explicit or implicit cues from both the Migration Board (who intervened during the interviews) and their legal counsel. The main issue of a legal counsel being present during the production of a narrative is that the counsel is there to ensure that their applicants will provide such a narrative that is as close as possible to what the government agency in question is expecting and insisting on. That is of course important from the legal point of view, but, unfortunately, when it comes to linguistics and narratives of traumatic events, this means that the legal counsel is trying to guide their applicants towards a narrative they are incapable of producing. This ultimately does more harm than good and results in more incoherence and inconsistency – the traumatised individuals are already unsure of themselves, their own memories, and their own language, and the feeling that they cannot live up to certain expectations distresses them even more. That is, undoubtedly, also true when we consider the government agency (in our case, the Migration Board) and their attempt to make the person in question change their narrative to better fit what they demand through asking for clarification or using backchannels indicating either approval or disapproval. Overall, the traumatised individual who is affected by the nature of the trauma itself becomes even more overwhelmed, and it significantly affects the production of their narrative in a negative way.

5.2.5 Conclusion to Narrative

Narrative is a discourse genre that is very natural for human beings – we tend to create stories to talk about various things. However, narratives of traumatic events differ from

the ones we usually encounter. Because of the character of memories of trauma (disorganised, fragmented, less articulated), temporal order and rationality do not meet standard expectations. Another way how these narratives are affected then includes the fact that simpler language is used to talk about trauma and the problem that because memories of traumatic events are likely to get recontextualised over time, we can detect a lot of inconsistency. Moreover, there are many specific issues which depart from what we usually want from narratives and which complicate comprehension and interpretation by listeners. The structure of narratives of traumatic events tends to substantially differ – abstract and evaluation are missing or insufficient, and orientation and complicating action are also lacking and often intertwined together, causing a lot of confusion. Another issue is the length of the narratives, which is either inadequately short or excessively long. Similarly, shifts in tenses and a lack of personalisation cause the narratives to be perceived as incomprehensible.

Clearly, all of these issues represent linguistic elements which do not come easy to traumatised individuals – therefore, we can observe additional problems as interaction gets included in the production of the narratives. Through asking for clarification, backchanneling, or paralinguistic cues, listeners affect the final version of a narrative, unfortunately, mostly negatively. They signal to the particular traumatised individual to fix the deficiencies that are, in their eyes, hindering comprehension on their part – that overwhelms the individual who cannot meet their expectations and impedes the narrative production. Finally, all of those aspects of narratives of traumatic events mentioned above can then be illustrated with the example of people who experienced torture and rape, which was provided in this chapter.

5.3 Coherence

The second linguistic phenomenon we need to consider and try to better understand in the context of the discourse of traumatic events is coherence. So far, it has been mentioned many times that two of the central characteristics of how people mentally process and later talk about traumatic events are incoherence and fragmentation. Therefore, it is imperative to take a closer look at what it actually means and how it manifests itself in the discourse, specifically in the discourse genre of narrative, which was discussed in the previous chapter.

5.3.1 Coherence and Cohesion

If we look at fragmentation in narratives from a linguistic point of view, we can see that it is reflected in two closely related language domains: narrative coherence and narrative cohesion (O’Kearney, Perrott 90). With narrative coherence, we focus on conceptual organisation of the narrative in question, whereas with narrative cohesion, we consider the level of connectedness through various linguistic tools. Both of these domains are perceived as essential elements of any discourse production, but their necessity and expectedness are even more emphasised in narratives. Producers of narratives aim to create a complex, interconnected discourse that carries a clear meaning, which can be hard to decode if various elements of narratives do not work together and do not connect. Thus, both narrative coherence and narrative cohesion need to be present – or, to be more precise in the context of narratives of traumatic events, they are expected to be present, which means that their absence or deficiency are met with a confused or even dismissive reaction.

It can often be the case that narrative coherence and narrative cohesion are considered and examined separately. However, for the purpose of this thesis, we will from now on work with the approach that narrative cohesion contributes to narrative coherence in the sense that it is one of the ways of creating and signalling coherence in narratives (Tanskanen 7). Therefore, whatever is said about narrative coherence also applies to cohesion. The reason for employing this approach and not examining narrative cohesion separately is that in narratives of traumatic events, individuals do not necessarily struggle that much with cohesion in itself. Specifically, the fragmented and incoherent nature of their discourse does not simply and straightforwardly stem from the fact that their general use of connectors, such as conjunctions or pro-forms, is inadequate or even absent (O’Kearney, Perrott 88). With that said, we can certainly perceive deficits in the use of connectors, nevertheless, that only contributes to the overall disorganised and incomprehensible character of the narrative of traumatic events in question by highlighting its conceptual disorganisation, it does not singlehandedly create it.

Now that we have established the relationship between narrative coherence and narrative cohesion, we should take a closer look at coherence itself. The essence of narrative coherence lies in the fact that the author of the particular narrative establishes a sense of conceptual organisation by creating meaning relations between different

information units in the text (Sanders, Noordman 37). On the more elementary level, this can be seen as combining minimal neighbouring clauses into more complex textual segments through various types of relations, but as we build on these meaning relations it starts to span across the text as a whole and create one complex and integrated meaning. Essentially, coherence relations result in the fact that the narrative is more than the sum of its parts (Sanders et al. 51). It achieves this effect by employing linguistic devices such as meaning relations, continuity, recurrence of elements, or signalling.

As for meaning relations, we will focus on those in more detail in the following subchapter, for now it is just important to know that meaning relations connect individual clauses by creating a link between them, a link that is not directly stated in itself and more complex than a simple use of a linguistic connector. Next in order, continuity consists in the use of similar or proximate discourse elements (Campbell 12), which is mainly related to the fact that we need to use discourse elements that are relevant in the context of other discourse elements in order to create a coherent discourse. This should not be confused with recurrence, although they are certainly related. Recurrence (sometimes also termed reiteration) then refers to a repeated appearance of a specific discourse element (Givón 61), though it might not be in its original form. For instance, a specific noun can recur as a synonym or a general noun. Last but not least, signalling is a device which gives emphasis to specific elements of the semantic content of the particular narrative, and therefore indicates which elements are central to the overall interpretation of the text.

Finally, there is one fundamental feature of narrative coherence which needs to be addressed. While it is important, as we have done, to consider specific linguistic textual devices which contribute to coherence (such as meaning relations, continuity, recurrence, and signalling), we also need to keep in mind that narrative coherence is not an objective property of the narrative itself (Sanders et al. 51), but it relates to the cognitive representation discourse participants make of the narrative in question. By cognitive representation, we mean the results of mental processes that consist in discourse production on the part of the author of the narrative and discourse comprehension on the part of the listener (Givón 60). In other words, whether one sees a certain narrative as comprehensible or not stems from their act of perceiving, processing, and interpreting the given text, which makes it highly subjective. Thus, it is important to provide as many discourse elements that contribute to narrative coherence as possible if we want to avoid

misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. Unfortunately, as we will discuss in the following subchapter, individuals who have been affected by traumatic events struggle with providing these devices and elements, which results in those individuals being disadvantaged as they strive to make themselves understood.

5.3.2 Differences in Coherence

In this subchapter, the focus will be on the specific departures from the common coherence we can find in the narrative coherence of traumatic events. All of the divergences that will be mentioned and examined are obstructive to the act of interpretation on the part of the listener. Therefore, they hinder traumatised individuals' ability to guide the listener to understanding and relating to their story that takes the discourse form of a narrative of traumatic events.

