

From where is truth questioned? Perspectives from lacanian psychoanalysis

De onde se interroga a verdade? Perspectivas da psicanálise lacaniana

¿Desde dónde se interroga la verdad? Perspectivas del psicoanálisis lacaniano

D'où s'interroge la vérité ? Perspectives de la psychanalyse lacanienne

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Abstract

This article is organized around the question Lacan poses in Seminar, Book XVIII: On a Discourse That Might Not Be a Semblance: from where is truth questioned? Drawing on a literature review as its methodological approach, we retrace Lacan's elaboration of the notion of truth throughout his teaching, which ultimately led him to formulate this question. To this end, we take as our guiding framework the recognition of two main paradigms: the structural anthropological and linguistic paradigm, prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, and the logical-mathematical paradigm, which came to the fore in the 1970s. From the 1950s through the 1960s, truth is linked to the negativity inherent in the movement of desire. In the 1970s, by contrast, it comes to be understood, on the one hand, as a place within the structure of discourse and, on the other, as a half-saying, modeled on the enigma. Along this trajectory, we identify how Lacan situates truth as a problem of language that foregrounds the dimension of enunciation sustained by semblance. Thus, the idea of a discourse that might not be a semblance emerges as a key to questioning truth.

Keywords: analyst's discourse, language, psychoanalysis, semblance, truth.

Resumo

Este artigo se organiza em torno do que Lacan apresenta no "Seminário, livro 18 – De um discurso que não fosse semblante: de onde se interroga a verdade?". A partir de uma proposta metodológica de revisão de literatura, recorreremos ao percurso lacaniano acerca da noção de verdade em seu ensino, que o conduziu a tal questionamento. Para isso, tomamos como linha-guia o reconhecimento de dois paradigmas principais: o antropológico e linguístico estrutural, presente nas décadas de 1950 e 1960, e o paradigma lógico-matemático, destacado nos anos 70. De 1950 a 1960, a verdade se vincula à negatividade do movimento do desejo, em contrapartida, na década de 70, passa a ser, por um lado, um lugar dentro da estrutura discursiva e, por outro, um semidizer, cujo modelo é o do enigma. Nesse

caminho, identificamos que Lacan situa a verdade como um problema de linguagem que centraliza a dimensão da enunciação suportada pelo semblante. Logo, a ideia de um discurso que não fosse semblante aparece como chave de leitura para se interrogar a verdade.

Palavras-chave: discurso do analista, linguagem, psicanálise, semblante, verdade.

Resumen

Este artículo se organiza en torno a lo que Lacan plantea en el Seminario, libro 18 – De un discurso que no fuera semblante: ¿desde dónde se interroga la verdad? A partir de una propuesta metodológica de revisión de la literatura, recurrimos al recorrido lacaniano en torno a la noción de verdad en su enseñanza, que lo condujo a dicho interrogante. Para ello, tomamos como hilo conductor el reconocimiento de dos paradigmas principales: el antropológico y lingüístico-estructural, presentes en las décadas de 1950 y 1960, y el paradigma lógico-matemático, destacado en la década de 1970. Entre 1950 y 1960, la verdad se vincula con la negatividad propia del movimiento del deseo; en cambio, en la década de 1970 pasa a ser, por un lado, un lugar dentro de la estructura discursiva y, por otro, un medio decir, cuyo modelo es el enigma. A lo largo de este recorrido, identificamos que Lacan sitúa la verdad como un problema de lenguaje que centra la dimensión de la enunciación sostenida por el semblante. De este modo, la idea de un discurso que no fuera semblante aparece como una clave de lectura para interrogar la verdad.

Palabras clave: discurso del analista, lenguaje, psicoanálisis, semblante, verdad.

Résumé

Cet article s'organise autour de ce que Lacan présente dans le Séminaire, livre 18 – D'un discours qui ne serait pas semblant : d'où la vérité est-elle interrogée ? À partir d'une proposition méthodologique de revue de la littérature, nous nous sommes appuyés sur le parcours lacanien autour de la notion de vérité dans son enseignement, ce qui nous a conduits à cette interrogation. Pour cela, nous avons retenu comme ligne directrice la reconnaissance de deux paradigmes principaux : le paradigme anthropologique et le paradigme linguistique structural, présents dans les années 1950 et 1960, ainsi que le paradigme logico-mathématique, mis en avant dans les années 1970. De 1950 à 1960, la vérité se lie à la négativité du mouvement du désir ; en revanche, dans les années 70, elle devient, d'une part, un lieu au sein de la structure discursive et, d'autre part, un mi-dire, dont le modèle est celui de l'énigme. Dans cette démarche, nous avons identifié que Lacan situe la vérité comme un problème de langage, en mettant au centre la dimension de l'énonciation portée par le semblant. Ainsi, l'idée d'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant apparaît comme une clé de lecture pour interroger la vérité.

Mots-clés : discours de l'analyste, langage, psychanalyse, semblant, vérité.

This article is organized around the question posed by Lacan in Seminar, Book XVIII: On a Discourse That Might Not Be a Semblance: from where is truth questioned? (Lacan, 1971/2009, p. 66). We begin with the hypothesis that the formalization of psychoanalysis as a discourse brings together the conditions necessary for this question to emerge within an analytic structure. These conditions include the status of the psychoanalytic subject and object, the discontinuity between knowledge and truth, the discrepancy between statement and enunciation, and the presence of the Real within the structure.

