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THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION ACROSS PSYCHOANALYTIC PARADIGMS, AND
CULTURES

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Although I shall later on use translation in a different sense, I am using it here to refer to the efforts we make to render comprehensible our individual psychoanalytic thinking to the larger psychoanalytic field. I also refer to the efforts we make to understand what each of us is saying to the other when we try to speak together about patients and by extension when we use theories, or speak about theories, that permit us to believe that we understand patients. Such translation poses many problems, in our present theoretical eclecticism, whether or not it involves, in addition, a crossing of linguistic frontiers. Of course, differences of language often correspond to differences of theory and culture and surely exacerbate our difficulties, but the difficulties would exist without linguistic frontiers. If we are to continue to have an inter theoretical and international psychoanalytic thought community, it is urgent that we find some way to bridge these widening and proliferating theoretical, cultural and linguistic gaps.

Translation in the Trenches

I speak from the perspective of someone engaged, however modestly, in trying to narrow these gaps. For the past four years, I have been the Associate Editor of Foreign Books for the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association (JAPA)*. My position exists to inform JAPA's readership of psychoanalytic developments beyond its linguistic shores. I and the exemplary group of individuals who make up the committee

that advises me try to identify psychoanalytic books in foreign languages that are representative of the best innovative thinking in a particular language and to find a reviewer capable of reading the book, understanding it, and writing a clear and informative piece for our readers.

The reviewer is the translator, on the front lines of communication.

As the following example will illustrate, it is a most difficult task. Here, one of our reviewers struggles with a book with new ideas about linking that explicitly diverge from basic ideas familiar to the author's thought-community, but not to ours. The new ideas need not only to be understood and put in the context of the familiar ideas; they also need to be put in words that resonate with the culture of the JAPA audience. The following quotation has already passed through at least one edit.

[The author of the book] distinguishes two different approaches to the link....In the first one, the classical, each subject has predetermined potentialities that are or can be actualized in the experience of the link, but the encounter does not basically alter the two subjects. There is a tendency to homeostasis and a limit to whatever is possible, a limit then pre-determined by the potentialities of both subjects. But the new conceptualization [of the link] is radically different. According to it, the link both determines and impacts on both subjects. Each instant defuses the "between" us, in fact the "us" is not two complete, stable subjects. The link that both subjects share defines them at each instant. The effects of the encounter are not predetermined. The difference would be between the vision of transference as a displacement onto the analyst of a prior experience and the experience co-created between the two

participants. [The author] highlights that both ways of approaching links are independent, both seem reasonable. However, there is a vacuum between each of the two positions.

To *understand* the concept, the reviewer must steep him/herself in the ideas originating in the psychoanalytic culture of the author and in doing so absorb the thinking, expressions, and conventional condensations of the author's entire thought community. To *explain* the concept, however, the reviewer must keep one foot in the sub-community of his readers as well, to be able to imbed the concepts in networks of associations evoking clinical situations, so that the text will not seem doomed to the incomprehensibility of a failed translation.. This is the foot that tends to slip.

To venture now beyond the problems of the single translator, if we want to maintain a larger unified thought community and prevent the isolation of subcommunities so that we are speaking only to those who share our idiom and ways of thinking, we require both the time and space to set out and communicate in an organized way the theoretical basis of our thinking and to undo the condensations that characterize local communication. But even had we world enough and time, space, ability and inclination, we would still need a method.

Toward a Method of Translation

Historical linguists and anthropologists have worked to reconstruct several lost native American Algonquian languages from the Eastern portion of the North American continent. The languages are similar to each other in the way Romance languages are similar to each other. The traces left to us are few and vary from language to language in their quantity and in the information they furnish. From sparse vocabulary lists

compiled in Jamestown to a dictionary and grammar from the Munsee of Delaware, historical linguists have managed to construct a Proto-Algonquian language with a vocabulary of 4000 words, the putative ancestor, akin to Latin for the Romance languages, of the various individual lost tongues. This hypothetical common language is available as a research tool.

Once established, the proto-language functions like a bridge, enabling linguists to take a word already known in one extinct language, apply morphological rules developed in the construction of the proto-language and reconstruct the lost word in another individual language where it is not known. That is, a study of morphology enables scholars to work from a language where one word is known, backwards to reconstruct the word in the proto-language and then forward in another direction with different rules of morphology to reconstruct the word in another lost language. I began to wonder whether this method could be adapted to psychoanalytic communication.

