

SÁNDOR FERENCZI'S MULTIPLE CONFUSIONS OF TONGUES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON PSYCHOANALYTICAL THINKING*

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ABSTRACT

Using a poststructuralist model, this article explores the lecture given by Ferenczi and published under the title “Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child -(The Language of Tenderness and Passion).” By initially focusing on the closed structure of the text, the author identifies two types of confusion of tongues that are closely interlinked: the confusion between adults and the child, and that between the analyst and the analysand. By then placing the manuscript within the corpus of Ferenczi, he connects it to the latter’s multilingualism and pleads in favour of autobiographical determinants for psychoanalytic conceptualizations. This positioning of the text in its historical framework also enables it to be situated in the context of the metapsychological confusion of tongues between Freud and Ferenczi, and to delimit the influence of Ferenczi’s ideas in psychoanalytic posterity.

KEYWORDS: Ferenczi; Freud; Trauma; Sexual Abuse; Analytic Relationship; multilingualism

RESUMEN

El presente artículo explora, mediante el uso de un modelo posestructuralista, la conferencia de Ferenczi publicada bajo el título “Confusión de lenguas entre los adultos y el niño. (El lenguaje de la ternura y el de la pasión)”. El autor se centra inicialmente en la estructura cerrada del texto e identifica dos tipos de confusión de lenguas que están estrechamente inter vinculadas: la confusión entre los adultos y el niño, y aquella entre el analista y el analizado. Luego, al ubicar el manuscrito dentro del corpus de Ferenczi, lo conecta con el multilingüismo de la segunda y argumenta a favor de los determinantes autobiográficos en las conceptualizaciones psicoanalíticas. Esta ubicación del texto en su marco histórico también permite situarlo en el contexto de la confusión metapsicológica de lenguas entre Freud y Ferenczi y delimitar la influencia de las ideas de Ferenczi en la posteridad psicoanalítica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ferenczi; Freud; Trauma; Abuso sexual; Relación analítica; multilingüismo.

INTRODUCTION

Preliminary argumentation

This contribution focuses on an emblematic text of Ferenczi’s thought that is of paramount importance to both the theory and history of psychoanalysis. “Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child -(The Language of Tenderness and Passion)” is a transcript of Ferenczi’s presentation at the Twelfth International Psychoanalytical Congress held in Wiesbaden in 1932. The lecture is presented as a continuous flow in its published format; in other words, the author chooses not to split the text into parts or sections separated by asterisks, with his argumentation unfolding as an uninterrupted whole. For “pedagogical” reasons, however, this organic body can be artificially divided into two parts: the first centers on psychoanalytical technique, while the second discusses trauma. Yet, as we shall soon see, these two themes are inextricably -and perhaps even intrinsically- intertwined. We could even go so far as to say that the first part not only heralds the second, but is also transposable to it, and, inversely, that what is developed in the second part retrospectively clarifies the first, which, by all evidence, begins to resemble a preamble. Indeed, these two “parts” describe

two types of confusion of tongues: the confusion between adults and the child, and that between the analyst and the analysand.

Herein, I explore the title of Ferenczi's article from multiple perspectives that lead to an historical and theoretical contextualization of the text and reveal two additional types of confusion: a confusion of tongues, in the true sense of the term, in the life of Ferenczi, and a confusion of metapsychological tongues between Freud and Ferenczi. Finally, to conclude the multitude of questions raised in this fundamental text of the Hungarian psychoanalyst, I will consider the influence of "Confusion of Tongues" on several authors from different linguistic traditions with a filiation to Ferenczi, whether asserted or not: Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, Michael Balint, Pierre Bourdier, Jean Laplanche, and Arnold Wm. Rachman.

Methodological remarks

I would first like to draw attention to the importance of the title and/or subtitle of a text: a lecture, article, thesis, and literary work, not to mention a painting, choreography, and any other "fabric of signs."¹ The title and subtitle comprise what are known as "peri-textual" elements in narratology, that is to say, what is found "around the text" (Genette 1987). Such peripheral information -the date and place of publication, dedication, references, footnotes, and back cover- can significantly expand the significance of a given work. For example, the title and/or subtitle can veil or unveil the contents, emphasize an important theme, or even shift it away if the author is clever or playful. An analysis of the title and subtitle can also intertextualize a text by initiating a dialogue with other texts, contextualize it historically and/or biographically, and even disclose its latent or unconscious issues. The title of Ferenczi's article, "Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child -(The Language of Tenderness and Passion)," lends itself perfectly to such a pluralistic exploration.

It should be noted that my analysis of the article's title, in evident relation to its content, follows in the wake of poststructuralism. As a consequence, it considers the text as both an effect of structure and language and as an extra-text, while taking into account the biographical entity of the author and the integration of this "fabric of signs" in history, or as it so happens in our case, in the history of psychoanalysis. The first two parts of this article focus on the closed structure of the text, whereas the third and fourth endeavour to leave behind this "enclosure" to expand on the signification of Ferenczi's contribution.

Confusion of sexual tongues

Let us first highlight that "Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child -(The Language of Tenderness and Passion)" is not the original title of Ferenczi's contribution, but rather the name by which his lecture would pass into posterity; the initial title was instead "The Passion of Adults and their Influence on the Sexual and Character Development of Children."² "Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child -(The Language of Tenderness and Passion)" is actually taken from a phrase found in the second half of the text that draws attention to the gap between the language of adults, rooted in the passion of genital sexuality and imbued with guilt, and the language of the child, animated by the tenderness of pre-genital eroticism and imprinted with passiveness:

I should like to call this the stage of passive object-love or of tenderness. Vestiges of object love are already apparent here, but only in a playful way in phantasies. Thus, almost without exception, we find the hidden play of taking the place of the parent of the same sex in order to be married to the other parent, but it must be stressed that this is merely phantasy; in reality the children would not want to, in fact they cannot do without tenderness, especially that which comes from the mother. *If more love or love of a different kind from that which they need*, is forced upon children in the stage of tenderness, it may lead to pathological consequences in the same way as the frustration or withdrawal of love quoted elsewhere in this connection. It would lead us too far from our immediate subject to go into details of the neuroses and the character maldevelopments which may follow the precocious super-

imposition of love, passionate and guilt loaded on an immature guiltless child. The consequence must need to be that of confusion of tongues, which is emphasized in the title of this address. (Ferenczi 1933, 227-228)

Beyond the difference in the essence of adult eroticism and infantile sexuality, we discover the idea of excess linked to the response of the object when faced with the primordial quest of libidinal satisfaction, an invariably harmful and pathogenic excess, whether in its positive form of supply (“more love”) or its negative form of absence (“frustration or withdrawal of love”). Indeed, too much love is equivalent to too little love, with this “too” signifying the imbalance between two types of sexual disposition.

