

Hysterical Authority

Candela Potente

For Jacques Lacan, analysis begins with an invitation: “Away you go, say whatever, it will be marvelous” (Lacan 2007, p. 52). This strange imperative to “say whatever” coincides with the analysand’s sense of the analyst as the “subject supposed to know.” But although the analysand expects the analyst “to know,” she actually produces knowledge herself. Even more, Lacan insists that the analyst is not really supposed to know very much at all. And yet it is only because the analyst is treated as an authoritative figure, as a subject who knows, that the analysand can herself produce meaning. Eventually, it becomes possible for the analyst to “fall” as the master that, in a sense, she never really was.

Authority in the analytic setting, then, works in a somewhat paradoxical way—it appears to be constructed through the necessary assumption that the analyst knows, and although it exerts its power by not appearing as an assumption at all, it ultimately fulfills its function by revealing itself as a mere presupposition. One can then ask: at what point does the analyst’s knowledge reveal itself as presupposed? How does the analysand make this discovery and what does it entail? What is the analyst’s authority? And if it is the analysand that institutes her authority in the first place, what is the analysand’s relationship with authority?

Asymmetrical Discourses

Although the analyst is expected to have knowledge that the subject of analysis does not have, Lacan often emphasizes that knowledge is on the side of the analysand. Because of the invitation to “say whatever,” it is actually the analyst who institutes the analysand as the subject supposed to know, as Lacan states—“This is after all not in such bad faith, because in the present case the analyst cannot put his trust in any other person” (Lacan 2007, p. 52). Even though it is the analysand who knows, the function of the subject supposed to know is given to the analyst, who in turn can only trust the analysand with knowledge. It is with this paradox that the question of authority begins.

At the same time that the analyst is given this authoritative function, the analysand is given a specific position. In the context of his well-known theory of the four discourses, Lacan points out that the analyst marks the analytic experience with “the hysterization of discourse,” defined as “the structural introduction, under artificial conditions, of the hysteric’s discourse” (Lacan 2007, p. 33). When someone undergoes psychoanalysis, they pass through the discourse of the hysteric, as the analyst asks certain questions and pauses on specific elements of the analysand’s discourse, causing the analysand to be addressed as a divided subject. It is this position from which the hysteric addresses the Other in the hysteric’s discourse. This divided or barred subject becomes attentive to the Other’s wants: what the “hysterization of discourse” institutes, therefore, is a constant confrontation with the analyst’s desire (Fink 1997, p. 131). The analysand, in this way, occupies the position of the hysteric regardless of her psychic structure (which could or could not be hysterical).

Now, the asymmetry of discourses appears in the fact that, although the analyst is addressed as the subject who knows, she addresses the analysand from a completely different position. Lacan not only notes that the analyst does not know much at all,

but goes as far as to say that he learns everything from his analysands, that it is from them that he learns what psychoanalysis is about (Lacan 1975, p. 34). This asymmetry can be clearly seen in Lacan's formalization of the discourses of the hysteric and the analyst: while the analyst, who occupies the place of the object a (the cause of desire), addresses the analysand as a divided or barred subject, the analysand—passing through the discourse of the hysteric—occupies the place of the barred subject but does not address the analyst as the object a , that is, as the cause of her desire. Instead, the analysand addresses the analyst as S_1 , which is the master signifier, the signifier that needs no further justification.¹ In other words, the subject supposed to know is addressed as the master in analysis because the analysand is occupying the position of the hysteric.

Lacan points out that the hysteric always wants a master and for the master to know a lot of things, to the extent that he speculates about the fact that the hysteric might have invented the master in the first place (Lacan 2007, p. 129). The hysterization of discourse in analysis means that the analyst, by positioning the analysand as a hysteric, is consequently positioned by the analysand as the master. The analyst, therefore, occupies two positions at once—the one from which she addresses the analysand and the one from which she is addressed by the analysand. This structural asymmetry is what makes psychoanalysis possible, because without the presupposition of the analyst as the locus of knowledge, no meaning can be produced, even if it is the analysand who in fact produces it.

From the perspective of the discourse of the hysteric, then, the analyst is the figure of authority in the analytic setting—even more, she is the master. However, we know that in a certain sense, the analyst's authority is hypothetical, and that her interventions, as Lacan emphasizes, must be equivocal rather than theoretical,

¹ It is only in the discourse of the master that S_1 occupies the dominant place.

suggestive, or imperative. He explains that analytic interpretation is not made to be understood, but rather “*pour produire des vagues*” (Lacan 1975, p. 35), which means to create ambiguity while evoking the expression “*faire des vagues*”: to make waves or rock the boat. Psychoanalytic interpretation, for Lacan, is “often established through an enigma,” and he states:

It is an enigma that is gathered as far as possible from the threads of the analysand’s discourse, which you, the interpreter, can in no way complete on your own, and cannot consider to be an avowal without lying. It is a citation that is sometimes taken from the very same text, on the other hand, from a given statement—such as one that can pass for an avowal, provided only that you connect it to the whole context. But you are thereby appealing to whoever is its author (Lacan 2007, pp. 37–38).

