

Change Language to Fit People, not People to Fit Language

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In a world where change is essential if we are to live healthier and more sustainable lives, language is the forgotten tool. We talk about changing ourselves but rarely consider how the words we use to define ourselves are keeping us trapped in old routines. This paper will address the issue of how change is possible if we focus more closely on how language has defined us: as certain types of people, with certain habits and routines. The context of children's eating practices is used as an illustrative example, since if there is one thing that we wish to change it is how children eat. A discursive psychological perspective is used to explicate the ways in which psychological matters, such as food likes and dislikes, are organised through discursive and embodied practices within social interaction. By treating discourse as constructing rather than reflecting the world, we can examine how these discursive practices become deeply embedded in the most mundane of situations: when we eat together. Data examples are taken from family dinners in the UK and preschool lunches in Sweden to illustrate how we become trapped within existing understandings of ourselves through language. It will be argued that we need to adapt our discursive practices to allow for change rather than trying to fit ourselves into the constraints of language.

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