A PROTO-THEORY FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS

In this case, of course, we need to speak not of a proto-language, but by analogy of a proto-theory. Since an analogy can only be used for illustration, the work of these historical linguists can be used to illustrate our need for an orderly procedure for thinking about developments of theory. In order to construct such a proto-theory we need first to identify basic principles, to consider in what context and how they have developed, how generally applicable they are and how potentially unifying, how much they encompass later ideas and what their intrinsic limitations are. We would need further to identify the specific theories that have come from the proto-theory, the way vernacular languages have come from the proto-language, and those that have not.

We would need, in addition, a workable system for categorizing subcategories of theory.

Skipping over further issues of classification, there would need, in general, to be collective work that establishes categories roughly corresponding to an identification of the proto language (Latin), its differentiation from each of the vernacular languages (i.e. Spanish, French), the differentiation of the vernacular languages from each other, the identification of the languages from which words, not directly derived from the proto-language, have been imported and the uncovering and identification of rules of change among these entities.

I am hoping that this work would lead to a hierarchical organization of theoretical concepts, as well as of changes, elaborations and differences in those concepts. Such an architecture would be roughly analogous to the identification of the hierarchical relationships that the historical linguists have identified among languages. I am imagining that we could learn to be cognizant of the different levels on which theoretical ideas exist and of their relation to each other relative to the rules of change we have established. Just as we are aware of the rules for moving from the earlier and more encompassing proto theory to any individual theoretical subculture, say ego psychology or a Kleinian version of object relations, via known rules of change, we would know the steps to be taken to move from one theoretical subculture to another via the bridge of the proto-theory.

Although difficulties would certainly arise in agreeing on general principles and hence on a proto-theory, I suggest that we bypass them to consider William I. Grossman's brilliant delineation of Freud's «psychoanalytic mode of thought.»

GROSSMAN'S FREUD

Grossman reminds us that Freud's «psychoanalytic mode of thought» is both a theory of the mind **and** a method of analysis and that its uniqueness consists in its centrally addressing «The effort to describe the analyst's use of his self-observation as a tool in the study of his patients and their self-observations» (Grossman, 1992, p, 58).

Grossman further emphasizes the coherence, flexibility and far reaching nature of Freud's underlying theoretical model. This underlying model Freud derived from the the structure, spatial arrangements and language of the neurological model first presented in On Aphasia (1891). Like Ariadne's thread, «This model provides a ... recurrently recognizable organization leading through a labyrinth of diverse conceptualizations» (Grossman, 1992, p. 28-29). With some variants, Freud uses this basic model to organize aspects of psychic functioning and phenomena, aspects of social and interpersonal occurrences, and some aspects of biology.

Freud's reliance on a single model to explain such diverse, though related, phenomena leads to repetitive nomenclature in variable contexts. Transference, for example, early refers to different sorts of psychic activities. Nevertheless, these uses have in common substitution, representation, and displacement, both of meaning and value. Grossman comments: «Substitutions of objects and displacements of meaning and value are...necessarily related. Freud emphasized one or another of these elements when describing the relation of conscious to unconscious fantasies and the way the mental apparatus develops....In this way he created a picture of the mind as a hierarchical structure of agencies, functions and fantasy organizations in which

complexity resulted from the combination of relatively simple relations and operations» (Grossman, 1992, pp. 29-30).

The psychoanalytic mode of thought is thus hierarchical and stratified in the same way as the original neurological model. Groups of smaller entities each with specific functions combine during development into larger, more differentiated, more complex entities with changed functions. Each individual system is also an entity with boundaries.

The psychoanalytic mode of thought, moreover, depends centrally on translation, which I now use in a second sense, related to the more common one, but with important differences. Dominique Scarfone has suggested that this second sense is related to **transduction**¹. At issue is the translation, the carrying over, of one system of hierarchical stratification across boundaries into another, similarly hierarchical, but more (or less) complex system. One self-contained hierarchical series may become a single stratified representation within another system.