First of all, as for the general coordinates of the narrative, various cohesive relationships and elements contribute to narrative coherence regarding the specificity and extent it provides in relation to place orientation, time, sequence, and character of the event in question (O'Kearney, Perrott 90). These coordinates are integral to the overall character and ultimately to the interpretation of the whole narrative. However, in the case of traumatic experiences, individuals' ability to describe these coordinates of the event is greatly affected (Luno et al. 2017). More often than not, they are unable to create such a narrative that would provide adequately recounted place orientation, time, and sequence of the individual parts of the particular traumatic event. Either traumatised individuals have repressed the memories of the events, and therefore cannot categorise them in terms of time and place, or they provide a lot of discourse elements as descriptors that do not create complex coordinates of time and place because these discourse elements are not sufficiently interrelated, or they even contradict each other. Similarly, it is very demanding to provide the overall character of the traumatic event, mainly because traumatised individuals protect themselves from the trauma by refusing to perceive it in its entirety and for what it is. To put it simply, it is not easy for them to say that what happened to them should be considered traumatising. Overall, all of these above-mentioned factors contribute to the fact that the listener is unable to produce their own coherent representation of the event in their mind, and thus struggles with the interpretation of the narrative.

Second of all, there are meaning relations, which greatly contribute to the overall coherent nature of a narrative. These are relations between segments of a narrative, specifically between individual clauses, which establish and specify the meaning connecting the particular segments, and later these relations build on each other to create the meaning of the whole narrative. Moreover, the meaning of the relation between the segments also affects the way we process and interpret each of the segments on its own (Sanders et al. 52). In other words, the meaning of one clause can be reinterpreted or altered in our mind based on its relation to another clause. For those reasons, they are extremely crucial in establishing the narrative coherence of a text.

With narratives of traumatic events in particular, we especially need to consider these meaning relations: cause-consequence, condition-consequence, consequence-cause, argument-claim, and condition-claim. As for the meaning relations which include the elements of cause and consequence, it should be pointed out that clauses related in terms of causal relationships greatly contribute to the processing of narratives (Sanders et al. 39). Essentially, we as human beings are used to seeing events through the optics of cause and consequence, or through another variant of that relation. It is a natural instinct for us because we have the need to explain everything around us (Trabasso et al. 193). Unfortunately, when it comes to narratives of traumatic events, traumatised individuals mostly lack the ability to create causal links because they struggle with making sense of the events. Furthermore, they were often not actively involved in what happened to them, they were usually only victims or observers of an unfortunate situation, and they also try not to see themselves as a part of the events at all as a defence mechanism, which further contributes to their problems with describing the causes, conditions, and consequences. Specifically, the expressions of intentional action and physical causality tend to be problematic in narratives of traumatic events (Trabasso et al.194) – intentional action because traumatised individuals are not voluntary participants in the events and their traumatising nature affects the individuals' rational thinking, and physical causality for the same reasons. Basically, when people are experiencing traumatising events, they lose most of their ability to think and subsequently act as rationally as they would in any other situation, which then results in the fact that they cannot put their thoughts and actions into rational causal relations in a coherent narrative. In the case of the rest of the mentioned meaning relations, argument-claim and condition-claim, we encounter similar issues as

with the others since it is difficult to make any claims about certain arguments or conditions if you are unable to make sense of the situation you are recounting.

While these local clause to clause meaning relations, which we have discussed so far, are certainly important, there are two phenomena integral to the final act of interpretation: the topic of the narrative, and also the overall meaning that arises from the integration of particular local meaning relations (Trabasso 191). Together with meaning relations we then also have the device of signalling, which helps us locate the important parts of the narrative by emphasising them and therefore contributes to the topic and the overall meaning. In the case of narratives of traumatic events, however, signalling is exactly the element that is often lacking or missing, and thus complicates the production and comprehension of a coherent narrative (O’Kearney, Perrott 90). The issue mainly stems from the fact that the most significant parts of the narrative of traumatic events are also the most traumatising and upsetting ones, and that is why individuals do not mention them at all, do not draw further attention to them in order to protect themselves, or emphasise other parts of the narrative in the effort to shift the focus somewhere else. This is also a good time to point out and stress that this is not necessarily done intentionally by the authors of narratives of traumatic events – it is mostly a subliminal defensive mechanism through which they protect themselves from vividly remembering and re-experiencing their trauma.

After the phenomenon of meaning relations, we should consider continuity and recurrence of discourse elements next. As it was mentioned before, these two should not be confused with each other, but they are indeed related. This contributes to the fact that they share the reasons why they are central to narrative coherence and also why they do not work in narratives of traumatic events in the same way they do in regular discourse. First of all, they are significant because we create a sense of a united and integrated narrative through reiteration of the same discourse elements (it does not matter whether it is through a simple repetition or a substitution) and through the use of discourse elements that are relevant based on their relation to each other (Tanskanen 99). Unitedness and integration then play a big part in arriving at an interpretation that is coherent and therefore functional in communication. However, an individual’s ability to produce such coherent qualities is negatively affected when it comes to trauma narratives (Luno et al. 2957). Traumatised individuals struggle with this in different ways, they

either overuse continuity and recurrence (because they are still trying to make sense of the experience while recounting it, and it unfortunately results in a narrative heavily focused on certain related elements, often ones that do not have considerable significance), or they do not use it sufficiently and adequately (not wanting to use or repeat certain traumatising parts of the narrative). It does not matter which of these cases it is, it negatively affects the overall narrative coherence nonetheless (Tanskanen 111).

Last but not least, the focus will be on textual connectors since it is extremely difficult to achieve coherence without cohesive texture, mainly in texts that are longer and that lack a sufficient amount of shared context (Martin 71), which is definitely the case for narratives of traumatic events. Essentially, the more efficiently connected and cohesive a narrative is, the more accessible and comprehensible it is to its interpreter (Givón 64). For narratives of traumatic events, the connective phenomenon which poses the biggest problem is certainly anaphoric reference. Since it a very demanding communicative performance to create a narrative of a traumatic experience (traumatised individuals do not want to recount it and want to quickly forget about it), its producers tend to fail to remember what has already been said and to anaphorically refer to it (Givón 99). This ultimately results in unnecessary and intrusive repetition, which was already examined above from another perspective, and it also makes the whole narrative less coherent and therefore harder to relate to and interpret.

5.3.3 The Significance of Interaction in Coherence

Similarly to narratives themselves, narrative coherence is also created in interaction, though we might not automatically perceive it as such. In its essence, coherence is a task of negotiating understanding within human interaction that is accomplished through employing various systematic discourse elements and devices (Goodwin 117). In the case of narrative coherence, this negotiation however usually does not occur explicitly, it mostly happens as a reaction to subtle indicators (or to a lack thereof, an example of which can be a lack of backchanneling cues) from the person that is supposed to comprehend and interpret the narrative. These indicators tell the producer of the narrative that there are possible issues with comprehension, which creates an opening for revisions and alternations. However, this kind of flexible maintenance of coherence is not always possible, and that is particularly true about narratives of traumatic events (Trabasso et al. 189). Authors of such narratives would certainly like to make them more coherent if they

could, but they struggle and fail to do so. This then results in a very unfortunate reaction – traumatised individuals feel the pressure to create a coherent narrative (Goodwin 122) and when they realise their shortcomings in such a task, the level of incoherence rises even more as a result of the individuals being distracted and stressed.

