

## Non-verbal language in the analytical process through the body and its narcissistic identifications

### A linguagem não verbal no processo analítico através do corpo e suas identificações narcísicas

### El lenguaje no verbal en el proceso analítico a través del cuerpo y sus identificaciones narcisistas

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This is a narrative review conducted in 2018. It aims to describe non-verbal body language in the analytical process with a Freudian perspective. Three topics were listed: *The drive and its aspects*; *The body in Freudian psychoanalysis and the ego ideal*; and *Narcissistic identifications*. In the Freudian perspective, there is no distinction between psychic and somatic, both are linked. Thus, the instinctive influence on the subject's constitution is verified, and the instinct is present since the first phase of sexual development, which is orality. Identification is one of the elements found in narcissism, in which the first identifications will occur on the family scene, during the Oedipus complex. The way the patient behaves in the session, through non-verbal language, also tells their life story, which is unconscious in them. The analyst has the function of unveiling what is behind the non-speakable discourse, externalized by non-verbal language. As well as, by the main resource that is the manifestation of the unconscious through symptoms, Freudian slips, dreams and jokes.

**Descriptors:** Psychoanalysis; Language; Sexual development; Narcissism.

Esta é uma revisão narrativa realizada em 2018, com o objetivo de descrever na perspectiva freudiana a linguagem corporal não verbal no processo analítico. Três tópicos foram elencados: *A pulsão e seus aspectos*; *O corpo na psicanálise freudiana e o ideal do ego*; e *Identificações narcísicas*. Na perspectiva freudiana não existe distinção entre o psíquico e o somático, ambos estão ligados. Assim, verifica-se a influência pulsional na constituição do sujeito e, a pulsão está presente desde a primeira fase do desenvolvimento sexual, que é a oralidade. A identificação é um dos elementos encontrados no narcisismo, na qual as primeiras identificações vão ocorrer na cena familiar, durante o complexo de Édipo. A forma como o paciente se comporta na sessão, por via da linguagem não verbal, também conta a sua história de vida, o que nele está inconsciente. O analista tem como função desvendar o que está por trás do discurso não dizível, externalizado pela linguagem não verbal. Assim como, pelo principal recurso que é a manifestação do inconsciente por via dos sintomas, atos falhos, sonhos e chistes.

**Descritores:** Psicanálise; Linguagem; Desenvolvimento sexual; Narcisismo.

Esta es una revisión narrativa realizada en 2018, con el objetivo de describir desde una perspectiva freudiana el lenguaje corporal no verbal en el proceso analítico. Se enumeraron tres temas: *La pulsión y sus aspectos*; *El cuerpo en el psicoanálisis freudiano y el ideal del yo*; e *Identificaciones narcisistas*. En la perspectiva freudiana no hay distinción entre lo psíquico y lo somático, ambos están conectados. Así, se comprueba la influencia pulsional en la constitución del sujeto y la pulsión está presente desde la primera fase del desarrollo sexual, que es la oralidad. La identificación es uno de los elementos que se encuentran en el narcisismo, en el que las primeras identificaciones se darán en la escena familiar, durante el complejo de Edipo. La forma en que el paciente se comporta en la sesión, mediante el lenguaje no verbal, también cuenta su historia de vida, lo que hay de inconsciente en él. La función del analista es desvelar lo que hay detrás del discurso que no se puede decir, exteriorizado por el lenguaje no verbal. Así como, por el recurso principal que es la manifestación del inconsciente a través de síntomas, actos fallidos, sueños y chistes.

**Descritores:** Psicoanálisis; Lenguaje; Desarrollo sexual; Narcisismo.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language allows communication with the other, even in silence, there is a saying; to compose a speech about something not sayable, an act experienced in the analytical setting. Such silence fills an environment, a space and can lead to an interpretation or even an insight. The analytical technique starts from the subject's discourse and works with its representations, those that can be unveiled through free association and the manifestation of the unconscious.

In works by the founder of psychoanalysis (*"On Aphasia"*<sup>1</sup>, *"The Unconscious"*<sup>2</sup>), the first fundamentals about thing-representation (unconscious) and word-representation (preconscious) were presented. From the treatment of patients with hysteria, it was noticed that the word had an affective representation, initiating the use of the free association method, which characterizes the analytical technique.

