

Diana Kamienny-Boczkowski : Influence of foreign languages in psychoanalysis

Ce texte a été produit et présenté en 2006 pour un congrès qui avait lieu en Chine la même année.

L'auteur, de langue maternelle hispanique, l'a d'abord rédigé en français, puis traduit en anglais. Il fût revu par un anglophone et entendu par des chinois et des coréens.

Il était la réponse à une question que se posait alors l'auteur, issue de sa propre expérience psychanalytique, sur la nature de la langue qu'elle pratiquait.

Ce travail eût une suite, un article sur Lacan et la langue japonaise, paru en 2013 dans la revue Savoirs et clinique, n°16.

L'expérience analytique avec quelques patients japonais, et coréens, ainsi que la lecture des philosophes s'occupant de traduction comme Barbara Cassin, m'ont conduit à créer l'espace psychanalyse et transferts culturels à la Maison de l'Amérique Latine, <http://psychanalyse-et-transferts-culturels.com> [1].

Il est classique, depuis Freud, de considérer l'usage d'une langue étrangère par le sujet comme l'indice d'une proximité avec le réel de la castration. Les rêves sont un vivier fourmillant d'exemples, et l'apparition d'un obstacle à la traduction, ou l'usage d'un signifiant dans une autre langue, doit trouver sa place dans le graphe du désir. Parfois comme dans le cas du patient arabophone, il s'agit de sa position à l'égard de l'autre sexe.

Ce que Lacan semble introduire avec la langue chinoise d'abord, mais surtout avec la langue japonaise, avec le rapport des japonais à leur langue, montre une autre manière d'abonnement à l'inconscient, structurée par les langages idéographiques.

L'expérience analytique, qui pourrait être assimilée à une traduction impossible, vise ce point commun à la traduction et à la psychanalyse qui est ce point impossible de non traduction qui situe, encadre, vise l'objet.

Objet d'amour qui cache l'objet pulsionnel, objet haï qui le cache moins, objet que le sujet est à lui même dans son rapport à l'Autre, objet in fine dont le sujet a à se séparer.

Et si l'analyste, lorsque lui même est issu d'une autre langue que celle du patient, potentialisait l'effet Autre de la place de l'analyste? Et si cette même condition facilitait l'isolement de l'objet dans le transfert, ainsi que sa chute en fin de cure?

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Psychoanalysis is a therapy which aims to reveal the unconscious meanings to explain symptoms and pathological behaviors. The discovery of unconscious is generally linked to a historical period, and a place: Vienna, in the dawn of the XXth century.

In the beginning of psychoanalysis many European and American patients travelled to Vienna or Berlin to do their training and treatment. Some patients spoke in English to Freud who spoke German. Some others patients spoke in German to their analysts but their mother languages were Hungarian, Russian, and others languages.

In consequence of this multilingual situation, we can argue that psychoanalysis was, historically and structurally, always intercultural. There has always been a strong interrelation between psychoanalysis and foreign languages. In this paper, I will cover three main areas of discussion that can lead to this conclusion.

1. Exile and psychoanalysis

The first point I will discuss is how exile was bound up with the life of the "father of psychoanalysis", Sigmund Freud; how exile was, from the very beginning, a significant element in the development of his theory and practice.

Freud was born in Galicia in east Europe, and his father spoke to him in tcheck. Freud, it seems, studied Hebrew, Jewish traditions and ideas.

Joseph Yerushalmi (Yerushalmi,1991), an American historian and researcher, tried to prove how, in the making of many of Freud's theories such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the seduction theory in causing hysteria, and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) which was completed in exile, the influence of language was the product of Freud's early contact with Hebrew and his father's desire.

In fact, Freud was very concerned about this fact and about psychoanalysis being considered a Jewish science. As we know, Freud wanted his theories to be considered as "pure" scientific theories. Yet, his critics used the ideology and race arguments to criticize the universality of his ideas, claiming that his origins strongly influenced his discoveries. Even today, proponents of certain theoretical positions about sublimation consider that sublimation is not necessarily the same in Chinese as in English. Sublimation is not the same in German as in Yiddish.