The next issue related to interaction we should consider is that what greatly influences narrative coherence is our natural human need to see texts as coherent wholes and also perceive events as inherently related, though they may be completely random, and we thus cannot really create a coherent narrative around them (Trabasso et al. 189). Traumatic experiences can then definitely be categorised as events without interrelatedness and coherence on their own, at least from the point of view of the person who has gone through them. Despite that, the person is expected to produce a narrative that has those coherent and causal qualities. Although they are unable to do so, the listener in the particular communicative situation cannot get rid of their need for such a narrative according to their standards, which subsequently leads to many breakdowns in communication and misunderstandings.

This ultimately connects to the fact that the experience of relatedness and coherence in narratives is very subjective and intuitive, and it is largely a matter of personal judgement (Trabasso et al. 190). What it means for narratives of traumatic events is that we should always keep in mind when listening to someone recount their trauma that what we expect of a narrative in terms of coherence and how we perceive the level of coherence resides in our own preference and subjective perception. We should then adjust our expectations and also accept that traumatised individuals are unable to provide us with narratives that are coherent in a way we would like them to be. This approach can contribute to a more open interaction, one that is considerate of the person who has experienced something traumatic.

5.3.4 Application in Practice

How we should apply the information gathered above in our approach to traumatised individuals will be demonstrated on the case of S.M. V. Croatia. This ECHR case deals with alleged trafficking in human beings, in particular with an accusation of a man by the applicant of physically and psychologically forcing her into prostitution. The applicant met the man, who introduced himself as a friend of her parents, and they

started to keep in touch because he promised her that he would help her find a new job. Instead of providing a job for her, he told her during one of their meetings that she would have to become a prostitute until he found another job for her. When the applicant refused, he beat her and took her to meet the client he found for her anyway. After that incident, he rented a flat under her name where she moved under threats of physical harm (he threatened to harm her, her roommate at the time, and her family members). They both lived in the flat, but the applicant did not have her own keys and was constantly monitored by cameras installed in the flat on the rare occasion that the man left. In that flat, she was forced to provide sexual services both to him and to other men, and she was physically punished anytime she protested. Finally, the applicant was able to escape one day when the man was absent from the flat for a longer time and she left for a friend's house. After her escape, the man contacted her and threatened to hurt her parents. The applicant reported all of it to the police who investigated the man for prostitution under coercion and human trafficking, although he stated that it was simply an attempt to take revenge on him. When the case reached the Croatian court, the man was not found guilty, mainly because the court did not find the applicant's witness statements sufficiently coherent and credible. With that summarised, the aim of this chapter is to look at what the court was not satisfied with in the applicant's statements from a linguistic perspective.

The main issues in the eyes of the court that we should consider were then these: the statements were incoherent, illogical, and hesitant. Firstly, the fact that the court found the statements incoherent can be related to many issues. One of the aspects that is central to coherence and the interpretation of narratives is that the producer of a narrative needs to provide general coordinates, which usually consists of time and sequence, place, and character of the event in question. While time and place did not play an important role in this case, the sequence definitely did as the applicant in our case was unable to provide a clear outline of the events that had led to her moving to the flat the man had rented for her. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that during that time she had already experienced physical abuse and had been threatened with more physical violence not only to her, but also to the people close to her. Therefore, it must have been very challenging for her to try to come up with a sequence of these events that would establish a coherent timeline as her memories of those traumatic experiences were certainly very fragmented, disorganised, and inconsistent.

Moreover, the court also expected the applicant to come up with a united character of her experience that would be central to the interpretation of the narrative she produced. Basically, it would have helped the interpretation and greatly influenced it if she had explicitly said that what had happened to her was traumatising coercion to do things against her will. Instead, the court found that she could not relate all the details of the case to each other to form one coherent definition of what she had experienced. Even if we disregard the fact that to name this type of abuse is a matter of specific vocabulary (mainly related to legal register), as a traumatised individual, the woman must have used a defence mechanism of repressing the actual traumatic nature of her experience, and thus it was not easily accessible to her to describe it as such.

Apart from general coordinates, the applicant also failed to employ sufficient signalling in her narrative. In other words, she did not emphasise the important parts of the narrative that would guide interpretation on the part of the listener, in our case the court. As it was mentioned above, one of the problems the court took into consideration was that there was a number of details that did not relate to each other and at times contradicted each other, and despite the details provided, her testimony was even characterised as too general. In the end, she did not sufficiently stress the details, or in other words individual utterances or individual words, that would guide the listener during their interpretation of the narrative as a whole and help them create a unified and specific representation in their mind of what has happened. For any listener, important parts of a narrative that are signalled, whether through using specific words (such as connectors or adverbs) or specific syntactic structures (such as cleft sentences), are essentially basic building blocks in interpretation to which they relate the rest of the narrative (functioning as a more detailed background). However, in the case of traumatic events, the most significant elements of the narrative tend to also be the most traumatic ones, which traumatised individuals do not want to face and relive. Thus, even if they get mentioned, traumatised individuals do not draw attention to them, and they can, unfortunately, appear as less meaningful than they actually are.

The second main problem with the applicant's statements was that they were illogical, which is basically a subcategory of being incoherent. Coherence is based, among other things, on meaning relations between individual utterances, which are ultimately combined to indicate the overall meaning of a discourse, specifically of

a narrative in this instance. Therefore, if these meaning relations are not used sufficiently and effectively, the narrative can in fact be perceived as illogical – especially if the listener is not prepared for a narrative that is alternative to what they are normally used to and expect, which is exactly what happened in the case of the applicant. She failed to make her narrative appear sufficiently logical and coherent to the court because she was unable to employ meaning relations of cause-consequence or consequence-cause and argument-claim.

As for cause-consequence or consequence-cause, these meaning relations are essential causal links that occur regularly in common narratives. In narratives of traumatic events however, their traumatised producers are rather lacking when it comes to the ability to link constituent utterances in this way. First of all, they participated involuntarily in whatever happened to them, and second of all, they often did not act in a rational way during these events, which is why they subsequently struggle to explain their actions. In the case of the applicant, she could not causally link how she had ended up doing prostitution – in other words, she knew how it happened, but she could not make sense of it as she was coerced into it against her will, which makes the memory of the experience itself extremely confusing. Similarly, she could not explain why she had not tried to escape earlier or alerted somebody – but when we take into consideration that fear itself is a very instinctive emotion, we can see how it can be difficult to explain through a straightforward meaning relation such as cause-consequence. All the things that have been said about causal links can then also be applied to the meaning relation of argument-claim. What was expected of the applicant was that she would make certain claims about her experience that would be supported by arguments. This is, once again, quite challenging for someone who is affected by trauma. While the argument element might be present, it is the claim part that causes problems. Providing claims about and therefore characterising traumatic experiences is not easy as the representations of the experiences in the mind are very fragmented and incongruent, which reflects in the language and hinders the production of a summarising claim or characterisation.