The basis of psychoanalysis is the functioning of the unconscious (Ucs), conscious (Cs) and pre-conscious (Pcs) systems, which are articulated and have their own way of functioning<sup>2</sup>. It is considered that there are two processes: the primary, which consists of the operating mode of the Ics system, characterized by the displacement and condensation mechanisms, and the secondary, which is the processing mode of Cs and Pcs<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, non-verbal communication is the non-discursive form. In itself, it is said that it comprises 93% of the possibility of expression. Since:

*38% of the opportunities are due to vocal signals (intonation of the voice, grunts, vowel noises of hesitation, pronunciation, cough and sigh caused by tension) and, in 55%, by the silent signals of the body, such as gestures, gaze, posture, facial expression and physical characteristics*<sup>3</sup>.

The first impression to be transmitted to the external world is through the image perceived by the one who looks. Also in dreams, non-verbal communication is used in psychoanalysis.

The image is seen as an expression of affections encrypted through condensation and displacement, which are surrounded by representations and symbolisms. It is possible to perceive that both verbal and non-verbal communication work together, so that the subject can give news of his unconscious.

Uniting language, psyche and body, it is proposed to identify how the psyche is founded from the Freudian perspective:

*(...) the human psyche is based, on the one hand, on the order of the body and drive and, on the other, on the order of language, which implies intersubjectivity, the basic context for representing the conceptual and ethical innovation, introduced by Freudian discourse*<sup>4</sup>.

From this conception, in the analytical setting, it is possible to make some interpretations through non-verbal language, mainly body language: the way the patient dresses, how they lie or sit on the couch, facial expression, gestures with arms and hands and even the reproduction of speech - whether it is timid, insecure, arrogant or imperative. All of these factors are considered as non-verbal communication and it is up to the analyst to interpret and identify in these attitudes what your analysand really brings "behind the scenes" of his speech.

In the concept of acting it is pointed out: *a set of habits and actions that the analysand uses, when he is unable to remember and verbalize certain repressed feelings*<sup>5</sup>. The acting has a non-verbal communication function, which, in most cases, is only perceived from the analytical process. The role of acting in the subject's life is to prevent the contents that are repressed from becoming conscious. In such cases, the analyst's role is to identify the analysand's standards of conduct and involve him in his attitudes and responsibilities.

There was a change in the perception of the role of acting in contemporary clinic<sup>5</sup>. This acting may not be an inconvenient form of resistance for analysis, but rather a primitive non-verbal mode of communication, waiting for the analyst to be able to decode and name the

unconscious dramatization. In addition, it can be negative and due to the predominance of the death drive (hinders the analytical process of change), or benign (provides a means of communication) and, there, the life drive prevails. Thus, this study aims to describe non-verbal body language in the analytical process from the Freudian perspective.

## METHODS

This is an exploratory narrative review based on Freudian theory, carried out in 2018. Three texts from the Freudian work were used as reference, namely: “*On Narcissism*”<sup>6</sup> of 1914, “*The Instincts and their Vicissitudes*”<sup>7</sup> of 1915 and, “*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*”<sup>8</sup> of 1921, which bring aspects about: the body, the drives, narcissism and identification.

As a guiding question, it was considered: *How is the communication between non-verbal body language and narcissistic identifications manifested in the analytical process?*

After reading the texts, there is a reflection on psychoanalysis and non-verbal body language within the analytical setting.

## RESULTS

In the listed texts, the following topics were explored on issues related to non-verbal language in the psychoanalytic perspective: *The drive and its aspects; The body in Freudian psychoanalysis and the ego ideal; and Narcissistic identifications.*

## DISCUSSION

### *The drive and its aspects*

The drive is a force distinct from the stimulus, since it has its excitations, which come from the external world<sup>7</sup>. The drive, in turn, has its source in the psychic representation, which is internal; and, it was initially divided into two parts: Ego drives (or self-preservation) and sexual drives (or species preservation)<sup>7</sup>.

The drives are divided into the drive for life and the drive for death. The impulse has always been one, what happens is that, throughout a process of subjectivation and through “dualism”, the life drive becomes “sexualized” and the death drive remains the same (desexualized). The function of sexuality, in the course of human life, will be to curb the death drive<sup>9</sup>.