The function of the enigma involves a “half-saying,” which is why Lacan points out that the analyst cannot complete the enigma on her own. The analyst merely cites from the analysand’s discourse; it can only pass for an avowal if it is placed in the context from which it was taken. The analyst’s authority is framed in a rather surprising way here when we consider this description of psychoanalytic interpretation as an enigma that tiptoes around the analysand’s discourse, citing it either very quietly or slightly less quietly if a reference to the context makes it unequivocally clear that it was, indeed, a citation. The enigma surreptitiously points to the analysand as the author of meaning in analysis—she is the one who completes the analyst’s enigmas and who produces the context from which the analyst cites.

Interestingly, this half-saying is also what allows for the analyst to fulfill the expectations of the analysand: “What one expects from a psychoanalyst is [...] to get his knowledge to function in terms of truth. This is why he limits himself to a half-saying” (Lacan 2007, p. 53). Because “truth can only ever be said by halves,” it is only through these enigmatic utterances that the

analyst can be what the analysand expects from her: the subject supposed to know. And yet, the interpretation of these enigmas, as Lacan seems to suggest, is the analysand's work, which in turn reveals that knowledge does not come from the analyst, but from the analysand. The analyst can remain the subject supposed to know as long as she puts into practice her lack of knowledge through enigmatic utterances such that, in time, the analysand can acknowledge herself as the author of the meaning that is produced in analysis.

The analyst's authority, then, is fundamental to the development of the analysis, insofar as the supposition of knowledge is what institutes transference. And through the analyst's enigmatic interpretations, the analysand's expectations are fulfilled since, as Lacan states, "an analysis is what one expects from an analyst" (Lacan 2007, p. 53). But it is because of the enigma that the analysand is eventually confronted with the fact that the analyst's knowledge was merely presupposed. Through her half-sayings, the analyst makes the analysand confront the fact that, rather than knowledge, there was a presupposition of knowledge, and what is more, that presupposition was from the beginning of her own making. As Slavoj Žižek explains it, "the subject discovers that *from the very beginning there was no support in the Other*, that he was himself producing the 'discovered' meaning" (Žižek 2008, p. 171). The revelation that all "discoveries" had all along been *produced* by the analysand, and the Other's support had only been a hypothesis since the beginning of analysis, is what causes the analyst to "fall" as the subject supposed to know. But what causes this revelation?

In the analysand's discovery that knowledge was always produced by her, the way in which analyst and analysand address each other no longer appears to be based on a structural asymmetry, unlike the beginning of analysis when the analysand was hystericized in the analytic experience and the analyst was expected to be the ultimate source of knowledge. Since the analyst

is not “supposed to know” anymore, she is not addressed as the master. Once this asymmetry disappears, it becomes possible to reconceptualize the function of authority in analysis. How does the analysand discover that all along it was actually she who produced meaning? What is it that causes this shift? In order to address these questions, I will turn to Freud and, in particular, his understanding of translation.

Translating the Already

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud often resorts to translation as a metaphor—a use that may be inspired by his own experience translating several books into German, like works by John Stuart Mill, Jean-Martin Charcot’s *Tuesday Lectures*, and two books by French physician Hippolyte Bernheim. Freud sometimes uses translation as a figure to explain psychic processes, and on other occasions, he refers to his technique of dream interpretation as *Traumübersetzung* or *Übersetzen von Träumen*, “dream translation” or “translation of dreams” (Freud 2010, pp. 372, 408; 1982, pp. 354, 388). Robert J. C. Young, who traced diverse instances in which Freud discusses questions of translation, already stressed the importance of translation in Freud’s work. According to Young, Freud’s innovation is in fact to move dream interpretation into the realm of translation (Young in Marcus and Mukherjee 2014, p. 372). I will address the two uses of translation that I mentioned, building upon some of Young’s remarks, and recast the question of translation as the key to understanding how authority works in the analytic setting in the following section.

