

The translating process: A paradigm of the caring relationship?

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Abstract

This article explores the intersection between psychoanalysis and translation, emphasizing their shared quest for meaning. In a transdisciplinary perspective, the study analyzes how translation informs psychoanalytic theory and care practices. The concept of translation extends beyond language, encompassing unconscious processes and care dynamics, touches the deeply sensory-engraved experiences. The support from clinical experience and case studies helps to shed light on how translation crosses various levels of care, from an individual level to group or even collective dynamics. By analyzing how language bridges the personal and collective dimensions, the authors describe translation as a fluctuating process in therapeutic relationships, revealing the intricate power structures and transformative potential inherent in the act of interpretation. The article proposes a model that combines psychoanalysis and translation, highlighting the plurality of psychic spaces and their influence on care practices.

Keywords: translation, group psychoanalysis, care practices.

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Interpret and translate: the common quest for meaning in psychoanalysis and translation

For both the translator and the analyst, there is therefore something untranslatable, something irreducibly beyond words that nevertheless shapes them, and whose inscription can only be experienced negatively, in the form of a decentring. The dissatisfaction and helplessness of the translator are also the prerogative of the analyst, the wound necessary to the opening up of words, to their relational fertilisation and fruitfulness.

(Allouch, Chiantaretto, & Pinel, 2011, p. 55)

The aim of this article is to explore the notion of translation, the role it plays in supporting the practice of healthcare professionals and the way it feeds into psychoanalytic theories. Adopting a transdisciplinary approach, it will focus on the concept of translation and its practical application can be used to rethink care and support practices. The issue is not new, and it would be wrong to say that psychoanalytic theories have not looked at the question of translation (Serrano Tristán, 2014). Although S. Freud never devoted any specific thought to translation in itself (Boulangier, 2010), there are many links between these two disciplines, whether in terms of the practice of analysts and translators (Basile, 2005), or in terms of theorising about interpretation (Aulagnier, 1991). For example, the terms *Übertragung* and *Übersetzung* can refer to the translation process. Whereas *Übertragung* is systematically used to designate transference, it can also, like *Übersetzung*, be used to refer to different types of unconscious translation (Ayouch, 2009). In all cases, these terms contain within them the idea of a dis-

placement, a transport, and a potential transformation. Translational processes can be likened to transformation processes within the subject, such as interpretations by the therapist which make it possible to convey an image or a word about an experience or an affect. In the same way, in the field of early interactions, processes of 'affective attunement' are considered to be transmodal translations by a parent of an affect experienced by a baby: the parent will translate the baby's affect or their emotional situation by a behaviour, a gesture which will take on the form, intensity and rhythm of the baby's experience (Stern, 2015). This kind of translation generates a feeling of shared subjective experience for the baby.

In France, Jeannine Altounian, herself a translator of works by Sigmund Freud, addressed the question of translation in a context of collective trauma, and particularly the Armenian genocide. She approaches it in various texts from the untranslatable and the need to translate survivors' accounts in order to pass them on to (Altounian, 2005). For her, when trauma detransitionalises, translation, is an attempt at retransitionalisation of the traumatism (ibid.). Indeed, by borrowing another language, the spoken word can shed some of its traumatic charge and thus open up the potential for potential for mourning.

In a fundamental work, Piera Aulagnier deals with the question of interpretation and the violence associated with it. Piera Aulagnier discusses the way in which all interpretation contains within it the potential for violence (particularly that of a parent towards a child) (Aulagnier, 1991). For this author, the interpreter's most difficult task is to "*find words that make figurable for the I of the two partners these representations of things, these*

*pictorial compositions that painted, these affects that we call fusion, rage, envy, hatred*¹" (ibid. p. 445). For the analyst, the therapist, it is a question of finding words "as close as possible to those first representations of bodily things through which the psychic activity specific to the original metabolised into psychic existents" (ibid., p. 464). In Daniel N. Stern's model (previously mentioned) and in Piera Aulagnier's approach, interpretation and translation from a care perspective - shared by carers and parental figures - come close to a translation that is as intimate as possible with primary, archaic language, linked to the body, senses and affections. We could also say that the movement inherent in the translation exercise, operating in the interval between two languages – or more widely in a relation between two or more people – summon a listening of what operates between the lines and below the words, bringing us back to the primary communications and interactions at the origin of the subject and its language.