The drive has four characteristics that are inherent to it: source, purpose, pressure and object<sup>7</sup>. Source is part of the somatic process, which is present in an organ or a certain part of the body where the stimulus takes place, represented in psychic life by the drive. Pressure refers to the pressure exerted and constant in the amount of drive energy, which represents the economic aspect. Purpose is always the search for satisfaction, which is obtained in the state of stimulation present in the drive source. Object is the way to reach the goal, being very variable and changeable; it can be an external object, a person or a part of the body itself. Its purpose is to reach satisfaction, in the discharge of excitement<sup>7</sup>.

At the beginning of life, the drives are only self-preservation, which proposal will always be to achieve satisfaction, in various ways; therefore, this satisfaction is linked to desire and not to need, and is situated between the somatic and the psychic. In the drive for self-preservation, the baby's life and the care that the mother has with him are related<sup>9</sup>.

This symbiotic process, which provides sensations of warmth, protection, security and love, brings the first perception of body contours. Because of this fact, it is at this moment that the baby begins to have a perception of their body, this period being called the oral phase. In this stage, sexual drives are discharged through orality, in the contact of the mouth with the mother's breast, in addition to the discovery of other parts of their own body, in a process of autoeroticism<sup>10</sup>.

In the theory of sexuality, the first erogenous zone to be discovered is discussed:

*When sucking or sucking with delight, we can already observe the three essential characteristics of an infantile sexual manifestation. It is born based on one of the vital somatic functions, it does not yet know any sexual object, being autoerotic, and its sexual target is under the control of an erogenous zone.<sup>10</sup>*

### ***The body in Freudian psychoanalysis and the ego ideal***

Freud's work makes no distinction between physical and psychic bodies, so that the psychic and the somatic are linked and it is through the body that the psyche acts to externalize feelings, sensations, perceptions and symptoms. In turn, the presence of sexuality in psychic traumas experienced in childhood<sup>10,11</sup>, was pointed out.

The concept of sexuality, something beyond genitals, is directly linked to all aspects of human life and consists of what allows the human to connect with life, in the search for satisfaction and pleasure<sup>7</sup>.

The study of hysteria was fundamental to the development of psychoanalysis. Traumatic events generate a fixation on the subject's psychic life and hysteria is constituted from the emotion suffered in these traumatic situations, which are not externalized. A part of this emotion remains as a continuous charge in psychic life and will be a permanent source of excitement. The other presents itself in physical symptoms, such as hysterical conversion, which received this name due to the bodily phenomena and symptoms present in all hysterical patients<sup>12</sup>.

Hysterical conversion is something beyond bodily phenomena, an action between affection and the repressed idea in which repression operates. Hysterical symptomatology has a characteristic similar to the deformation of dreams. Or even, it is possible: *"to describe such phenomena as hysterical when they arise not as a result of extreme affection (but of objective foundation), but, apparently spontaneously, as morbid manifestations"*<sup>12</sup>.

To compose the thinking of the body in psychoanalysis, one relies on the bodily ego: *"The ego is, first and foremost, a bodily ego; it is not simply a surface entity, but, it is itself, the projection of a surface"* and, the body is a receiver of sensations and perceptions, both internal and external<sup>11</sup>.

One of the ways that the subject is able to become aware of their organs and body is through the diseases that cause pain and suffering: *"pain seems to have a role in this, and the way we acquire new knowledge of our organs, in diseases painful, it is perhaps a model for how we get to the idea of our body"*<sup>11</sup>.

Or again: *"what we have already said about the conscious self is above all a self of the body"*<sup>11</sup>. The Ego is made up of bodily sensations, as well as perceptions. It is the mediator between the Id and the Superego, and assumes some responsibilities, specifically: to care for and care for the psyche and the body; be common sense and act on the perception of memory, feelings and thoughts. When a failure in the Ego occurs, afflictions, anxieties and symptoms arise<sup>11</sup>.

The body and the Ego appear intrinsically associated and the Ego starts to have, within its tasks, the mission of being a messenger, who beckons when things are not going well, being a source of internal and external perceptions<sup>11</sup>. Suffering, in turn, provides a return of the libido of objects to the body surface.

The Self derives, ultimately, from bodily sensations, especially those arising from the surface of the body. Thus, it can be seen as a mental projection of the body surface<sup>11</sup>. Thus, one can think of the body as a possible channel of communication with the world, through non-verbal language, based on internal and external sensations, captured by stimuli.