Freud often takes translation as an operation that explains the nature of psychic processes that involve the transformation of an image or representation (a *Vorstellung*) into various symptomatic expressions through the different reactions of the psychical apparatus towards that image. In his discussion of typical dreams,

for example, Freud recounts the case of a young woman who went through a series of psychical conditions. The first one was a state of confusional excitement in which she expressed a strong aversion towards her mother, often hitting and abusing her, while she was affectionate with an older sister. This state was followed by another, which was both lucid and apathetic, and which involved sleep problems—it is at this stage that Freud began treating her. Many of this young woman's dreams, in more direct or indirect ways, concerned the death of her mother, and as the treatment developed, she began having hysterical phobias, such as an overwhelming fear that something might have happened to her mother, which drove her to frantically go check on her to convince herself that her mother was alive. At this point, Freud explains:

This case, taken in conjunction with what I had learnt from other sources, was highly instructive: it exhibited, translated as it were into different languages, the various ways in which the psychical apparatus reacted to one and the same exciting idea [*er zeigte in gleichsam mehrsprachiger Übersetzung verschiedene Reaktionsweisen des psychischen Apparats auf dieselbe erregende Vorstellung*]. In the confusional state, in which, as I believe, the second psychical agency was overwhelmed by the normally suppressed first one, her unconscious hostility to her mother found a powerful *motor* expression. When the calmer condition set in, when the rebellion was suppressed and the domination of the censorship re-established, the only region left open in which her hostility could realize the wish for her mother's death was that of dreaming. When a normal state was still more firmly established, it led to the production of her exaggerated worry about her mother as a hysterical counter-reaction and defensive phenomenon. (Freud 2010, p. 277; 1982, p. 264)

What this case is able to show is how the psyche, in reacting to one and the same idea or image, can result in various translations into different languages, as Freud suggests. In this context, the difference between languages is a metaphor to explain the difference between these reactions of the psychical apparatus.

And this difference is expressed as several symptoms: the motor expression of abusing the mother, the censored expression that took place in dreams of funerals and mourning clothes, and finally the hysterical expression of extreme worry once a more “normal” state was reached.

What is important here is not only that translation leads to these different versions of how the psyche reacts to an image, but also that those reactions are being identified as translations of one and the same image in the process of interpretation. Translation is what explains not only the difference in the reactions of the psyche but also the coincidence of that to which the psyche was reacting in the first place. Identifying translations as translations is something that is present in the interpretation of dreams before the interpretation itself: according to Freud, there is a first instance of interpretation that is the very act of reproducing the memory of a dream, which he calls a “re-translation” [*Rückübersetzung*]. Freud notes that this re-translation can be more or less fragmentary, but it does not make the dream any less enigmatic than it was before (Freud 2010, p. 83; 1982, p. 77).

By considering the reproduction of the dream as a *re-translation*, Freud draws attention to an instance of translation that took place beforehand, that is—as above—the psyche’s reaction to a given image. In fact, when Freud addresses the question of why we often forget our dreams, he mentions as a possible reason “that the different arrangement of the ideational material in dreams makes them untranslatable, as it were, for waking consciousness” (Freud 2010, p. 75). If dreams turn out to be untranslatable for waking consciousness and are forgotten, they cannot be interpreted. In this sense, the process of dream interpretation always begins with some degree of translatability, and it is what results from this first instance of translation that the analyst must then, once again, translate.

I turn now to the question of translation as dream interpretation, of which Freud offers several examples in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, like in the context of his explanation of counter-wish

dreams. These are dreams in which there is “a wish that I may be wrong” or a wish-fulfillment of masochistic inclinations, which is a component “in the sexual constitution of many people” (Freud 2010, p. 182). As an example of this “mental masochism,” Freud offers the following case:

I will quote one such dream, produced by a young man who in his earlier years had greatly tormented his elder brother, to whom he had a homosexual attachment. His character having undergone a fundamental change, he had the following dream, which was in three pieces: *I. His elder brother was chaffing him. II. Two grown men were caressing each other with a homosexual purpose. III. His brother had sold the business of which he himself had looked forward to becoming the director.* He awoke from the last dream with the most distressing feelings. Nevertheless it was a masochistic wishful dream, and might be translated thus: ‘It would serve me right if my brother were to confront me with this sale as a punishment for all the torments he had to put up with from me.’ (Freud 2010, p. 182)

As an interpretation of this young man’s dream, Freud offers no less than a translation of the reproduction of the memory that his patients bring to him (which, according to Freud, is itself a re-translation). He first synthesizes the analysand’s account of the dream into three separate elements, and then renders the account of the patient’s dream into conscious terms in a first-person formulation. Freud’s translation is based both on the reproduction of the dream and on previous associations that this analysand brought up with regard to the relationship with his brother.