Still in relation to the title, the dissymmetry between the two tongues is suggested by the plural “adults” and the singular “child,” which allows us to interpret the stranglehold of adults as a “group” over the isolated “child.” Let us stress here that the perverse precedence of adults over the child and the imbalance between these two unequal parties constitute the leitmotiv of Ferenczi’s lecture. Consequently, even the very structure of the title, “Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child,” reflects the manifest content of the paper, while emphasizing the second part on trauma. This explains why the majority of discussions tend to “skip over” the first part on the analyst’s stance and countertransferential problems.

It is interesting to note that the original title, “The Passion of Adults and their Influence on the Sexual and Character Development of Children,” the “zero degree” of the title of Ferenczi’s lecture, makes quite explicit the idea of a stranglehold. The initial title points to the real theme of the lecture as the exogenous source of character and neurosis: this requires us to return to the importance of the extraterritoriality of the traumatic factor. Thus, the original title openly tells us that the “original sin” derives from the passion of adults. As the title includes neither the word “tongue,” nor the term “language,” this only reinforces the need to consider the linguistic babelization of the second title as a metonymy for another reality. In truth, the two tongues correspond to two varieties of love -the tenderness of the child (“passive object-love or stage of tenderness”) and the passion of the adult (“passionate and guilt loaded love”)- two forms of communication, two different psychosomatic universes.

Needless to say, this is not found in the literal sense, but rather within the metaphorical register. We should not forget here that Ferenczi had a particular fondness for metaphors, as can be observed through his use of the image of the “fruit that was injured by a bird or insect,” which has the consequence of hastening the ripening of the fruit (Ferenczi 1933, 228). It could be argued that this image is a metaphor for the external aspect of trauma, and is suggestive of the environment that marks and shapes the Ego.

Let us also note that, by claiming a confusion of tongues between adults and the child and not simply between parents and their progeny, Ferenczi frees us from the familial exclusivity that weighs on psychoanalytical thought, in order to direct us toward a problem that transcends civilizations and cultures. The confrontation between adults and children and, more specifically, the child’s access to the adult world, are indeed an anthropological constant, as recalled by Laplanche, who reconsiders the theories of the cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead in light of “Confusion of Tongues”:

Since it is ultimately a contingency rooted in biology and human history, it is not a necessary fact in itself that a child is raised by parents, by his/her parents, by the parents. The originary situation as proposed by Ferenczi is the confrontation between the child and the adult world. Without a family, one can, if need be, become a human being, but one cannot do so without this confrontation. Here, a reexamination of Margaret Mead’s writings on comparative anthropology would lead us to the same conclusion: the fundamental question that she poses, beyond any cultural variants, is the issue of accessing the adult world. (Laplanche 1987, 123)

The child–adult disparity, thus, takes us “beyond” metapsychology toward an anthropological topology.

Confusion of transference tongues

While “Confusion of Tongues” refers explicitly to the unequal confrontation between the world of adults and the world of childhood, the syntagms “tongue-tied patient” and “to loosen their [i.e. children’s, patients’, and pupils’] tongues” implicitly link this confusion to another type of confusion that permeates the analyst–analysand relationship. Let us cite the first mention of this new contextual tongue presented as a metaphor:

Something had been left unsaid in the relation between physician and patient, something insincere, and its frank discussion freed, so to speak, the *tongue-tied patient*, the admission of the analyst’s error produced confidence in his patient. It would almost seem to be of advantage occasionally to commit blunders in order to admit afterwards the fault to the patient. (Ferenczi 1933, 225; emphasis added)

What inhibits the words of the analysand and blocks his associativity -what “ties his tongue” according to Ferenczi- is the abstentionist attitude of the analyst and his obstinate silence when faced with the analysand’s countertransference problems, which is only reinforced by the insufficient duration accorded to training analysis (Ferenczi 1933, 225). This denunciation of the traditional analytical posture, reminiscent of the “malevolent neutrality” mentioned by French psychoanalyst and pioneer of institutional psychotherapy Chemla (2009, 43-59) in relation to the treatment of serious pathologies, echoes the traumatizing mutism of parents toward the suffering of their abused child, as such silence only amplifies the traumatic effect of the seduction (Ferenczi 1933, 131). Likewise, the distant, haughty, and glacial language of the analyst is just as foreign and intrusive as the adult seducer’s passionate language with the child and just as alienating as the silence that pervades the scene of abuse.

The interdependency of adult–child tongues on the one hand and transference tongues in the treatment domain on the other becomes more evident in the following extract, which immediately follows the description of the dissymmetry of sexual languages:

Parents and adults, in the same way as we analysts, ought to learn to be constantly aware that, behind the submissiveness or even the adoration, just as behind the *transference of love*, of our children, patients and pupils, there lies hidden an ardent desire to get rid of this *oppressive love*. If we can help the child, the patient or the pupil to give up the reaction of identification, and to ward off the *overburdening transference*, then we may be said to have reached the goal of raising the personality to a higher level. (Ferenczi 1933, 228; emphasis added)

First let us note the series “parents, adults, analysts” in opposition to the series “children, patients, pupils.” The “transference of love,” “oppressive love,” and “overburdening transference” associated with “identification” should be connected to the forced love of the parent, which causes the child to identify with the aggressor on whom he/she entirely depends (just like the analysand depends on the analyst). Astounded by the irruption of his/her seducer’s passionate tongue, the child introjects this guilt-derived tongue that is not her own, intra-psychizes the exterior reality that exceeds his/her capacities for elaboration, and then becomes split between innocent and guilty. The “traumatic trance” (Ferenczi 1933, 227) mentioned by Ferenczi in the extract describing the autoplasty induced by the identification with the aggressor is intertwined with the “analytical trance” (Ferenczi 1933, 228) that he refers to in the broader context of parents, adults, and analysts.

