Psychoanal Cult Soc (2022) 27:163–180
https://doi.org/10.1057/s41282-022-00275-3

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Lacanian discourse analysis and emotional textual analysis compared: New proposals on articulating psychoanalysis and psychosocial studies

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Published online: 22 August 2022

Abstract This work resumes and carries on the scholarly discussion on the relationship between psychoanalytic conceptualization of the unconscious and language use in the field of Lacanian discourse analysis and in the methodological perspective of emotional textual analysis, which is rooted in the work of Renzo Carli. Based on research data, the authors discuss key theoretical tenets, as well as similarities and differences between both approaches.

Keywords unconscious · language · social relations · text analysis · psychoanalytic research methods

Introduction

A key question of the theoretical and methodological debate within psychosocial studies can be expressed with the following words from Lynne Layton (2008):

> One of the main difficulties for those of us who do recognise the effects of the social is how to account for the effects of the social without succumbing to the reductionism of social determinism, and how to account for the idiosyncrasies of human subjectivity without removing subjectivity from its social and historical context (as most dominant discourses are wont to do). (p. 64)

This question is also at the center of Frosh and Baraitser's (2008) paper that examines the central and yet controversial place of psychoanalysis in the field of psychosocial studies. Psychoanalytic theory, the two authors claim, is able to

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subvert mainstream dichotomies in social sciences through the notion of *psychic reality,* proposed by Freud, which describes the constant link that binds the inner and the outer world and thereby the individual and the social. "A special contribution of psychoanalysis is that it breaks down the division between different kinds of knowledge and opposes the fetishising of objectivity, in the humanities and social sciences as well as in clinical practice," Frosh says (2016, p. 469).

Nevertheless, Frosh and Baraitser (2008) expressed concerns toward the deployment of psychoanalytic interpretive strategies and procedures that have arisen in the specific context of the clinical situation of the "consulting room" in another context—that of doing research:

> Where psychoanalysis is mined for its *technology*, as for example in the Hollway and Jefferson (2005) attempt to apply the notion of countertransference to their discussions of how their research participant made them feel, there is a strong and present danger that it will be used as an ungrounded expert system of knowledge in precisely the way objected to by its critics. (p. 363).

In recent years, the debate concerning the relationship between psychoanalysis and psychosocial studies has moved ahead, in particular through a group of studies using the Lacanian analyses of textual data in multiple unprecedented ways for psychosocial research purposes (Saville Young & Frosh, 2010; Hook, 2013; Hook & Vanheule, 2016; Pelletier & Kneebone, 2016; Lapping, 2013, 2016; Lapping & Glynos, 2018).

Our intent in this paper is to resume the reflection on the relationship between the unconscious and language already discussed in this literature, and to enrich it by discussing another methodological perspective, emotional textual analysis (ETA). Our interest is therefore to make a comparative exploration of different psychoanalytic approaches to textual analysis, which offers a still little explored and promising field of study (Lapping, 2013). Namely, we intend to examine, differences between ETA and Lacanian discourse analysis (LDA), especially in its most recent developments. By doing so we will be able to discuss key theoretical assumptions underlying psychoanalytic psychosocial research.

ETA is an interesting case in this sense. It originates in Italy from a "niche" scientific experience springing from the work of Renzo Carli, marked by a highly specific, meaningful convergence of the national and international dimension, as we will discuss. In theoretical terms, ETA finds its place within the Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalytic tradition. Probably, without object relations theory one would not be able to understand the whole dimension of the symbolic underpinning this methodology. However, it remains an approach that resists school and field classifications and ultimately maintains a singularity of its own.

The Focus on the Unconscious

LDA and ETA both aim at tapping into the psychical and psychosocial reality. Yet, as previous works have already outlined (e.g., Hook, 2013; Carli & Giovagnoli, 2010), when using psychoanalysis in studying the psychosocial, the way one

interprets the notion of the unconscious is crucial, and at this point both approaches differ.

LDA builds on Lacan's notion of discourse. This concept stems from his work in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including books XVII ("The other side of psychoanalysis"), XVIII ("On a discourse that would not be semblance") and XIX ("… Or worse") of the seminar. Crucially, these works go beyond Lacan's classic symbolic notion of the unconscious from the 1950s and 1960s, which states that the unconscious is structured like a language. In his later works Lacan adds a so-called real component, indicating that all unconscious productions revolve around a "sexual non-rapport."

