

BENVENISTE, LACAN AND STRUCTURALISM: ABOUT THE OPPOSITE MEANINGS OF PRIMITIVE WORDS

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- **ABSTRACT:** This article intends to make clear some given aspects of Benveniste's structuralist interpretation about freudian linguistic reasoning, mainly in his text *Opposite meanings of primitive words*. It is put Benveniste's text *Observations about the language function in freudian discovery*, proceeding a dialogue with linguistic hypothesis developed by Freud in his aforementioned text. It is pursued a link between linguistic and psychoanalytic fields, searching Freud's notion of primitive language and comparing it with Structural Linguistic assumptions supported by Benveniste. The approach is strictly theoretic, in order to enlighten the divergences between language reasoning in Freud and Benveniste. In order to achieve this aim, it is searched Freud's examination about the negation, putting in touch with Benveniste's examinations about linguist Carl Abel, a strong linguistic influence on Freud's work, mainly in his text *Opposite meanings of primitive words*. As a conclusion, it becomes possible to assert that, as being a system and a structure, language has an universal and non-historical quality, which refutes the freudian thesis concerning the existence of primitive languages.
- **KEYWORDS:** Language. Structure. Unconscious. Negation. Enunciation.

Benveniste: brief historical data

Émile Benveniste (1902-1976) is recognized as the leading representative of Linguistics of Enunciation and the chain that became known as **theories of enunciation**. He was a Saussurean comparative linguist and a leading expert in Indo-European. Born Jewishish in Aleppo, Syria, he was dedicated to Iranian studies, the comparative grammar of European languages and to language in general. As a specialist in Indo-European, the biggest one in the twentieth century alongside Jerzy Kurylowicz, and also a comparative of numerous ancient and modern languages, Benveniste is primarily recognized and valued for having reintroduced the subject in the field of linguistics, heretofore repressed, by his enunciative approach. Dosse (1993) relies on Durcrot's words, who claims that Benveniste is the linguist to whom he owes the most, due to the fact that he demonstrated that the linguistic system, whilst being a system, should take into account the phenomena of enunciation.

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The concept of **enunciation** is undoubtedly the most important one to overcome the limits of linguistic language attempt. In this historical context, Benveniste was the first linguist to develop a linguistic theory that encompasses the dimensions of subject and speech in the thought of Saussure. For this reason, but not just for it, Dessons (2006) defines Benveniste as **an apart linguist**. Having introduced the concept of **enunciation** in the Linguistics of his time, he exercised strong influence over the fundamental concept in language studies: **discourse**. Benveniste demonstrated a very early acute perception of the notion of discourse, by explaining the failure of the concept of **talking** on the conceptual apparatus of Saussure, although the talking treads the path to the universe of discourse.

According to Dessons (2006), the notion of **discourse** opens the way to ponder the activity of language in all the human and social sciences. Indeed, the work of Benveniste sharply reverberates not only in the field of linguistic studies, by providing a historical anthropology of language that affected philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis and literature. This spillover into other fields of human and social sciences is evidenced by Dosse's words (1993), by stressing that Benveniste left with an image of an independent researcher, not belonging to any school and taking on original points of view about language and sometimes revolutionary ones. He was known to have crossed his career without committing to specific movements, remaining loyal to his own theoretical horizon like an authentic solitary thinker. However, although his reflections have a very evident originality, it is certain that his thinking cannot be disentangled from the historical context, more specifically, Structuralism. The historical context in which his theories of the subject and enunciation were developed consisted in the heyday of structuralism, which makes him be recognized by François Dosse (1993) as **the French exception**.

Benveniste's key innovation, which leads to the recognition as the **French exception**, is explained by the fact that he articulates subject and structure, as did Lacan later in the field of psychoanalysis. The linguist proposed a conceptual break in the linguistic community of his time, by remaining faithful to the thought of Saussure and the notion of structure and, within the same saussurean project, treat the subject of enunciation. It is a paradoxical position that Benveniste shares with Lacan in spite of the necessary differences that separate both thinkers, because, strictly speaking, the structure does not bend to the subject and enunciation itself.