Quite significantly, the syntagm “to loosen the tongue” is mentioned in the conclusion of the article:

I shall be pleased if you would take the trouble to examine in thought and in your practice what I said today and especially if you would follow my advice to pay attention more than hitherto to the much veiled, yet very critical way of thinking and speaking to your *children, patients and pupils and to*

loosen, as it were, their tongues. I am sure you will gain a good deal of instructive material. (Ferenczi 1933, 229; emphasis added)

The same series re-emerges here: “children, patients, pupils” implying the antagonistic group of “parents, analysts, teachers.” The elements of the first series share the language of victims, while those of the second, the language of executioners. The former language presents passiveness and submission in a metaphorical manner, whereas the latter is used as a metonymy for sadistic authority or even perverse stranglehold. Consequently, the title “Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child” should function as a sort of “screen memory” that condenses the series of major and minor characters in a sadomasochist scenario. It should be reiterated that, in the text, Ferenczi voluntarily confounds and endlessly superposes the problems associated with the analyst’s stance and countertransference with those of infantile seduction.

Confusion of tongues per se

The title “Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child –(The Language of Tenderness and Passion),” chosen by Michael Balint to re-baptize Ferenczi’s paper from September 1932, is an intertextual reference to the latter’s intimate and “autographical” *Clinical Diary* composed between 7 January and 2 October of the same year, in which the gestation of ideas developed in the lecture can be traced. This reference does not only relate to the contents of these fragmentary writings published posthumously, but also to their form. Although the analyst’s stance and trauma constitute the double thematic axes of this *Diary* as an echo to the central themes of Ferenczi’s lecture, it is interesting to note that this exceptional manuscript is itself a true Tower of Babel composed in a curious mixture of Hungarian, German, French, Latin, Greek, and English. Indeed, it is written predominantly in German, while English occupies by far the greatest amount of space, being the language in which Ferenczi analysed many patients, mainly Americans, after his visit to the United States in 1926 and 1927 (Amati Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri 1993, 37). This *Diary* was obviously intended for publication, as it was dictated to a secretary and typed, with the exception of a few passages relating to Ferenczi’s deep feelings for Freud, which were written in longhand on different pieces of paper. This would seem to imply that the latter did not envisage, or at least hesitated, to publish them (Dupont 2016, 16). According to Hoffer (1996, XVII), the multilingual *Clinical Diary* serves as an epilogue, perhaps even as “volume 4” of the Freud–Ferenczi correspondence, which is considered by some observers as a 25 year-long analysis of the Hungarian analyst by his master (Hoffer 1996, XXI).

Let us mention here that the historical roots of psychoanalysis extend deep into a social and cultural context in which multilingualism and polyglotism was the rule rather than the exception.³ The majority of Freud’s disciples came from Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, and sometimes the United States. It was, therefore, quite typical for Freud’s disciples as well as his patients to communicate during analysis in a language that was not their mother-tongue (Amati Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri 1990, 569). The Hungarian historiographer of psychoanalysis Erös underscores that “ethnocultural and linguistic pluralism was typical of assimilationist, middle-class, upwardly mobile Jewish families, such as Freud and Ferenczi’s” (cited by Aron and Star 2016, 117).

In spite of such an interesting background, direct references to multilingualism in the works of Freud or his historic disciples are very few (Amati Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri 1990, 569). In Ferenczi’s *Clinical Diary*, numerous examples of analysis carried out in languages other than his own mother-tongue provided him with material for his original considerations on obscene words (Ferenczi 1911)⁴. However, not even Ferenczi makes specific mention of polyglotism within the individual’s structure or in the clinical experience (Amati Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri 1990, 569).

In my view, even if the plurilingualism of the *Clinical Diary* has an historical justification, it is impossible to disassociate this linguistic chaos from the metaphorical confusion of tongues from which Ferenczi’s patients suffered. Let us recall here what Nietzsche had audaciously proposed in the preface of *The Gay Science*, 17 years prior to Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*:

The unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the cloaks of the objective, the ideal, the purely spiritual reaches a terrifying degree, and quite often, I have asked myself whether, after all, philosophy has not simply been both an interpretation of the body and a misunderstanding of the body. (Nietzsche 1882, 30)

It is easy to understand how all philosophy and intellectual expression represent the autobiography of the body and the exegesis of the unconscious. This is even truer when it relates to psychoanalytical theories that directly call upon infantile experiences and unconscious phantasy.

While all metapsychological concepts and intellectualization include an intimate and autobiographical component, prudence is still required when employing the psycho-biographical springs of a work, so as to avoid simplifications and crude shortcuts. In one significant example of this “scientific” approach, French philosopher Onfray (2010) built his blistering attack against Freud by drawing from the same citation of Nietzsche, affirming that the inventor of psychoanalysis had projected on humanity and universalized what constituted his own morbid complex. Some psychoanalysts exhibit the same imprudence when, faithfully transposing the contents of Ferenczi’s theory onto his life, they maintain that he had been sexually abused by his father with the tacit accord of his silent mother.⁵

We shall not fall into the trap of perilous or simplistic biographism by recalling the fact that the majority of Ferenczi’s notes are composed in German, the language admittedly learned by the Hungarian psychoanalyst during his studies in Vienna, but, above all, the language of his analyst and spiritual father, Freud. It is also difficult not to highlight that Ferenczi inserts the following sentence in English into his German notes: “The idea of the *wise baby* could be discovered only by a *wise baby*” (1932b, 274, note from 30.11.32). This sentence refers to the specific Ferenczian concept of the “*wise baby*” -another metaphor which emerges in several texts of the Hungarian psychoanalyst, including “Confusion of Tongues” (Ferenczi 1933, 228), and which has been the source of numerous psychoanalytical⁶ and literary⁷ exegeses. This concept relates to the traumatized child, who is forced to grow up prematurely and speak in parallel to his/her natural language of tenderness by using the foreign language of passion imposed by adult seduction. The fact that Ferenczi discloses his own metapsychological creation -the “bilingual” *wise baby*- by jumping to another language, notably English, in contrast to the German of his master Freud, undoubtedly reveals an attempt to break the stranglehold of the father of psychoanalysis. Consequently, Ferenczi’s avowal could be translated as follows: I invented the “*wise baby*,” I created a new metapsychological concept, I identify myself with the *wise baby*, I express my scientific autonomy in English, and I distance myself from daddy Freud.