In the 1950s and 1960s Lacan assumes that linguistic articulation and the symbolic structures, what he calls the symbolic order or the Other, always mediate a human being's relation to the world. To establish representations and forge meanings humans are dependent on social relations in which they exchange signifiers to establish ideas (also called signifieds). Quite crucially, this use of the signifier is marked by lack. On the one hand, the articulation of signifiers for a substantial part escapes self-control. In Lacan's view the unexpected signifiers we still articulate make up our unconscious, and articulate an unconscious desire against which the ego defends. On the other hand, this spontaneously reoccurring production of speech marks our self-experience. The meanings and representations we construct never make up a stable whole that would denote our identity. Hence Lacan's ideas on the divided subject: the subject is a point of symbolic indeterminacy that cannot be stuffed with ideas. Moreover, by placing what happens to the subject as a consequence of what takes place in relation to the Other implies that the subject of the unconscious cannot be identified with what is "most intimate" for an individual, because this intimacy is always constituted in relation to the Other; it is based on exteriority. In this perspective, rooted in Hegelian dialectics, the individual transcends into the symbolic order, and the speech is placed at the foundation of the human community (Fink, 2004; Vanheule, 2011; Verhaeghe, 2013).

From the mid 1960s onwards an interesting change takes place in Lacan's work as he starts accentuating that human symbolic articulation cannot be disconnected from the excitement or *jouissance* the living body entails. Humans are not speaking robots, since "language never covers it all and that even that which it does cover is, so to speak, perforated by an extra-linguistic intrusion without which it could never function for us" (Neill, 2013, p. 340). Humans are plagued by a living body that responds to our encounter with the Other. This would lead Lacan, in the 1970s, to move from the supremacy of the symbolic to the centrality of *jouissance*. It is the action of the signifier itself that, by representing the subject for another signifier, generates something, a reminder called object *a*, that escapes any action of the signifier. Language is not a net that over the subject, covering it and leaving a piece of it out. Language determines our being, represents it, but by representing it, it irreversibly loses it. The singularity of *jouissance* can never be integrated in the symbolic, not because there exists a prelinguistic field that language cannot reach, but only because it is the very action of language that determines the irreducible difference between the human being, which finds a representation, and that which

this same representation excludes, precisely where it represents it. The *jouissance* of the living body, in this perspective, is no longer in opposition, it is not external, but it is a littoral inside the signifying chain. The real of the *jouissance* is a trace produced and remaining between the lines of the signifying chain. This trace does not concern how the subject relates to the external world but refers to how the subject inhabits language itself. In this way, within the language, "within the usual functioning of the sense, we see the rise of the emptiness of the outside meaning" (Laurent, 1999, p. 249; our translation).

In the 1970s, the symbolic lost its primacy; Lacan identifies a specific type of relationship between signifier and *jouissance*, the so-called non-rapport. Specifically seminar XX ("Encore") is the seminar of non-rapports: the non-rapport between signifier and meaning, the non-rapport between *jouissance* and the Other, and the non-rapport between the sexes. The famous aphorism, "*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*" means that there is no "instinctual orientation" for the speaking being to regulate the relationship between the sexes, as it happens in the animal kingdom. This non-rapport makes up the real unconscious and each encounter with it is always contingent; that is, there is no possibility of writing the rules governing the relations between the sexes, just as there is no fixed relationship between signifier and signified, or between *jouissance* and language (Miller, 2007). Thus, "*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*" becomes the sign of impossibility. According to Alemán (2003), in Lacan's ontology language, sex and death are all names for the same impossibility.

Furthermore, Lacan inscribes this fundamental non-rapport in his theory of discourse. All discourse is organized around the central impossibility of establishing fixed solid bonds. In Lacan's view the sexual relationship is Real. It is "that which does not stop not being written" (Lacan, 1975/2011a, p. 57), which implies that in order to establish a link between individuals, speech must always be mobilized. In other words, social bonds, genres, and discourse constitute different historical modes of substitution for a fundamental non-relationship. Indeed, in Lacanian terms, discourse is a social bond because it is a way individuals try to make up for this fundamental impossibility of connection (Vanheule, 2014).

ETA, by contrast, builds on a different conception of the unconscious, in which psychic reality is seen in terms of what Matte Blanco calls emotional infinite. According to Matte Blanco (1975) conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind can be described in terms of *bi-logic*: as two modalities of sense-making, profoundly different from one another in terms of the rules by which they are governed, but equally systematic and continuously interacting. We should imagine a continuum running between two polarities of psychic experience: at one extreme, any sign (including linguistic signs) is purely signifier, endowed with infinite polysemy: that is, it could virtually signify everything, in as much as all things signify one thing; here we find the symmetrical logic of the unconscious transforming any relation of contiguity into a relation of identity, which is also the reason why we feel attached to things, caught in an engaging relationship with the world that takes on value of life to us (Salvatore & Freda, 2011). At the opposite extreme, the asymmetrical logic of consciousness divides the world into discrete elements interrelated by pure difference, in the sense that every element of a

signifying system makes sense in as much as it is of a different order from another element of the system and so on; based on this dividing logic we can think of ourselves as separated from the external world and existing in it as individuals.