In the fifties, there is another text that, besides being crucial with regard to the theory of enunciation, is particularly important to Benveniste's dialogue with psychoanalysis: "Comments on the role of language in Freud's discovery", written in 1956 and published in *Problems of General Linguistics I* (BENVENISTE, 2005). In

this particular text Benveniste develops the notions of dialogue, intersubjectivity, subject and discourse; articulating their implications for psychoanalysis and for the field of language studies itself.

Still regarding the text above mentioned, it is important to stress that this is a collaboration required by Lacan himself, and published in the first volume of the journal *La Psychanalyse* in 1956. Lacan asks the intervention of Benveniste due to his interest in the subject matter, a question that contributed to bringing both thinkers together during the fifties. The purpose of Benveniste's article is to review the lacanian thesis that **the unconscious is structured like a language**. In this article, among other things, Benveniste makes remarks about Freudian text "About the antithetical meaning of primitive words", published in 1910, outlining a review on it. Freud, in this text, founded the operation of the unconscious and dream, both unaware of the principle of contradiction, establishing an analogy with some primitive Egyptian languages. He takes as its starting point the work of linguist Carl Abel, who notes in these primitive languages the existence of a single word denoting opposite meanings, and apply this principle to the operation of the dream and the unconscious, with the aim of explaining how in dreams the same representation means two diametrically opposed things.

Benveniste notes that Abel's speculations are meaningless because every language, being a system, works from this basic principle of contradiction that is not a prerogative of primitive languages. From this review, the author highlights the non-historical rhetoric of lacanian unconscious, whose structure of language is seen as a system that does not depend on a particular language enrolled in a primitive or contemporary period of history. This non-historical perspective of the unconscious and the lacanian conception of language converge with the criticism that Benveniste outlines about Abel in his text. According to Benveniste, every language is marked by anomaly, asymmetry and antithesis, which are inherent characteristics of the linguistic system. The archaic languages, approached differently from Abel and Freud perspective, are not more or less different than those spoken in the present. In Benveniste's words, to envisage a primitive stage of language, no matter how **primitive** it could be, is a pure chimera.

According Dosse's research (1993), Benveniste established the history of the development of Linguistics from a tripartite division age: the philosophical age (which corresponds to the reflection period of Greek thinkers about language); the historic age from the nineteenth century with the discovery of Sanskrit and the structuralist age of the twentieth century, in which, in his words, the positive notion of the linguistic fact is replaced by the relationship one. This third age gives access to the complex field of culture that is the symbolic phenomenon that interests both Benveniste and Lacan, more properly **the first Lacanian classicism**, a term coined by Milner (1996). In Dosse's (1993) point of view, the

domain of symbolic maintained, throughout the fifties, both thinkers in close proximity and dialogue, articulating linguistic and psychoanalytic issues from the doctrine of the subject.

Benveniste with Lacan: the question about the subject

The freudian text “About antithetical meaning of primitive words” (FREUD, 2013) is a fundamental reference for those who are interested in the interface between Linguistics and Psychoanalysis. Just as Benveniste is one of the linguists most cited by Lacan, Abel is Freud’s linguist *par excellence*. As Arrivé’s search testifies (1999), Abel is not only the linguist most cited by Freud: after discovering Abel’s work, Freud cites it with great frequency, as it is a theory that allows him to situate the relationship between language and the unconscious. Therefore, there is an interesting articulation approaching Abel, the linguistic most quoted by Freud, and Benveniste, one of the linguists most cited by Lacan. Benveniste, as far as it is known, only noted Abel from Freud’s paper and his interference is the result of a request by Lacan.

The fact that Lacan requests Benveniste’s intervention precisely on the freudian text about antithetical meaning of primitive words is certainly not by chance. This becomes even more remarkable if we assume, as does Arrivé (1999), that this peculiar freudian text remains to this day an obligatory passage point for anyone who is interested in the relationship between Psychoanalysis and language.

Benveniste and Lacan formed a partial dialogue during the fifties, the period in which Lacan was intimately close to Linguistics. Lacan’s reference and deference to Benveniste and his recognition as a great linguist predate the invitation to the publication in the first issue of *La Psychanalyse*. In the lesson *De locutionis significatione*, of June 23rd 1954, that belongs to the Seminar 1 “The technical writings of Freud”, Lacan makes remarks about the Saussure’s theory of the sign and supports his comments on Benveniste’s linguistic authority. Lacan relies on Saussure and Benveniste to legitimize the relevance of terms such as **significant**, **meaning**, **discourse**, **signification** and **semantic** to the analytic situation.