In this sense, considering Lacan's elaboration of truth up to the early 1970s, the work of psychoanalysis is sustained by questioning truth from a different perspective than that adopted by philosophy or science. This entails, on the one hand, questioning truth from an Other scene – the unconscious – and, on the other, taking into account the psychoanalytic premise of a not-all foundation, that is, working with incompleteness. Both aspects are evident in the methodological foundations employed by Lacan: linguistics and structural anthropology, which made it possible to conceptualize the unconscious as structured like a language, and the logical-mathematical paradigm, which enabled an approach to the singular features of the psychoanalytic structure: an evanescent subject and an elusive object.

Situated at the transition from the structural-linguistic paradigm to the logical-mathematical paradigm, Seminar, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis represents a move toward the formalization of psychoanalysis through the theory of the four discourses (Lacan, 1969–1970/2016). This move foregrounds the analytic experience by placing it in relation to three other discursive positions: the master's discourse, a position dominated by power; the university discourse, in which tyrannical knowledge comes to the fore; and the hysteric's discourse, which emphasizes the authority of the symptom. The analyst's discourse (the name Lacan gives to the discursive position associated with analytic praxis) differs from the others by foregrounding, within its structure, the very incompleteness with which psychoanalysis works.

Within this framework, truth comes to represent a place that “is only distinguished [...] by approaching what is at stake in the functioning of what arises from articulation in that place” (Lacan, 1969–1970/2016, p. 107),¹ i.e., insofar as it is occupied by one of the letters composing the discursive structures. The matheme of the four discourses is organized as a structure comprising four fixed places (the agent, the other, production, and truth) through which four letters circulate: the master signifier (S1), knowledge (S2), the subject (\$), and object a (a). With each quarter-turn, the shift in the positions of these letters produces one of the four discourses.

Under the primacy of the unconscious, truth enters the psychoanalytic fabric with a certain quality of concealment, as an enigma permeating the subject’s history in language and thus appearing as something that can be questioned. By the 1970s, in Seminar, Book XVIII: On a Discourse That Might Not Be a Semblance, Lacan (1971/2009, p. 66) delineates the horizon toward which his inquiry is directed, the point he sought to reach at that stage of his teaching: if truth has the structure of fiction (Lacan, 1956–1957/1995) and if its model is the enigma (Lacan, 1969–1970/2016), “from *where* [emphasis added] is truth questioned?” (Lacan, 1971/2009, p. 66). Our emphasis on the adverb points to a place from which it would be possible to question a truth corresponding to the psychoanalytic notion of truth.

Accordingly, the literature review undertaken in this study briefly retraces the notion of truth throughout Lacan’s teaching in order to establish a line of development in his thought that led him to the question formulated in Seminar XVIII. We first examine the construction of the notion of truth within the structuralist paradigm and its relationship to the ideal of science and to language. We then discuss the development of the concept through its increasing proximity to the register of the Real within the logical-mathematical paradigm. Finally, we examine in greater detail the moment at which Lacan formulates this question, foregrounding the concept that permeates this seminar: semblance.

Psychoanalysis, science, and language: truth in the realm of negativity

Throughout Lacan’s teaching, a sustained engagement with the problem of truth is evident, even though this notion underwent significant transformations as the French psychoanalyst developed his propositions. During the 1950s and 1960s, the methodological approach underpinning his theoretical developments drew on linguistics and structural anthropology, which established structure as the fundamental epistemological operator.

With regard to truth, Lacan (1955/1998b) presents it through an extended prosopopoeia that places it at the center of language, for at this point truth itself speaks. And truth speaks, as it were, in fits and starts, through dreams, jokes, and slips of the tongue; that is, it emerges in the contingency of speech as something that may, on occasion, speak. During this period, Lacan accords particular importance to the register of the Symbolic, with consequences for how the notion of truth is approached: it is conveyed through a figure of speech and fundamentally distinguished from reality.

At this stage, Lacan’s field of theoretical development is the field of language, which, together with the foundations of structuralism, establishes that “the unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan, 1964/2008a, p. 27). In brief, this important assertion foregrounds a signifying articulation that constitutes the structure of the unconscious, thereby bringing its subject (the subject of the unconscious) into view. In contrast to the one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified found in the Saussurean linguistic sign, Lacan not only rejects such correspondence but also grants the signifier primacy over the signified. Thus, the signifier (S1), a priori, has no meaning in itself. A second signifier (S2) must be articulated with it for meaning to be retroactively constituted.

To state that a signifier, in isolation and without articulation, has no meaning is to recognize that it depends on a relation. The signifier is defined by its systemic place, by the position it occupies in relation to another signifier (Milner, 1996). Only from within this position can it represent something for another signifier. Lacan (1960/1998) identifies two distinct movements in relation to the signifying chain: (1) the synchronic movement, concerning the construction of the signifying chain, which can be read from S1 to S2, from S2 to S3, and so forth; and (2) the diachronic movement, corresponding to the reading of meaning, whereby the already constituted chain is read backward: from S3 to S2, and from S2 to S1.

In the interval between the linkage of one signifier and another lies a fundamental gap in which the divided subject is brought forth. This subject is characterized by division and incompleteness, that is, by becoming evanescent in relation to the cause of desire. This occurs because, in addition to producing a subject, the operation of language also produces a remainder that cannot be apprehended by the Symbolic. Lacan calls this remainder object a, the object-cause of desire. Thus, the minimal structure within which language operates consists of S1 (the master signifier), S2 (the signifier designating knowledge articulated in a chain), \$ (the barred subject of the unconscious), and objecta.