Jean Laplanche, another French psychoanalyst, has worked on the question of translation, which he has developed into a model based on three processes: translation, detranslation and retranslation. According to J. Laplanche, translation is the process by which the analyst attempts to understand the analysand's discourse through the search for hidden or unconscious meanings, and which leads to a reformulation of the analysand's discourse (Laplanche, 1997). Detraduction is the process by which the analyst questions his or her own translation, seeking to understand the implicit meanings behind it. According to Jean Laplanche, detraduction enables the first translation to be taken up again, in order to transform it and hear the more deeply buried

and archaic parts of the unconscious. Jean Laplanche emphasises that translation and detranslation are continuous and iterative processes that enable the analyst to discover new layers of meaning in the analysand's discourse (which is then considered to be structured like a palimpsest).

For Zoé Andrejev, translation is intertwined with origin. For this author, the infraverbal is omnipresent in interlingual translation, and brings us back to the body and sensoriality. She takes up Jean Laplanche's concepts of translation and detraduction and sees them in a dynamic, back-and-forth mode. For this author, what remains untranslated is to be found in the infantile, beyond words. She goes on to say that the translator has to drown themselves into the flesh of the text, translating the sensory effects of the text such as its rhythm, its inflections (Andrejev, 2021, p. 310). In other words, as Rajaa Stitou theorises, translation, interpretation and the passage through another language always lead back to the Lacanian *lalangue*, the manifestation of the traumatic or of 'childish babble', of infantile suffering, of primary vulnerability (Stitou, 2014). In this line, Susan Ingram (2003, p. 109) suggests that translation is a boundary phenomenon with profound cultural significance, akin to transference. The translator embodies an archetypal liminal role, positioned at the edges of cultural awareness as a response to recurring crises. These crises, in part, stem from the inherently aggressive, metonymic nature of language.

¹ Translations made by the first author from French to English.

Dire quasi la stessa cosa²: translational theories

The translational approach and the theories of translation, as described by James Holmes, are varied and based on different disciplines, studied by different authors from different linguistic backgrounds (Holmes, 1972). A look at these theories will help to consolidate theories on translation and support our thinking on the description of this notion as a paradigm of care according to a psychoanalytic epistemology. Walter Benjamin, a philosopher, wrote an important essay at the end of the twentieth century entitled "The Task of the Translator" (Benjamin, 1991). Here he describes translation as an essential task for mutual understanding between languages and cultures. According to him, foreign languages are not simply different linguistic systems, but all have the same intention: to attempt to communicate the hidden essence of language, that which cannot be transmitted in a communicable way, which he calls the "core-essential" (ibid.). He theorises that translation is a "provisional means of measuring what makes languages foreign to each other", of keeping them alive (ibid., p. 250), but also of highlighting the way in which there is transparency between languages. The translator's task also includes bringing out the transhistorical relatedness of languages, while acknowledging their foreignness.