Last but not least, the court also found the applicant's statements to be very hesitant. In the case of a narrative of traumatic events, the hesitation simply stems from the fact that its production takes longer and includes a lot of pauses since there are many demanding linguistic devices that a traumatised individual encounters. Other than

the ones that have already been mentioned, these certainly include continuity and recurrence of elements together with cohesion, specifically with anaphoric reference. The main reason why it is so demanding for people affected by trauma is that they are still trying to make sense of their trauma during the production of their narrative, which results in the excessive use of recurrence of certain elements and underutilised anaphoric reference. To put it simply, the people cannot easily recall what has already been mentioned and how (because it is very difficult for them to produce any kind of narrative, and also because they do not want to go back in their mind to the more traumatising elements of the narrative), and they tend to repeat a lot of the same things excessively, which definitely contributes to the overall hesitant appearance of the narrative in question. However, using the same or related discourse elements can at the same time be insufficient because of not wanting to go back to certain traumatising elements or topics and because of the overall tendency to avoid them. Overall, it is obvious that the fact that at some points there can be too much of these linguistic devices and at others too little contributes to the perception that the narrative is incoherent and hesitant. It is also what happened in the case of the applicant as it was found detrimental to her statements that they were both too confusing in the number of details provided and too abstract in the sense of connections and relations of these details being absent.

5.3.5 Conclusion to Coherence

Coherence refers to the conceptional organisation of, in our case, narratives, which is supported by connectedness through linguistic tools, i.e. cohesion. For narratives of traumatic events, it is important to be aware of the fact that coherence is very subjective – that is why it is important to provide as many effectively used linguistic devices that support coherence as possible, but that is exactly what traumatised individuals struggle with. They find it difficult to provide general coordinates of narratives (such as the character of the event in question, place, or time) to guide their listeners in their interpretations, and they also do not sufficiently use meaning relations, particularly those establishing causal links. Similarly, signalling and using textual connectors, such as anaphoric reference, are very lacking. Continuity and recurrence in narratives of traumatic events also tend to be inadequate, but at the same time they often get overused, which ultimately results in a lot of perceived incomprehensibility. Overall, coherence is something that is commonly expected by listeners, and if it does not meet their standards,

we end up with breakdowns in communication and misunderstandings. Listeners even often indicate to traumatised individuals that there are issues with comprehension due to a lack of coherence, but these individuals do not possess the ability to flexibly maintain their coherence since they battle with it so much. Finally, all of those aspects of coherence in relation to trauma can then be illustrated with the example of someone coerced into prostitution, which was provided in this chapter.

5.4 Conversational Maxims

The last linguistic phenomenon which will be closely examined in this thesis are Grice's Conversational Maxims. These maxims are a foundation for Grice's Cooperative Principle that poses the idea that there is an underlying principle in each conversation, one that determines how we use language to achieve efficient and successful communication (Cruse 355). This idea emphasises something that has already been mentioned at numerous points in previous chapters: utterances raise certain expectations related to what they should contain and how they should be structured, and if these expectations are not met, we start to infer other meanings and implications that are not explicitly stated in the texts themselves.

5.4.1 Differences in Conversational Maxims

The four maxims on which the cooperative principle is founded are then the following: the maxim of quality, the maxim of quantity, the maxim of relation, and the maxim of manner. Most of these, except for the maxim of quality (which can still be relevant but not in such a substantial manner as the others), play a big part in how narratives of traumatic events deviate from usual communication, and therefore the cooperative principle.

In the chapter devoted to narratives, it was pointed out that the length of a narrative is often an issue when it comes to traumatic experiences: the narrative tends to be either too short or too long. Disproportionate brevity is characteristically related to the repression of traumatic memories or to the inability to produce a sufficient amount of text because the person producing it feels overwhelmed by the traumatising nature of their experience. On the other hand, when the narrative becomes excessively lengthy, it tends to be because of unnecessary and disproportionate use of repetition and speech fillers.

Moreover, it is also very typical that the producer of the narrative is unable to remember and recall the specifics of the particular traumatic event, which results in them using more general words in an attempt to express themselves and describe the situation (Luno et al. 2957). This affects not only the maxim of quantity, but also the maxim of manner.

The maxim of manner tells us, among other things, to avoid obscurity. The failure to express oneself in specific terms and structures then certainly contributes to a higher level of obscurity. Another element of the maxim of manner is that we should avoid ambiguity. The use of general words instead of specific ones can affect the ambiguous nature of a narrative of traumatic events as well, but what is detrimental to it the most is the fact that since traumatic memories have poorer clarity, they tend to produce more ambiguous narratives compared to the ones we usually encounter in our everyday lives (Amir et al. 386). Last but not least, we should also address the maxim of relation. Producers of narratives should try to be relevant – in other words, they should say things that do not deviate in an excessive and unreasonable manner from the main topic and overall meaning of the particular narrative. However, deviating themselves from the main topic is a very legitimate strategy for traumatised individuals because in this divergence they can take a break from constantly thinking about and reliving the trauma (Luno et al. 2959), which ultimately helps them not to become too overwhelmed and prevents the abandonment of their narrative effort.

5.4.2 Deviations from Conversational Maxims

As the ways in which individuals affected by traumatic experiences deviate from certain conversational maxims have been summarised, it should be noted that people do not fulfil and completely observe the maxims in many situations and for many various reasons in everyday life (Cruse 358). When that happens, the addressee of the particular discourse has two options as they are faced with violating and flouting of the maxims: they can either assume that the co-operative principle has been abandoned, or they can infer that the deviation carries its own specific significance pertinent to the meaning of the discourse. The latter option is then called a conversational implicature. A conversational implicature can be characterised as a meaning implied (as opposed to being explicitly stated) by a speaker of a discourse – this meaning implicitly arises from not observing and rather flouting the conversational maxims (Huang 31).

In relation to narratives of traumatic events, there are three possible situations which need to be considered for their relevance as they cause breakdowns in communication. First of all, it is the situation when the speaker does not observe the cooperative principle and conversational maxims not because they want to but because they have no other choice due to the traumatising nature of their experience (Cruse 358). This then leads the addressee to believe that the speaker has abandoned the cooperative principle, which results in a dismissive reaction on the part of the addressee towards the speaker's narrative and perhaps even the speaker themselves. Second of all, it can happen that the speaker once again does not observe the cooperative principle because they are unable to do so, but this time the addressee assumes that they are trying to create a conversational implicature, which can lead to unfortunate misunderstandings.

Last but not least, it is entirely possible, and it often does happen, that the speaker indeed aims to create a conversational implicature by flouting the conversational maxims. For instance, they use a lengthy description of a certain detail in order to point to its significance without explicitly expressing it. However, in the case of narratives of traumatic events, conversational implicatures do not tend to be as straightforward as this one in the sense that this particular instance of a conversational implicature follows principles of flouting conversational maxims that ordinarily and repeatedly appear in everyday conversation. More often than not, the addressee struggles to figure out the traumatised speaker's intended conversational implicature through an inference (Huang 157). The reason for this is that while the addressee might be used to typical conversational implicatures and therefore tends to make accurate inferences related to them, conversational implicatures made by traumatised individuals mostly do not follow ordinary patterns, at least not in an expected way. An example of that can be that the lengthy description of a detail mentioned above can easily be meant to express avoidance of the larger context of a situation (Luno et al. 2957), which is rather unexpected and harder to infer. Overall, it is simply more difficult to orient oneself in conversational implicatures connected to narratives of traumatic events, especially since we cannot as easily relate to someone else's traumatic experiences as we do relate to other events in life. One's experience of a traumatic event is highly subjective and therefore creates a very subjective narrative, whose interpretation requires more effort.