The approach to language and the signifier is therefore situated within the paradigm of structure, that is, within the reduction of the operation of language to its minimal elements, without which no movement of language can occur. Among these four elements, object a stands out as belonging to this reduction, albeit through exclusion. Because it cannot

¹ For the purposes of this article, all direct quotations from the original sources have been translated into English.

be apprehended by the Symbolic, object *a* is fundamentally excluded from the structure; nevertheless, its exclusion is the condition that allows the structure to exist and function.

This property attributed to object *a* highlights a function of negativity that refers, on the one hand, to the concept of desire and, on the other, to psychoanalytic truth. Consider its clinical consequences: at this stage, Lacan works with the idea of full speech, that is, a moment in which the subject in analysis would be capable of taking ownership of their discourse, including what appears within it as faltering or inconsistent. What is recognized is “precisely the subject’s assumption of their history, insofar as it is constituted by speech addressed to the other” (Lacan, 1953/1998, p. 258). This subjective history, set in motion through speech in the analytic process, is what points toward the subject’s truth. This truth, however, is fundamentally structured as a fiction. This is because, like much of what concerns the question of origins, truth constructed as history begins from an obscure, negative point, from which the subject constructs something that can be nothing other than a fiction.

The subject thus takes ownership of the gap within their discourse, as though confessing a subjective truth enacted in speech addressed to the analyst. The gap, however, does not disappear, because what it establishes is the necessary inconsistency of the Other of language. Thus, by taking ownership of the failures in their discourse, the subject also takes ownership of the lack in the Other, which foregrounds the very capacity to desire and allows the subject to “recognize desire in its pure form, stripped of any empirical content” (Nunes, 2015, p. 425). In this sense, relating desire to a certain function of negativity means identifying pure desire as that which entails absolute negativity, that is, as a desire that cannot be referred back to any object and that, for this very reason, is reducible neither to need nor to demand.

It is within this logic of negativity, concerning both desire and truth, that the object specific to psychoanalysis (namely, object *a*) is situated. Let us consider this discussion in comparison with the object of science. For psychoanalysis, language does not have a purely communicative function, as it is understood in other fields of knowledge. On the contrary, because language is situated within the Symbolic and conveyed through the signifying chain, it performs a castrating function that foregrounds the discontinuity between language and the world of things. Whereas common sense understands truth as being stated on the basis of an equivalence between discourse and the object being spoken about, in psychoanalysis truth emerges in the discrepancy between reality and discourse, the place where the subject is structurally situated (Silveira, 2022).

However, the social function of language still leads us to believe in the illusion that the world of things can be mastered through words. Silveira (2022, p. 161) states that “the notion of the world is thus reduced to the reiteration, within the structure, of a potentiality for being said.” In other words, the domain of language creates the idea that the object – as designated by language – corresponds to the image of a world that would, in turn, be accessible to the subject. Against this backdrop, the discussion undertaken by psychoanalysis through the concept of the unconscious concerns precisely what is and is not encompassed by language, and what can and cannot become an object of knowledge.

According to the scientific tradition, the psychical is associated with consciousness, thereby linking the psychical phenomenon to the phenomenon of knowledge. As França (2013) explains, if “we were to identify the psyche with consciousness, the unconscious would belong exclusively to the physical order. However, if we assume that something psychical can be unconscious, Psychology cannot be reduced to the science of consciousness” (p. 179). The psychoanalytic unconscious thus represents a dimension of the psychical that, first, is not strictly physical and, second, is not encompassed by consciousness. In this sense, by understanding the unconscious through structuralism – i.e., by conceiving of the unconscious as a language – Lacan introduces a separation between the psychical phenomenon and the phenomenon of knowledge, assigning language a limited scope with respect to naming the objects of the world. This is because the very notion of the unconscious entails a lack of knowledge; thus, “how could the object be accessible to thought if thought itself is not accessible to itself?” (Silveira, 2022, p. 162).

This would constitute the distinctive feature of psychoanalysis in relation to science with regard to the apprehension of the object and, consequently, the treatment of truth. At this stage, Lacan is grappling with the ideal of science, addressing the intersections and disparities between psychoanalysis and science in greater detail in his 1966 text “Science and Truth.” Still working within structuralism, Lacan (1966/1998a) emphasizes that the recognition of the unconscious as a structure derives from the position the analyst assumes in relation to subjective division, for just as science begins from a hypothesis, the unconscious must likewise be understood by the analyst as a hypothesis. In other words, it is the analyst’s position in relation to the analysand’s unconscious that produces effects in the subject and directly points to the fundamental separation between knowledge and truth, such that the idea of the analysand’s conscious knowledge is replaced by a form of knowledge that brings the analysand closer to truth.

For Lacan, the subject is divided between knowledge and truth, a division exemplified by the fact that the inscription is not engraved on the same side of the parchment when it comes from the printing press of truth as when it comes from that of knowledge. That these inscriptions become intermingled was something that could be resolved simply through topology: there was readily at hand a surface on which the obverse and reverse are able to join everywhere (Lacan, 1966/1998a, p. 878).

The topology to which Lacan refers is the Möbius strip, a figure that illustrates the development beyond Euclidean geometry and makes it possible for the inside and outside not to be precisely delimited. The subject's division between knowledge and truth is experienced in this way, which, according to França (2013), marks a delocalization of truth. This does not mean, however, that truth is an adrift realm; rather, it is a non-place – in which negation marks a difference – circumscribed by the characteristics of the Freudian Unheimlich, recognized as familiar yet simultaneously experienced as uncanny. In these terms, the movement of psychoanalytic truth is established, first, through a subversion of the value attributed to consciousness and knowledge – which França (2013) calls established knowledge – and, second, by carving out its existence in a singular manner, in which inside and outside together “fleetingly and contingently establish the impossible existence of a localized universe” (França, 2013, p. 185).