Matte Blanco deemed all spatial models used in psychoanalysis up to that time inadequate to describe mental phenomena since they relied by default on a three-dimensional space. He believed that in order to grasp numerous psychic instances, particularly unconscious phenomena, we needed to envisage more than three dimensions, probably multiple, potentially infinite dimensions, as mathematics allows us to do. The concept of the infinite, which Matte Blanco says underlies, even if not explicitly, many Kleinian formulations, would help to express the experience of indivisibility, of an infinite totality, which is part of us. Namely, by representing psychic experience in terms of multiple spaces, and spaces characterized by a different number of dimensions, this could help us explain the fundamental antinomy which informs our psychic life and experience:

> … of something which is always the same unique something and also a number of other somethings. It is one *and* many … We might say that when an indivisible[1] … finds that the intellect[2] tries to divide it, then it creates a Babel in the intellect …. It kicks back and in this way makes its presence felt. (Matte Blanco, 1988, p. 253, endnotes added by authors)

This fundamental antinomy, according to Matte Blanco, could be better explained if we think, in geometrical terms, of the problem that arises when defining a space in another space of a smaller number of dimensions; for instance, when we try to unfold a tridimensional object within a one-dimensional space—the same point in the tridimensional space becomes multiple points in the one dimensional space; it is one *and* many.

This perspective implied for Matte Blanco the need to reformulate in new terms the very notions of object, of internal and external, as well as of repressed.

This is not far, in our view, from the numerous implications of Lacan's conceptualization of the unconscious: in the last reading of Freud's "primal repression," for example, primal repression coincides with the impossibility of writing the sexual rapport (Lacan, 1975/2011). The existence of language, in fact, requires that something falls, that something is irreversibly lost. This loss, however, is both a sign of a lack and a sign of excess (*plus-de-jouir*). It is only because language exists that we can experience the impossible, that is, the non-stackability between the plane of enunciation and the plane of the statement, as well as between signifying and meaning, or the impossibility of unifying being and make-believe (*semblant*), as well as of relating to the Other sex without failing the sexual rapport. In other words, the primal repression indicates this gap, which is both the effect of lack and the effect of excess, between the representativeness of the signifier and the singular existence of the subject.

The polyvalent nature of all signifiers, as in their conveying more than one possible meaning simultaneously, Hook suggests, is literally created when we use

[1] Unconscious mind.

[2] Heterogenic-dividing mind.

words in speech: "it was only by virtue of what was said or expressed that a 'repressed' was created" (Hook, 2013, p. 43). This is similar to Matte Blanco's claim about the encounter between an indivisible and the intellect trying to divide it, which creates a Babel.

Agamben (2015) invites us to position contemporary psychoanalysis among semiotic sciences (along with aesthetics for instance), that is, sciences that unlike semantic sciences (the vast majority of modern sciences according to this author) postulate a gap between signifier and signified, hence a fracture within knowledge (and with a relationship between the two terms constantly being crafted). This fracture presents itself in psychic terms as *excess of the signifier* (recalling Levi-Strauss's words), that is a surplus of its symbolic function, over the signified to which the former should fit according to a certain sociolinguistic order.

This is crucial to understanding the functioning of ETA in which the analysis starts from breaking the tie between signifier and signified in a text, in order to be able to explore the polysemic quality of this relationship and the historically determined cultural process of its reduction. This takes place by isolating within the text what we call the "dense words" and then relying on a specific statistical and interpretative processing to study the words' co-occurrence within the text. In LDA, by contrast, the focus is on how discourse aims at treating the dimension of non-rapport that provoked the use of discourse in the first place. Studying discourse means examining how every time the dimension of meaning appears, there is a dimension of the outside meaning, where *jouissance* is situated. It consists of recognizing where the cut between meaning and the outside meaning needs to be situated, as well as between what is said and the point of *jouissance* that circulates in it.

We will expand on these differences in the following sections not only in terms of procedures but more as the theoretical premises underlying different methodological choices and hence different research purposes. A particular focus of our inquiry is how the notion of social relation is translated into research and clinical experiences. To do this we rely on recent research projects.

Emotional Textual Analysis

ETA was developed in the eighties by Carli and Paniccia as a tool for psychosocial research and intervention (Carli & Paniccia, 2002; Carli et al., 2016). To understand the methodological framework of ETA, one must know the theoretical construct from which this methodology stems and of which it provides a translation: that is the theory of emotional collusion. Carli began to outline it already in the second half of the 1960s, based on his work that closely integrated psychoanalytic clinical experience and experimental research (Carli, 2006). His formulation found another pivotal step in the rich experience of psychosocial intervention-research with organizations and institutions that Carli and Paniccia (1981) carried out in the 1970s and 1980s, being among the founding members of Italian psycho-sociology.

Starting from Matte Blanco,[3] the two authors assume that every aspect of social experience, from the viewpoint of unconscious knowledge, is polysemic, in the sense of being endowed with multiple, virtually infinite emotional connotations. Within the social relationship, such a polysemy is progressively reduced, giving rise to a shared symbolic process between the participants in a context (e.g.. teachers and students in a class, doctors and nurses in a hospital unit, and so on). This process of emotionally sharing the sense of reality between social actors, like the first substratum of meaning-making on which all subsequent symbolic activity is built, is what Carli and Paniccia call collusion, which literally means, from the Latin *cum ludere,* playing together. We can see a connection with the nascent pre-symbolic thirdness, of which Benjamin (2007) speaks, as the earlier reciprocal patterning based on affect resonance that "lays down the foundation for the later interpersonal symbolic thirdness" (p.16).

