

## Formation of Symbolic System in Lacan's Psychological Theory

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### ABSTRACT

Jacques Lacan believes that man's subconscious mind has a structure like that of language. It means the same relation between the indicator and the indicated governing the lingual system exists in the subconscious structure, too. In other words just as the application of indicators like sounds and words create a chain of the indicated or meanings in the mind of the listener (audience) the subconscious, too, when in contact with indicators such as taste of foods, smell of persons or seeing some pictures, awakens some memories in the form of the indicated in our mind.

Affected by Freud's theories, Lacan believes in a basic difference among three concepts of *need*, *attraction* and *desire*; and as he considers he first concept as a physical force believes in a psychological process for the other two.

Lacan brings the "Oedipus Complex" hypothesis into the lingual system. In his point of view when the child is born, he enters a competitive climate with the father to possess the mother. Now, in order to compete with the father, this child should attend the same symbolic system where the father had already entered and should use language as the tool create this relation. This article is an attempt to show how the language is formed in this symbolic system.

**KEYWORDS:** Jacques Lacan, language, subconscious, indicator, indicated, metaphor, symbolic system

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### INTRODUCTION

According to the Freudian theories the subconscious is the most fundamental part of the human psychic system and is the place of innate attractions and suppressed tendencies and memories wherein the events are registered as they take place. Usually, it is not possible to gain access to the subconscious; and this knowledge is likely to be accessed in the subconscious arenas, i.e. *dreams*, *tongue lapses*, *tongue discrepancies*. These formations imply the suppressed tendencies that find the chance to emerge out of the individual's will power and are guided by a network of the *representatives* which are in no way detected by the individual's awareness, for they contain mysterious and ambiguous information.

Discussing the representatives, Freud speaks of mental traces, i.e. a topic or object imprinted in our mental system. He believed that when a word is uttered these mental traces go from the subconscious to the conscious phase.

Using this Freudian view, Lacan expressed his own theories:

"The unconscious is that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual which is not at the subject's disposal in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse" (Lacan p: 214)

According to Lacan's psychoanalysis the subconscious structural system is a collection of memories manifested in the form of a series of notions. These notions are like the orbits rotating around a central pathogenic core; the closer an individual comes to this center the more his resistance will increase and the more difficult will be to enter this core which forms the fundamental of the individual's personality, for it contains the most mysterious and hidden layers of the individual's personality. The presence of lingual elements can bind these notions together.

Just like language which makes a chain of sign units in the form of a coherent structure, human subconscious stores up, like lingual codes, a collection of sign and symbolic elements that are the outcome of the individual's frustrated tendencies and unmet desires.

Mysterious notions existing in the subconscious that emerge in the form of ailments, have an interrelated system--just like the sign language--and create a network of the indicators. Reading a collection of these indicators or ailments will lead us to decode the individual's subconscious.

In this article, besides explaining the subconscious structure in Lacan's theory, we will analyze the relation between the psychological elements and the lingual models; we will also examine the Oedipus complex in Lacan's psycho-lingual approaches.

#### Important Characteristics of Subconscious in Lacan's Philosophy

1. The processes of the subconscious system are not arranged according to the time sequence; that is to say they won't alter with the lapse of time. To put it simpler, this system has nothing to do with time and is able to remain unchanged during time because, basically, timing belongs to the human conscious system.
2. The processes of the subconscious system are not formed on the basis of realities, but this system is a subordinate of the principle of pleasure. In other words, the objective realities of the world outside are replaced by the psychic realities.
3. The subconscious system functions according to storing the obtained information; and this act is done without making a distinction between the pure and impure or real and unreal.

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One of the characteristics of Lacan's theories, compared to those of Freud, is the systematic organization of the subconscious as an intertwined network of the human perceptions.

### Relation of Psychological Elements and Lingual Symbols

According to Lacan's system every sign is comprised of three elements, namely, indicator, indicated and "reference." Indicator is the sign which conveys the meaning; but the indicator is the concept created of the indicator in our mind. Reference is the link between the first two concepts which can be embodied and objectively manifested in the real world.

For example, let us review the memory of falling from a bike in childhood that has left a scar in our face or body. The sign of this wound is the indicator which conveys a meaning in the symbolic system. The indicated is what has remained in our mind from the incident; here it can be a memory of a violent behavior of one of our playmates during childhood who made us fall from the bicycle. The reference is the thing which has exactly happened; that is falling from the bicycle.