Grossman reconstructs a complex hierarchy that begins with the relation between the periphery and the brain and continues to the relation between the brain and the psychic processes. Each level consists of two systems «in inexact parallelism» (p. 34). The systems Ucs. and Cs. are two such inexact parallels that belong to this hierarchy of systems. When Freud, writes Grossman, considered whether the transposition of an

¹ “a way of "translating" between two totally heterogenous forms of matter/energy. For instance, the electric current in a telephone line requires a transducer (also called an "effector") to translate it into human voice, although the voice is certainly not electric current but air waves. I thought that this is also what happens quite often in analysis when material that was not yet in the psychic forms of word-representations becomes amenable to speech and conscious feeling. It is, therefore, a form of "radical translation" (personal communication).

idea from the Ucs. to the Cs. required a second registration, he concluded that it was unworkable to locate mental systems in specific parts of the body, but that for an idea to enter the second system the introduction of words to the idea of the object was necessary. «This conclusion» comments Grossman, «turns double registration *into a type of translation*» (p. 35, my italics). That is, the relation between the thing presentation in the system Ucs. and the word presentation in the system Cs. is a translation (in a second sense).

Translation, in this second sense, thus occurs in the linking of system to system. This linking can occur in the related tasks of presenting «a verbal description of the nonverbal spatial model in presenting the theory» (p. 39) and in the translation of «the symptomatic images and perceptions into verbal interpretations» in the psychotherapy of hysteria. But there could also occur a failure of translation and the translation of that failure could become the cause of psychopathology. As Grossman points out

«[I]n Freud's account of memory in a letter to Fliess....[he] wrote that 'our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a rearrangement...to a retranscription...[M]emory is present not once but several times over....' He added that 'successive epochs of life' lead to 'successive registrations and translations of «psychic material». In the psychoneuroses, some of the material isn't translated, Repression is this 'failure of translation'» (Grossman, 1998, p. 470).

The translation of self-contained series of stratified elements into other self-contained series of stratified elements leads ultimately to «a building up of superimposed agencies» (1998, 471).

The processes of defence lead to compromise formations and the progressive building up of complexity. This is an aspect of development leading to new

mental structures (Agencies) within which earlier steps of mental development are preserved in modified form in the later ones (Grossman, 1998, p. 471).

Memory traces of the relation to a caregiver can combine in different arrangements to create aspects of ego as well as of superego, for example. The function of translation thus provides for one mnemonic image to appear in different stratified hierarchies, metamorphosed within systems and across boundaries.

The recognition of these recursive rearrangements of stratification means that our proto-theory already contains a method for recognizing and classifying whatever changes may occur in psychoanalytic theory. This does not imply significant theoretical restriction. Among the principles of mental functioning that appear and reappear at different strata are several that are quite comprehensive. The complementary series, for instance, lends a complex dual perspective to the process of structure building. The following example of the ramifications of the substitution of the pleasure principle for the reality principle, offered by Grossman, will here serve two purposes: First, it illustrates the pivotal role attributed by Freud to the complementary series in that structure building. Second, it also will show the function of translation (in our second sense) in the service of the construction of ever more complex entities.

This series begins with an aspect of individual adaptation and ultimately encompasses the development of social institutions. Freud, writes Grossman, understood «the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle» as being accompanied «by projection of its endopsychic perception into the outside world in the form of religious beliefs in the afterlife. This belief provides a view of reality that contributes to and supports inner controls» (Grossman, 1998, p. 472). When, as Freud indicates, «that reality exerts an influence on the formation of psychic structures

through the internalization of external prohibitions,» an «external prohibition 'in reality' becomes an internal prohibition by the 'reality principle'. This, in turn, creates the «Agencies»; however, «the dissatisfaction which results from the replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, is itself part of reality» (Freud, 1911, p. 224 quoted by Grossman, 1998, p. 472). «That is,» says Grossman, «the adaptation to reality produces new psychic situations that must be dealt with and the struggle against prohibitions continues now on two fronts» (Grossman, 1998, p. 472). Here we can see translation (in the second sense) leading to changes in function at each level of complexity.

The duality of perspective provided by taking into account the complementary series as functions change and systems become more complex can again be perceived in Freud's reflecting «on the relationship of mind to the world within which the mind creates its own version of the world» (Grossman, 1998, p. 480). «Socio-cultural institutions provide a kind of group mind in which each generation understands unconsciously the unconscious message contained in what is transmitted by upbringing, customs, tradition and education» (480). Grossman locates the source of these ideas in Freud's contemporaneous «increasingly rich conceptions of the usual role of projection, identification and narcissism in the mental life of the individual and of the family» (p. 480).