ETA literally detects how such a collusive process occurs through language and can be studied in language, by assuming that emotions expressed in language are not individual phenomena, but organizers of historically determined social relations.

Commenting on Matte Blanco's conception of emotions as infinite sets, Salvatore says:

> The idea of meanings as infinite sets, resulting from the antagonistic encounter between symmetrical and asymmetrical principles provides a powerful tool for modelling emotions as the first semiotic output of the dynamics of emergence of meaning in the mind. Indeed, emotions can be conceptualized as the first hypergeneralized, homogenized classes of meaning resulting from the rupture of the undifferentiated presymbolic symmetrical totality. (2016, p. 130)

With the notion of emotional collusion, Carli and Paniccia continued to develop a semiotic conception of the unconscious, along the path mapped out in Italy by Matte Blanco and Fornari (1976), but within a theory of social relationship that highlighted the role of culture and of cultural change over history in the formation of subjectivity. When using ETA, the process of inquiry most often starts with focus groups or individual interviews based on one initial open-ended question aimed to let the interviewees broadly narrate their experience with regard to the research topic. The interviews are recorded, transcribed verbatim and put together in a single textual corpus for analysis, for which ETA uses a procedure that combines quantitative, supported by specific software (T-Lab or Alceste), and qualitative analysis. The analysis starts by isolating in the text what we call "dense words." The software generates the complete vocabulary of the words in the corpus and from these the researchers choose the dense words. With dense words Carli and Paniccia (2002) mean words characterized by a maximum degree of polysemy and by a minimum degree of ambiguity, as their emotionally *dense sense* (that is emotionally evocative of an intense multiplicity of meanings and associations to relevant

[3] Matte Blanco was a prominent contributor to Italian psychoanalysis. He moved permanently to Italy, to Rome, in 1966, and became a didactic analyst of the Italian psychoanalytic society and lecturer at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. It was here that he wrote the two volumes that had the greatest international academic resonance: *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets* (1975) and *Thinking, Feeling and Being* (1988). Renzo Carli was his close collaborator.

experiences) is evident even when the word is isolated and taken out of the context of the discourse. We can think, for example, of words like love, failure, ambition. On the other hand, articles, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, and other words whose ambiguity is such as to require the context of the discourse for their emotional sense to be defined, are considered non-dense.

The choice of the dense words is a component of and based on a clinical process, which methodologically underpins all the research steps, centered on the relationship between the research team and the participants and clients of the research: all steps, from the first contacts to the discussion of the research aims, the interviews or focus groups and so on, are organized by the research team in order to respond to the objective of establishing an exchange in which it is possible to explore the emotional components of the problem being investigated. This in turn implies the possibility of researchers and participants rethinking each time the sense of their own involvement in the research project (Bucci et al., 2021).

Thus, initially, ETA breaks up the narrative order of the text in order to enable a different order also present in the text to emerge. This could be called an emotional order, based to a greater extent on the principle of the symmetry of unconscious logic. In other words, the leading question in ETA, the starting point from which we look for clues in the text, is: how is it possible for us to talk, for example, about work (the research example that we will discuss in a moment relates to this)—our work, the work of others, etc.—and be able to distinguish this as an area of social experience, which implies a discrete field of experience that already eludes the indivisibility of the unconscious, without getting lost in a myriad of cognitive details and sensory fragments (the working hours, the working environment, the workplace, the colleagues with whom one relates, the documents, the meetings, and so on)? Instead we maintain the perception of work as a unitary experience, a mental fact and something significant and emotionally engaging for us, ultimately something that exists for us (Salvatore & Freda, 2011). According to Carli and Paniccia, this is the product of the process of emotional collusion that develops within social relationships. Here, the relationship is not seen in terms of the external phenomena, as enacted social relationship; instead, ETA focuses on understanding the set of symbolic-cultural references historically shared between people, namely between the research participants, which allow us to participate in a social experience, subjectively relevant in the genesis of meanings, even when we are alone with ourselves.

