

## Speaking in tongues / languages<sup>1</sup>

### Translation and transmission

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We read in Acts of the *Apostles*: " On the day of Pentecost all the Lord's followers were together in one place " – and here we are, on the eve of Pentecost, together for the first time after the pandemic.

The first real-time translator to bring together speakers of the languages of Babel was the Holy Spirit. A magnificent multilingual translator that has not yet been surpassed, despite the technological development of the last millennia.

At Pentecost the tongues of fire poured out the grace of simultaneous translation of different languages: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues, according to the Spirit gave them to speak"; " The crowd gathered; they were surprised, because they were hearing everything in their own languages, in their own dialect, how, then, "did we hear them speak each in our dialect or dialect in which we were born? "

Possibly, it can be assumed, the Holy Spirit did not hesitate to translate the tongues spoken by each one so that every human can understand unequivocally, and in his mother language.

The gift of speaking in tongues is also a grace. St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, differentiated speaking in tongues from prophetic speech. If in order to pray it is convenient to allow oneself to be taken by that misunderstood language "which speaks in me", on the other hand, to address the assembly, the church, it is necessary to speak in a

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek *γλῶσσα* (glossa), as the Spanish *lengua*, means both tongue and language. Is an example of a translation controversy. See <https://www.bibliatodo.com/en/bible/common-english-bible/1corinthians-14-2>. The decision to use this or that term was made according to the context, and to facilitate the reading.

language that everyone understands: "If you speak languages that others don't know, God will understand what you are saying, though no one else will know what you mean. You will be talking about mysteries that only the Spirit understands. "

"By speaking languages that others don't know, you help only yourself. But by prophesying you help everyone in the church... prophesying does much better than speaking unknown languages, unless someone can help the church by explaining what you mean."

Analysts, when we speak in the assembly face to supposed analysts, in psychoanalysis in extension, or when we speak to non-analysts in other areas, in the world, do we speak in languages? Do we prophesy?

To whom did Lacan speak? With what rhetorical resources? Always in the same way, facing any audience? Visibly not, it was not the same style when addressing the elite of *l'École normale supérieure*, as when he was passing on psychoanalysis in the universities of North America. Would his style, today, be the same? If it were, would it have the impact that it had, the incident that it had?

It is up to us to ask whether it is possible, if necessary, to adapt the terms and style of transmission to the current epochs, without lowering the discourse, trying to save the Freudian truth in its cutting edge.

### The koine resource

The simplification of languages is not new, it began in Magna Graecia with *Koine* Greek, the simple Greek language that could be understood by the settlers, by the common man. The *Septuagint* is one of the results of that operation, with the effects we know.

Closer in time, the transformation of the German language into a language of propaganda and domination occurred during the Third Reich, but the idea was destined to a global reach. "The language of the victor is not spoken with impunity... you breathe

language and live according to it," Klemperer points up. Paul Celan, for his part, reinventing the German language, does not fall to call it a murderous language.

The prohibition of speaking certain languages or dialects spread throughout Franco's Spain like an epidemic. The establishment of American English as a *lingua franca* meant and supposes a leveling -on a scale of impoverishment- of national and regional languages, to give rise to the globalization of the *American way of speaking the life*.

Is there a *lingua franca* for psychoanalysis, today? Is there for transmission a Lacanian koine language (simplified for the colonies)? Or, on the contrary, do we consider barbarians those who do not understand jargon (by fusing the mystery - of speech in tongues - with the enigma)?

Humboldt had already pointed out that each language presupposes a vision of the world, one vision among others, and every time you leave a language to enter another there is a transfer of vision of the world, of how things are said. There is no act of language that is not equivocal, since it involves the listener, who never understand the same thing, argued the first linguist. More than one language inhabits us and, in everyday life - perhaps not in the academies - this is expressed even in the rules of courtesy, which are part of the genius of each one, the vision of the world of each language; this is what Barbara Cassin tells us when we go through the ways in which we say *good day, goodbye*, in each language in use. Umberto Eco affirmed that the language of Europe is translation, Henri Meschonnic pointed out that Europe has its founding texts in translation.

We, Latin Americans, received the founding texts of psychoanalysis in translation. What does it mean for our practice? Is it a local, regional issue, or does the issue concern every practicing analyst?