This idea of the unconscious understanding of the unconscious of others is another more widely encompassing principle than modern readers might have anticipated. It is «Freud's version of developmental and clinical intersubjectivity.» It is also the beginnings of a theory of object relations and the reason «that children can identify with

parents' unconscious». There is, of course, a parallel to these ideas in Freud's writings on another system, that of transference, this time as a strictly clinical concept. Not only does «the combination of disposition and early experience produce a number of stereotype plates» (482) which are repeated multiple times, but «transferences have variable contributions from the past and the present, disposition and present circumstances» (482, my italics).

Indeed, we might say that both links our reviewer was struggling to describe are already adumbrated in Freud and the preceding ideas could have been used to clarify the distinction between links, had we a collective grasp of this proto-theory.

How might we use Grossman's Freud as a proto-theory? It would be necessary to learn it well and to teach it widely. Then, we could begin to identify whether the recursive, stratified series of inexactly parallel systems that comprises Grossman's Freud were present in any newer, more «vernacular» theory. If we could identify them, the work of our translation (in the first sense) would consist of identifying its inner translation (in the second sense) that led to the newer theory. That is, we would need to identify the structure to which the new theory was related, recognizing the form of its previously existing relationship to that structure, and becoming aware of the rules of change by which it had become what it presently was. We could then move, relatively easily, with this knowledge of these rules of change that we would have described in a general form, from the new theory to the proto-theory, or, if necessary, from the theory of one subgroup of the psychoanalytic community to the bridging proto-theory, «translate» at that level into the hierarchical terms of the proto-theory, then move, again

utilizing different rules of change, to a different subgroup with its different theory and form of communication.

Of course, not all psychoanalytic theory, even in Freud, obeys the laws Grossman describes as Grossman himself acknowledged. Where an aspect of the theory, new or old, does not fit the stratified model but where the theory is clinically useful, we might attempt to translate (in both senses) the theory into Freud's hierarchical recursive model. If that was not possible, we would establish whether its journey into its present form could be traced from ideas derived from the psychoanalytic mode of thought even though it might have early on lost the hierarchical and recursive characteristics. We would then reconstruct the unique rules of change by which it had become different and apply those to translate it into the proto theory. At the most extreme, we could identify a theory as a «foreign» import, akin to the word jazz in the English language. In this case we would recognize its contribution as well as the reasons for its necessary uniqueness. Sometimes, of course, a «translation» (in the first sense) would be disappointing, would have lost its capacity to translate (in the second sense) and we would be obliged to indicate that this vernacular had become impoverished in the process of its evolution. We would be able to show, however, how this had happened, that is, which concepts had been eliminated, just as we can show that when *frater* becomes *frere* we lose a syllable.

I think it worthwhile to study Grossman's elaboration of Freud's «psychoanalytic mode of thought» and attempt to apply it systematically to our theoretical/clinical diaspora. In so doing we may discover with greater clarity the recurrent patterns of transcription and retranscription and accompanying shifts of function that constitute

our theoretical architecture and that lie unnoticed within and among our multiple theories. We might then be able to develop a disciplined method of translation.

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SUMMARY

IN THE FACE OF THE DIVERGENCIES OF EXPRESSION OF THEORY AND ITS APPLICATION, IN THE FACE OF THE IMPLICATIONS AND CONNOTATIONS PECULIAR TO SUBSETS OF THE PSYCHOANALYTIC COMMUNITY ORIGINATING FROM THE FACT THAT ORAL TRADITION CONTINUES TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN LEARNING AND IN THE TRANSMISSION OF IDEAS, TECHNIQUES AND BELIEFS, PSYCHOANALYSIS FACES A SERIOUS CHALLENGE. SHALL THE PSYCHOANALYTIC THOUGHT COMMUNITY FRAGMENT INTO SEVERAL PARTS OR CAN ITS SEVERAL PARTS CONTINUE TO ENRICH EACH OTHER? TO DO THE LATTER WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO APPLY OURSELVES TO THE FACT AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATION BY CREATING AN ARCHITECTURE OF ORIGINAL IDEAS AND THEIR CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE COLLECTIVELY DEVELOP A PROTO-THEORY THAT WILL SERVE AS A BRIDGE AMONG ISOLATED SUBSETS OF OUR THOUGHT COMMUNITY. THIS PAPER SUGGESTS THAT FREUD'S «PSYCHOANALYTIC MODE OF THOUGHT» AS IT IS DEVELOPED IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM GROSSMAN WOULD SERVE AS SUCH A PROTO-THEORY.