Clues to the collusive process are detected in the text in two ways. Remember that the text we are referring to is made up of all the interviews collected in a single corpus. The text is cut into homogeneous segments, called elementary context units (ECU), via the software that supports the quantitative part of ETA. In this way, we get a logical matrix of dense words × EUCs. On this matrix, through factorial analysis of multiple correspondences and cluster analysis, we study how the dense words co-occur within the text, forming stable significant repertoires: that is we obtain clusters of dense words positioned within a factorial space that defines their reciprocal relationships (see Fig. 1). These statistical procedures were chosen by the authors of ETA to be consistent with the hypothesis of emotions as infinite sets that can be represented in a multidimensional space. The interpretation of the clusters

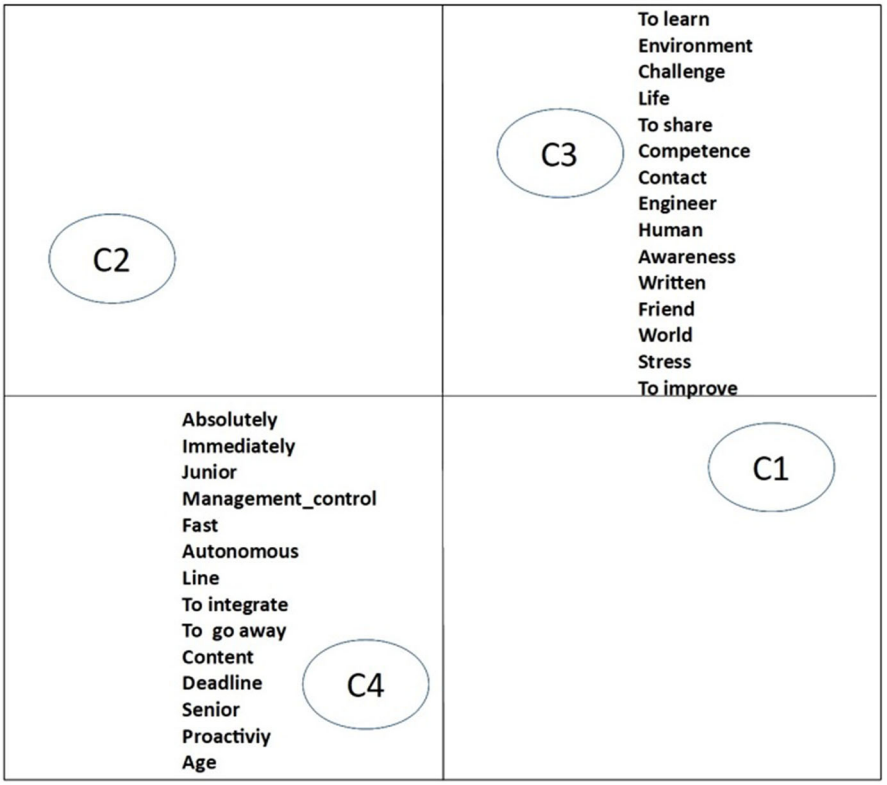

Fig. 1 Dense words within C3 and C4 (data drawn from Bucci and Vanheule, 2020)

takes place through qualitative analysis. This is characterized by a process of maximum initial reopening of the polysemy at the level of the single word and of subsequent progressive reduction of the polysemy by studying the association between words within the clusters and finally the relationship between the clusters within factorial space. One starts from the central word in each cluster[4] by looking at the etymology of words, which gives us clues to layers of shared meanings rooted in the history of language. The interpretation is guided by a pool of analytic models (Carli & Paniccia, 2002) that distinguishes different areas of emotional symbolization at play in the relationship with the context. We can think of a continuum, starting with the primary emotional distinctions, good/bad, friend/enemy and those linked to the experience of the body (inside/outside), until we arrive at categories that define increasingly situated cultural dynamics.

We will give an example taken from a study that we carried out a few years ago (Bucci & Vanheule, 2020).

The purpose was to explore how young people's expectations of work and working relationships, at an emotional level, diverge from and interact with the

[4] The centrality of a word is indicated statistically by a higher chi-square value.

economic culture they encounter in companies. In the last decade, young people have been at the center of intense debate internationally, faced with an occupational crisis that has raised questions about the future of work and its very nature. We conducted focus groups with young graduates, who were about to start their first job in multinational corporations, and with their corporate mentors. On one of the factors obtained from the analysis of the transcripts by ETA, we find two clusters opposed to each other (see the vertical line in Fig. 1): one cluster (C3) is most significantly associated with the accounts of the young employees interviewed, at the beginning of their work contract (the study was based on interviews at the beginning and at the end of the first working year), the other (C4) with their mentors' accounts.

The central word in C3 is *to learn:* in Italian (the language in which the interviews were done) *apprendere*, which derives from the Latin *ad* (intensifier) and *prehendere*, "to grasp." By reading the associations with the other dense words in the cluster, we understand that young people think of work as the trigger of a learning experience in the sense that they wish to find work environments where the sharing of competencies, on a technical level, might go hand in hand with the forging of new social bonds, even of friendship, as well as with the awareness arising from truly coming into contact with the issues they have studied. So, *learning*, at an emotional level, seems to mean literally the wish of "apprehending," that is of grasping reality, against the multiple splitting to which young people feel culturally exposed. The significance of this cluster is further clarified when we read it in relation to the other cluster to which it is opposed within the factorial space: C4. The central word in C4 is *absolutely*—from the Latin *absolutus*—that is, unrestricted, untied, free from limitation; complete and perfect in itself. Here one can hear the experience that workers have of companies as closed, auto-referential systems, tending to assimilate the variability coming from the relationship with the external world (that is human and social variability)—namely to incorporate it—in terms of an internal code that serves processes of management and control. This is particularly evident in the way time is symbolized: in the corporate myth of *being fast* time loses any reference to life and to social experience, which exposes workers to an experience of urgency and threat.