Paul Ricoeur, a phenomenologist, also proposes a reflection on translation using A. Berman and W. Benjamin as a starting point (Ricoeur, 2004). For him, translation is a difficult task, a challenge submitted to the drive to translate. He uses Walter Benjamin's term "translator's task" and proposes the idea of work in the psychoanalytical sense of the

term, close to the work of mourning, involving rescue and loss. It involves dealing with the resistance that arises from the stranger's challenge (Berman, 1984). It is also a matter of exposing oneself to the heterogeneity of translation and its ever-present untranslatability. For Paul Ricoeur, it is therefore necessary to mourn the loss of the perfect translation, which can then open the capacity for the pleasure of translating and, above all, for "linguistic hospitality". However, Paul Ricoeur returns to the idea that a language is always embedded in a cultural and historical substratum, the complexity of which must be recognised to translate. He goes further, saying that the translator's task is not a linear progression from individual words to sentences, texts, and ultimately the cultural whole. Instead, it is a reverse process: deeply immersed in the broader spirit of a culture through extensive reading, the translator descends from the cultural context to the text, then to sentences, and finally to words. The ultimate step in this process is the creation of a glossary at the level of individual words—a decisive act that encapsulates the inherent challenge, and perhaps impossibility, of translation (Ricoeur, 2004).

In fact, for Paul Ricoeur, translating ultimately consists in constructing comparables (ibid.). Barbara Cassin, philosopher and Hellenist, bases her theory of translation on the question of the untranslatable (Cassin, 2004, 2016). For Barbara Cassin, translation is a practice that involves both interpretation and creation. She highlights the importance of translation for intercultural understanding and communication between peoples. She takes as her starting point the term barbarian, used to designate someone who does not speak the same language. Translation, which she praises (Cassin, 2016), makes it possible to overcome

² (Eco, 2012)

linguistic and cultural barriers, promote mutual understanding and enrich our understanding of the world. With the help of other researchers, she is compiling a "Dictionary of the Untranslatables". She describes the untranslatables as semantic or syntactic symptoms, of the gap between languages, that show the repetitions we can hear in a psychoanalytical way. She says that these untranslatables are "not what we do not translate, but what we never stop (not) translating" (ibid., pp. 24-54). In other words, the untranslatables are what we keep trying to transform through translational repetition, which keeps stumbling because it is always caught up in the negative.

Tiphaine Samoyault proposes a reflection on translation which considers that the war between languages does not stem from their difference, but from the idea that the diversity of languages is an evil to be erased or exhibited (Samoyault, 2020). Tiphaine Samoyault criticises the vision of translation as the definitive remedy for this evil and considers that the war of languages is also present in each person, in an internal space of conflict between languages:

The war of languages is also the war that each person carries within him or herself, between mother tongue and national language, between intimate language, inner language and language of the world, between mother tongue and foreign languages - the configuration of this space of conflict is different for each person. (ibid., p. 48)

In this way, she puts the question of translation back into perspective in respect of the relations of domination between languages.

For Tiphaine Samoyault, translation should not seek to erase differences, but rather to recognise them and bring them into play, particularly in the power relationships that exist between languages (and their cultures). In

her view, the translation exposes to the experience of a limit, because it recomposes the divided fragments into a new unity in the other language. This confrontation with the limit, the finiteness, forces the subject "to look death in the face" and survive while transmitting the words in a different way, which she calls agonic translation (ibid., p. 52). This agonic translation makes it possible to confront the forces of conflict inherent in translation and to use them to assert a position and make a decision. Agonic translation is therefore situated in political rather than ethical terms and acknowledges the conflict before seeking a compromise.

Tiphaine Samoyault explains that the discourse of consensus fails to take account of the political potential inherent in translation, because the two in translation can never be fully reduced to the one, and because in plurality there is always a risk of reduction by means of an authoritarian decision. Translation is therefore a place where it is necessary to regulate confrontation and minimise the reduction of the plural, while recognising the boundaries between separate identities without enclosing them in distinct properties.

This diversion through the theorisations of translation studies is invaluable in situating the translation process in a broader context, opening up to a group, collective and political dimension. The notion of translation is complex and crosses different epistemologies and spaces. It thus enables us to extend our thinking beyond the intrapsychic space. Indeed, by delving into the dimension of language and, even more so, into interlanguage space, translation leads us to consider the cultural, historical and political aspects underlying these languages. One step further, considering that translational processes are at work in every interpersonal relationship, these considerations

open the way to thinking about these different aspects in the therapeutic and care relationship. Basically, exploring the notion of translation through a psychodynamic prism raises the question of what is translated in the relationship with the other, what is not translated, what seeks to be translated, and the different paths taken by these translational processes. It also raises the question of who translates, for whom and how, in relation to the potential transformative effects and domination relations this can generate.

