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Metaphor and Oedipus

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Abstract

The main aim of this article is to point out metaphors taken from oral tradition or performed by patients in psychotherapy as a royal way to Oedipus complex in analysis working through process. First, the position of the metaphor in clinical works and in philosophy is presented and its importance for clinical practice is shown even though it was excluded from the field. In addition, some examples in psychotherapy using metaphors are displayed and analyzed. It is indicated that Oedipus complex is present in living metaphors and in dead metaphors, whichever we succeed working with the metaphors that the patient uses, which usually brings out his symptom. A new way of life might emerge.

Keywords: Metaphor; psychotherapy; oedipal complex.

Metáfora e Édipo

Compendio

Este artículo tiene como objetivo principal atentar a las metáforas provenientes de la tradición oral, o dichas por pacientes en proceso psicoterápico, como un camino Real para el complejo de Edipo en análisis trabajando a lo largo del proceso. Primero, la posición de la metáfora en el trabajo clínico y en la filosofía, así como su importancia para la práctica clínica, aunque esta haya sido excluida de los campos de actuación. Se analizan ejemplos de uso de metáforas en psicoterapia, y se indica que el complejo de Edipo está presente en metáforas vivas y en metáforas dichas por pacientes, siendo portadoras de sus propios síntomas.

Palabras clave: Metáfora; psicoterapia; complejo de Edipo.

Metaphor, Philosophy and Clinical Work

Metaphor has been removed from traditional clinical work. Although clinical work, conceived here in all its extension, exists before Greek’s philosophy, metaphor was usually distrusted or at least considered with precautions. Following this same tradition, we can even say physicians do not usually respect metaphor. Since the Greeks, metaphor was banished from the philosophical thoughts, because it was perceived as a promoter of ambiguity and equivocity. Overall, it was usually considered that metaphor incited enchantment or persuasion. This last feature is very important in clinical work, so we will return on this subject, called clinical pragmatics.

It is good to have fun not to work with it said an old Psychiatrist Professor, advising to cope with patient’s metaphors carefully. Besides, metaphor quoted only as a

said it was important to forget patient’s language is an excellent ‘condition’ to be observed in mental medicine.” Heidegger’s (1946/1983) words disqualification of language during the last century. This remains as a huge problem of modern times. Moreover, metaphor has a way in general speech and language, but its use in scientific and clinical work might be a threat to language unreliability in scientific and philosophical thoughts. Despite this, metaphors are facts in our language and reality, and it is important to recognize and understand them, above all in a clinical context, what justifies our refusal to “throw the baby with its dirty water out of the bath”.

We propose to enlarge metaphor conception further than metaphor traditional use as an action belonging only to Rhetoric and Poetry, and to emplace metaphor in his entire philosophical project, promoter of ambiguity and equivocity. Overall, it was usually considered that metaphor incited enchantment or persuasion. This last feature is very important in clinical work, so we will return on this subject, called clinical pragmatics.
Oral Tradition and Metaphor

Oral tradition holds a great amount of histories, which comes from people's life experiences. The sooner history retains a lot of life experiences and resolutions made by each character in real life and the more it lasts, the better. When a patient talks to us, he is usually using metaphors, analogies, comparisons, periphrasis and others modalities of elements of speech. All these aspects are important to be studied, but this is not our clinical aim at the point. Notwithstanding, life experience is noted in every word and in metaphors said by someone. Tales tell all about crucial moments of life development in human groups and societies, as well. Exempli gratia, Sophocles' tragedy about Oedipus is not only a myth created by a genius mind. It is a crop of many others histories and stories, which were selected and synthesized by Sophocles - for instance, Dodds (1966) and Rudnytsky (1987) show that others works of Sophocles before Oedipus Rex as Laios, Seven against Tebas, The Sphinx have a lot of informations for our comprehension of Oedipus Rex. Anyhow, it is not usual to know patients that carry on tales with them to tell their therapists. They usually tell metaphors. Considering that, metaphors are to be understood not only as a figurative speech. They depend on the way listeners will work out a new meaning. Ricoeur (2000b) may help us to enlighten what we are striving to say:

"Thus, a metaphor doesn't exist in itself, but in and for an interpretation. The metaphorical interpretation presupposes a literal interpretation that self-destroys in a signifiant contradiction. It is this self-destruction process or transformation that imposes a type of torsion to words, an extension of sense, which allows us to disclose a meaning, where a literal interpretation would be absurd. That's the reason why a metaphor appears as a type of response to a certain inconsistency in the metaphorical enunciation interpreted".

The simple quiz "How are you going?", which usually starts our contacts in daily life could be listened as an invitation to build a personal metaphor that is invariable in patient's enunciation and history (Martins, 2003).

1. - How are you?: "More or less", says the neurotic denying.
2. - How are you?: "Very bad, look at the harm I've caused", says the depressed neurotic.
3. - How are you?: "I'm fine", says the pacified ordinary person.
4. - How are you?: "Excellent, everything is divine and I'm presented on the first place", says the hysteric, uneasy, with a transference to the analyst, in a paranoid position, self-entitling himself.
5. - How are you?: "Are you?", answers the autistic.
6. - How are you?: "I'm fine, can't you see that my leg is broken?", says the hippomaniac. 
7. - How are you?: "Very bad, look at the harm I've caused", says the depressed neurotic.
8. - And you, what's going on?: "What? I'm a deaf, distracted, handicapped or learning English person.
9. - How about you who are coming here in a psychotherapeutic session, are you all right?", asks the therapist.
10. - How are you?: "Why are you interested?", asks the anthropophobic person.
11. - So, how are you? "How dare you say that?!
12. - How are you, Mr. John? "Business is just going down, but life is going on", answers the grocery store owner with obsessive worries after he had bought a new car.
13. - And you, how have you been doing? "Nothing (at the same time he is crossing a street at all)", answers and acts an old person with becoming apragmatic, but dominated by survival drives.
14. - How about you?: "It’s none of your business, I haven't got a heart", replies an anthropophobic person.
15. - What are you going to do here? "I’m a poor emigrant, seeking to survive in life abroad"]I am visiting your beautiful country, but nobody who is infatuate until death.
16. - And you, Sir, how are you going? "I'm fine", says the pacified ordinary person.