Freud decided to make his Christian follower Carl Gustav Jung the head of his psychoanalytical movement – precisely to defend it from attacks against it being a Jewish movement. Freud wanted to go beyond his cultural identity. He was born Segismund Shlomo Freud – typically Jewish names. But he never used his middle name Shlomo, and from his teens, he went by Sigmund and not Segismund. Both names were German, but Sigmund was less common in the Jewish community. He wrote to Abraham that if his name had been Oberower, the path of psychoanalysis would have been smoother and there would have been less resistance to it (Letter from S.Freud to K.Abraham, 1908).

Yerushalmi's research has shown how Jacob Freud, Freud's father, wrote an inscription to Freud in a bible he gave him addressing him as "Shlomo Sigmund Freud".

Many elements of Freud's life are present in his theories. We aim to highlight the fact that from its origins, the relationship with his culture and his identity were important factors in the development of Freud's theories.

Today, people are generally more familiar with foreign languages and are more sensitive, and probably more open to, the effects of language. Indeed, Freud's interpretation of dreams, one of the starting point texts marking the origins of psychoanalysis, where we find the theory of the unconscious structured like a language, as Lacan later identified this concept, is probably a consequence of Freud's early contact with foreign languages. Yerushalmi tempted to demonstrate, Freud was well versed in Hebrew and not only was he able to read the Bible, but he also understood the meaning of the words.

Yerushalmi also analyze the relationship between one of the Freud's most significant works, *Moses and Monotheism* and the bible that Freud received as a gift from his father. In this bible, his father wrote a short inscription in Hebrew using "Melitzah", a particular utilisation of biblical texts, in which he tells his son to draw closer to the Jewish community and Jewish traditions.

Freud recorded periods of mourning in his life in his notes. Through these notes, we learn about his relationship with Karl Abraham as well as with Sandor Ferenczi and his son and daughter.

Loss of someone close leads to changes in a person's psychological development. These changes take different forms and are not always pathological. Yerushalmi highlights the fact that by an "obéissance après-coup" (deferred obedience), Freud read and followed his father's dedication that had been written in his bible for 35 years.

Following Freud's own theory of mourning, we can say that *Moses and Monotheism* was a natural consequence of his father's death. But we can also cite the influence of the presence of the Hebrew language in the book he received from his father. Like the Greek myth of Cadmos which recounts the myth of the origin of writing, Freud's creation *Moses and Monotheism* was also strongly influenced by the death of his father.

Hebrew, the language of his origins, a language his father tried to transmit to him, is an object of loss and in this way, an object which marks the starting point of a long period of sublimation, with *Moses and Monotheism* as an end result. In some ways, writing *Moses and Monotheism* was a way for Freud to complete his mourning period for his father. Yet, this work is highly determined by the presence of language. Thus, we are led to question if the concept of "obéissance après coup" that Yerushalmi derives from Freud and uses in his analysis of Freud's *Moses*, is a general phenomenon in patients being able to speak, or having spoken or having been brought up speaking, foreign languages.

Within the psychoanalytical community, it has often been said that as a philosophical theory, psychoanalysis was founded and developed in exile. Exile was a reality in the lives of the psychoanalysts who developed the theories. Many psychoanalytical institutions were established by exiled practitioners or by the second generation of exiled people (for example the Asociación psicoanalítica in Argentina, as well as in Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, France, the UK and the US). The migrant psychoanalysts could in this way continue to belong to the culture they lost as a consequence of the forced exile (Mijolla, 2002).

In psychoanalytical psychotherapy, we attempt to draw out childhood language from the patient, and this language is spoken in what we call the “mother tongue”. For this reason, many psychoanalysts believe that is very hard to analyze or be analyzed in a language other than one’s mother tongue. However, based on this hypothesis, Freud himself would not have been able to work as a competent psychoanalyst, given the fact that his mother spoke a poor German, and most of the time she communicated in Yiddish!

In Argentina, Freud’s work appeared for the first time in 1910 as a reference in an article presented in a congress of psychiatry in Buenos Aires. However, psychoanalytical theories were only properly introduced and practiced in Argentina from the 1940s onwards, with the large wave of European immigration to the country. Many exiled psychoanalysts or sons of exiled people, such as Bleger, Raker, Liberman, Langer, and many others, were pioneers of psychoanalysis in Argentina. Klein, Sterba, Otto Kernberg, Helen Deutsch, Alexander, and later in France, Granoff and Smirnoff, were just a few of the psychoanalysts coming from east Europe and practicing psychoanalysis in a language which was not their mother tongue.