***Traduttore, traditore*³: Risks and possibilities of venturing onto others' ground**

Might we not say that the practices of care, support and education come together in the attention paid to encounters and to others, both in their otherness and in their similarity? This is always a delicate and sensitive area, at the crossroads between curiosity and openness on the one hand, and domination and enclosure on the other. In attempting to understand, let alone translate, the language of others, there is a constant risk of betrayal. If the notion of translation is always associated with that of betrayal, it is because the two terms have a common etymological origin: translation and intercomprehension always involve a risk of betrayal. Paradoxically, we could then assume that this risk enables a culture of doubt and humility with regard to the other and his or her thoughts. Indeed, as Ron Britton has argued, the culture of doubt has qualities at various levels. It allows us to move away from thinking in silos, leading to greater creativity in epistemological propositions, greater reflexivity in the clinical position and in translation practices (Britton, 2003). It allows us to

resist the imposition of single, confining thoughts, which often impose themselves on minor or minority voices, supporting the sideways and complex thinking that is absolutely necessary in care practices.

The paradigm of translation, as we propose to explore, can be found at different levels of support and care. Here we propose a study based on the coordinated psychic spaces proposed by René Kaës, a French pioneer of group psychoanalysis. The singular-plural thinking of René Kaës, interested in the subject in his groups, in the group as subject and in the groups internal to each subject, opens up new reflections on space. This approach encourages a multidimensional conception of psychic space and its extended theory of the metapsychology (Kaës, 2015). The modelling of a group psychic apparatus (Kaës, 1976) reshuffles the deck and, more generally, the geographical and topological organisation of the psyche. Psychic space is pluralized, leading to a conception of psychic spaces, stratified and levelled according to four dimensions:

- The intrapsychic dimension: ‘specifies the internal space of the singular subject. It is in this space that in this space that the logics of the Unconscious have been brought to light’ (Kaës, 2015, p. 67).
- The interpsychic dimension: ‘describes the psychic space between subjects in the different bond configurations: couple, group, family, and the effects of subjectivity (which I believe defines intersubjectivity). This space between is both what links them and what differentiates them’ (ibid., p. 67).
- The transpsychic dimension ‘characterises the psychic reality that is transmitted through subjects, their bonds

³ Translator, traitor

and the groups of which they are members, without them having reality, but only the agents of its reception and transmission' (ibid., p. 67).

- The metapsychic dimension: 'Each of these three dimensions is framed and supported by the metapsychic function performed by the higher level of complexity' (ibid., p. 67).

Working on these different subjective levels, crossing the individual, the group and collectives at an unconscious level, is particularly relevant to the issues raised by translation. Indeed, the processes of translation, or translation as a professional practice, are rooted in both the intimate and the social, collective dimensions, in time and space. Language itself, personal and singular, is shaped by the group and supported by social and cultural meta-frames. In order to observe these processes and be able to describe them, we propose to take a closer look at the professional groups involved in care work. Our hypothesis is that observation of these teams will shed light on the way in which translation processes cross several levels (intra-, inter-, trans- and metasubjective) in contact with subjects seeking care or social support.