5.4.3 Application in Practice

How we should approach narratives of traumatic events from a linguistic perspective, specifically from a perspective of conversational maxims, will be demonstrated on principles of narrative therapy that are described in a handbook of psychology called *Principles of Trauma Therapy*. In the handbook, narrative therapy is a type of therapeutic approach that is recommended for and illustrated on patients who have experienced domestic abuse, particularly having been repeatedly attacked and otherwise physically abused. What is therefore advised is that in their therapy, these patients should focus, with the help of their therapists, on developing a coherent narrative of the traumatic event in question as it helps them deal with it. However, it is vital that their therapists need to be aware of the fact that this is not something that can be achieved during one therapy session. The essence of narrative therapy is that patients' stories are revisited and continuously developed over numerous sessions because the more they talk about their trauma, the more coherent their narratives become.

In connection to the topic of this thesis, the aim of the chapter is to focus on how aspects of narrative therapy can be related to conversational maxims and interpretation of narratives of traumatic events in general. The principal aspects are then that the therapists need to work with their patients on making their narratives: more specific, longer, and more focused. Firstly, as the patient continues to develop their narrative over numerous sessions, it should become more specific. In the case of victims of domestic abuse, that means that a part of the narrative can potentially be initially described very generically:

“He hit me on the head, and there was yelling and blood.”

Later, this generic description will continue to include more details as more pieces of memories are recalled and put together:

“Okay, he was yelling at me, saying I was lazy, and then he hit me with an ashtray, a green one, and it cut my head. I bled all over the carpet in the living room.”

From a linguistic perspective, this is clearly relevant to the maxim of manner, which tells us to avoid obscurity and ambiguity. If we take a look at the first iteration of the narrative, it is rather obscure because there is no agent to the action of yelling (which also makes it ambiguous), and we do not have a clear image of how the hitting on the head was carried out and of how much blood and therefore how big of an injury it caused. Conversely, it

is quite clear from the second narrative that the one yelling was the abuser (which gets rid of the ambiguity), and that the victim of the abuse suffered a severe wound, which we can infer not only from the weapon that was used and the type of the injury, but especially from the phrase “bled all over”. Moreover, the first version of the narrative leads to ambiguity in terms of temporal sequence – we cannot tell with certainty whether the yelling occurred before, simultaneously, or after the attack. The second version then provides more clarity and clearly states that the yelling preceded the attack. While it might seem a bit inconsequential to some, it is actually very important because it establishes that the attack was not a rash reaction to a specific and momentary behaviour of the victim, and that it was a gradation of the abuser’s own actions. Therefore, we can see what difference it makes whether the maxim of manner is followed or not, and how it is not appropriate to expect victims of abuse to produce a clear narrative without ambiguity if they have not received sufficient help and support. Furthermore, it should also be addressed that in the case of the first narrative, not following the maxim of manner can result in a conversational implicature and that can bring about a misunderstanding. Specifically, such a general description leads the listener to believe (if they do not expect it) that the producer of the narrative is almost mentioning it in passing and not really perceiving it as central to the overall narrative, which is of course far from the truth.

The next aspect a victim of domestic abuse works on with their therapist is making their narrative longer, which is obviously related to the maxim of quantity. Initially, narratives of victims of domestic abuse tend to be disproportionately short compared to the narratives we commonly encounter since the victims lack perspective and only include a few facts. This can, unfortunately, result in the fact that their listeners conclude that they have abandoned the cooperative principle, and the whole communication breaks down. The next step in developing a coherent narrative of such trauma is that the victims start to ruminate about every single detail, and their narratives become unnecessarily long. Once again, this may lead their listeners to believe that the cooperative principle has been abandoned, or they can perceive it as a conversational implicature. Further, they infer that the fact that the victim produces a lengthy description of a detail points to its significance. For instance, if we look at the second version of the victim’s narrative above, it could be a long description of the ashtray, including various details and perhaps even a history of the item. However, this would more likely not be meant to imply significance, it would simply be a result of rumination, which is a natural step in making sense of the memory

of the abuse in question (as the victim tries to think of every single detail, and only later starts to determine what is important). Finally, after brief narratives and rumination, victims of domestic abuse can start to produce narratives that follow the maxim of quantity as they increase their sense of perspective and are able to achieve cognitive processing that is more complete. However, it is necessary to remember and expect that at this stage their narratives still often include long and general explorations of thoughts and feelings, which can result in a lengthy, ambiguous discourse, because they are never truly done with processing and making sense of what happened to them (due to the disruptive nature of trauma).

The last aspect that will be addressed is that during narrative therapy, it is an aim that the victim should continuously become more and more focused. What initially prevents this is that victims of domestic abuse are susceptible to rumination and irrational thoughts, their retelling of the traumatic events can trigger memories of other traumatic experiences, and they naturally get emotionally overwhelmed. All of this then contributes to the maxim of relation not being followed. Rumination has already been addressed since it produces longer narratives, but it also causes traumatised individuals to digress. For instance, we come across utterances following descriptions of abuse such as this one:

“I was thinking about all the weird stuff he used to say to me and my friends, like, before he did it to me.”

While this is still clearly relevant, taking a break from describing the abuse in question like this can lead to losing oneself in past events or even irrational thoughts in the sense that everything in the past is seen in relation to the abuse and the victim starts to blame themselves for not predicting the abuse and not avoiding it (unfortunately, victims of abuse tend to irrationally blame themselves). Furthermore, it does happen that as the particular victim starts to face their traumatic memories of abuse, this prompts other traumatic memories to resurface. Victims are usually not prepared for that, and they thus abandon the current topic for the new one. While it is completely natural, it does break the maxim of relation. Last but not least, it is also very natural that traumatised victims of domestic abuse get emotionally overwhelmed. To combat that, they are likely to dissociate, i.e. to disconnect themselves from their thoughts and feelings, which basically serves as a distraction from those overwhelming feelings. This is ultimately reflected in their language production, for instance in sudden changes in topics. If it happens often,

the listeners in the communicative situation can easily start to believe that the maxim of relation has been abandoned. Moreover, during individual instances, it can also cause them to assume there is some sort of a conversational implicature, which there is, but it might be difficult for them to infer the appropriate meaning if they are not familiar with how traumatised individuals create narratives.

5.4.4 Conclusion to Conversational Maxims

Grice's Cooperative Principle demonstrates how listeners hold certain expectations in relation to utterances and how it causes issues when these expectations are not met. Out of the four conversational maxims on which the principle is built, three of them pose a challenge for traumatised individuals, which results in not obeying these maxims. As for the maxim of quantity, narratives of traumatic events are perceived as either too long or, on the other hand, too short. The narratives also tend to be obscure and ambiguous, mainly due to a higher number of general words, which does not follow the maxim of manner. Moreover, the maxim of relation is often not obeyed as well as individuals affected by trauma are likely to deviate from the topic of trauma to take a break from how overwhelming it is. These deviations from conversational maxims are seen by listeners mainly as an abandonment of the cooperative principle, but sometimes also as a conversational implicature even though that is not the intention of the traumatised individual in question. Although, it does happen that these deviations are meant as a conversational implicature, but then the issue often is that in narratives of traumatic events, conversational implicatures are quite specific and harder to make an inference from compared to other discourses. Finally, those aspects of conversational maxims can be illustrated with the example of narrative therapy for victims of domestic abuse, which was provided in this chapter.