Many analysis were multilingual and this clinical fact is seldom mentioned in early articles. (Buxbaum, E. 1949; Ferenczi, 1911; Loewenstein, 1956; Krapft, E. 1955; Greenson, 1950; Movahedi, S, 1996)

2. Language and psychoanalysis

The second point will be to study how language might affect psychoanalysis, keeping in mind that the theory and the clinical practice of psychoanalysis are based on many other concepts and theoretical positions. However, for Freud Unconscious and languages is closely related.

In some ways we can consider the development of science as intercultural within its historical evolution. Psychoanalysis was intercultural from its very outset. Not only Freud’s biographical influence on his work, with his origins in an exiled or migrant family, but the history of psychoanalysis in relation to History with a big H, meant that psychoanalysis was necessarily an intercultural or transcultural object. The Second World War and the rise of anti-Semitism led directly to the exile of many psychoanalysts.

We can also identify cultural influences on psychoanalysis. In this way the so-called “short session” introduced by Lacan, based on his theoretical position on the unconscious and its manifestation, can be considered as a cultural object. But it isn’t because it’s just a consequence of his theoretical position about unconscious. The attitude of British and American psychoanalysts toward the European colleagues is interesting to study.

Inside a same culture, the psychoanalytical one, it was possible to find different attitudes against the foreign analysts. Several times, in the exchanges between analysts it was signified that to immigrants it would be too important to have degrees in order to be accepted and also that they have to have the knowledge. Even in such a tragic period, in the late Nazi government, psychoanalysts were very rigoristic with that. Some historians think it was a form of anti-Semitism. (Steiner, 2002).

However, in order to go astray from our subject, let us return to the obstacle encountered when the mother tongues of the patient and the analyst are different. The followers of “orthodox” psychoanalysis would argue that “facts” or “images” recounted by the patient are linked to a very strong material reality. Perfumes, colors, tactile memories are all significant. However, this linguistic obstacle might still be encountered even if analyst and patient belong to the same culture and share the same mother tongue.

We are not describing a Babel situation.

Patient and analyst must have a common language. Nevertheless unconscious surprises, the *lapsus* or “Freudian slips”, the failed memories, are all “spoken” in a new language. Even while accepting that the patient’s mother tongue is the most

familiar and easily accessible, we should still regard this mother tongue attempting to describe or express unconscious phenomena as a foreign language. This is why we argue that psychoanalysis is always dealing with foreign languages, even when the analyst treats patients in their own “country language”. Psychoanalysts are well aware that even the mother tongue is “*unheimlich*”: *unfamiliar*”, or “*Other*”.

It is interesting that in psychoanalysis, the first “foreigner” who affects the child’s development is the mother, who takes care of the child and at the same time, transmits the so-called “mother tongue”. Thus, the mother is the first “foreigner” that the baby has to incorporate into his/her psychic world! Taking this as a basic premise, and using the Lacanian concept of Other, we can thus show that not only was the psychoanalytical movement developing in exile and using foreign languages, but also that at the very origin of human development, the human being is pushed to speak a foreign language, his/her mother’s language! (Milner, JC.1978)

In some psychoanalytical theories, this switch from a mythical state of pure drive, to a state of language and unconscious building, goes alongside the incorporation of language. Indeed, it is worth noting that most psychoanalytical theories speak of the “incorporation” of language.

In this sense, from the very outset, language is identified as a foreign object. Consequently, in our work, even when patients speak the same mother tongue as we do, the first or significant “sayng” of the Other, is still felt to be foreign. The “Other” is, in Lacanian terms, directly related to language (Lacan, J. 1955-56, 1966)

This kind of foreign experience that psychoanalysis aims to reproduce in each cure, allows the patient to see again, hear again, this “told” as foreign. But this time, within the transference, they are able to “analyse” the meaning that was rejected the first time round in order to be loved by the mother or any other significant parent-figure in their lives.

We receive a language, and this fact is what drives the infant to any given neurotic situation. Something strange or “foreign”, something not well incorporated, can be the basis for a further symptom, whether neurotic or psychotic. We cannot underestimate the impact of the first mother/foreign language the human being receives. But using the same logic, we have to analyse the interaction between analyst and patient.

We are trained to recognise in the patient, to “hear”, these language phenomena that the patient needs to break with his/her unhealthy submission to the other. Meanings and languages structure this submission. When the patient is able to recognise the meanings which were interpreted for the first time in his, her first mother tongue, psychoanalysis can then bring him, her to a sense of freedom.