Early in his presentation, Lacan talks about an interview he had with Benveniste on the question of meaning and refers to him as “the most eminent person in the French linguistic domain”. In pursuing his exposure, the analyst assigns to “a man so eminent as Mr. Benveniste” the first discovery of a double zone of meaning in language. Finally, Lacan tells his audience that such discovery of the linguist had been entrusted to him as a current forwarding of his thinking and it is something that is done in order to inspire us a thousand reflections.

It is remarkable to observe the high degree of respect and admiration that Lacan puts on Benveniste in this moment of his teaching and thinking. This is reaffirmed in the ninth footnote of “The seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”, from 1954, in which Lacan calls **masterful** the rectification made by Benveniste about the false philological path outlined by Freud on the antithetical meaning of certain words, whether they are primitive or not. It is known that the dialogue and the partnership between Lacan and Benveniste, and so for between Lacan and other linguists, was more intense in the fifties, the period in which the psychoanalyst relied on linguistic structuralism for his return to Freud. Later came disruptions, dislocations and disappointments.

Lacan later explains this discontent in the year of 1970 in *Radiofonia* by attacking Benveniste and his contribution to the first issue of *La Psychanalyse*. Noting that Linguistics does not have any influence on the unconscious, by leaving blank what has an effect on it, the **object a**, Lacan (2003, p.408) expressed in this way: “This lack of the linguist, I could check it out when I asked a contribution to the greatest one that existed among the French ones, to illustrate the launch of a magazine of my creation [...] – the psychoanalysis, nothing less.” Despite the evident dissatisfaction that Lacan later demonstrates to Benveniste’s contribution, as suggested by the expression **lack of the linguist**, the great Linguist of Enunciation remains recognized as **the greatest that existed between French ones**, demonstrating a probable mixture of admiration and contempt by Lacan.

Regardless of such issues, during the fifties, a rich period to the lacanian dialogue with several linguists, Benveniste actually occupies a different position, as states Arrivé:

Now, in what sense is taken the opposition between language / language / speech? Exactly in Benveniste’s terms. Why Benveniste? The reason for the choice is clear: between Saussure and Jakobson, he is the linguist who is the most continuously claimed by Lacan. (ARRIVÉ, 2001, p.114).

Thus, the dialogue with Psychoanalysis, as Dosse (1993) observes, provides Benveniste a way to enforce and recognize his positions regarding the enunciation and the emergence of the subject in language, positions rejected by the linguistic field of this time. Benveniste, in his text, not just articulates psychoanalysis with issues of language in his theoretical scope, but even establishes its importance in the clinical management, in the relationship between analyst – analyzing, and highlights the notions of **dialogue** and **intersubjectivity**. Thus, it is possible to see in the text of 1956 the presence of an enunciative theory involving language and subjects or involving word and subjectivity that, in the specific case illustrated by the analyst – analysand relationship, involves partners in a dialogic

and communicative situation.¹ About this dialogical situation, Benveniste (2005, p.83) even questions the specificity of the analytical language as an instance of representation of the subject (analyzing) and to / from the other (analyst)

Everything here announces the advent of a technique that makes language its field of action and the privileged instrument of its efficiency. Then arises a fundamental question: what is this “language” that acts as much as it expresses? Is it identical to the one that is employed out of the analysis? Is it the same only for both partners? (BENVENISTE, 2005, p.83).

It is noticed in this excerpt a concern to articulate, while at the same time to distinguish, the language for the analytical field and everyday language, and so far the conception of language operated by psychoanalysis and the one operated by linguistic theories. Benveniste (2005, p.93), commenting on the language of dreams, further states that “In the area that reveals this unconscious symbolic, it may be said that it is both below and above linguistic.”, explicitly articulating the unconscious with language and, more specifically, with Linguistics itself.