Irony is considered a figure of speech in literature and linguistics whereby a concept implies a secondary concept. With the help of irony we use a small part to express a whole (sword instead of war); or we use a trivial element to express an important one. In Lacan's opinion this very phenomenon happens in our memories, dreams and tongue lapses showing our subconscious; that is to say that manifestation of an apparently trivial factor indicates a basic defect inside us. For instance, sometimes fear of animals has its roots in a deeper fear remaining since childhood in our subconscious; the fear resulting from the continuous anger of the people around us during childhood gives way to fearing outside elements (animal, insect) or any other external factor.

The metaphorical role of language better appears when we want to show that every discourse or writing, principally, stems from the subconscious motives originating from the early years of human life; and it is just here where the theory of infinite indicators and the "lost indicated" is raised. From the view point of Lacan there is no relation between words and the objective world. And every "indicator" is a tool to express the indicated; it is lost because reaching the ultimate meaning is impossible. According to psychology this lost indicated is manifested in the subconscious of the individual due to the suppressed elements leading to censorship of his discourse structure. For this reason, it can be said it is only the indicators that govern our discourse because the indicated or meaning is constantly postponed.

Lacan believes that the individual's subconscious domain precedes his conscious one, for, since his birth he is placed in a symbolic network of links and similarities, and that is why he writes in his book "writings": "Subconscious is the desire towards *another one*." But what he means by "another one" includes numerous meanings. First, "another one" is just "language" which is the manifestation of a symbolic system. Secondly, it is an inter-mental relation between the psychoanalyst and the patient.

Thirdly, "another one" is the same as "subconscious psyche" of individual that appears in the form of "other than me" and it is just in this arena that the subconscious emerges as discourse but a discourse needing to be decoded.

Following Freud, Lacan puts forward three concepts of *need*, *attraction* and *desire*. Need is a physical force while the other two concepts show a psychological process.

Freud puts attraction between the two forces of need and desire. In his opinion attraction is an enduring force stemming from the man's biological and organic nature which tends to eliminate any discrepancy factor in man's psycho-physical system. Yet it is distinct from a simple physical need because, by provoking man's carnal desires, it enters his psychological structure before anything, though it doesn't specifically belong to the psychological system of human being. Indeed the attraction force enters individual's psychic system via perceptual means.

But the "desire" force is exactly been set in line with the psychological system and according to what the individual perceives from the pleasant and unpleasant things or processes it is oriented. This force is able to make the psychic system act and move. "Desire" is able, as an effective force, to create discrepancy in the psychic system and enter a phase where the means of the "attraction" force have already entered. But "attraction" refers to the physical need which itself is the founder of "attraction", however, it shows the lack or loss created after separation from mother's body.

According to Lacan, *lack* is the starting and void point of the human psychic structure which creates organic needs; so it appears prior to internal and physical "attractions." The presence priority of this lack or loss will be possible through "discourse" or speech manifested in the form of the "indicator." Therefore, this lack goes very much near to the "attraction" force. But this "lack" is more a kind of deficiency which has not yet found a rhetoric element in the form of "indicator" while the "attraction" force is a call for answering the carnal needs, and also shows a kind of disorder in the physical structure of man. But Lacan considers "desire" the linking factor which preserves unity among the elements shaping the individuality of human being. Lacan explains the mental subconscious manifested in the form "discourse" via elements that shape the human individuality.

For instance, if Phillip's subconscious desire is to make relation with Marie, this desire is to block the *castration* disorder caused by separation from mother. Since childhood this desire has been surrounded by an indicator substituting mother; or put it better, it is surrounded by a phallus (masculinity) substitute indicator—it should not be forgotten that the child tends to play the role of a male for his mother. This tendency which is subconscious is conducted in the form of drinking milk from the mother's breast. Thus, in the example of Phillip, this desire of drinking milk during childhood will be replaced by another mouth attraction (kissing) Marie during adulthood.

Lacan likens crossing the stage of lack to the stage of desire to the human subject (actor) seeking aid from language; that is to say with the presence and interference of father that hinders any relation with mother, individual resorts to the lingual

system and thus all the Libido attractions are deviated from the real path in him and go towards explanatory (expressive) discourse and tendencies, but this banning will lead him to independence of personality.