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Speakers of Indo-European languages guess important metaphors well. Metaphors hidden in patient’s speech are related to existence, like metaphors of roads, which are being traveled by the speaker (or walker?!). When a patient does not think of metaphors of roads as an answer of that quiz, we might note answers like the ones psychotics bring off, who handle the significant as things (5) or the ones produced by an autistic child (6). We could ask about the late simpleton answer or to somebody distracted (8) whether they indeed understood our simple quiz or not. The intention is to light up what we meant, our presupposition that people would use a metaphor concerning the existence as a road. It is well acceptable that: 

1) neurosis, 2) melancholy, 3) depression neurosis, 4) hippomaniac, 7) harsh compulsive significant interpreter, 9) obsessive, 10) hysterical answer, 11) paranoid, 12) obsessive grocery story owner, 14) anthropofobic man, 15) emigrant quite naive, 16) passionate man, and 17) pacified common man likely understood our presupposition. We can argue all these label diagnosis and if each answer had a presupposed belief in existence as a road. The fact is that this metaphor is in our culture that time that is also understood money. As quoted before, we think likely that metaphor of roads is present in all languages. To now, we do not know another metaphor to replace this one. We have never heard somebody using images of ‘dancing’ as an example the metaphorical expression of a lover when he expresses his love. These experiences, ‘natural’ for some authors, can be universal, terms of social institutions, politics, economics and religions. Finally, our interaction with other people inside our culture (in movement, manipulation of objects and meals, etc.); and, finally, our interaction with our physical atmosphere (perceptual apparatus, motor, mental capacities, emotional concepts occurs in different experiences: our body metaphorically. The metaphorical structuring of the ideas provides images that the patient can project him on it, and this is a very important issue for our practice. This is a very important issue for our practice. 

Metaphors, Symptom and Oedipus

Metaphor is important since it provides help to handle and symbolize the patient’s symptom well. Symptoms also show the patient’s being. Moreover, it expresses the way he is going on, especially how he gets along with his wishes. Meaning is an achievement that comes from a resolution of a driving search for an object. It provides the opportunity to present an image to himself. This is a very important issue for our practice. It helps the patient to express the idea of how is he going on, in spite of the fact that it would be possible in a very nice culture.

He decided to do what he wished a long time ago... We shall explain that the woman he was longing turned to be very cult
but also cunning, playing around with his feeling, defying him as a man, but having a disguising feminist speech. Then, he could cope his symptom, face a charming, roguish and cunning woman how she really was and not how he was imagining she should be. Thus, it means to work through his castration complex. His shyness was only an aspect of his fear. He told the therapist some months after that utterance: "when I think in your statement, I burst out laughing". Irony with oneself can be very powerful to heal one’s own selfishness. It means to kill his Self of being a Prince in order to recover life.

For a psychoanalyst, Oedipus is the history of all histories. Sophocles held together a very long tradition of tell tales. Thus, a psychoanalyst expects their patients will bring a new and elaborated, creative and original Oedipian history in their speech. It is also supposed that each patient retains cultural metaphors linked directly to his Oedipus complex from his childhood and from his parents and acquaintances. That is our general hypothesis. It also means that during his life route every man will face the Sphinx.

W., bewildered by his obsessional way of life and symptoms, told us in the beginning of an analytical session: "my mother told me 'she's lost in a wood without a dog'". In Brazilian Portuguese language, it is said: "está perdida em um mato sem cachorro", which means "she is in a state of helplessness. Therefore, she needs someone or something to complement and fix her wished absent object". Before he could resume his speech, the therapist asked him: "Are you going to be her dog?" Taken by surprise, he replied saying immediately "Yes, but..." Finally, he made a decision and said he wanted "no more to be his morther's pit bull dog, it takes a lot of risk and I am only an ordinary man". So, he decided by himself, reminding his own illusion bubble, to halt his ambivalence and bring his life near to anyone else life. His neurosis was becoming a common neurosis without complaints and swallowed sorrows he could not bear.

However, what does it mean to be a dog in this old Brazilian metaphor? In order to answer that, we shall find out the origin of this metaphor in oral tradition linked to everyday life. It could mean that a family, struggling to survive in a wild land, had to take with her a fierce dog to face the unknown whenever someone would go to a virgin forest. What would a mother the commands, orders, or instructions give but ferocious. This patient was frozen considering his mother as a displeased woman, was very difficult for him to get himself because he idolized his mother as a godly devotion or at least as a modern "Our Lady", he would like to be her complement, to be something on his mother.

Metaphor has not yet been recognized in this text points out its importance. When used, it performs images that introduces and complements with the patient’s symptom. Oedipus coming in a general framework in movement. It means to be updated with creativity and originality each time a metaphor is worked through in a therapy by a patient. In cases and some statements were carried out to provide hope to those who want to share a kind of therapy that uses an enlarged Semiology.

References
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