Beckett, who translated into French his own works composed in his mother tongue of English, admitted at the end of his life that he had changed language “to be someone else,”⁸ thus to differentiate his existence, similarly to the hero of the “family novel” who reimagines his genealogy in order to escape from parental authority. To give a more pathological example, the famous schizophrenic writer Wolfson used foreign languages to drown out the intolerable sound of his mother tongue.⁹ For her part, Kristeva (1996, 68–69), the French psychoanalyst of Bulgarian origin, speaks of matricide and the desire to transcend the “performances” of progenitors when choosing to adopt a language different from one’s parents. Can we speak in an analogous manner of “parricide” in the case of Ferenczi, who called himself -not without complacency- “*the enfant terrible* of psychoanalysis” (1931, 468)? Can we not argue *in fine*, by paraphrasing the words of the Hungarian psychoanalyst, that the idea of a confusion of tongues can only be discovered by someone who has been embroiled in such “confusion”?

Confusion of metapsychological tongues

The very idea of shifting to another language in order to escape parental authority and develop one’s own individuality leads us to the final type of confusion of tongues if we consider the title of the text within the theoretical and historical framework of psychoanalysis in line with our poststructuralist-inspired reading. Thus, in the discord between Freud and Ferenczi, they each persevered by speaking in their own metapsychological language.

Freud's tongue

Between 1895 and 1897, Freud maintained that trauma is the pathogenic effect of incestuous sexual abuse, before outright denying this theory in favour of the idea of hysterical fantasy rooted in phylogenesis. Let us recall here the Freudian theory of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action, afterwardsness) and two-phase trauma corresponding to two temporally different scenes, as well as Jung's objection, according to which the older scene constitutes the effect of an imaginary reconstitution a posteriori ("retroactivity"). To resolve this quandary, Freud postulated an even older reality beyond individual existence. He, thus, supports the existence of originary phantasies that were phylogenetically transmitted, as well as inherited memory-traces.¹⁰ Referring the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* to the scenes experienced in phylogenesis, he links it to an "anxiety of the real." This, however, calls into question Freud's idea of the purely endogenous source of trauma following his abandonment of the theory of the hysteric's seduction by an incestuous father.

From the 1920s onwards, the theory of trauma was replaced by a sort of psychic apparatus favouring the economic problem of trauma. This trauma represents a breach of the protective shield, the psychic barrier intended to filter the great mass of impulses. The *Hilflosigkeit* (helplessness) of the baby, thus, becomes the paradigm of overflowing anxiety, when the signal of anxiety no longer allows the Ego to protect itself from a quantitative infraction, regardless of its external or internal origin. The description of the protective device, along with the mechanism of projection that transfers impulses to the exterior so that the protective shield may treat them as external stimuli (Freud 1920), still requires us to nuance the Freudian theory of the "pure" interiority of trauma after the renunciation of the *Neurotica* theory.¹¹

Ferenczi's tongue

For Ferenczi, who takes into consideration the demonic nature of repetitive compulsions, trauma is not only linked to the consequences of a fantasy of seduction, but it is also rooted in the avatars of a certain type of libidinal destiny associated with the excessive, violent action of premature sexual excitement caused by an adult seducer during childhood. Expanding on the issue of seduction as hitherto theorized by Freud, Ferenczi makes a considerable advance by envisaging traumatic aetiology as the result of a psychosomatic infraction, a disavowal of the adult's seductive act, and a refusal to recognize the child's distress. Not only is sexuality far from being the only issue here, but, even more so, by defending his conception of a double confusion of tongues (sexual and transferential), Ferenczi emphasizes a much-overlooked type of trauma, since he throws into question the innate nature of the object and, consequently, that of the analyst.

It is interesting to highlight that, in his very last commentary of "Notes and fragments," Ferenczi (1932c) introduces the neologism "intropression," a portmanteau word encompassing the repression of the child's Ego and the introjection of the adults' Superego that result from parental violence and devastating education. The references to "cure finishing" in the same note plead in favour of the argument of Martín Cabré, who sees in this neologism a hint to "a certain way of analysing, which implied submission, the introjection of guilt and an inability to manage the mental resources of certain patients and above all of some future analysts" (2011, 325). Hence, intropression "entails a disqualifying effect that denies the representations and thoughts of children, patients or candidates, who end up losing their trust in the value of the interpretation that is being made of their psychic reality" (Martín Cabré 2011, 321). We could wonder whether Freud's authoritarian and judgemental attitude of Ferenczi's analysis, as expressed in his firmly held opinion that the mature, non-neurotic choice of a wife for Ferenczi could only be Gizella Palos (Hoffer 1996, XXXIX), would have been felt by the Hungarian disciple as an intropression that placed Freud in the position of a parental knower, wherein the analyst knows what is best for the analysand-child, whose vision is perceived to be clouded by neurosis.

I should add here that the psychoanalytical anthropology proposed by Ferenczi in *Thalassa* (1924) is suggestive of a trauma originating "from the outside." The original trauma, thus, stems from a natural disaster: the emergence of continents, the fragility of earthly life, the separation of soma from germ cells, the necessity to copulate to ensure the species' survival, and the Malthusian catastrophe resulting from the quaternary glaciations.

In short, the premise of the primacy of trauma's exogenous origin, the notion of real sexual abuse that revives Freud's *Neurotica*, the emphasis placed on the conception of countertransference, relational, and co-created interaction between the analyst and the analysand, the plea against the traditional analytical framework, as well as the diverse experiments pursued by Ferenczi (active technique, mutual analysis, indulgence, and relaxation methods) all contributed to the schism that emerged between the Hungarian psychoanalyst and his grand vizier, thus provoking an irremediable confusion of metapsychological tongues. Let us quote here Martín Cabré's argument according to which "the debate Ferenczi and Freud held between 1928 and 1933 went beyond a mere discussion on traumatism, and that it was in fact a debate on the issue of psychoanalytic transmission and, if preferred, on the issue of psychoanalytic education" (2011, 324–325).