### ***Narcissistic identifications***

Narcissism refers to the myth of Narcissus, a hero who fell in love with his own image. Delighted by his reflected beauty, he lay on the grass of a river, trying to speak with his own image, until, desperate for the silence of the image, he threw himself into the water and drowned. His body disappeared, and the "*narcissus*<sup>13</sup>" flower was born in its place.

In accordance with the concept of narcissism, the constitution of the self and investment in the libido are defended. There are two types of narcissism: the primary and the secondary. In the first stage, the body is an organism that reacts to the environment in a disorganized way, is experienced by a series of uncoordinated partial drives, such as autoeroticism, and at that point, satisfaction is taken from the body itself<sup>10</sup>. It appears that in the act of the baby when sucking the breast, the mother is seen as an extension of it. Until that moment, for the baby, there is still no awareness of the external world and his own body.

When analyzing the characteristics of primary narcissism, parents exercise their own narcissism on the baby, called abandoned narcissism: "*When we see the tender attitude of many parents towards their children, we have to recognize it as a revival and reproduction of their own narcissism. very abandoned*"<sup>6</sup>. The parents' love for this baby thus arises as narcissism is reborn.

After the phase in primary narcissism, the subject is faced with the ideal self, which refers to what they would like to have been. It designates the wishes of parents and the expectations of society. The ideal of the self is a secondary instance, formed from the Oedipus complex and represents what it should be through identification; it is a symbolic instance. Soon, it will become the substitute for parental figures and shift this identification to other representatives, such as teachers and people who exercise a hierarchy<sup>8</sup>.

Identification is one of the elements found in narcissism, a process through which the Ego goes unconsciously, which can be total or partial. Therefore, the identification contains another characteristic, which is the introjection made by the parental figures. The Ego, in accordance with object representations, is influenced by the superego and its idealized figures, such as loved, admired or hated<sup>8,11</sup>.

The object love of connection is proper to the male sex, which has a sexual overvaluation, which is related to primary narcissism. In this case, this narcissism was replaced by the sexual object. This phase is associated with the stage of passion that results from an impoverishment of the Ego, in connection with the object of love. In the female scenario, the process of identification and object choice occurs differently, since the dissolution of the female Oedipus has its peculiarities, taking a longer route than in the male<sup>7</sup>.

The first identifications will occur on the family scene, during the Oedipus complex; however, in adult life, this movement appears in the subject's relations with the world and the environment in which they live<sup>7</sup>. Identification is the oldest affective manifestation with the other. The dissolution of the Oedipus in the boy who, when undergoing castration, adopts a hostile stance against the father, when he realizes that the only way to have the mother is to be equal to the parent<sup>8</sup>.

The identification has three aspects: primordial, as a form of affective connection with the object; regressive, being a path to the libidinous object connection, or just as a form of identification with the other, which is not the object of sexual instincts<sup>7</sup>. Freudian theory defends identification as:

*(...) the oldest and most original affective form; in the circumstances of the formation of symptoms, that is, of repression, and of the predominance of the mechanisms of the unconscious, it often happens that the choice of object becomes again identification, that is, that the Self adopts characteristics of the object*<sup>8</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Here the focus was on the drive, the body in the Freudian perspective and its narcissistic identifications. Telling the story of a subject without looking at these points in an analytical process becomes impossible for clinical management.

It is common, when asking in the first sessions for the patient to talk about themselves, about their family and report how was their childhood and adolescence, some find difficulties and do not know how to start, or even what to say.

This is a time when identifications can present themselves. However, not all people are clear about their identifications and even body awareness. The analytical process will contribute to this recognition and understanding.

If the psyche and the body are the same, there is no separation between them. However, in general, patients have difficulty expressing themselves in verbal ways and, in order to carry out communication, they resort to the artifice of non-verbal language. Patients use extra-linguistic resources to communicate and can express themselves through a type of clothing, behavior, shyness, over-expansiveness, among others.

Thus, the analyst must identify this movement through the manifestation of the unconscious, which also presents itself through symptoms, flawed acts, dreams and jokes. It is based on this conception that the analytical process takes place.

This study has as limitations the choice of classic texts, without facing it with contemporary productions, however, it points at the same time, the importance of a look at non-verbal language, in the analytical setting.

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#### CONTRIBUTIONS

**Marcia Martins Teixeira** was responsible for the design, analysis, writing and reviewing. **María Teresa Paz Aravena Lagos** and **Simone Bruno de Oliveira** contributed analysis and writing. **Rita de Cássia Ramos** participated in the writing and reviewing.

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