In the discussion concerning the ideal of science, Lacan situates psychoanalysis within a form of formalization that does not disregard subjectivity and, therefore, does not suture the subject. It thus becomes possible to work analytically within the field of truth, understanding it as the subject's truth, which, for this very reason, requires a fissure, a fundamental opening in the Symbolic plane. Since its inception, the scientific enterprise has been dependent on thought as the sole means of acquiring certain knowledge. It is worth recalling that Cartesian truth was encapsulated in the maxim “I think, therefore I am,” which amounts to asserting that the domain of consciousness is responsible for constructing a form of knowledge capable of formalizing the scientific object. Psychoanalysis, however, works with an object whose very condition – as a lost object, excluded from the structure – makes it impossible to formalize in its entirety. In view of this, Lacan would come to work with the idea of formalizing the impasse, a means by which the French psychoanalyst sought to preserve the irruption of the Real into the Symbolic, which marks the subject's elusive movement.

That said, although truth is related to discourse, language in itself does not have the function of telling the truth. For psychoanalysis, truth is not constituted as a mere agreement involved in the communicative function (Silveira, 2022). On the contrary, it encompasses the point in language that is subjective, singular, and fictional. Thus, even though the object is constituted in language, it emerges through the negativity found in desire, which, in turn, refers to the emergence of the subject within the signifying chain. That which pertains to language and is shared is what constitutes reality, since reality is an imaginary consequence of the Symbolic plane of language. Owing to its very constitution through the specular image, the Imaginary domain organizes an illusion of completeness that constructs the plane of reality.

Discourse, on the other hand, although constituted on the Symbolic plane and forming part of what is situated within reality, has a particular point of reference. In Seminar, Book V: The Formations of the Unconscious, Lacan relates truth to this reference, stating that

by the mere fact of being speech, discourse is founded on the existence, somewhere, of the term of reference that is the plane of truth – truth as distinct from reality, which brings into play the possible emergence of new meanings introduced into the world or into reality. These are not meanings already present there, but meanings that truth causes to emerge within them, that it literally introduces (Lacan, 1957–1958/1995, p. 21).

Truth is thus consistently linked to the negative, which represents the movement of desire, a singular movement. As discourse circulates, truth (the subject's truth) is anchored in the point of failure that tells the analyst that discourse speaks beyond what is actually said (Lacan, 1957–1958/1995). After all, in Lacan's prosopopeia, “I, truth, speak” (Lacan, 1955/1998b, p. 410).

If truth does indeed speak, how is this saying structured, given the persistent presence of a negativity surrounding the notion of truth? Moreover, if the object of psychoanalysis is elusive, how does Lacan organize his proposal for formalization? Both questions begin to unfold around the 1970s, when Lacan comes to regard the structuralist paradigm as insufficient to address the methodological questions raised by an approach increasingly oriented toward the register of the Real. We will now examine the effects that the turn toward mathematical logic had on Lacanian thought and on Lacan's approach to truth.

Half-saying and the impossible: truth between the symbolic and the real

“I always tell the truth: not-all of it, because to tell it all [...] is impossible, materially: words fail. It is precisely through this impossibility that truth has to do with the Real” (Lacan, 1970/2003, p. 508).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Lacan drew on the methods of structural linguistics and anthropology to develop the idea of an unconscious structured like a language, locating truth within the symbolic movement of discourse. However, as the concept of structure developed within psychoanalysis – becoming capable of accommodating an evanescent subject and an elusive object – Lacan increasingly approached the register of the Real by defining the Real as the logical impossible, which manifests itself in the failure of the Symbolic. In other words, the Real reveals what escapes language and, consequently, structure. Linguistics and anthropology thus became insufficient to provide the methodological foundations for this new terrain in Lacanian thought, leading the French psychoanalyst to turn to mathematical logic in order to delimit his own

notion of structure more precisely. In these terms, “Lacan’s relationship with structure passes through structuralism but does not depend on it. Structure as a method for approaching and delimiting the Real is maintained” (Triska & D’Agord, 2017, p. 232), but now takes the form of a mathematizable structure.

In the second half of the 1960s, in “Science and Truth,” Lacan (1966/1998a) questions the scope of the methods of linguistics and anthropology in relation to the subject and object of psychoanalysis, once again highlighting the suturing performed by science. In these terms, mathematical logic enters the scientific scene as a proposal for the formalization and transmission of concepts that sought to exclude pure abstraction from experience, which, to some extent, had led to a psychologization of symbolization. The royal road pursued by figures such as Leibniz, Boole, and Frege was the development of a purely formal and objective writing that would require no supplementation by any other kind of language—that is, a form of writing free from the ambiguity and equivocation characteristic of natural languages.

In light of the work of the logicians, Lacan (1966/1998a) observes that:

It [logic] is unquestionably the strictly determined consequence of an attempt to suture the subject of science, and Gödel’s final theorem demonstrates that it fails to do so, which amounts to saying that the subject in question remains the correlate of science, but an antinomic correlate, since science proves to be defined by the impossibility of the effort to suture it (p. 875).

This passage highlights two main points: (1) the idea of a purely formal language, one that would exclude any trace of subjectivity, fails on its own terms because, as Gödel’s theorem demonstrates, formalization is consistent only insofar as it reveals the inconsistency inherent in its own formalization. In other words, it points not toward a formalization without remainder, but toward a failure that is itself logical (Lacan, 1968–1969/2008b); and (2) what the formalizing effort of logic produces provides Lacan with the conditions for constructing his own formal writing, a writing grounded in logical failure, which is characteristic of the structure of the subject.