In “Saussure after half a century”, published in 1963, Benveniste (2005, p.44) is not shy to say that “All aspects of the language that we have as data are the result of logical operations that we practice unconsciously.” (BENVENISTE, 2005, p.44). He continues his assertion with an ironic phrase that disrupts the reader: “Let’s be aware of it.” The reader is thrown into an embarrassing paradox, being invited to become aware of the fact that all aspects of language usage are charged under the background of an unknown and unconscious knowledge. How can one become aware of something that is inherently unconscious? The textual construction of Benveniste operates in the manner of a joke. However, Benveniste’s approach between language and the unconscious, as his own texts and enunciation theory clarify, is not given by language as pure structure, but through the mediation of speech and language in use, which converge to the perspective of analytic practice.

At another point in the text, we can find Benveniste anticipating critical issues, widely developed in 1970 in his famous article **The formal apparatus of enunciation**, about the distinction between language as a system and language used by a subject in the context of the utterance:

Language is a system common to all; speech is at the same time the bearer of a message and instrument of action. In this sense, the words settings are increasingly unique, although taking place

¹ Lacan refuses to situate the analytical scene in the strands of dialogue and communication, insisting on a non-subjective position of the analyst (first as the big Other, then as a face of the object a).

inside – and through – the language. There is therefore in the subject an antinomy between speech and language. (BENVENISTE, 2005, p.84).

Freud, Benveniste and the antithetical meaning of primitive words

Benveniste was invited by Lacan in 1956 to give his contribution to the first issue of *La Psychanalyse*, for having demonstrated adherence to theses discussed in *Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, published in 1953, one of Lacan's texts most strongly anchored in linguistic assumptions. Benveniste's contribution to the journal in question is the text "Observations on the function of language in Freud's discovery", a critical commentary on Freud's text "On the antithetical meaning of primitive words" and also a tribute to the analytical **talking cure**. The linguist discusses the subjective dimension of language that analysis invites someone to experience and discusses the concept of healing grounded in the possibility of rewriting and reposition before someone's own story, from a biographical narrative process. Benveniste also defines what Freud called **psychic reality**, by stating that the dimension operated by psychoanalysis is not the size of empirical reality, but the size of the speech, and this comes to lend authenticity to the experience:

In fact, if it is necessary that the patient tells you everything – even if it is expressed at random and without defined purpose – it is not to recognize an empirical fact that has not been recorded nowhere except in the patient's memory: it is because empirical events have no reality to the analyst unless the – and by – 'discourse', which gives them the authenticity of the experience, regardless of their historical reality, and even (it has to be said: above all) if the discourse avoids, transposes or invents the biography that the subject assigned. (BENVENISTE, 2005, p.83).

The ethical dimension of language in use is constantly stressed by Benveniste in his writings, by staging accountability of the subject in his enunciation. Benveniste also shows interest in Freudian analysis and its intimate relations with the universe of words and subjectivity. He emphasizes that the analyst must not only pay attention to the speech, but to the speech disruptions, demonstrating his adherence to a conception of discourse not anchored on an unopened understanding. Also according to the linguist, Freud launched decisive lights on the verbal activity, as revealed in free association, being all the force of language intimately linked to the hypothesis of the unconscious. The analytical process is a phenomenon of discourse marked by a particular outlet of the word, the word that brands each subject in a strictly private manner.

This highlights a point of contact between the enunciation theory of Benveniste and lacanian elaborations prevailing at the time. Such conceptual encounter is justified by Dosse:

This encounter between Lacan's and Benveniste's thesis is not fortuitous: it is a result, in addition to the mutual interest to establish the scientificity of their thoughts, of the common desire to escape the mainland discourse of each one to its dependence on history, whether the freudian filogeneticism to one or the historical philology to another. (DOSSE, 1993, p.63).

In this text, Benveniste proposes a reflection on the relationship between Freud and the linguist Carl Abel. He thus shows interested in the reflections of Abel, but one mediated by Freud's interest: it is to question the influence that Abel had on Freud. In a footnote, added in 1911 to the third edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud draws on the theories of Abel to justify his hypotheses about the dynamics of the unconscious, establishing a parallelism between the theses of Abel on the antithetical nature of words in some primitive languages with the way the opposing representations coexist harmoniously in the unconscious. These opposing representations are presented by a single element, in that the unconscious knows no "no", any principle of contradiction and the rates of positivity and negativity. In his words, the dreams feel free to represent any element by its opposite, making it impossible to decide at a glance whether any element which allows a contrast is present in the dream-work as positive or negative.

