

Article type (Conceptual Review)

PSYCHONEUROSES AND NEUROPSYCHOSES: FREUD, POST-FREUDIANS, AND DSM/ICD

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Abstract

This study examines the distinction between psychoneuroses and neuropsychoses in Freud's work on the basis of a documentary analysis of the original German texts compared with their English and Portuguese translations, highlighting how this translation process generated conceptual ambiguity. Freud initially used the term Neuropsychosen as a synonym for psychoneurosis but later reserved the term "psychosis" for severe cases involving a rupture with reality. The results of the analysis reveal that the literal translation of the German term "neuropsychoses," in both English and Portuguese, induced misinterpretations, suggesting that Freud was already referring to psychosis in its modern sense. The article also discusses post-Freudian reinterpretations, particularly the contributions of Klein and Lacan, and draws a parallel with contemporary psychiatric classifications (DSM/ICD), which abandoned the term "neurosis" in favor of specific descriptive categories. It is concluded that the historical trajectory of these translations reveals both the conceptual richness of psychoanalysis and its growing divergence from current psychiatric nosography, with implications for the contemporary reading of Freud's work.

Keywords: Freud; psychoneurosis; neuropsychosis; translation; DSM; ICD.

1. INTRODUCTION

Freud's work established fundamental distinctions between actual neuroses and psychoneuroses, used by Freud to differentiate clinical presentations whose symptoms result directly from a current disturbance of sexual life from those whose symptoms derive from repressed psychic conflicts. However, the translation of the original German and subsequently into Portuguese via English generated interpretative distortions that persisted in the contemporary reception of the author's work. This article aims to clarify these differences on the basis of a documentary analysis of the original texts, to discuss post-Freudian reinterpretations of the theme in Klein and Lacan and to situate the debate in relation to modern psychiatric classifications (DSM/ICD), which progressively moved away from classical psychoanalytic terminology.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A documentary analysis of Freud's works in the original German was conducted, comparing the translations into English (Standard Edition, translated by James Strachey) and into Portuguese (Imago and Companhia das Letras editions). The review included the following key texts: *Die Abwehr-Neuropsychosen* (1894), *Zur Ätiologie der Neurosen* (1896), *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1905), and *Hemmung, Symptom und Angst* (1926). In addition, works by post-Freudian authors (Klein, Lacan) and reference psychiatric classifications (DSM-III, ICD-10) were consulted, with the aim of comparing the original Freudian terminology with its reception in the target languages and with contemporary psychiatric nosography.

This study is theoretical, conceptual, and documentary in nature and does not involve human or animal subjects; therefore, the requirements for research ethics committee approval or informed consent do not apply.

Data availability: The primary sources analyzed correspond to published works by Sigmund Freud and post-Freudian authors, which are publicly accessible through libraries and specialized publishers; there is no unpublished data to be deposited.

Use of artificial intelligence: Generated artificial intelligence tools were used exclusively to support the formatting and structural adaptation of the manuscript to the journal template and were not used to generate the theoretical content, analyses, or conclusions of the study.

3. RESULTS

3.1 *Freudian terminology*

- Psychoneuroses (Psychoneurosen): hysteria, obsessions, and phobias, whose symptoms derive from repression.
- Neuropsychoses (Neuropsychosen): This term was initially used by Freud as a synonym for psychoneurosis; the author later reserved the term "psychosis" for severe cases involving a rupture with reality.
- Translations: In English and Portuguese, the literal translation as "neuropsychoses" reinforced the mistaken idea that Freud was already referring to psychosis in its modern sense.

3.2 *Post-Freudian reinterpretation*

- Klein: reinterpreted neuroses as early drive conflicts associated with object relations in early infancy.
- Lacan: structural distinction between neurosis, psychosis, and perversion, with the introduction of foreclosure as the specific mechanism of psychosis.
- Other authors: Winnicott and Bion expanded the clinical understanding of neuroses from other theoretical perspectives.

3.3 *Psychiatric classifications (DSM/ICD)*

- The term "neurosis" was abandoned starting with the DSM-III (1980), in favor of descriptive categories.
- The conditions previously grouped under the term "neurosis" were redistributed into specific diagnoses, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorders, dissociative disorders, and somatoform disorders.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed that the literal translation of *Neuropsychosen* as "neuropsychoses," in both English and Portuguese, generated conceptual confusion that was relevant to the contemporary reading of Freud. In the period when he used this term, the author was not referring to psychosis in the modern sense but defend against neuroses conditions in which repression, rather than a rupture with reality, constitutes the central mechanism. The later evolution of Freud's work, in which the term "psychosis" came to designate specifically conditions involving a rupture with reality, was not accompanied by a retrospective terminological revision in the established translations, which contributed to the persistence of this ambiguity.

The contributions of Klein and Lacan, in distinct directions, consolidated structural distinctions between neurosis and psychosis that do not find direct correspondence in the original Freudian terminology as reproduced in translations. Lacan, in particular, by introducing foreclosure as the specific mechanism of psychosis, offers a structural criterion that allows for a more precise distinction between conditions that Freud, at different points in his work, designated using similar but nonequivalent terms.

The contrast with the DSM/ICD highlights the growing divergence between psychoanalytic language and contemporary psychiatric nosography: while post-Freudian psychoanalysis refined the structural distinction between neurosis and psychosis on the basis of metapsychological criteria, descriptive psychiatry abandoned the term "neurosis" in favor of categories on the basis of observable and operationalizable criteria. This divergence does not invalidate the psychoanalytic clinical reading but calls for caution when concepts are translated between the two fields, particularly when similar terms carry distinct meanings in each tradition.

As a limitation, this study is restricted to the documentary analysis of already published translations, without a systematic survey of all editions and re-editions of Freud's works in Portuguese, which could be further explored in future studies focused on the history of the translation of psychoanalysis in Brazil.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that distortions occurred in the translations of Freud's works regarding the distinction between psychoneuroses and neuropsychoses, with an impact on the international reception of these concepts. Post-Freudian psychoanalysis, particularly through Klein and Lacan, refined the distinction between neurosis and psychosis on the basis of structural and metapsychological criteria, whereas modern psychiatry reorganized the corresponding clinical presentations into descriptive categories within the DSM/ICD framework. The historical and comparative analysis presented here contributes to understanding both the conceptual richness of psychoanalysis and the limits of its terminology in relation to current nosographic classifications, reinforcing the need for terminological caution in studies that engage both psychoanalysis and contemporary psychiatry.

Conflict of interest statement: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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