In these two clusters and in their opposition we find dense traces of a cultural change regarding the experience of work, at an emotional level, which has been taking shape over the last few decades, through the great recession of 2008 and, probably, the pandemic contingency of today. We speak of change in the sense that the polarization between two modes of experience associated with work now appears very clear: that is between being subjects within total systems, on the one hand, and being active subjects of an understanding through systems of relationships that enable the construction of *third elements* (Bucci & Vanheule, 2020) as the words competence and friendship represent, on the other. In this 2013 study, some clear signs of this question emerged and were discussed in the final meetings with the research participants.

Lacanian Discourse Analysis

Outlining the LDA field is not easy because what can be covered by the term LDA is not a clearly defined, well-established approach to analyzing discourse but rather a theoretical background, referring to Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the English speaking world the origins of the LDA can be traced to the reflections of Parker (2005), who positioned his works of Lacanian textual analysis within the field of critical discursive psychology studies. However, from the outset Parker and Pavón Cuéllar (2014) left LDA's methodological foundations deliberately vague and nonrestrictive. Although authors who put their works into the LDA domain recognize discourse analysis as a creative process affected by the position taken by the reader/researcher towards the text itself, some of them—such as Parker and Pavon Cuellar (2014), Lapping (2013, 2016), and Hook (2013)—ground their research on multiple Lacanian concepts. Others—such as Neill (2013), Vanheule (2016), and Van Roy et al. (2016)—position their research more clearly in Lacan's theory of the four discourses.

In our reading, LDA is always rooted in Lacan's later work, and implies the assumption that discourse is not a means of communication, but a means of *jouissance*: "the only discourse there is the discourse of *jouissance*" Lacan states in seminar XVII (1991/2007, p. 78). The concept of discourse implies an epistemological step beyond the primacy of the symbolic, making it a tool to study how the non-rapport that makes up the real of the social bond and of the unconscious is treated by kinds of speech and modes of relation.

Following Lacan in seminar XVII, at the surface level, any discourse implies an intersubjective relationship: an *agent* addresses an *other*. Yet, this agent is driven by a repressed *truth* and the relationship produces an unforeseen *product*, indicating that all discourse implies imbalance: the product is never appropriate in terms of the motivating truth. Such imbalances make people switch between discourses, such as between the discourse of the master and the discourse of the university, but actually demonstrate that discourse cannot master the non-rapport, but only shape it in particular ways.

In this line of reasoning the concept "rapport" has a specific meaning (Vanheule, 2014). Lacan defines the relationship between two elements in terms of a rapport if the laws that govern their bond are fixed. If this is the case, the relationship "can be written" (Lacan, 2011a, b/2018, p. 65). For example, within this view, gravitation is a relationship that can be written: starting from knowledge of the physical properties of an apple, like its mass, formulas make it possible to calculate how long the apple will take to touch the ground when it falls from a tree.

Applied to sexuality it could be argued that the way male and female animals interact is fairly uniform, and depends only marginally on how two specific specimens behave. Yet as soon as our focus is on humans, the nature of relationships is not given a priori. In this context Lacan (2011a, b/2018, p. 18) notes "the inability to formulate a precise rule at this point." A sexual relation is not established on the basis of the correct triggers being projected, but is always contingent, and shaped through an encounter. Thus, for humans, the sexual relationship cannot be written: it

cannot be formalized in terms of fixed rules that apply to each particular relationship: "The Other is absent from the moment that what is at stake is the sexual relationship" (Lacan, 2011a, b/2018, p. 104). This is why Lacan qualifies the sexual relationship as a non-rapport. The only things humans are left with are speech and discourse, which for Lacan (2011b, pp. 83, 148) should be thought of as an effect of the non-rapport. Indeed, all speech on the sexual non-rapport is a mere "half-saying" (Lacan, 2011a, b/2018, p. 12), meaning speech that is always beside the point.

In seminar XVII Lacan denotes the impossibility of writing the non-rapport with a triangle or a double slash, which he places at the lower level of his discourse formula, between "truth" and "product.' Furthermore, each kind of discourse implies an interaction between four elements: isolated signifiers (S_1), the signifying chain (S_2), the divided subject ($), and the object a (a).