We can make use of an often cited freudian example, a dream where white represents both the innocence and sexual impurity. Freud concludes that, on this point, the dream behaves the same way as these primitive languages surveyed by Abel.

It is noticed that the interest in the issue of language, specifically by the linguist Abel, is something that Freud himself founded at the beginning of his theorizing and is referred to the time of the creation of Psychoanalysis. Being aware of this, Benveniste does not refrain himself from bringing The interpretation of dreams in his article and to reference the particular logic of dreams to discuss the theories of Freud. According to Milner (2008), it seemed to Freud that Abel proposed two exact parallels within a strictly lexical field: what is true in the dream about the relationship between representative materials (white color) and represented significance (innocence or impurity) is also true in the language on the relationship between phonic materials and the thing signified.

Thus, from his discovery in ancient Egyptian, the same phonic material may mean opposing realities. Freud exemplifies it with certain words that can mean

both **strong** or **weak, command** or **obey**; and with compounds as **old - young** or **away - close**. He concludes that these compounds express, in the use of language, the meaning of one of its contradictory parts, a part that would have had the same meaning in itself. Abel justifies this curious linguistic phenomenon in a way that, despite many different aspects in his thinking about language, allows us to consider him as a Saussurean *avant la lettre*. He did not fail to point out, and Freud follows his trail, that our concepts owe their existence to comparisons. In his words, everything in the world is relative and has an independent existence only insofar as it differs to their relations to other things.

Thus, the word that at first seems to mean both **strong** and **weak** means in reality the relationship and the difference between them. Here lies, in a sense, a parallel with the classical structural principle proposed by Saussure: language is a system of differences with no positivity or negativity itself. Continuing the reasoning of Abel, this strong linguistic ambiguity was resolved by speakers through use of gestures that indicate the mean pole of the word to be used in each communication context.

Milner (2008) argues that in Abel's research on ancient Egyptian, the important fact is the blurring of the order and not its opposition, because the blurring rules out the existence of **no**, as in the logic of dreams. In dream logic, as it is known, an element is represented by its opposite so that there is no way to decide at first whether this element to admit otherwise is present in the dream as positive or negative.

The logic of the opposition, in turn, forces Freud to limit his thesis about the absence of contradiction in dreams and announces the notion of **denial**, developed in his important article "*Die Verneinung*"; published in 1925 under the title "The negative" (FREUD, 2007). In this article, Freud notes that the use of **no** in the analysand discourse is an index of repression, it means that the unconscious only makes itself known in the discourse on the brand of a denial. Taking the example cited by Freud, when a patient recounting a dream about a certain character says **it's not my mother**, what you have is a **not** followed by a statement **is my mother**. The logic of the opposition relies upon the same principle of denial: it utilizes the "no" to denote something positive. What Freud finds in Abel, in turn, are situations marked by an absence of linguistic paradigm of opposition between the names and the denial itself. Abel, in short, does not question the denial. On this issue, Milner (2008) notes a paradox of Freud, who refers to Abel precisely at the time that the thesis of the absence of "no" in the dream is affirmed by itself. What Abel illustrates, in turn, is the inability to demarcate at first the meaning of a given element.

When using the support of Abel's linguistic theories, Freud creates a stalemate. If on the one hand the absence of **no** and the principle of contradiction in the

dream is affirmed and endorsed by Freud, it is also limited in several ways, because the dream operates condensations and displacements of representations that assumes the principles of contradiction and denial. If Freud states that an element of the dream can be represented by its opposite, how then can one claim that it is unaware of the principles of contradiction and denial? Likewise, if the condensation mechanism assumes two opposing representations represented in the same element, how can we delete again the principles of contradiction and negation? The argument sought in Abel by Freud is relevant and at the same time fragile and the contradiction shows up in Freud himself.