Ferenczi's "swan tongue"

"Confusion of Tongues," which contains a large part of Ferenczi's theories on trauma, quite ironically inflicted a real trauma on its author. At the height of the composition of his *Clinical Diary*, and on route for the congress in Wiesbaden where he was due to present "Confusion of Tongues," Ferenczi stopped over in Vienna. Upon learning of the text, Freud became strongly perturbed by Ferenczi's conception of trauma, which, in his view, was a regression toward real seduction; he, thus, asked his disciple to renounce his contribution. Forever torn between his fidelity to his master and his own creativity, Ferenczi nevertheless presented the lecture, but this time defending the singularity of his own tongue to the bitter end.

As an intriguing detail, "Confusion of Tongues" was the real "swan song" of Ferenczi: shortly after the congress, he developed an incurable form of anaemia. He, thus, makes the following confession in *Clinical Diary*:

In my case the blood-crisis arose when I realized that not only can I not rely on the protection of a "higher power" but on the contrary that I shall be trampled under foot by this indifferent power as soon as I go my own way and not his. (Ferenczi 1932a [1985], 375–376)

Also, at the end of *Clinical Diary*, he engages in a fruitful reflection on psychosomatics, probably in echo of his exchanges with Groddeck (Hoffer 1996, XXVI), vowing: "A certain strength in my psychological makeup seems to persist, so that instead of falling ill psychically, I can only destroy -or be destroyed- in my organic depths" (Ferenczi 1932a [1985], 376). If we were to translate Ferenczi's staggering reflection into our own tongue, it could be summarized in the following terms: "I die, because I do not speak the same language as my tyrannical dad, whom I nevertheless continue to venerate." This is not a simple, traumatizing confusion of tongues, but indeed a deadly confusion. Although I do not necessarily adhere to Ferenczi's psychosomatic origin of illness, as Balint did, followed reticently by Dupont (2016, 15), I would still like to draw attention to the Hungarian psychoanalyst's own conception of truth similarly to how the analysand's unique truth is received by the analyst in the treatment space.

We can only be struck by this Ferenczian quest and the expectation of being protected by a "higher power" -the quest for the super-ego- which raises the question as to whether there is not a double meaning in relation to the over-idealized figure of Freud, since the desire for protection oscillates with a far more masochist registry, tinged with homosexuality and seeking an oppressive form. Of course, this does not mean exonerating Freud of all responsibility too rapidly, since the will to exercise censorship over this text is unacceptable and quite disappointing. Yet here we may ask whether Ferenczi did not expect, paradoxically, an even more autocratic and oppressive attitude from Freud. It also points to a certain degree of paranoia, thus raising questions as to the intactness of Ferenczi's psychic constitution. Let us recall here the legend propagated by Ernest Jones, according to which Ferenczi was suffering from paranoid psychosis near the end of his life. This consequently made Michael Balint's widow reticent toward the publication of the *Clinical Diary*, fearing that its intimate content might confirm this conviction. Notwithstanding, as Dupont (2016, 15–25) puts it, the whole Ferenczian clinical and theoretical attitude until the "fatal" congress in

Wiesbaden should not be assimilated with paranoid delusion, but rather with a limitless involvement in the traumas of his patients and “a painful encounter with the bounds of possibility.”

The influence of “Confusion of Tongues”

This divergence between two metapsychological tongues was experienced as a violent trauma not only by Ferenczi, but also by the entire psychoanalytical community, torn between the ideas of Freud and Ferenczi (Balint 1968), and especially by Freud himself, who had to admit “that everything happened as with Rank, but much sadder,” alluding to the dissidence and irrevocable estrangement of the author of *The Trauma of Birth* (Assoun 2009). Notwithstanding, some troubling aspects lead us to believe that “Confusion of Tongues,” which undoubtedly disturbed Freud, also opened up an immense field of new reflections for him.

In *Constructions in Analysis*, one of Freud’s major technical writings, he extols the virtue of sincerity with patients vis-à-vis the false constructions of the analyst, and he does so in a manner that recalls Ferenczi: “But if nothing further develops we may conclude that we have made a mistake and we shall admit as much to the patient at some suitable opportunity without sacrificing any of our authority” (Freud 1937, 261–262). These words appear to replicate what Ferenczi held against analysts in “Confusion of Tongues”: “I am no less grateful to those of my patients who taught me that we are more than willing to adhere rigidly to certain theoretical constructions and to leave unnoticed facts on the side that would injure our complacency and authority” (Ferenczi 1933, 226).

Yet, in *Moses and Monotheism*, in which Freud makes a “testamentary” assessment of his theories on trauma, he mentions for the first time the primary attacks of the Ego in the aftermath of traumatic experiences that have serious repercussions on identity. He develops the example of the sexuality of a young boy, prematurely violated after perceiving the sexual movements of his parents, which translates into identity confusion. In the theoretical section of his elaboration, Freud associates these traumas not only with “sensorial perceptions most often affecting sight and hearing,” but also with “experiences that touch the very body of the subject” (1939, 74), whose pathogenic scope depends on the quantitative factor. By conceiving the negative effects¹² of these premature intrusions, with parental seduction forever looming in the background, he mentions the creation of a traumatic cyst (“State within a State,” 1939, 74), the rebel of all communication with the rest of the Me, which is reminiscent of the autoplasmic rift described in “Confusion of Tongues,” as well as the “crypt” conceptualized by Abraham and Török (1978, 229–324) and inspired by Ferenczi. Freud’s entire argument betrays the influence of Ferenczi, which causes Bokanowski (2001, 31) to speculate as to whether the master had incorporated the ideas of his deceased acolyte through a sort of introjection of the lost object¹³. Further, if we take into account the aforementioned remark from *Constructions in Analysis*, we could speak of a fusion of Freud and Ferenczi’s metapsychological tongues.