5.5 Conclusion to Relevant Linguistic Phenomena

The discourse of traumatic events is quite problematic. Essentially, we need to recognise that what emerges from discourse is one's identity. However, for people affected by trauma, their identity feels threatened, and they try to create an identity that does not include trauma, which results in a lot of avoidance. This avoidance, together with the complicated nature of memory and emotions in relation to traumatic events, affects certain linguistic phenomena, such as narrative, coherence, and conversational maxims,

in the sense that they depart from what we normally expect in many aspects. This poses a problem as listeners are often not prepared for it, and what we end up with are many misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. That is unfortunate mainly because discourse is a tool which can help traumatised individuals restore a sense of meaning they have lost due to trauma, but for that they need listeners who are aware of how challenging certain linguistic phenomena are for these individuals and do not hold it against them.

6. Features of Children's Discourse in Relation to Traumatic Events

In the previous chapter, it was examined and described how certain linguistic phenomena greatly differ in the context of traumatic events from what we are accustomed to in our regular communicative experience. All of these differences then result in many issues leading to misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication, which cannot be as easily solved as they would be in other situations. Now, if we combine these difficulties with particular typical features of children's discourse, we come to the conclusion that things get even more complicated because these features often contribute to greater fragmentation and incoherence in children's speech. That is why this thesis includes a separate chapter which focuses on children's discourse and its specifics in relation to traumatic events. The structure of this chapter will follow the relevant points that have been previously discussed in relation to individuals with clearly developed linguistic and communicative competencies. Nevertheless, before we proceed to that, we need to address two general issues regarding children's discourse and traumatic events.

First of all, it is a fact that children actively use language to construct an identity and self-awareness within their social and cultural setting (Kyratzis, Cook-Gumperz 686). They gather semantic and pragmatic linguistic resources around them to help them realise and express who they are (and how they interact with their surroundings as themselves). However, traumatic experiences will problematise that. As it has been already mentioned in this thesis, trauma is extremely threatening and disruptive to an individual's identity, and that is even if that identity is mostly or fully developed. Thus, what happens to traumatised children is that they have no way of sufficiently accumulating linguistic resources to express their identity that is not yet fully developed and even disrupted due to their trauma (Crain, Thorton 1074). That results in them being unable either to produce a narrative of the traumatic event in question at all (the younger they are, the more probable that is), or to produce one that would have any resemblance of an ordinary, coherent narrative.

Second of all, after the issues with identity itself, it is necessary to point out that children also do not possess fully developed emotional intelligence and they are still learning to express their emotions in a comprehensible and accepted form (Simon et al. 230). In other words, they lack awareness of their actual feelings and even if they are

aware of them and intend to express them, there are quite a lot of deficiencies in their ability to do so. Overall, we essentially have to keep in mind when communicating with traumatised children and trying to comprehend their narratives that since they have not yet fully developed their identity and emotional awareness, they cannot possibly include those qualities in the production of their utterances, which means that those utterance will inevitably be rather incomprehensible by our usual standards in communication.

6.1 Psycholinguistic Aspects

Before we proceed to relevant linguistic phenomena, we need to consider certain psycholinguistic aspects that play a big role in children's discourse, especially in relation to traumatic events. In general, the fact that children's cognitive abilities are still developing and also fluctuating in quality leads to many issues (Melinder et al. 159). Primarily, their memory does not have sufficient capacity and fully functional procedural mechanisms (Simon et al. 230). Those insufficiencies then result in an increased risk of inaccuracies and inconsistencies in their discourse.

Combined with the general fragmented nature of traumatic memories, children's discourse of traumatic events should be expected to include many contradictions and inaccuracies, and we should also assume that their discourse is naturally susceptible to change depending on various situations (Melinder et al. 159). Since the memories have no way of being fully formed and integrated, they can be more easily influenced and altered based on surrounding conditions and reactions, which is then reflected in the respective discourse. This is also interrelated with children's heightened suggestibility. Children are sensitive to their surroundings, particularly to verbal and non-verbal cues provided by others (Melinder et al. 174). The sensitivity then only grows if they are nervous, confused, or in a state of shock, which they certainly are after a traumatising event or when they need to recount such an event. Children then tend to make changes in their discourse and develop it in a certain way based on cues from other participants in communication.

Most importantly, it is necessary to understand that children mostly cannot fully comprehend the meaning and impact of the clues and their effect on the children's discourse (Steinberg, Sciarini 26). This issue can be best concretised and demonstrated on an example: if someone asks children leading questions (questions that push

the children towards a certain response), the children are unaware that they are basically being manipulated and alter their discourse accordingly without realising the effect and even semantic meaning of such alterations. Therefore, when we interact with traumatised children, we need to be mindful of how we communicate because our actions can easily influence those children and result in a discourse that is not true to the children's own perception and interpretation of the traumatic events in question.

Another significant cognitive ability that needs to be addressed is conceptual processing, specifically meaning making. In this process, people create a conceptual representation of an event and assign an emotional reaction to it (Simon et al. 230) – this is what they later draw from in communication. However, children's ability to perform this process is quite limited compared to adults. As for creating conceptual representations, children mainly struggle with concepts that are abstract or complex, and particularly with the ones that are both (Pennebaker et al. 556). To put it into context with trauma, children's mental representation of a traumatic experience is even simpler than it is the case for adults because they lack the skills to achieve the opposite in general, not just specifically in relation to traumatic events. Moreover, as it has already been discussed, children are not fully equipped when it comes to emotional intelligence – that is why assigning an emotional reaction to an event poses a challenge, especially when the emotions felt in relation to the event are complex and unfamiliar, as it is certainly natural with traumatising events (Simon et al. 230). Overall, what this ultimately means for children's trauma discourse production is that we should expect children to provide us with utterances that correspond to the above-mentioned qualities, and we certainly should not judge the discourse by and hold it to our regular standards in communication.

6.2 Narrative

Narrative in itself is a very complex discourse genre, one that requires a lot of integration of miscellaneous types of knowledge and skills (Stein 282). Pair it with the disjointed nature of memories of traumatic events, and you undeniably arrive at narrative disorganisation that is much greater than we are used to under normal circumstances. Furthermore, if you take this already established narrative disorganisation and combine it with how additionally cognitively and linguistically demanding narrative is for children (Berman 356), we simply end up with a fragmented discourse that only resembles narrative in certain aspects. Thus, for children affected by traumatic experiences, it is

almost an impossible task to create a narrative that would be clearly organised and comprehensible.

Specifically, children struggle the most with these three elements of narratives: orientation, complicating action, and evaluation. Their struggle is then even enhanced once we include trauma into the production of narratives. As for orientation, which represents basically background information to a narrative, children tend to produce overgeneralised fragments of texts that are very lacking in details (Miragoli et al. 112). In other words, they provide little to no specific pieces of information about time, location, and people involved. Further, with complicating action, we encounter the obvious issue of insufficient temporality and connectivity (Berman 356). There is a great deficiency in causal or any other kind of connections, resulting in extremely fragmented, disjointed, jumbled, and seemingly unrelated segments of events. Additionally, what also contributes to this state of disorganisation is the fact that traumatised children experience difficulties in maintaining a single perspective (Simon et al. 238).