Regarding this impasse, Milner (2008) proposes a reading to solve it by postulating that *The interpretation of dreams works* as if everything in the text operates as a *Verschiebung*, a displacement as coined by Freud, in which the key is not which is highlighted as a direct argument, but its result: the undecidability². The continuation of Milner's elaborations allows an intimate link between *The interpretation of dreams*, the structuralist paradigm and the last teaching of Lacan: stopping on the essential, Freud's thesis tells us that the dream is analyzable in increasingly minimalist terms. This minimalist hypothesis is what Milner calls the **Ones** of the dream: the desire, the thought, and the minimum elements of dreams. In the same way that language and reality are also analyzable in terms of the **Ones**: the word, the thing, the act.

The unconscious is thus a system in which one assumes the least possible properties. The Structural Linguistics, as a paradigm of reducing elements to a criterion of pure difference in a system, maintains certain minimalist theses. The minimum properties of the language system are liable to be decomposed into equally minimal elements, and the element of the system has its properties determined by the system itself. On the other hand, we find the notion of the record of **One** in the work of Lacan, from *Seminar 19 ...Or worse*. **The One** is sympathetic to notions of enjoyment and real of the language, by implying an aspect of interpretation no longer anchored in the discourse of the Other. Starting from these considerations, you can find in *The interpretation of dreams* both dialectical sides of language that are the subject of Psychoanalysis: a symbolic language that provides the basis for Lacan's structuralist approach, widely discussed in the work of interpretation and production of meaning in dreams; and the unrepresentative of language, the real, correlate to **the navel of the dream**, as Freud expressed:

Even in the most thoroughly interpreted dream, there is often a stretch that has to be left in the dark; it's because, during the work of interpretation, we realize that there is at this point a tangle of

² Undecidability: term searched in Milner, which means an impasse in interpreting, the difficulty to decide on one of the interpretive centers.

dream-thoughts which does not unravel, moreover, adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it dives into the unknown. (FREUD, 1976, p.482).

The Ones can also mix up with the record of the symbolic, if we consider the laws of condensation and displacement that govern the dynamic of dream. What in the dream can be represented by one single element can in reality be quantitatively represent by a multitude of elements, which is characteristic of condensation. From a qualitative point of view, a representation that is essential in the dream may be unimportant in reality or conversely, what is characteristic of displacement. Finally, something that might be mixed up in the dream can be separate or even oppositional in reality, that is the antithetical meaning as coined by Abel.

According to a review by Milner (2008) that actually follows the same associative pathway proposed by Freud, the quantitative and qualitative non-coincidence among the various Ones can be conceived as the crucial point of the analysis, in which a single wish can be stated in many ways, be expressed in multiple and diverse actions. By focusing on the expression **non-coincidence**, fully developed by Authier – Revuz's work (2001), it becomes more understandable why the dream is considered a discourse and a heterogeneous discourse. The dream is an Other, an otherness subject to the dreamer himself, and a privileged place of staging the unconscious, which Freud called from an expression by Fechner, another scene (*ein anderer Schauplatz*). The record of the dream and the reality itself form a heterogeneous discursive scene marked by non-coincidence of their respective utterances. The dream-work projects, so in a single plane of representation, the various Ones and their correspondences.

Returning to Abel's research on the antithetical meaning of primitive words and the reading undertaken by Freud, it is observed that the psychoanalyst found in Abel's article elements to legitimize his theories about language in the unconscious, but in order to specify the own non-coincidence among the **Ones** and its undecidability. The non-coincidence and undecidability of the Ones can be illustrated by Abel from his hypothesis about the use of signs in spoken language in ancient Egypt. In his opinion, it was through the use of gestures that the desired meaning of the antithetical word could be spelled. The interpretation of dreams, by contrast, is not worth a foreign element to the spoken language to evidence the meanings and sense of representations. The **ones** of the dream are also mixed up in its extensive network association of condensations and displacements, but it is the work of language itself, from the interpretation process, that a meaning can be chosen, tracing the path from undecidability towards non-coincidence of the Ones. The interpretation, as in the primitive gesture language, introduces a

distinction and does not confuse undecidability; but through an element of spoken language itself and not outside of it. These are two distinct modes of explaining the non- coincidence in Abel and in Freud.