### What language, for psychoanalysis?

Psychoanalysis was born in the German language. Could it have been born in another language? Are the language procedures that caught Freud's attention and which he

recognized in unconscious psychic processes, such as condensation and displacement, a strictly unconscious process, or rather a characteristic of the German language? Is the homophonic equivocation that Lacan places as one of the three forms of equivocation a strictly unconscious process, or does it reflect the genius of the French language, which is not spoken as it is written? In each language there are different possible misunderstandings. What can our colleagues in China, whose language does not require grammar and resembles, as Freud said, the language of dreams, tell us about this? In Spanish, each and every one of the written letters is pronounced, a matter that for a speaking French is unheard of, bizarre: there are letters that, in French, being written, are not pronounced. What is the relationship between language as a structure of the unconscious and the language spoken, particularly the language of the epoch?

We are witnessing a world in which, thanks to globalization, languages have degraded to the point of speaking no longer in tongues but in abbreviations and *emojis*. This impoverishment adds to the loss of the very value of speech. There are patients who assume that they talk to their relatives because messages are written, without having to play the voice in communications via cell phones. The term telephone itself will soon be an anachronistic significant. The smartphone will no longer be a phone, it will be just *smart*, it will stop serving communication by speech. This impoverishment is surely not unrelated to the growing autism in the social sphere, as we said in 2019 in *Convergence: malaise in culture, autism in society*.

The German language is not today a language of Convergence, which is paradoxical in a Movement in which the multiplicity of links is intertwined with the plurality of languages; but the mother language of psychoanalysis is not spoken. And we still have to decide how to position ourselves with respect to the Chinese language.

Every time we analysts meet, and even more so in the virtual meetings imposed by the pandemic, the question of translation arises systematically, and compels us to take position as to what theory of language and *lalangue* we work with, and therefore analyze. This concerns an ethic of transmission.

The plurality of languages became a symptom for analyst's meetings during the pandemic. The question of translation - simultaneous, successive - does not concern an economy of money, although the multiplicity of languages also implies a multiplicity of economies. It is, in our opinion, a question of taking a position regarding the treatment of an impossible, a translation without rest, a Pentecostal translation.

When one opts for a translation linked to meaning, to carry from one language to another the contents, as they are called, it necessarily remains untranslated that which excludes meaning: the real of a language, that which makes not only the genius of each language but the real of the act of saying. The fact of saying is forgotten (*Qu'on disse reste oublié*). Or erased, if we go to the extremes. This impossible of an integral translation is indelible. But, as we said, it also happens that things are not said in the same way in the diversity of languages; there are fundamental terms of analytical jargon that have either passed into the current discourse, trivializing, such as the Oedipus Complex for the West, or have no referential correlate at all, such as the Oedipus Complex for the East (we mean China).

The problem does not lie in the impossibility of a Pentecostal translation, but in the fact that sometimes we proceed to erase the mark of that impossibility; to put it in Meschonnic's terms: to erase the mark and erasing that it is erased; this is a procedure that degrades our practice when it comes to translating. We Spanish speakers suffer from the erasure of the marks of the untranslatable in our access to the written or transcribed word of Freud and, above all, of Lacan. The so-called *established* text degrades the possibility of reading when what it offers is not an exercise in translation but an interpretation, or even a version, which opens the way, whether it is transited or not, of a perversion in transmission. It is inevitable, of course, that there will be a version of the father (*père-version*), of each father of the text in translation. However, to point out the difficulties and impasses inherent to one version makes an ethical position, ignoring or deny them makes another position.

Thus, at one extreme we have Pentecostal psychoanalysts who speak in languages, in such a way that their speech is incomprehensible to the uninitiated—the laymen, the *idiots*

in St. Paul's terms — and to many initiates as well. At the other extreme we have the psychoanalysts who speak in the style of the TED talks, in Lacanian Koine.

### A third way

What is the fate for psychoanalysis if it does not become sensitive to the marks of the epoch and thus engenders - by a pretended extraterritoriality - a net rejection or, at the other extreme, if it is assimilated to the epoch in such a way that sooner rather than later it becomes a forgotten symptom? We know, history continues to teach it, extraterritoriality badly knotted with assimilation is followed by segregation.

Neither speak in languages -extraterritorial- nor in Koine Lacanian -assimilation- Nor the "quasi-religious maintenance of – inherited- terms" (Lacan). Our challenge is to speak – that is: to practice and theorize – psychoanalysis considering the paradigms – cultural, scientific, political – of the time, and to try to transmit it in a style that allows psychoanalysis continues to exist.

Is it not time to try to join, to our discourse, the paradigms with which the epoch challenges us?