According to this reaction the child expresses his need through discourse; but he organizes his psychic system with the help of language and externalizing this depravity. Therefore, we can divide his situation in two parts: first his subconscious reality and second using the tool of language in the conscious world which is a reflection of the same subconscious reality.

As it was mentioned the subconscious psyche has no connection with the logical world but the elements existing in it make the individual's fundamental structure or in fact his individuality. Lacan shows the *fundamental indicators* of the subconscious as some examples during the childhood:

1. Feeling the smell of mother's body by the child upon returning from a short picnic.
2. Change in mother's tone.
3. Seeing a speckle on mother's face.
4. Mother's warm hands touching the child's face.

Each of these indicators affects one of the child's five senses, namely, smelling, hearing, seeing and touching. The presence of these fundamental and elementary indicators links the child with the real world. These transient and effective moments make the child suspending between the world of pleasure and the world of discourse, and thus one of the ways of the human subject to enter the world of language becomes possible via these elementary indicators, although there are not linked by any internal logic because they deal with the world of pleasure and have no time logic or order. So they appear in the subjective world only when the organized language parameters are present.

Prior to the birth of the child father and mother are linked via a pleasure-seeking bond. As soon as the child is born he finds a place in their bond. From now on the child enters a competitive atmosphere with the father to possess the mother. Interestingly, this is not exclusive to the son but the daughter acts just like the son to gain pleasure from the mother's body. Now, to enter this scene of competition with father, the child should find a place in the discourse with mother so that he/she is capable of entering this system of pleasure. Therefore, he/she must attend the same symbolic system where the father has attended, and should use language as a tool to create this discourse.

However, the child won't be able to have mother exclusively and he/she has no other choice but to give in to the *symbolic castration*. The mother, too, submits to this paternal law and prevents the child from this bond. Indeed by father's interference and preventing the child, he/she is banned to associate with the mother.

Yet, the child spares no efforts to reach this point. Noting that the bond between the father and mother is made through language, the child tries to exactly use the same method to have the mother's bosom again. According to Lacan if the child had succeeded to make the bond with the mother he/she wouldn't have been able to be equipped with the language tool. As a result, replacing the elementary lost pleasure by discourse is done via a substitute element that Lacan calls them metaphor and irony.

But this suppressed desire which manifests the child's internal reality will never be satisfied through discourse and the endless chain of the indicators: "There is always a stage beyond discourse, and in the process of speech-therapy desire appears as an incurable element which is itself the result of the distance that constantly exists between the internal need and discourse."

## Conclusion

According to Freud and Lacan the subconscious is like an internal core of the human psyche. The activities of this core appear through the tendencies that exist in these indicators in the form of the Libido forces. These representatives form a part of the human perceptive system and the way they act is comparable to the sign system of language. In addition, these representatives are a symbol of every individual's psychic attractions. Lacan insists that the content of this subconscious, like the language signs, has an expressive and media nature.

According to the Oedipus complex hypothesis, the individual subconscious is impacted by an early frustration, i.e. separation from mother; and these representatives are able to represent the individual's subconscious content and even register the individual's internal attractions. The Oedipus desire drives the child to associate with the mother but he/she is placed in a competitive climate with the father and this desire of his is suppressed. Yet this suppression creates personality independence in him and forms his/her social identity:

"This ego, whose strength our theorists now define by its capacity to bear frustration, is frustration in this very essence.

Not frustration of one of the subject's desires, but frustration of one objet in which desire is alienated" (Lacan p: 208)

In Lacan's opinion psychoanalysis is a structural analysis of the situation of the subject human that is on the conjunction of the imaginary perception and the symbolic discourse; and language can be the conveyer, the support and the place of emerging of the human wisdom.

If the "human desire is desire to another one", this "another one" is the very discourse which is a shadow of the suppressed desires. Therefore, in explaining Lacan's ideas, it is not an exaggeration to say that there is no change from that primary desire of the childhood and today's desire; and rather the way of its appearance has altered.

In fact, every discourse can provoke the desire force and at the same time it can make clear the situation of the "subject" vis-à-vis that desire. Thus every discourse is the conjunction of desire, discourse and another one. And desire is manifested in the individual's discourse.

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