It is precisely this failure that interests Lacan (1966/1998a), to the point that he defines logic as the science of the Real: a Real that intervenes in the symbolic order as a remainder that makes itself present in every operation. Logic opens access to the impossible that characterizes the Real insofar as mathematical logic demonstrates a mathematically realized Real (Cardoso, 2010). In this sense, the impossible is nothing other than a logical impossibility, that is, a logical obstacle contained within symbolic formalization.

In summary, mathematical logic demonstrated this relationship through the persistent paradoxes encountered in its formalizations. No matter how rigorously logicians sought to eliminate the equivocations characteristic of natural languages, logical formulas—written in mathematical symbols—continued to carry within their own structure the impasses of that very structure, something that remained elusive even while forming part of it. In this sense, logical calculus could never fully close upon itself; it could not produce a totality without encountering some impossibility, a paradox inherent in formalization².

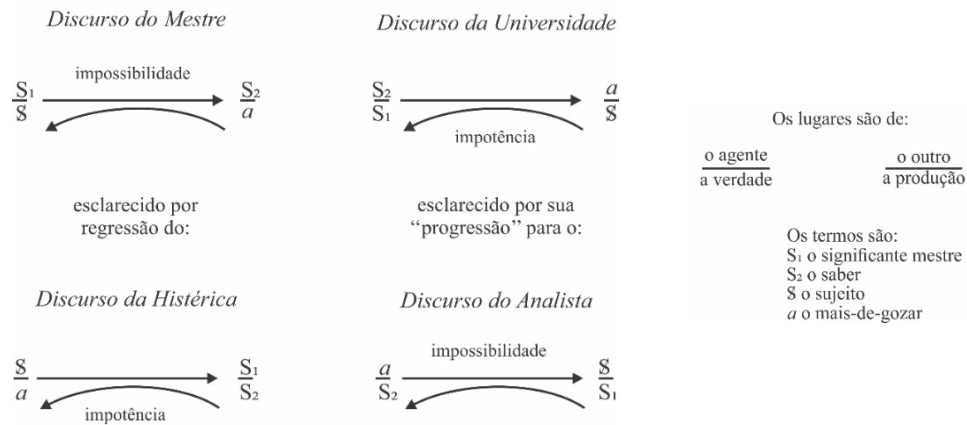
This type of paradox interested Lacan, and it was along this path that the structural paradigm gave way to the logical-mathematical paradigm, within which the proposal of literalization stands out as a means of reducing the qualities of objects to letters that compose mathematizable formulas. Lacan calls these formulas *mathemes*, recognizing in them the possibility of locating the Real as a logical impossibility, since the letter would carry the property of writing these fragments of the Real (Triska & D’Agord, 2017). Unlike the logicians, however, Lacan conceives the letter as a mechanism of transmission that represents less the impasse of formalization than the formalization of the impasse. Lacanian psychoanalysis therefore recognizes this impasse as the impossibility that the Real represents for any work involving the Symbolic. It is not without reason that Lacan (1971–1972/2012, 1972–1973/2008) points out that access to the Real occurs through the Symbolic, albeit a Symbolic grounded in mathematization. In this context, the letter is used as a material resource because, unlike the signifier, it is capable of moving between the Symbolic and the Real: it is a symbolic writing that formalizes and transmits the impasses of the Real, like logical-mathematical formulas. Thus, the logical-mathematical paradigm is added to the structural-linguistic paradigm in order to accommodate a psychoanalytic structure. Consequently, the approach to truth is likewise affected by this new encounter.

During this period, truth moves closer to the register of the Real and to the effects of formalization, thereby coming to bear a dimension of the impossible that also traverses it. Truth that speaks produced consequences at the discursive level, culminating in the formalized presentation of what Lacan (1969–1970/2016) called discursive structure, foregrounded in Seminar, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis. A discourse without words is how Lacan defines the formalizing gesture of social bonds that writes the *matheme* of the four discourses, as shown below:

² The main example of this is Russell’s reflexive paradox. In a simplified, literary form, we can describe it as follows: imagine a library that has decided to create a catalog (which we will call “Y”) to organize its collection. This catalog must include a list of all the library’s catalogs that do not cite themselves in their own pages. The paradox arises when we consider “Y” itself: if “Y” is a catalog that does not cite itself, it meets the criterion and must be included in the list; however, once included, “Y” begins to cite itself and must therefore be removed from the list. Yet, once removed, it again meets the criterion and must be included. Thus, the paradox continues indefinitely, without resolution.

Figure 1

The matheme of the four discourses.



(Lacan, 1970/2003).

Within this framework, the concept of truth underwent an important reduction. Allocated within the theory of discourses, truth comes to be configured as an a priori empty place, since it is a place of passage. In each of the discursive structures – the master’s discourse, the hysteric’s discourse, the university discourse, and the analyst’s discourse – truth is a place that allows for different causal readings depending on the letter occupying it. With regard to truth, the theory of discourses can be read as a transition “from a truth inscribed under the rubric of contingency to a truth conceived under the regime of the impossible” (Iannini, 2013, p. 37). Lacan proposes the four discourses on the basis of the three impossible professions identified by Freud (1937/1996) – the impossibility of governing, the impossibility of educating, and the impossibility of analyzing – to which he adds a fourth impossibility, the impossibility of making someone desire. This movement reveals a dimension of the Real present in every structure of a bond with the Other, which, because it is discourse, takes place through language.