Let's take a clinical situation that has enabled us to put forward some hypotheses about translation issues in care:

We'll be talking about a patient, Ms Rosa⁴, who is being cared for in a service for asylum seekers. She receives psychological support in the form of psychotherapy, but is also followed by a psychiatrist, a social worker and a family doctor who work in the same unit. As part of her psychotherapy, Mrs Rosa is treated in Russian, as this is one of her mother

tongues, which she shares with her therapist⁵. Mrs Rosa soon expressed the need for her therapist to be able to accompany her in her consultations with the other professionals in the department, both as a carer and as a translator, as she did not trust the interpreters who were usually called in. This gave rise to a new stage in the care process, which was collectivised and carried out by a number of people, both during the interviews and outside them, in the spaces between professionals, where the goal was to try to translate the counter-transference experiences that diffracted between the members of the team. These inter-professional exchanges sometimes bring up experiences of betrayal, unease and discomfort. However, Mrs Rosa herself seemed to want the team to be talking about her, and to feel supported by a group, whereas she felt 'uprooted' as a result of her exile. The continuation of this care raised questions within the department about working with interpreters and, more broadly, about teamwork with people dealing with intercultural issues.

We can see how, in this situation, translation runs through all the care given to Mrs Rosa. Firstly, it involves translating her traumatic experiences, which she has experienced throughout her life, both in the therapist's counter-transference and in the intersubjective relationship. This dimension of translation, close to the conceptualisations of Pierra Aulagnier, Jeannine Altounian and Jean Laplanche (Altounian, 2005; Aulagnier, 1991; Laplanche, 1997), which relates to the interpretation and connection of dimensions that have remained indiscernible or untranslatable, seeks a plural address, within a group united by a task that can provide a resonance chamber and transform these experiences. This group, this team, is then supposed to share a common culture, which can both contain the massiveness of Mrs Rosa's story (as well as that of the other patients in the unit), but also

⁴ The data has been anonymised to ensure patient and institutional confidentiality.

⁵ provided here by S. Urgese.

diffract it, allowing it to be heard in a composite, hybrid, multiple vision.

Taking things a step further, from the point of view of the team and its group structure, Ms Rosa pushes to question the limits of each individual, their intervention and their place in the unit and its organisation. Ms Rosa invites us to (re)invent current practices, to question established habits, and to create new narratives - and therefore a new group language - to convey them. In a sense, caring for Mrs Rosa deterritorialises the team and leads them to invest in a new environment and new rituals, while at the same time questioning the inherited legacy and old ways of doing the work. The translation, which began in language, extends to a shift in space and time, forcing everyone to situate themselves in the patient's present situation. It helps to build new benchmarks for practice, forming the foundations of the team's group culture. Beyond this specific situation, this example shows the way in which the definition of translation within the framework of psychoanalytical theories is, on the one hand, fruitful, and on the other, calls for an extended vision, even *in extension*, as R. Kaës proposes in relation to the psychic apparatus (Kaës, 2015).

“Psyche ist ausgedehnt”⁶, translation in extension

The extensive and expanding dimension of the notion of translation in the psychoanalytical field and more widely in care practices has led us to propose a model to account for the complexity of the processes involved in translation and the different levels it covers (Urgese, 2023). This model is largely based on

René Kaës' model of coordinated psychic spaces, which highlights the different subjective levels and their interactions. It seems to us that this model makes it possible to deploy the way in which translation crosses different layers of individual and group subjectivity, and to offer a representation of the different processes at play that can support carers' practices, opening up an epistemological dialogue between psychoanalysis and other disciplines. It is thus based on the intra-, inter-, trans- and meta-subjective levels introduced by René Kaës, applied to the translational model in the intersubjective and group link, starting from the same situation as cited by P. Aulagnier and D. N. Stern, i.e. an interaction between a child and his or her parent, or between a patient and his or her therapist (Aulagnier, 1991; Stern, 2015; Urgese, 2023; Urgese & Ciccone, 2021). It can be sub-divided into intra-interpretation, inter-interpretation, other-interpretation and translation:

- The intra-pretation would refer to the idea of making the other's account one's own, of extracting a subjective meaning from it, of taking it in one sense or another, of giving it meaning. It is akin to the "private", intra-subjective space described by R. Kaës (2015).