Last but not least, evaluation is very specific in the context of traumatic events and children as producers of narratives because we rarely find mentions of internal states and motivation (Miragoli et al. 107) – or, to be more precise, these mentions do not take a form that is normally expected. For instance, children do not describe their inner mental processes directly, but these processes can sometimes be inferred from how children talk about their physical reactions and activity. Moreover, traumatised children also experience issues with regulating their current emotional reactions, and they include them in evaluations (Simon et al. 238), despite the fact that these reactions are more pertinent to the moment at present, not to the traumatic event itself. In any case, expressions of these emotions are then very intrusive and disruptive in the process of producing and comprehending a narrative, especially because they are not necessarily relevant in nature, and because they divert attention away from other essential elements of the narrative.

6.3 Coherence

We have already established that producing narratives is fairly challenging for children, and the same can be said about coherence since language competences related to coherence (such as consistency or signalling) mature with age (Miragoli et al. 12).

Moreover, the extent and quality of these competences is greatly influenced by the emotional significance of the particular event children want to represent in their speech. The more emotionally charged the event is, the more narrative coherence suffers (Ghetti et al. 1978), and we certainly cannot deny that that is precisely the case for traumatic experiences. Similarly to various linguistic devices that are used to achieve coherence, children's memory retention is also still in development, and it is susceptible to fluctuation in quality due to traumatising events. That is particularly detrimental to the competence of reference. Specifically, traumatised children struggle with providing non-redundant information and recognising what can be considered mutual knowledge (Ghetti et al. 1992), which results in a narrative that is inefficient and therefore rather incoherent.

Furthermore, there is one competence (or a lack thereof, to be precise) which we need to address in this context that is very specific to children's discourse: it is the inability to move easily from the general to the particular in both directions (Walker 11). For narratives of traumatic events, this particularly manifests itself in the fact that children cannot effortlessly transition from describing details of an event to producing summarising or evaluating statements. Obviously, summaries and evaluations are very demanding for children in themselves, and that is even more valid in the discourse of traumatic events (Miragoli et al. 3) as it has already been discussed. Nevertheless, even if children attempt those summaries and evaluations and manage to produce them, there is little chance of them being expressed as naturally connected with the details to which children intend to refer. That is certainly another factor that is detrimental to the overall quality of narrative coherence.

With that said, it is at this point when it should be stressed that incoherence does not have to be seen as purely negative in the context of traumatic events. We simply need to adopt the right approach to stop perceiving it as such. While narrative incoherence is usually held against traumatised children, if we really think about it, inconsistent, disorganised, and incoherent narratives actually contribute to the confirmation that traumatic events have really taken place (Miragoli et al. 12). Conversely, it should be seen as suspicious if children provide coherent narratives of traumatic events, not the other way round. In other words, incoherence should have the positive effect of providing legitimacy to traumatised children's narratives.

6.4 Application in Practice

How the information gathered above should be acknowledged and applied in real life will be demonstrated on the case of *S.N. v. Sweden*. This ECHR case deals with alleged sexual abuse of a 10-year-old boy by the applicant of the case. To summarise what happened, the schoolteacher of the boy contacted responsible authorities because she believed that her pupil was repeatedly sexually abused by the applicant. After it was reported, the child was interviewed by the police. However, the applicant found that it was insufficient and required another interview, in which the child was expected to provide more details of the sexual abuse, especially with respect to the time and place of those alleged actions. Later, the first instance court found the applicant guilty to which he reacted with an appeal to a superior court. The court of appeal found the applicant guilty as well, but at the same time lowered the charges against him. This decision was arrived at because, according to the court of appeal, the child's statements regarding the sexual abuse were very uncertain and incoherent in nature, among other things. Finally, after another unsuccessful appeal to the Supreme Court of Sweden, the case was submitted to the ECHR. Now, the aim of this chapter is certainly not to consider the case from the legal standpoint or to try to determine whether the alleged sexual abuse actually happened or not. Instead, it aspires to look at the child's statements as narratives of traumatic events and reflect on them accordingly.

Principally, there were four prominent descriptors of the narratives that were eventually held against the child in that they led to lowering charges against the applicant. Those descriptors were uncertain, distant, incoherent, and contradictory. Firstly, let us consider uncertainty. A 10-year-old child cannot possibly possess sufficient cognitive competencies to process traumatising events in a way that would result in an integrated memory and that would produce complex mental conceptual representations of those events. Essentially, the child does not remember and think of the sexual abuse as one complex entity that has its general characteristics through which it can easily be summarised and that can further be broken down into specific elements that are related to one another and that have certain hierarchy (for example, based on their concreteness). On the contrary, the sexual abuse is stored in the child's mind as a shattered bundle of disjointed events. Therefore, when the child is asked to produce a narrative of the sexual abuse they experienced, they cannot be confident in the production because they do not

access a mental representation of the event that is ready to be transformed into a narrative. Instead, all they have to work with is a disorganised, confusing representation that they attempt to piece together at the moment of the production of the narrative. In other words, the child is expected to create a complex and coordinated discourse, in other words a narrative, based on simplistic and fragmented ideas and images in their mind. This ultimately and understandably not only results in great uncertainty that manifests itself, for instance, in frequent unintentional repetitions or digressions in the narrative, but it also contributes to a higher probability of contradictions, which will be addressed in more detail later.

Another aspect of the child's narrative that was seen as peculiar by the court was that it was very distant. In other words, the child was perceived as almost impartial to the traumatising event based on their narrative. This is the result of two things: a lack of expressed emotions and deficiency in articulated mental processes. As for emotions, children struggle with expressing complex and unfamiliar emotions. What it means is that in the case of sexual abuse it should not be an issue for them to narratively express fear or anxiety as they are simple, objective (in the sense that every person experiences them very similarly) emotions. However, since they possess such qualities, they do not promote personal involvement in the event in question. On the other hand, complex emotions that are very subjective in the way we experience them, such as concern, despair, or even hate, present a challenge for children. The reason being that children have not yet fully developed their emotional intelligence and communicative competence related to expressing these emotions. Moreover, children do not have a lot of life experience with these emotions compared to adults, which only enhances the difficulties in understanding and articulating them. All of this results in the fact that without these emotions expressed, children can seem distant and as if not strongly emotionally involved in an event, which is an extremely inaccurate and harmful assessment. The same can then also be said about mental processes, such as intention or motivation. Without the sufficient ability to express them, children struggle with presenting themselves as active parts of the narrative, which once again makes them appear distant.

The third issue the court had with the child's narrative was that it came across as incoherent. Specifically, they found fault with vague and disconnected statements that were lacking details of what kind of sexual contact occurred, how many times it occurred,

and when and where it specifically occurred. As of where and when it occurred, in linguistic terms we can say that the narrative did not include sufficient orientation. Orientation is very important for listeners because it helps them create an overall picture of the event in question— and that overall picture is something they insist on. However, children do not have the capacity to provide it, both for the lack of cognitive capabilities and linguistic competencies. Similarly to orientation, the narrative of the child also did not contain adequate complicating action from the point of view of the court. In other words, the child did not provide an interrelated sequence of clearly defined events (because of their inability to do so), which contributed to the incoherent nature of the narrative. The particular reason for it is that if we enter communication expecting and demanding detailed description and unified sequential characterisation of events with clearly asserted relationships, the opposite will always appear incomprehensible.