Whereas truth had previously conveyed something about negativity—accompanying the movement of desire—it now bears within its structure an irruption of the impossible. The formalization of psychoanalysis as a discourse delineates the intimate relation of incompleteness between truth and knowledge, leading to Lacan’s (1969–1970/2016) presentation of truth in Seminar, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis as structured as a half-saying, modeled on the enigma, “for this is precisely how it always presents itself to us, and certainly not in the form of a question” (p. 108). Unlike a question, an enigma demands a response from the subject, who, first, is compelled to decipher it and, second, can do so only through the construction of knowledge that is singular and incomplete. At this point, Lacan (1969–1970/2016) states:

If there is one thing that our entire approach delineates, something that has certainly been renewed by analytic experience, it is precisely that no evocation of truth can be made except to indicate that it is accessible only through a half-saying, that it cannot be entirely said because, beyond its half, there is nothing to say (pp. 53–54).

This means that, even when situated within discourse, truth can never be fully said, because there is a dimension that the Symbolic cannot reach. It is therefore no coincidence that the place assigned to truth in discursive structures is a barred place, below the bar, which, within this framework, represents a place that is not-all accessible. In Seminar, Book XX: Encore, Lacan (1972–1973/2008) names psychoanalytic truth a congruent truth, which from the outset does not claim to be whole and whose defining feature is that it is not carried through to completion within the symbolic perspective of language.

Accordingly, the truth of discourse functions as the position that sustains the subject’s discursive movement, based on how the subjective handling of lack and castration has been able to respond, thereby marking, for each subject, the structure of a truth that, in addition to being half-said and arising from an enigma, writes a singular fiction. These properties place truth in the interval between the Symbolic – with what can be said – and the Real, preserving a dimension of the impossible. Reiterating this point, Iannini (2013, p. 283) emphasizes that “the impossible of fiction is indispensable to the functioning of language and subjectivity. More than that, the impossible is real. What links language to the real according to the structure of fiction is precisely truth.” Fiction, organized as a bridge between the Symbolic and the Real, is what lends consistency to discourse, opening it to the dimension of truth. Put differently, when the impossibility traversing truth operates from the void of the Real toward the Symbolic, the only possible construction is a fiction, one whose structure preserves the hole that the Real engenders in the Symbolic.

It is only within this framework that psychoanalysis recognizes truth. Truth gravitates within language and, for this reason, binds the Real and the Symbolic together in a particular way of bringing the subject into manifestation. The incidence of language divides the subject, and one of its effects is the separation between meaning and truth, since the impossibility established there also points to a limit inherent to language itself, given the nonexistence “of a discursive instance capable of identifying the real as real, or truth as truth” (Iannini, 2013, p. 204). In these terms, what enters the scene belongs to the order of semblance, a category that brings truth and the Real into play through the signifying function within discourse. We now turn to the consequences of introducing semblance into the theory of the four discourses and to the effects it produces on the questioning of truth.

Semblance: between truth and falsehood

In the theory of the four discourses, the status assigned to truth in its discontinuous relation to knowledge results in a torsion in the use of language, which becomes apparent through the concept of semblance. In these terms, the position of the agent of discourse is also designated by Lacan (1971/2009) as semblance; that is, within the laws of language that organize a universe – the universe of discourse – the one who speaks is also a semblance. And the one who speaks is always sustained by a truth. Iannini (2013) reminds us that “the question of truth opens up for human beings because language tears them away from nature, producing a double distancing: separated from the object, the subject becomes alienated in language” (p. 281). It is this distancing that gives human beings the capacity to feign, insofar as the operation of language makes them subjects of the signifier.

For animals, for example, there is no question of truth because there is no operation of language that, by separating them from the object, leaves behind a trace open to interpretation; that is, there is no question of mistaking the false for the true. Human beings, by contrast, are “animals capable of pretending that they are pretending: this is what happens in the theater, for example. It is also for this reason that they can pretend even when telling the truth, like Fernando Pessoa’s feigning poet³” (Iannini, 2013, p. 281). The capacity to feign is possible only because truth is found exclusively in speech in the form of a half-saying, which attests both to the impossibility of saying only the truth and to the impossibility of not saying it. Semblance therefore does not operate in opposition to truth; rather, by introducing through discourse a close relation between truth and falsehood that passes through the impossible, semblance becomes articulated with the Real.

Dunker (2017), in commenting on Seminar, Book XVIII: On a Discourse That Might Not Be a Semblance and examining the relationship among truth, discourse, and semblance, revisits one of the most widespread philosophical notions of truth: the idea of *aletheia*. *Aletheia* is a word of Greek origin, later taken up by Heidegger, to designate truth as something that reveals itself and, in this sense, presupposes a forgetting. This revealing is also connected to the idea of concealment, because [...] to veil means precisely to cover, an image commonly used to designate the relationship between appearance and essence. Appearance is what covers over, distorts, and produces a veiling. When appearance is removed, essence appears. To veil is to conceal, but to reveal is to veil once again and, in this sense, what is doubly veiled becomes shown. When Jacques Lacan proposes that semblance is sustained by truth, we can only read it through this key (Dunker, 2017, p. 68).

Therefore, considering the place Lacan assigns to semblance in discourse, the notion of *aletheia* appears to articulate the relationship between semblance and truth rather than truth itself, as understood in psychoanalytic terms. This articulation between semblance and truth, however, proves highly entangled, insofar as it is difficult to draw a precisely defined separation between them. For example, at the beginning of this Seminar, according to Lacan (1971/2009), it is when the function of semblance fails that something of the Real appears. Within the structure of discourse, semblance is situated above the bar that conceals truth and is supported by it; yet when semblance fails, it is not truth that is revealed: as the notion of *aletheia* might lead us to expect. What emerges is the Real, such that “in the failure of semblance, something appears that does not arise from discourse, speech, or language” (Dunker, 2017, p. 71). Thus, it is something that escapes, while nevertheless remaining part of the movement of discourse. This leads us to assume an interdependent relationship among semblance, truth, and the Real, which, in turn, becomes manifest only through what takes place in discourse.