Benveniste against Freud: the question of the structure

It is now proposed to avail a term of Milner (1987) in order to question **the desire of the linguist**. According to Milner (2008), there is something in Abel that shocks Benveniste. From the reading of his text, it is remarkable in Benveniste great discomfort with respect to Abel's elaborations and an effort to disqualify them. He does not shy in saying that no qualified linguist, either at Abel's writing time or subsequently, retained his text on primitive words, either in its methods or conclusions. He also affirms that Abel's data are false and that there are reasons, referring to the history of languages, to take away all the credit to Abel's etymological speculations that lured Freud.

Attacks on Abel gain very directive and personal contours when we recall the passage in which Benveniste, in a rather ironic way, expresses that if there is insensitivity to the contradiction, it is not to be found in language, but in the figure of the researcher himself. There is a strong aspect of Abel's postulations that causes serious resistance in Benveniste, which is his hypothesis about the use of gestures to explain the oppositional pole of antithetical word. Benveniste's theoretical constructs can be approximated to the lacanian axiom which states that **there is no meta-language**, which means that, for him, linguistics has nothing to learn from an instance which is foreign from language itself. For Abel, the use of gesture is to introduce differences in linguistic sign from an element which is foreign from the language. For Benveniste, being true to his Saussurean heritage, the language itself performs all the differences it has known. This principle is so essential that Saussure even states that language can be content with the opposition of something with nothing: there is a pure difference inscribed in the linguistic system itself.

If we understand that language is a minimalist system marked by oppositional relationship between its terms, it becomes clearer the understanding that primitive languages do not have a particular logic that differentiate them to the languages currently spoken. Just as contradiction and illogicality are inscribed in the very nature of the linguistic sign and cannot be particularized to a specific language inscribed in a particular historical time. We can read the lacanian axiom **the unconscious is structured like a language** in the light of the criticisms of Benveniste towards Abel. Designing the unconscious structured as a language has an important consequence: the algorithm refers to any language, without any specificity. In a later point in his teaching, in the

course of a lesson of *Seminar 19 ...or worse*, this structuralist point of view about language appears explicitly in Lacan's discourse in a passage which, though long, deserves to be transcribed:

[...] if something worthy of the title of 'linguistic science' can be sustained, something that seems to have language or speech as object, it was under the condition linguists swear to each other never ever again – because it is not done for centuries – but never, even from afar, allude to the origin of language. That was one of the slogans that gave this form of introduction that was articulated in my formulation 'the unconscious is structured like a language'. [...] It is not a matter, anyway, of speculating on any kind of origin to language. (LACAN, 2012, p.67).

Benveniste's solidarity with structuralism puts him in a close relationship with Lacan and Saussure away from Freud. Among these three thinkers, Freud was the only one who did not renounce the question of origins and referred the unconscious, at least in a period of his theory, the conformation of operating within the particularity of a "primitive language" and not the universal human language. Benveniste is direct and clear on this issue:

These confusions seem to be born, in Freud, in his constant use of "origins": origins of art, religion, society, language... Freud constantly transposes what looks like "primitive" to him in the primitive as a source, as it is exactly in the story of this world that he projects what we could call a chronology of the human psyche. (BENVENISTE, 2005, p.90).

Freud, a true passionate for the question of origins, as denounces the German prefix *Ur*, often employed in its concepts, (*Ursprache*, *Urvater*, *Urverdrängung*, *Urzene*)³, was unaware of that universal structural feature of the linguistic sign, although in his text about the primitive words, he shows great interest in these properties of language. The criticisms outlined by Benveniste endorse the lacanian theory of the unconscious structured like a language, as for both language is considered a system.

We can find in *Function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis* some passages in which Lacan also critically adopts a position in relation to the idea of a primitive language and to a historicizing perspective of linguistic and psychic phenomena. In this text, Lacan speaks of a **historical unconscious**, but quite different from the one treated by Freud in his solidarity with Abel conceptual

³ Primitive language, primal father, primal repression, primal scene. The German prefix *Ur* refers to something that is original, primitive.

sense. Lacan brings Psychoanalysis and History together in a way that can be considered innovative by postulating that both are sciences of the particularity, which deal with purely accidental facts and factitious, whose value is reduced to the gross aspect of the trauma.