- The inter-pretation would designate the movement of lending to the in-between, of measuring the gap and the in-between, the space between the self and the other. Situated in the intersubjective space of the "different", according to R. Kaës, it is the very experience that gives rise to the link and enables us to situate ourselves in relation to the other (ibid.).

- The other-pretation refers to the idea of returning to the other, of giving back, of rendering and re-presenting one's story. This

⁶ “Psyche is extended; it knows nothing of it” (Freud, 1984, p. 288).

process would be caught up in the always underlying double challenge of covering it up, coating it with its own intra-interpretation, but also reducing it, melting it down - referred to the definition of rendering in English (Oxford Learner's Dictionary Online, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/render?q=render>). It would come close to the "shared and sharable" dimension of the spaces described by R. Kaës. (ibid.).

- The translation, for its part, would be the process that emerges from these different operations, situated in the common space between the self and the other. Linked to the transference dimension, it would be what is adjusted, transported, transformed and transposed to cross the metasubjective-space, both beyond and within it, in the archaic, corporeal and sensory dimension of language (ibid.).

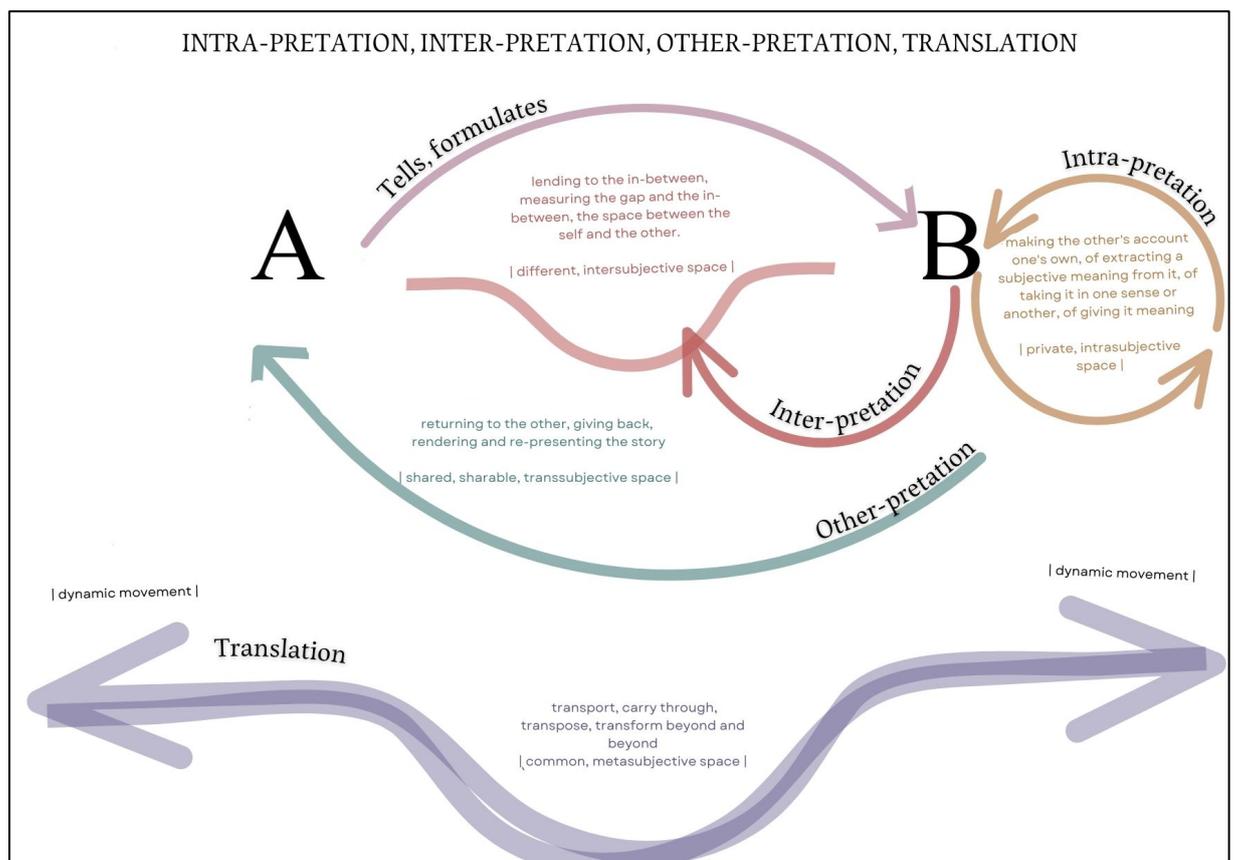


Fig. 1: Intra-, inter-, other-pretation and translation in the dynamic of relation (Urgese, 2023)

While it may seem clear that language is an entity that cuts across individual, inter-individual, cultural and socio-political levels, an interest in translational processes enables us to highlight the dynamic dimension of the construction of a shared language, as well as the immutable presence of otherness and plurality

within a single language. A language is always constructed by and through another - or others - based on a diversity of spaces and situated in a history that is both individual and collective. Translation, seen as something that runs through each one of us, as well as the social groups of which we are a part, suggests

the importance of thinking about psychic processes in a dynamic and moving way, far removed from the fixed theories that could trap the moving and plural realities of human relationships.

Conclusions and perspectives

We could say that psychoanalytic work consists of a succession of translations. Let's take the situation of interpreting a dream, a paradigmatic situation in psychoanalytic work. Let's continue with Donald Meltzer's (1984) idea that the interpretation of a dream is never the interpretation of the patient's dream, but always the interpretation of the dream that the analyst makes about the patient's dream. We would say that the dreamer's dream is a translation of an emotional experience into images and a scenario. The narration of the dream is in the same way a translation into language by the dreamer of the dream