On this point, Lacan (1971/2009, pp. 25–26) emphasizes that “truth is the dimension, or dit-mension – if you will allow me to coin a new word to designate this goblet – strictly correlative to that of semblance. The dit-mension of truth sustains that of semblance.” In these terms, we follow Cassin (2017) in understanding that the Lacanian neologism – combining the French word *dit* (said) with the English word *mansion* (house) – indicates that the fiction of truth is discursive, linked to the field of the Other of language. Put differently, truth “is an effect of the signifier, itself signifying, efficacious, and productive of effects” (p. 43). After all, truth speaks.

³ “The poet is a faker / Who’s so good at his act / He even fakes the pain / Of pain he feels in fact.” Excerpt from the poem *Autopsychography*, by Fernando Pessoa.

This is the novelty Lacan identifies when, still in this Seminar, he revisits his 1955 text, stating that “the first new fact, since the oracle began to function, that is, since forever, is one of my writings, called ‘The Freudian Thing,’ in which I indicated something that no one had ever said, eh? [...] I said that truth speaks I” (Lacan, 1971/2009, p. 66). With this in mind, let us return to the text he mentions, in the passage in which the psychoanalyst makes truth speak:

But here truth, from Freud’s mouth, takes the proverbial bull by the horns: “I am for you, then, the enigma of she who slips away as soon as she appears, you men who so readily consent to conceal me beneath the tinsel of your proprieties. Yet I do not deny that your embarrassment is sincere, for even when you make yourselves my heralds, you are no more worthy of bearing my banner than those garments of yours that resemble you, phantoms that you are. Through where, then, shall I pass within you, where was I before this passage? Will I ever tell you? But so that you may find me where I am, I shall teach you by what sign to recognize me. Men, listen, I give you the secret! I, truth, speak [emphasis added]” (Lacan, 1955/1998b, p. 410).

Returning to the initial question, “from where is truth questioned?” [emphasis added], we may infer from the passage above that truth offers a sign by which it can be recognized, and that sign is that truth itself speaks; it is therefore suggested that we may find it in speech. But how does it speak? For to say that truth speaks is different from saying that it tells the truth, as Lacan points out in Seminar, Book XVI: From an Other to the other [emphasis added]: “I made truth say: I, truth, speak [emphasis added]. But I did not make it say, for example: I, truth, speak in order to say myself as truth [emphasis added], nor in order to tell you the truth” [emphasis added] (Lacan, 1968–1969/2008b, p. 168). This statement has consequences for how we understand language, since it leads us to an important distinction between statement and enunciation.

Accordingly, the I that appears in the statement is not the same I that emerges from enunciation, and the Freudian discovery of the unconscious is what attests to this fact. According to Iannini (2013), Lacan links the emergence of truth to the Freudian novelty of the unconscious, endowing it with a rhetoric of its own, a position he adopted and developed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. However, Lacan’s interrogation of truth, the one with which we are concerned here, emerges in the early 1970s, by which time his formulation of truth had already reached the concept of half-saying as a device of enunciation. At this point, we may assume that truth speaks through a half-saying that emerges in enunciation.

Whereas philosophical truth and scientific truth seek to present themselves through their statements, psychoanalytic truth manifests itself through the primacy of enunciation. Thus, psychoanalysis recognizes that the claim that a statement can say what is true about truth, as science and philosophy seek to do, eliminates the dimension of enunciation. In contrast to this conception, psychoanalysis does not admit that there is simply a truth of truth. This corresponds to Lacan’s critique of metalanguage and of the Other (A) as a complete and closed set. To understand the Other in this way would be to admit the existence of an instance capable of containing within itself all signifiers and, consequently, all possible significations. Psychoanalysis, however, does not subscribe to such a conception, replacing this Other (A) with an incomplete and barred Other, which introduces into the field of language that which resists speech. Thus, the assertion that the Other is barred and the assertion that there is no metalanguage constitute the Lacanian condition for truth to present itself as a half-saying (Iannini, 2013) in enunciation.

In these terms, “enunciation belongs to the order of every possible representation, which stands opposed to the Aristotelian principle of noncontradiction, since it can operate with contradiction, without which nothing can be said” (Figueiredo, 2017, p. 446). The central role psychoanalysis assigns to speech/language is justified by its capacity for equivocation, through which the subject of enunciation and the unconscious itself emerge. Aristotelian logic, by contrast – which sought to determine the truth value of a statement on the basis of certain propositions – proposes three principles: (1) the principle of identity, according to which a true proposition is true and a false proposition is false; (2) the principle of the excluded middle, according to which a proposition is either true or false, with no third possibility; and (3) the principle of noncontradiction, according to which a proposition cannot be both true and false at the same time.

The introduction of the Freudian discovery into the field of knowledge unsettles, above all, the third principle, because, as Lacan (1971/2009, p. 68) reiterates, “this is precisely what you discover with the unconscious [...]. That the unconscious always tells the truth and lies is, starting from it, perfectly sustainable.” The same applies to truth. “You only know something about truth when it breaks loose” (p. 68), when it speaks through enunciation, to the point that truth can even say, “I am lying.” The “I am lying,” a well-known paradox in classical logic, ceases to present itself as a paradox when examined at the level of speech and enunciation, as admitted by the Other scene—the unconscious. Lacan (1971/2009, p. 67) refers to this in a particularly illuminating way: “I will remind you, more simply, of something I have already emphasized, namely, that any of the so-called paradoxes at which classical logic comes to a halt, specifically the I am lying [emphasis added], can only be sustained from the moment it is written.” Thus, when analyzed, “I am lying” is, at the level of the statement—that is, at the level of what is written—a lie; at the level of enunciation, however, it is a truth.