One of the most important aspects of this understanding of translation as a technique of dream interpretation concerns not only the process of translation itself, but also the act of identifying what is being interpreted as already translated, as well as the analysand’s free associations. In fact, Freud also uses the term “translation” to refer to interpretive techniques with which he disagrees—for example, when he points to the shortcomings of the decoding method, which “treats dreams as a kind of cryptography

in which each sign can be translated into another sign having a known meaning, in accordance with a fixed key” (Freud 2010, p. 123). He warns against overestimating the importance of symbols in the interpretation of dreams, which would mean reducing the work of dream translation [*Traumübersetzung*] to the translation of symbols [*Symbolübersetzung*], and stresses the importance of the dreamer’s associations (Freud 2010, p. 372; 1982, p. 354). Translation, then, only refers to a transformation of certain signs into others, but that does not necessarily follow the technique of dream interpretation that Freud proposes. In other words, translating by itself does not guarantee anything. It is fundamental to identify what must be translated (not merely the dream, for example, but the dream in the context of a series of free associations) as well as to recognize a translation as a translation (that is, understand a dream or a given set of symptoms as diverse translations that result from the psyche’s reaction to an image). The question, then, becomes the following: what is the result from this process of psychoanalytic translation?

An important point that Young makes is that, according to the principles that Freud lays out in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the meaning of dreams is not in the dreams themselves, but in their invisible origins (Young in Marcus and Mukherjee 2014, p. 372). He refers to Jean Laplanche’s notion of detranslation [*detraduction*], which consists in a dismantling and reversion of translation. For Laplanche, “*analytic* interpretation consists in undoing an existing translation, one that is spontaneous, possibly symptomatic, in order to find below it what it ardently desired to translate.” Thanks to this undoing, a “better” translation becomes possible: one that is less repressed and more complete (Laplanche 2008, p. 327, my translation). The manifest content, for Laplanche, is a bad and incomplete translation. Through the process of detranslation, it is possible to find the latent content that eventually led to that bad translation. It is in this sense that an existing translation is undone.

What results from this process of detranslation, however, is not an original in the way that the original is understood in linguistic translation: it is, as Young explains, a third text, which is the analyst's rephrasing (Young in Marcus and Mukherjee 2014, p. 375). Rather than a process in which there is an original text that precedes a translation, detranslation seeks to unwind an already translated material whose "primary text" is unknown. Instead of "moving forward" (from original text to translation), the process of detranslation "moves backward," seeking to reverse a translated material and yet resulting in a text that is not the original. The process of detranslation does not attempt to retrace the process that led to the translation such that the "primary text" is restored but is instead one that produces a phrasing that could never be compared with the "primary text."

But even if the text that results from the process of detranslation is the analyst's phrasing, it does not discover something radically new because it refers to something that was already there. It is for this reason that Lacan stresses that the analyst's utterances are half-sayings: something from the analysand's discourse is cited enigmatically, which often "moves backward" on the translation that this very discourse contained. While the analyst's phrasing appears as a "discovery" in analysis, it is the analysand who produces this meaning. Now, how does translation explain the shift that makes the analysand see that she produced what seemed to be discovered? How does it explain that the analyst is revealed as a subject who does not actually know?

Mere Translation

Let us consider Lacan's remarks about the equivocal character of analytic interpretations together with Freud's understanding of translation. Freud shows how the psyche translates certain images into symptoms, and how there can be several translations that,

in analysis, need to be identified as translations of one and the same “original,” even if this original is never to be found as such. The analyst, in offering her analytic interpretations, carries out a detranslation of the analysand’s dreams and associations. But these interpretations, to follow Lacan, are always half-sayings. It is the analysand who completes the translations, and it is her discourse from which the analyst cites and on which the analyst’s enigmas are based.

When the analysand discovers that the meaning produced in the analysis was of her own making, the analyst’s mastery reveals itself as hypothetical. This hypothesis does not mean that the analyst has no authority at all, even if her mastery exerts its power through the very fact that it is presupposed. Alenka Zupančič characterizes the analyst’s authority in relation to the temporal development of analysis and the work of repetition. She explains that, in psychoanalysis, it is not enough for the analysand to become consciously aware of something that used to be unconscious. The main problem is how to change the symbolic and imaginary structures in which the unconscious is embodied—for example, in her conduct and relationships with others. These ways in which the unconscious manifests “outside” of the analysand constitutes what Zupančič calls the comic dimension of analytic experience, that is, “the autonomy of the (subject’s) sameness that is operating ‘out there’, doing all kinds of things, involving the subject in various possible and impossible situations, sometimes very awkward ones” (Zupančič 2008, pp. 16–18). This is why Zupančič notes that we can get to know what there is to know early on, but that knowledge alone is not enough, because what is needed is the work of repetition. The analyst, then, is not an authority that insists on pointing out that the analysand is responsible for the things that keep systematically “happening” to her: “the analyst is, rather and above all, the authority that has to give all this ‘happening’ the *time* (and the space) to come to the subject” (Zupančič 2008, p. 18).