While Anna Freud did not side with the Hungarian psychoanalyst, her work entitled *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936) adopts Ferenczi’s concept of identification with the aggressor introduced 4 years prior in “Confusion of Tongues”. According to Ferenczi, the tender child with his pre-genital eroticism survives psychologically by introjecting the passionate, genitalized, and guilty adult who sexually abused him. Freud’s daughter, however, applies this same concept to children who had never been mistreated and who instead anticipate a possible aggression by identifying with the aggressor and becoming aggressors themselves. She cites the examples of a schoolchild who mocks his teacher’s expressions despite the fear of reprimand, and a girl who is scared of ghosts but defends herself by imagining herself to be a ghost. This is also conceived as a means to master anxiety in the face of authority, as in the case of the child who fears his mother’s punishment and reacts by hitting her. In short, as summarized by Dupont (1998, 243), “with Anna Freud, it is an imagined or minor aggression, whereas with Ferenczi, it is a real and vital danger for the victim of the aggression.” Let us add here that the “Stockholm syndrome,” coined by the psychiatrist Nils Bejerot, depends on the defense mechanism of identification with the aggressor first described by Ferenczi before its espousal by Anna Freud and other psychoanalysts such as Lagache (1962) and Spitz (1957).

It is important to stress here that the frequent non-explicit indebtedness to Ferenczi’s enlightening ideas participates in psychoanalysis’ early method to silence dissidents (“to tie their tongue,” according

to Rachman 1999)¹⁴, insidiously reproducing the attitude of parental authority that muzzles the child's feelings or words regarding their traumatic abuse. The Hungarian analyst's work virtually disappeared after his death in 1933. The Ferenczi lamp flickered in the period from 1940 to 1960, only to be kept alive by his students Michael Balint, Izette De Forest, Elizabeth Severn, and Clara Thompson (Rachman 2016a, 167–168). In the late 1970s to 1990s, a Ferenczian renaissance took place, spurred on by the French analysts working with Judith Dupont -a senior member of the contemporary Budapest School- the Swiss analysts collaborating with André Haynal, the Hungarian group led by Georgy Hidas and Judit Mészáros, several analysts working in the relational perspective, not to mention the publication of *Clinical Diary* in America (Rachman 2016a, 168).

I have chosen to present here four authors coming from different linguistic traditions, who openly acknowledge their indebtedness to “Confusion of Tongues.” First of all, the Hungarian Michael Balint, the great disciple of Ferenczi, his analysand, and his testamentary executor, was audacious enough to apply his analytical experience to medicine and integrate the relational dimension into the care process. In his work, *The Doctor, his Patient and the Illness* (1957), Balint revives the notion of a confusion of tongues by citing examples of linguistic misunderstandings between doctors and patients that may potentially lead to suffering. Preoccupied by the diagnostic process and therapeutic choice, the doctor pays insufficient attention to what the patient attempts to communicate to him in another register. The most frequently analyzed case is the response “there's nothing wrong with you,” which, although technically correct, is likely to be perceived by the patient as the doctor's refusal to hear his problem. This confusion of tongues connects with the notion of different significations depending on whether the words come from the doctor's or patient's mouth. In this respect, it is important to clarify that Balint did not seek to develop, based on the text of his master, the explicit confusion between the “tongue” of the adult and the “tongue” of the child. He instead elaborates the confusion of tongues between the analyst and the analysand -the “subtext” of Ferenczi's article- which pertains to the unequal discourse between the parties of the analytical “pact.”

For his part, the deceased French SPP training analyst Pierre Bourdier, a specialist in the treatment of children and adolescents (1970, 19-42), adapted Ferenczi's concept of the “wise baby”, that is, the premature maturation of the child victim of sexual abuse, 15 years before the publication of the *Clinical Diary* (1985) in France, which allowed the French analytic community to become reacquainted with Ferenczi's pioneering work. Drawing from his wealth of clinical experience, Bourdier discovered that, contrary to the disturbed children of borderline parents, the progeny of psychotic parents had a remarkable capacity for cognitive and intellectual adaptation, even over-adaptation and hypermaturity, because of the complex mechanisms involved in their dual relational role that switches between authenticity and pseudo-adaptations. Although such hyper-normality and adultomorphism imply an extensive recourse to alternative images, they also refer to the hypothesis of a mature maternal role that is reinforced in psychotic mothers. Such mothers would protect their children from paranoid-schizoid anxiety, but would not allow them to progress through the depressive position, thus condemning them to hyper-adaptation or death. With the brutal, narcissistic breakdown of the psychotic mother, the identification with the substitute, or in other words, the caregiver function -the child-psychiatrist in Ferenczi's words (1933, 228)- helps the child to master the intolerable affects by maintaining the fantasy of restoration of the threatened object. This reversal of parent-child roles gives rise to decisive and unfamiliar sexual experiences as well as a traumatic misunderstanding of the double language of tenderness and passion, which mark the departure point of a hyper-maturation process, and, in some cases, perversions and personality disorders. Sometimes only a very fine line separates the vocation of care from seductive and malignant behaviour. The merit of Bourdier is his exploration of the metapsychological status of hyper-maturity in children and his adaptation of Ferenczi's rampant thought to the field of psychosis.

Let us now move on to Jean Laplanche, translator of Freud's work in French and founder of scientific research on psychoanalysis at the University Paris Diderot -Paris 7 in France. In a meticulous reading of the Freudian positions on trauma, Laplanche freely admits that Ferenczi's “Confusion of Tongues” may be conceived as a preface to his theory of general seduction (1987, 89-148). Nevertheless, he rejects the usage

of the terms “tongue” and “language,” since the adult world communicates diversely through linguistic, pre-linguistic, and para-linguistic messages. Thus, with Laplanche, the passionate language of the adult takes the varied form of verbal language, gestures, conventions, mimics, and affects, signals emitted by the regard, the voice, and, indeed, the entire body. The language of the adult is traumatizing for the child for two reasons: first, it manifests the parental unconscious, and, second, the child remains ignorant of its meaning (1987, 124). Contrary to Lacan¹⁵, Laplanche affirms that “this manifestation of the unconscious cannot be reduced to the polysemic potentials of language alone: the problem remains [...] that of an individual unconscious” (1987, 124).