Specifically he thus discerns five discourses (Fig. 2). In the master discourse insistent signifiers (S_1) that provoke explanation (S_2) come to the fore. Their articulation connotes the subject underlying this articulation of signifiers ($), and at the same time provokes an excitement (a) that is split off from the subject. In the discourse of the university an articulation of knowledge (S_2) comes to the fore, resting on inarticulate master signifiers (S_1) that give this knowledge a semblance of consistency. Such discourse provokes bits of *jouissance* in the other (a), but make

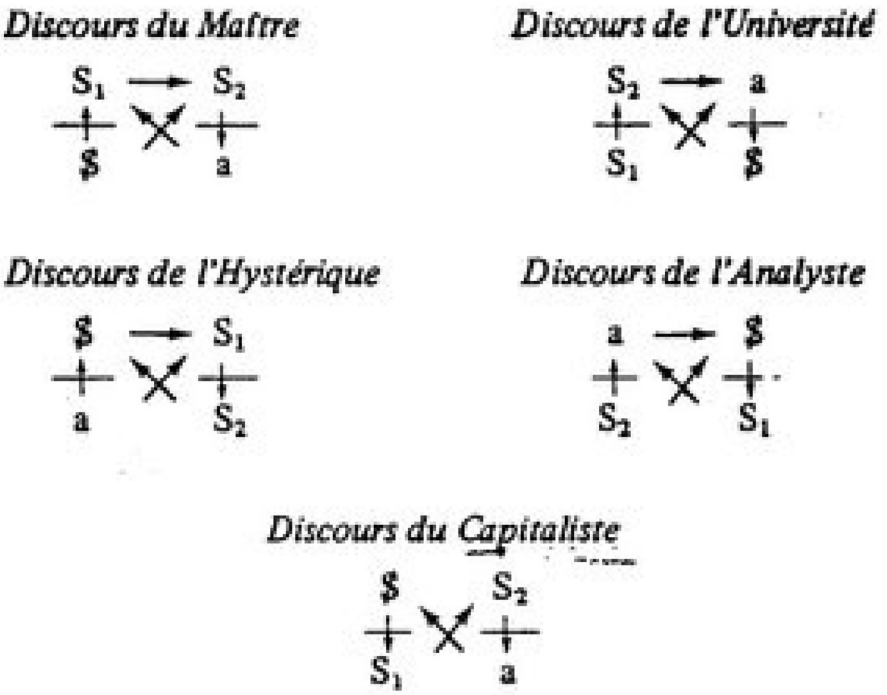

Fig. 2 Discourse of the master, discourse of the hysteric, discourse of the university and discourse of the analyst, discourse of the capitalist (Lacan, 1991/2007; 1978)

clear that in the end subjectivity is playing (*$*). Hysteric discourse starts from a plain articulation of divided subjectivity, which evokes surprising signifiers at the level of the other (S_1) and eventually results in explanations (S_2). The truth it is building is insistent senseless bits of *jouissance* (a). Analytic discourse means that an attentive presence (a) is brought to the fore, assuming that it provokes articulations of subjective division (*$*), which rests on unconscious knowledge (S_2). If taken seriously, this discourse results in the articulation of isolated signifiers (S_1) to which no fixed significations can be attached. To conclude, capitalist discourse is different. It denies the fundamental non-rapport, assuming that subjective division (*$*) can be solved by acquiring articulations that grasp its truth (S_1) and rest on knowledge (S_2). Yet the effect this has on *jouissance* (a) only reignites subjective division (Vanheule, 2016).

To exemplify this theoretical line of reasoning we now discuss an example of LDA carried out within a therapeutic community (TC) for children and adolescents with a diagnosis of psychosis and autistic spectrum disorders (Romelli & Pozzi, 2016). The research process started as the professional team of the TC realized that conflicting relationships between the parents of the children and members of the professional team generated an impasse in clinical work with the children. Clinically, working with parents is important, on the other hand, it introduces particular difficulties and moments of deadlock that mental health professionals must be able to recognize and manage. At an imaginary level, admitting a child to a TC creates two groups: the professionals and the family group. The group of professionals consists of individuals who are supposed to have expert knowledge, exercise parental responsibility, and take decisions. The family group is formed by parents who encountered difficulties in raising their child, which places them in a position of helplessness. The action research focused on the relationship between parents and the institution, and aimed at elucidating how deadlocks in the contact between them reflected a certain use of discourse.

To answer this question, the research team mapped speech and interactions during meetings in which parents met with the community staff. Conversations were transcribed verbatim and read by a panel of researchers trained in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Members of this panel separately identified discursive structures, narrative lines and stances related to arguments about relations with the institutional network and used to construct the positioning of parents and TC.

The following extract is taken from one of the meetings (Romelli & Pozzi, 2016). In this case, the psychologist leading the meeting asks an open question about an incident within the TC that involved two youngsters (girls), one educator (a young man) and indirectly the mother of one of the girls. The psychologist (PSY) and the parents of the two girls (M1 = mother; F1, F2 = fathers) speak in the extract.

PSY: May I ask … What about the fight?
F1: I don't know; someone touched a boy's privates.

M1: One educator was speaking with her, and she unwittingly gave him a kick, and then another girl touched his privates. The educator said something to her, and she started to shout. She called me and shouted, and I don't know, but you have to find some ways to calm her down, so she doesn't reach these levels.
F2: Our daughter is just here because you have to take care of her. If you are not able, we will take her away and go somewhere else!
PSY: In your opinion, what would help your daughter to calm down?
M1: Yeah…well…to be honest, it's difficult to calm her in certain moments. Finally, she only relaxed because another educator spoke with her, maybe you could have done it before, but I don't know.