Last but not least, the court did not appreciate that the child's narrative contained contradictions. On one hand, this is completely understandable, victims of crimes need to be able to provide consistent statements if they want to be believed. After all, there needs to be sufficient evidence in order to find the offender guilty. On the other hand, contradictions are very natural for children, especially in the context of traumatic experiences, due to the inconsistent nature of children's mental representations as well as their heightened suggestibility. In this instance, it is very probable that it was not only the child's cognitive and linguistic abilities (or a lack thereof) that played an important role, but the inconsistency was even enhanced during police interviews. Specifically, in the case of the second interview, the police were probably asking leading questions as they were, on the initiative of the alleged offender, looking for specific answers that would help in the investigation and judgement of the alleged sexual abuse. Those leading questions then could have led the child to alter his narrative without being fully aware of it. Overall, when it comes to traumatic events, we should try to balance as much as possible the two above-mentioned factors: the need for consistent statements and the high probability that due to many reasons children might not be able to provide them. Understandably, this is very difficult to do, but it is better to try to find the right balance rather than to be heavily inclined to only one of the two factors.

6.5 Conclusion to Features of Children's Discourse

Children's discourse is even more complicated when it comes to traumatic events, mainly because both their identity and emotional intelligence are not yet fully developed and are also very affected by trauma. Similarly, their cognitive abilities are also still developing and fluctuating in quality. Combined with trauma, this results in a lot of contradictions and inaccuracies, specifically because they struggle with abstract and complex concepts and expressions of complex and unfamiliar emotions, which are both necessary for integrating trauma into one's mind. Moreover, children's abilities related to linguistic phenomena such as narrative and coherence are also still maturing, causing their production of narratives of traumatic events to be very difficult and often perceived as incomprehensible. Finally, those aspects of how specific children's discourse is in relation to trauma can then be illustrated with the example of a sexual abuse of a young boy, which was provided in this chapter.

7. Conclusion

The thesis demonstrated how using a linguistic perspective can provide a lot of insight into how traumatic events affect someone and their use of language. A traumatic event represents a shock caused by a threat to one's perception of self – this shock is so sudden and severe that it actually prevents people from reacting to it regularly and effectively, which is reflected both in the way their mind tries to process such an event and in the way we use language to talk about it. Since trauma is so significant in terms of how it influences our mental processes and linguistic abilities, the thesis focused on trauma from the point of view of an individual that tries to communicate their experience to others, who usually lack the awareness of how trauma impairs one's discourse. The focus was also quite broad in terms of not targeting any specific kind of trauma – all the psycholinguistic aspects and relevant linguistic phenomena examined in respective chapters can be applied to any traumatic event, such as war, abuse, or torture. However, there was one particular group that was singled out in one of the chapters of the thesis because of additional issues that need to be taken into consideration in relation to trauma – children.

The chapter dedicated to psycholinguistic aspects involved two important mental processes that are related to subsequent language production – memory and emotions. Memory is particularly important in relation to how we talk about traumatic events because integrating trauma into memory poses an enormous problem. This difficult integration then results in the fact that traumatic memories are very fragmented and disorganised, which afterwards negatively affects discourse production as it ends up mirroring those qualities of fragmentation and disorganisation. Emotions also play a big role – since traumatic events are very emotionally charged for an individual, it impedes the organisation of their memories even more. Moreover, it also leads to a lot of avoidance and distancing oneself from the traumatic event in question, which has a lot of effect on how we express emotions through language. Mainly, it brings about neutral narratives without much personal involvement and emotional expressiveness, particularly regarding negative emotions. Unfortunately, the fact that narratives of traumatic events are neutral in that sense often leads to misunderstandings in communication on the part of the listener.

Furthermore, the thesis focused on how general qualities of traumatic events and their psycholinguistic aspects present themselves in the discourse of traumatic events. There were three relevant linguistic phenomena that were chosen: narrative, coherence, and conversational maxims. Narratives of traumatised individuals do not possess expected qualities of narratives, such as temporal order and rationality, do not follow typical structure, often include inconsistencies, and their overall form and content also suffers in many aspects, such as personalisation. As for coherence, narratives of traumatic events tend to be perceived as incoherent since they fail to effectively employ several phenomena, namely general coordinates, meaning relations, continuity and recurrence, signalling, and anaphoric reference. The problematic nature of conversational maxims in relation to traumatic events then lies in the fact that traumatised individuals struggle with following the maxim of quantity, the maxim of manner, and the maxim of relation. Resulting deviations are often unintentional and create the impression on the part of the listener that the traumatised individual in question has abandoned the cooperative principle. Moreover, when these deviations are intentional and meant to produce a conversational implicature, inference by listeners can be challenging as conversational implicatures in relation to trauma are quite specific compared to the ones in conversations we are a part of regularly. Overall, the main issue with the discourse of traumatic events is that listeners have certain expectations when it comes to language production and do not adapt these expectations when communicating with traumatised individuals, mostly because they are unaware of how these individuals use or struggle to use certain linguistic phenomena that normally do not present many problems. Therefore, the fact that the discourse of traumatic events departs from what is normally expected brings about many misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication.

As for the particular group that was singled out, children, the thesis examined the specifics of their discourse in relation to trauma. Children's identity, emotional intelligence, and cognitive abilities are still developing and fluctuating in quality. Combined with trauma, which causes problems in similar areas, we end up with a discourse that is substantially far from what we are used to in everyday communication. In particular, we can expect a lot of contradictions, inaccuracies, and problems with expressing complex concepts and emotions. Moreover, as the ability to produce a coherent narrative matures with age, and this production is impaired because of trauma, children's discourse in relation to traumatic events contains many deviations in

the structure of narratives and appears rather incoherent to someone who is not anticipating considerable issues concerning comprehension and interpretation.

Last but not least, the thesis included subchapters dedicated to application in practice, some of them using the field of law as an example and some the field of psychology. The legal real-life examples were all cases from the European Court of Human Rights. They showed that traumatised individuals are very vulnerable in the sense that the value and credibility of their statements is judged based on the same standards as in any other situations. While there are reasons for that in terms of law, we need to acknowledge, from a linguistic perspective, that people affected by trauma struggle with the production of narratives of such traumatic events, and they are therefore unable to effectively provide statements according to the required standard. As for the psychological real-life examples taken from handbooks of psychology, the thesis examined how symptoms of trauma and approaches to trauma therapy point to difficulties in language. These difficulties are not explicitly stated in the handbooks of psychology, but it is only natural to assume that being aware of the problems with language production traumatised individuals experience could only enhance the need to be cautious and benevolent when it comes to the perception and interpretation of their discourse.

In conclusion, the main goal of the thesis was to highlight how the discourse of traumatic events differs from other types of discourse and how it is necessary to approach our communication with traumatised individuals with a lot of awareness of the effects that trauma has on their use of language. This was done by examining various aspects of the discourse of traumatic events, both linguistic and psycholinguistic, and providing real-life examples viewed from the perspective of how trauma presents itself in language. Ultimately, the thesis illustrated that a linguistic perspective is something we need to be mindful of if we want to make sure that we treat people affected by trauma fairly and that we do not misunderstand them.

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