The messages emitted by the adult are enigmatic to the extent that they pertain to the enigma of the unconscious, a major factor ignored by Ferenczi. The child receives “enigmatic signifiers” from the adult, that is, messages impregnated with unconscious sexual significations, which create the difficult -even impossible- task of mastery and symbolization that inevitably leave behind unconscious residues, which Laplanche calls “the source-objects of the drives”:

This is not a vague confusion of tongues, as Ferenczi wanted, but precisely an inadequacy of tongues: the child’s inadequacy with the adult, but also, and primordially so, the adult’s inadequacy with the object-source that drives him. (Laplanche 1987, 128-129)

This theory of general seduction, which describes the original situation of the child’s confrontation with an adult who conveys undecipherable messages, constitutes one of the most elaborated ideas in Ferenczi’s confusion of “inadequate” sexual tongues.

I will terminate this overview with an American author, Arnold Wm. Rachman, honorary member of the Sandor Ferenczi Society in Budapest, who has largely contributed to the Hungarian analyst’s renaissance by applying the “Confusion of Tongues” ideas to a wide variety of historical and clinical situations, such as the relationships between adolescents and adults (Rachman 1995), Sigmund Freud’s “incestuous” analysis of Anna Freud (Rachman 2003), therapeutic alliance and transference (Rachman and Mattick 2012), and trauma in the clinical bond between Sandor Ferenczi and Elizabeth Severn (Rachman 2010, 2017). Most recently, Rachman (2016a) argued that the “Confusion of Tongues” paradigm has been neglected in favour of the oedipal theory, despite its potential to illuminate our understanding of what many social scientists consider a capital issue, that is, the incidence of incest trauma. Rachman underscores the political urgency to rehabilitate Ferenczi’s text, which reverses the highly influential psychoanalytic idea according to which the child is the oedipal seducer of their genitor and restores the focus on the adult abuser -usually a parent or parental surrogate- and their pathologically narcissistic sexuality. Hence, early molestation is not a figment of the child’s imagination, but an actual traumatic event in their life that calls for an empathically inflected psychodynamic cure, which aims to help the individual have a reparative experience with a non-traumatic therapeutic agent.

In another recent text, Rachman (2016b) utilizes the “Confusion of Tongues” model in order to comprehend the “trauma bonding” that can arise between a minor captive and a major captor, referred as a special clinical variance of the Stockholm syndrome. As in incest trauma, the imprisoned child identifies with their abductor, who is assimilated with parental authority in order to maintain the fantasy of being loved, to fight against feelings of abandonment and annihilation, and to maintain self-cohesion. The emotional merger with their adult abuser leads them to relinquish their own view of reality and “tie their tongue,” thus preventing them from speaking, remembering, resisting, or escaping, and making them an erratically Unprotesting sexual slave. Rachman illustrates his ideas by revising some highly publicized cases of abduction in the history of America. Like the works of Aron and Star (2016) or Hoffer (1996), his contributions underlie the critical importance of studying the interactions between psychoanalytic concepts and the social, cultural, or political environment.

By way of conclusion

I cannot stress enough the polyvalence and the theoretical and clinical richness of Ferenczi's "Confusion of Tongues." Not only does it consider the technical aspects of the analytic setting, but it also addresses psychopathological problems and anthropological issues: the posture of the analyst; transference and countertransference; regression during treatment; the behaviour of parents, educators, and, more generally, those in positions of authority; the discontinuity between the world of the adult and the world of the child; the premature maturation of the traumatized minor; and the introjection of the aggressor. These reflections demonstrate an abundant body of thought that was successfully applied to the fields of the neurosis, psychosis, and borderline states, as well as to the "psychopathology of everyday life" through the advances made in psychopathology and their elevation to ontological data.

To conclude, let us return to our point of departure -the title of Ferenczi's contribution- which acquires quite another resonance in the present era, marked by a very different linguistic babelization. Given the current tendency to measure, quantify, and objectify human suffering, with official voices declaring that "psychoanalysis is no longer part of the knowledge base of psychiatry,"¹⁶ work within institutional settings is now beginning to become a real confusion of tongues between the clinicians with Freudian training and those who communicate only through DSM categories. Will we be able to convert this confusion into a creative fusion, or will we experience a new traumatic schism and a linguistic phagocytosis of psychoanalysis by the imperialist "Newspeak" (Orwell 1949) of the DSM? The optimistic Ferenczi would have loved to imagine the first option.

TRANSLATIONS OF SUMMARY

En s'appuyant sur un modèle post-structuraliste, l'auteur de cet article étudie la conférence donnée par Ferenczi et publiée sous le titre de "Confusion de langue entre les adultes et l'enfant – Le langage de la tendresse et de la passion". En centrant tout d'abord son attention sur la structure fermée du texte, l'auteur établit une distinction entre deux types de confusion de langues qui sont étroitement liés: la confusion entre les adultes et l'enfant et la confusion entre l'analyste et l'analysant. En remplaçant ensuite le texte au sein du corpus ferenczien, il le relie au plurilinguisme de Ferenczi et plaide en re marks adresse to the French authorities and Regional Health Agency (ARS) by the professor of general psychiatry of Reims, who abolished 3 years ago the occupation of interne in the psychoanalytically oriented public psychotherapeutic institution Antonin Artaud (cited by the founder of the aforementioned institution, Chemla 2017, 9). faveur du rôle décisif des facteurs autobiographiques eu égard à la conceptualisation psychanalytique. Le positionnement du texte à l'intérieur de son cadre historique permet également de le situer dans le contexte de la confusion de langues métapsychologique entre Freud et Ferenczi, et de délimiter l'influence des idées de Ferenczi sur la postérité psychanalytique.