It is a conceptualization of the historical phenomenon which is quite different from the chronological conception usually learnt about it. A certain timeless character of the story, the unconscious itself, is also formulated by Lacan (1998, p.262): "The events are engendered in a primary historicizing, which means that the story is already on stage where it will be staged after it has been written in the inner self and external forum." Lacan is still very directive by saying, in the thread of his exhibition, that what in Psychoanalysis is taught the subject to recognize as his unconscious is his story. The analyst helps the individual to make up the current historicizing of the facts that already determined him in his existence a number of historical twists. If these facts have a sense of historical facts, they are as recognized or censored in a certain discursive order which is already included in the unconscious. Lacan (1998, p.294) thus reaffirms the structure of language in the unconscious symbolism, but this symbolism "[...] has the character of a universal language that echoes in all other languages, but at the same time, as it is the language that captures the desire at the exact point where it becomes human, [...] is absolutely peculiar to the subject ." Soon after, we find in Lacan (1998, p.295) a veiled criticism on Freud, which differs from the severe criticism that he made to Benveniste: "First language, we also say, what we do not mean primitive language, since Freud [...] deciphered it completely in the dreams of our contemporaries." it is not difficult to see how Benveniste was anchored in these lacanian assertions when criticizing the theme of origins in Freud.

If, on the one hand, Lacan's interest in structuralist and post-Saussurean linguistics is evident in this period, the proper linguistics methods are not used by him. According to Milner (2008), we can conclude that Lacan is interested in the general fact that language has properties established by structuralist linguistics, but is not interested in its methods. Thus, Milner (2008) also proposes a way of interpreting the axiom the unconscious is structured like a language that seems relevant: assuming that a language has structure properties (as shown in Linguistics), the unconscious has these same properties. However, for this to be true, the processes by which these properties are established are not relevant. The linguistics that interests Lacan, which is the same one recovered by Benveniste in his article, is the one that knows the language by focusing on retaining only the minimal properties of **any** system. If language is a system, Benveniste and Lacan, both following the trail of Saussure, demonstrate the incorrectness of freudian thought by articulating the unconscious processes with a specific primitive language.

To conclude, it is important to draw attention to the fact that Lacan's decision to convene a linguist to comment the freudian text About antithetical meaning of primitive words is not accidental, since this is a text strangely muted in Lacan's own work . It is a challenge to find in his work, at least in his writings and seminars yet established, any reference to that little freudian text, which has greater recognition in the linguistic medium than in the psychoanalytic one. It was in Benveniste's hands to make remarks on this opaque text, and in this review we found, in Milner's words (2008), a benvenistean moment par excellence with respect to opposite meanings.

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- *RESUMO: Este artigo pretende evidenciar determinados aspectos da leitura estruturalista de Benveniste sobre as fundamentações linguísticas encontradas em Freud, mais propriamente em seu texto "Sobre o sentido antitético das palavras primitivas". Coloca-se em diálogo o artigo de Benveniste intitulado "Observações sobre a função da linguagem na descoberta freudiana" com as teorizações linguísticas apresentadas por Freud em seu texto supracitado. Busca-se, assim, uma interface entre os estudos linguísticos e psicanalíticos, problematizando a noção de língua primitiva trazida por Freud e confrontando-a com pressupostos da Linguística Estrutural defendida por Benveniste. A abordagem tecida é eminentemente teórica, buscando iluminar os pontos de divergência entre a concepção de linguagem na perspectiva de Freud e de Benveniste. Para atingir esse objetivo, buscou-se o estudo sobre a negação desenvolvida por Freud em seu texto "A negativa" e colocou-a em relação com as observações de Benveniste sobre o linguista Carl Abel, forte influência linguística no pensamento freudiano desenvolvido no texto "Sobre o sentido antitético das palavras primitivas". Como conclusão, torna-se possível compreender que, se a língua é uma estrutura e um sistema, ela possui um caráter universal e a-histórico, o que contesta a tese freudiana sobre a existência de línguas primitivas.*
- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Linguagem. Estrutura. Inconsciente. Negação. Enunciação.

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