This time and space that it takes for these things that keep “happening” to come to the subject involve identifying them as diverse translations of unconscious ideas into specific symbolic and imaginary structures. The work of repetition is fundamental because, without it, these events could not be identified as the translations that they are. A person may learn early in the process of analysis, for example, that her tendency to create conflict with the people close to her is a constant attempt to work through a tumultuous relationship with a parent. However, learning this by itself does not change the fact that she will continue to find herself in explosive arguments with the people around her. She might find herself watching her own actions as if in the third person (the subject’s sameness operating ‘out there’) and only the work of repetition, the repeated and almost comical recurrence of the same events, can allow her to change the external ways in which her unconscious is embodied, to borrow Zupančič’s terms. Because of this repetition, the analysand can recognize those events as translations of a text that is unknown and yet familiar. The analyst does not indoctrinate the analysand into changing her behavior based on what was learned in the analysis, but rather allows the analysand to work through the recurrence of events that, although multiple, are all translations of the same unconscious ideas—sometimes, following Freud’s metaphor, into different languages.

While the analyst might not be a master even though she is addressed as one, she does have a peculiar kind of authority, which involves allowing the work of repetition to take place. To return to the asymmetry with which we started: the analyst’s authority is interpreted by the analysand as that of a master because of the hysterization of discourse in analysis, and yet that authority does not function as mastery on the part of the analyst. Following Lacan’s remarks about half-sayings, the analyst’s authority can be understood as the authority to cite, to utter enigmatic interpretations that the analysand will eventually recognize as

citations from the discourse that she authored. Through the work of repetition, translations can be identified as translations, citations can be identified as citations, and the repetition slowly reveals the analysand's authorship.

The analyst's hypothetical mastery is what allows for the work of repetition to take place in analysis. But at what point does her knowledge begin to appear as presupposed? It is not only the analysand's ability to complete half-sayings, to produce the third text that results from the process of detranslation, or to identify translations and citations as such—in other words, it is not only the analysand's ability to translate that causes the analyst to fall as the subject supposed to know. More importantly, the fall of the subject supposed to know (and her hypothetical mastery) comes with the realization that, in the end, *translation was all there ever was*. The analyst's interpretation, which appeared as a discovery, was in fact *just* translation. Through the work of repetition, that translation can not only be identified as a translation by the analysand, but at the same time, another kind of authority is revealed as belonging to her and as having been at work from the very beginning—I will call it hysterical authority.

Mastery in analysis exists under the form of a presupposition on the part of the analyst; however, the analysand discovers that meaning was not only being produced by her, but that the analyst was (after Freud) merely a translator. At the same time, in order to acknowledge the fact that it is the analysand who was producing meaning from the start and from whose discourse knowledge actually came, it was also necessary to presuppose knowledge in the Other. The analyst's mastery is such only insofar as it is the presupposition that allows the analysand to discover, through the work of repetition and translation, her own hysterical authority, which was at work from the very beginning. In this sense, the analyst's mastery is only revealed as hypothetical once the presupposition is acknowledged, but in order to fulfill its function in analysis, this presupposition needs to not be hypothetical at all.

The psychoanalytic experience requires a structural asymmetry in how the analyst and analysand address each other because it is constitutive of the analysand's authority as a hysterized subject. Because the analysand is hysterized, she institutes the analyst as the master, and because the analyst is addressed as a master and considered to be the source of knowledge, the analysand can produce the knowledge that results from analysis. The authority of the analyst as the subject supposed to know is necessary for translation to be possible, but because it is merely a work of translation, the analysand is able to see that the analyst's knowledge was a presupposition of her own. It is in this passage that the mastery of the subject supposed to know is revealed as the obverse of the analysand's hysterical authority.

The analysand's authority, then, is in the wielding of her power through the hypothesis of a master who can only be ousted, so to speak, through her own work in the position of a hysterized subject. Even more, the analyst's mastery exists only to be ousted. The ousting of the subject supposed to know is inscribed in the asymmetry that makes the analytic experience possible; it is inherent to the very practice of psychoanalysis. Instituting the analyst as the subject supposed to know while being herself the author of discourse and producer of meaning is the analysand's hysterical authority.

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