itself. The psychoanalyst's listening translates the dreamer's narrative. The psychoanalyst then translates into images, into the dream, the impact of the unique translation they have made from the dreamer's narrative. And their interpretation will be a translation of the personal scenario they have constructed. An interpretation that the dreamer in turn will have to translate. Ultimately, all human communication in which one subject transmits a subjective experience to another, all contained within a collective and the representations associated with it, operates on a similar model: a succession of translations. These successive translations, a real work of two, a co-construction, are carried out on the basis of "selected facts", according to Bion (1962, 1979), inspired by the mathematician Henri Poincaré (2011): a fact, in the observation and listening

of the disturbances of the inner world translated into images, sensations and words, in the patient as in the psychoanalyst, as well as in the observation and listening of the communication of the other - the patient who narrates and then the analyst who intervenes or interprets - translated in its turn into an inner scenario and then into words. These successive selected facts combine and bring together scattered elements, giving them meaning, revealing hidden or masked constellations, or reconstruct them. This is how a material becomes 'clinical', and this is how clinical material becomes meaningful. And this is also how all human communication leads to mutual understanding, which understanding is always a co-construction, by two or more people, based on a succession of translations. Beyond the practice of psychoanalysts, these proposals shed light on all care and support practices (whether social, educational, pedagogical, etc.) and highlight how inter-individual processes interact with group dynamics.

Translation opens the door to a wider reflection on language and its collective implications: cultural, historical, political - but also individual: in the bodily sensations and singular memories it conveys. It is also the frontier that separates the self from the other, but also enables them to communicate and to come together. On a larger scale, focusing on translation as a process and putting it into dialogue with psychoanalytical contributions means taking up a position at the very point of the border (between oneself and the other, between the individual and the group, etc.), observing how it is crossed and even questioning the existence of this border. By positioning oneself in this intermediary space, a liminal point of view is opened up, providing both a global view of the processes at play and access to the asymmetrical aspects and domination

that shape all dual (and plural) relationships. This is the reason for questioning the establishment of borders, separating spaces that are always connected, leading to movement within and across them, builds bridges between different spaces.

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