3. Cases showing these surprising encounters between patients and analysts and how even mother tongue could be foreign

The final section of this paper will examine several examples how the interaction between patient and practitioner is determined by their relationship with language and transference.

The first example we will give is a patient whose mother tongue was Spanish, who discussed with his analyst the fact that his mother was always reading encyclopaedic dictionary about great scientists (always men) and how this affected him. This patient analysed by an English speaking analyst, showed inhibitions to any form of intellectual work, his own job being intellectual. He also suffered greatly from the fact that his mother never went beyond the letter F, reading encyclopaedic dictionary. The analyst interpreted F as “F for Faulkner” who was the author of the current book this patient was working on. The patient paused for a long while and the analyst offered another interpretation: “F for female”. At this point, the patient was rather startled because in Spanish, the word female is *mujer*, beginning with an “M” and not an “F”.

Nevertheless, even if he was angry with his analyst, this patient could still recognize that the problem he could not resolve between Faulkner and himself was based on his problem with women, “*femenino*” in Spanish.

In another case, a French- and Arabic-speaking man dreamt about a prostitute wearing black stockings. His relationship

with this daughter, his only daughter, had been very difficult. To explain the character of the woman in his dream, he drew on some Arabic words. Those words expressed for him the true tender nature of a woman, ?????, as mother and as sister. Yet, he was unable to describe his daughter as ?????, *hanina*, tender. In this case, the analyst was French-speaking with Spanish as his mother tongue. The analyst did not speak Arabic but was able to ask pertinent questions in order to gain an understanding of the Arabic term and to realize the daughter represented the “anti- ?????” for the patient .

The third case is an American-German patient who spoke in French and who chose a French-speaking analyst in France. During her psychoanalysis, she was able to perceive her mother’s influence on her in the following way: the husband of the patient was German and she spoke in English to their son. During analysis, she discovered that the most significant reason for her rejecting her husband was the fact that she spoke to him in German and German was... her mother language. Her mother, probably psychotic, had lost many members of her family during the Second World War. She was always mourning this loss. Consequently, she was unable to be a role model as a mother and as a woman to her daughter. Thus, for this patient, to be a woman meant to speak in English or French, and not German. This patient could say she was a woman but not a *freulin*. The hysterical and somatic symptoms, which were the basis for her request to see an analyst, disappeared when she was able to discuss and enunciate the traumatic words in German her mother had spoken to her.

In Freud’s theory, transference is the possibility of remembering the past in the analytical space. Different theories of transference have attempted to explain the kind of attachment the patient has for the analyst. Lacan’s theory of transference, based on the knowledge that language hides, explains this attachment through the way the patient gives to the analyst the place of the Other. This is the place where the analyst takes on the role of someone who knows all the effects of language on the subject and all the meanings of the past. For Lacan, the analyst represents, during psychoanalysis, this other, but at the end of analysis, the patient should discover that this other was actually a “*semblant*”. At the same time this Other represents the code of language. This “code” is not a linguistic code, because the signs don’t correspond in a bi-directional way with things. For psychoanalysis, between things and signs we find the significant. An old discussion between analysts about the possibility or not to work in a foreign language, leads Freud to stop the discussions and say that the importance must be given to the choice of words made by the patient, in any language (Freud, 1909). Nevertheless analysts forget Freud’s radical position and make sometimes interesting interventions about the different uses the multi-linguistics patients might do with different languages they possess. Using of mother tongue as truly communication, using cultural language or second language as a way to reject the unconscious meanings, or as a way to seem include in the new culture.

Several conclusions

We would argue that even for patients sharing the same mother tongue with the analyst, this does not always guarantee a successful psychoanalysis. In any case, the impact of a particular word in the psychic universe of one person cannot be known in advance. Psychoanalysis is essentially a language puzzle, dealing with the fact that even our language, the language we speak every day is always, at its core, foreign. Lacan invented the concept of “*lalangue*” to express this idea.

Of course, we must conclude that the analyst needs to have a good working knowledge of the patient’s mother tongue in order to work together to a cure. Yet, in the same way that we have said that Freud probably continued to operate in his Yiddish-German world until his death, and that psychoanalysis has always situated itself in different cultures and languages, we can also argue that in the analytic setting, both the patient and analyst operate in a special kind of foreign language.

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[1] <http://psychanalyse-et-transferts-culturels.com>