The extract revolves around an incident that suddenly brought the issue of sexuality to the fore, which is in principle excluded from pupil-educator relationships: a first girl kicked an educator and another girl touched his privates. In Lacanian terms such an act is read as a wild attempt to address what the other sex is like and how to deal with it. As mentioned above, the difference between the sexes cannot be bridged and is usually just veiled and mediated through discourse. In this act, by contrast, sexuality is not treated with discourse. It directly stages the sexual non-rapport. In the conversation, as the psychologist asks about the incident, the mother of first girl responds, not by questioning the meaning of her daughter's behavior; instead, she questions the work of professionals, who failed to calm her. Based on her discontent (a) he installs a hysteric discourse that calls for an other with adequate responses. The focus on the professionals' work is also reinforced by the father of the other girl involved. Seemingly, these parents call for master discourse-like experts who take adequate decisions to control and shape the girls' drives and who are able to "regulate" their subjective expressions. They ask that the community's discourse operates starting from an S_1 capable of constructing knowledge that can contain (or rather, exclude) the *jouissance*.

Interestingly, in line with the analyst's discourse, the psychologist addresses the parents' reaction precisely by asking how they think such brutal confrontation with the sexual non-rapport could in fact best be addressed. He starts from the nonsensical quality of the act (*a*), wondering what adequate reactions could be. Analytic discourse does not intend to conceal the impossibility; on the contrary, it focuses on what remains irreducible to a mere explanation in terms of knowledge. This discursive articulation opens up the possibility of a further hysterization of discourse, in which it is accepted that knowledge cannot saturate subjectivity. In hysteric discourse, the subject does not recognize the knowledge of the other as true, but uses it as leverage to push forward the search for new forms of knowledge. The aim is not to provide or construct a shared meaning; rather, it is intended to highlight and support a process of subjective elaboration. However, in this example hysterization is only partial. On the one hand, the psychologist opens up to a subjective question that could help parents to construct a personal narrative about their daughters. On the other hand, he colludes with parents by reducing the discourse around the need to calm and placate the "unruliness" of the girls. This unruliness is precisely the sign of the girls' struggle with the sexual non-rapport.

Conclusion

Our conceptual and methodological comparison between LDA and ETA indicates in the first place that both approaches address the unconscious as continuously constituted in language, or, in other words, within the social experience, neither before nor outside of it. For this reason, research on the development and the uses of psychoanalytic methods of text and discourse analysis has given and might give, we believe, further impetus to reflection on the articulation between psychoanalysis and psychosocial studies.

Next to this similarity, our comparison revealed major differences in the role attributed to the unconscious and consequently to psychoanalytic inquiry in social experience. In ETA, words are clues to infinite emotions: by the unconscious way of being of the mind, the words of the interaction between the participants organize an affective sharing—a collusion—full of symmetrizing and synchronizing aspects. Like when entering a Norwegian *stavkirke*—we are referring here to a historical work by Carli and Paniccia (2011)—one finds signs, images, symbols full of meaning, which appear ambiguous in what they convey to us of their culturally multiple, not clearly distinct and therefore fascinating afferences. The *stavkirker*, medieval wooden churches, tell of a complex and conflicting cultural shift in the history of Norway, from paganism to Christianity, which took place in the space of two hundred years with profound political and social implications, still present in the emotions they evoke. Thanks to the encounter between the unconscious being and language, the stratified and complex semiotic baggage linked to the cultural history of a social group remains active and present in generating implications. In ETA—as well as in clinical work in its various possible settings—significant elements of such a baggage are reclaimed and given back to thinking. These process of thinking still charged with emotion reactivates the symbolic process through an understanding that is both grounding and unprecedented. In this sense, people can feel part of a cultural process and of a change, not in the sense of something that is decided by an act of will, but as orientation and disposition to action that is born from recognizing one's own involvement in experience. In LDA, on the other hand, according to the perspective that we have proposed here, the relationship between the unconscious and language is based on a fundamental non-rapport. This non-rapport concerns the non-harmonious relation between language and *jouissance,* and is expressed in the domain of sexuality in particular. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, Lacan accentuates that the individual transcends into the language through the recognition of the Other, starting from the 1970s, his emphasis is on the impossibility to found the subjective existence on such recognition. Speech therefore, no longer mainly entails recognition and identification; above all, it marks the existence of a hole in the signifying network. Thus, the unconscious becomes for Lacan what *does not cease not to be written* in the history of the subject, what has remained unrealized in someone's life and is doomed to be repeated. The new foundation of the human community, therefore, revolves around impossibility. Discourse, then, is a symbolic substitute for this deadlock. Each human interaction is founded on this absent rapport and is condemned to veil it through discourse.

However, such non-rapport also implies a creative impetus. The lack at the basis of all human interaction stimulates invention and reinvention.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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