Several years earlier, Lacan (1964/2008a) had already clarified that the division between statement and enunciation means that, in effect, in the I am lying [emphasis added] situated at the level of the chain of the statement—the am lying [emphasis added] is a signifier that forms part, in the Other (A), of the treasury of vocabulary in which the I [emphasis added], retrospectively determined, becomes a signification engendered, at the level of the statement, by what it produces at the level of enunciation (p. 138).

The I about which truth speaks – “truth speaks I” (Lacan, 1971/2009, p. 66) – is therefore an effect of enunciation. Language, once set in motion, reveals, beyond the apparent statement, the effect of enunciation. Thus, “I am lying” can only be taken as a paradox if we remain confined to its semantic value as a statement. However, once we consider the subjective function at work in language (Iannini, 2013) – as psychoanalysis does by not excluding the subject from the structure – we can see how the problem of truth comes to bear upon the Other, the unconscious, and enunciation. In this context, the paradox is situated where there is a separation between the divided subject—the subject of the unconscious – and the Other of language – the inconsistent and barred Other.

Accordingly, Lacan (1971/2009, p. 14) states that “the truth in question, the one I said says I, the one that enunciates itself as an oracle, when it speaks, who is speaking? This semblance is the signifier itself,” and further that “everything that is discourse can only present itself as semblance, and nothing is constructed within it that is not based on what is called the signifier” (p. 15). The subject’s alienation in language reveals a dimension of the Real that remains uncovered by the Symbolic and by the chain of meaning, making truth that speaks a half-saying, sustained by the signifier precisely in its insufficiency.

There is no discourse that is not semblance, insofar as the agent that establishes a social bond – that which produces collectivity, as Lacan (1971–1972/2012) puts it – is nothing more than a signifier that assumes the function of semblance. Semblance, therefore, refers to the dimension of a lying truth insofar as, spoken through a signifier, it reveals the dynamics between statement and enunciation and points to the Real at stake in every discourse.

Final considerations

It is from the intersection among the categories of truth, semblance, and the Real, which occurs within the field of discourse, that we can approach Lacan’s question: “from where is truth questioned?” Let us consider the particularity of psychoanalysis as a discourse. The mode of listening employed by the analytic dispositif, with object a in the position of agent, makes the place of semblance a desubstantialized place. The consequence of this lies in the prominence given to the place of truth, which, in this arrangement, is occupied by the unknown knowledge of the unconscious. This leads us back to the assertion that what is expected of an analyst is precisely the ability to operate with knowledge in relation to truth (Lacan, 1969–1970/2016), thereby demonstrating the structure of interpretation.

Psychoanalytic interpretation, insofar as it produces effects through the object-cause of desire, is capable of modifying the subject’s symbolic place within psychical dynamics (Kaufmann, 1996). Put differently, by working with the equivocality of speech, a not-all knowledge functioning in the place of truth acts upon the hole in the symbolic chain of meaning and, consequently, produces the signifier from another perspective. Semblance as such is therefore made to fade through the enunciation of this lying truth. Thus,

If analytic experience is implicated [...], it is precisely because it preserves the force of the oracle’s enunciation and, I would further say, because interpretation always remains at the same level. It is true only through its consequences [emphasis added], like the oracle. Interpretation is not subjected to the test of a truth to be decided by yes or no; rather, it unleashes truth as such. It is true only insofar as it is truly followed (Lacan, 1971/2009, p. 13).

From where, then, is truth questioned? From a discourse that might not be a semblance. If interpretation unleashes truth as such, it does so only because object a occupies the place of semblance, performing a certain function of effacement that, in turn, provokes the truth that sustained it.

In this sense, analytic discourse can sustain itself as a discourse that is not semblance, culminating in Lacan’s statement in the following seminar that the analyst “is the one who, by placing object a in the place of semblance, occupies the most appropriate position to do what must rightly be done, namely, to question as knowledge what belongs to truth [emphasis added]” (Lacan, 1971–1972/2012, p. 102). Truth, therefore, can only be questioned on the basis of what the speaking being articulates as knowledge. This knowledge is, in fact, an enigma.

Based on the trajectory presented here, this study brings together concepts relevant to psychoanalytic clinical practice and research in psychoanalysis, indicating several theoretical implications concerning the notion of truth. These implications delineate differences between the psychoanalytic approach to truth and those of philosophy and science, particularly in the way truth is intertwined with language. First, we emphasize that truth operates beyond meaning, constituting a fiction produced by the subject in the gap between reality and discourse. Second, with the turn toward logic and the theory of discourses, truth comes to occupy a place that sustains the semblance of a discourse. Consequently, truth is not found in what is said, but in the act of saying. Truth does not present itself through statements; rather, it speaks through enunciation, by means of a device of half-saying whose model remains the enigma.

Thus, whereas the notion of truth initially appears closer to the register of the Symbolic, semblance, half-saying, and enunciation later bring it closer to the register of the Real. It is here that the limits of our study lie, as we have not pursued

developments concerning truth through Borromean topology, in which the knotting together of the Imaginary, the Real, and the Symbolic may yield further implications and interpretive possibilities.

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