Mithilfe eines poststrukturalistischen Modells untersucht dieser Beitrag den Vortrag, den Ferenczi unter dem Titel "Sprachverwirrung zwischen den Erwachsenen und dem Kind: (Die Sprache der Zärtlichkeit und der Leidenschaft)" veröffentlichte. Der Autor konzentriert sich zunächst auf die geschlossene Struktur des Textes und identifiziert zwei Arten der Sprachverwirrung, die eng miteinander zusammenhängen: Die Verwirrung zwischen erwachsenen Menschen und dem Kind und die Verwirrung zwischen Analytiker und Analysand. Indem er den Text sodann in das Gesamtwerk Ferenczis einordnet, bringt er ihn mit dessen eigener Mehrsprachigkeit in Verbindung und arbeitet die Bedeutung autobiographischer Determinanten psychoanalytischer Konzeptualisierungen heraus. Diese Positionierung des Textes in seinen historischen Rahmen ermöglicht es auch, ihn in den Kontext der metapsychologischen Sprachverwirrung zwischen Freud und Ferenczi einzuordnen und den Einfluss von Ferenczis Ideen auf die psychoanalytische Nachwelt zu umreißen.

Rifacendosi a un modello interpretativo di tipo poststrutturalista, il presente articolo esamina la conferenza di Ferenczi pubblicata con il titolo di “Confusione delle lingue tra adulti e bambini (Il linguaggio della tenerezza e il linguaggio della passione)”. Concentrandosi inizialmente sulla struttura chiusa del testo, l’autore individua due tipi di confusione delle lingue strettamente connessi tra loro: quella tra gli adulti e il bambino e quella tra l’analista e l’analizzando. Procedendo in un secondo tempo a contestualizzare questo particolare scritto all’interno del corpus ferencziano, l’autore lo mette poi in rapporto con il plurilinguismo dello stesso Ferenczi, sostenendo l’importanza delle determinanti autobiografiche nel processo di formazione delle concettualizzazioni psicoanalitiche. Collocare il testo nella sua cornice storica consente peraltro di situarlo nel contesto della confusione delle lingue metapsicologica tra Freud e Ferenczi, e altresì di valutare meglio la portata dell’influenza delle idee di Ferenczi sulla psicoanalisi a lui successiva.

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Notas al final

- 1.- use the word “text” in the sense of semioticians who, following its etymology (text < lat. *textus*, *texere* “to sew”), perceive a “fabric of signs.” These signs may be linguistic (a book), pictorial (a painting), postural-mimical-gestural (a choreography), etc. Regarding the expanded meaning of the “text,” see Kristeva (1969, 82–11)
- 2.- Ferenczi’s paper was published in *Inter. Z Psa* (1933) 19: 5–15 and subsequently in *Bausteine Zur Pschoanalyse*, Vol. III. Berne, 1939. My quotations are taken from the English translation of Michael Balint in *Int. J. Psychoanal.* 30 (1949): 225–230.
- 3.- Amati Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri (1990, 589) recall that “the term ‘polylingual/polylingualism’ refers to a person who acquires from the very beginning the capacity to speak in more than one language. The term ‘polyglot/polyglotism’ refers to a person who has learned to speak other languages at a later period of life following that of acquisition of language.”
- 4.- For an extended comment on Ferenczi’s contribution on obscene words, see Amati Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri (1993, 33–42).
- 5.- See, for example, the argument of Harrus-Révid (2004, 10), French psychoanalyst, SPP member, and director of the journal *Champ psychosomatic [Psychosomatic field]*.
- 6.- See the volume edited by Bokanowski (2001), French training psychoanalyst, SPP member, and specialist in trauma and Ferenczi’s work.
- 7.- As an example, see the fantasy novel of French philosopher and awarded novelist Bruckner (1992).
- 8.- On the bilingual writing of Beckett, who has intrigued writers as much as psychoanalysts, see the analysis of the Italian translator and scholar in comparative literature Montini (2008, 77–86) and the more clinical report of Amati Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri (1993, 176–180).
- 9.- Wolfson explains the principles of his linguistic system and the everyday use found in his book, prefaced by Deleuze, *Le Schizo et les langues* (1970). See also Amati Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri (1993, 171–175).
- 10.- These phantasies are meticulously examined by Laplanche and Pontalis (1985)
- 11.- See Laplanche (1987, 89–148), who explains in detail how the traces of *Neurotica* persist throughout the Freudian corpus.
- 12.- By focusing on the positive effects of trauma described by Freud, Korff-Sausse (2006, 25), French psychoanalyst, SPP member, professor of clinical psychology at the University of Paris Diderot–Paris 7, and author of the introduction of the autonomous French edition of “Confusion of Tongues,” observes that the repetition of trauma favours a better psychic integration, which “repeats” a comparative idea stated by Ferenczi in *Reflections on Trauma* in 1932.
- 13.- While Bokanowski (2001, 31) endeavours to give an unconscious substructure to Freud in his incorporation of Ferenczi’s ideas, Korff-Sausse (2006, 23), referring more generally to Freud’s final texts composed between 1933 and 1938, accuses the father of psychoanalysis of plagiarism, pure and simple.
- 14.- In a recent paper, Rachman (2016b, 171) argued that the analytic community’s negative reaction to Ferenczi’s “Confusion of Tongues” was, at least in part, due to their perception that Ferenczi was accusing middle-class parents of molesting their children or, even worse, that analysts themselves were child abusers
- 15.- It would be tempting to read Lacan’s text “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” (1953) in the light of Ferenczi’s “Confusion of Tongues,” which is explicitly mentioned in the Lacanian paper. Notwithstanding, this would require a special investigation. The following, rather negligible reference could constitute the starting point of such research: “Actually, we would like to know more about the effects of symbolization in children. Psychoanalysts who are also mothers, even those who give our loftiest deliberations a matriarchal air, are not exempted from that Confusion of Tongues by which Ferenczi designated the law of the relationship between the child and the adult” (Lacan 1953, 241–42). I encourage the reader to consult Lugin’s article (2016), which describes Lacan’s mbivalent attitude toward Ferenczi, whose dissidence regarding the international analytic community probably offered an identification mark to the former.
- 16.- Remarks addressed to the French authorities and Regional Health Agency (ARS) by the professor of general psychiatry of Reims, who abolished 3 years ago the occupation of interne in the psychoanalytically oriented public psychotherapeutic institution Antonin Artaud (cited by the founder of the aforementioned institution, Chemla 2017, 9).