

VOCALISATION AND VERBALISATION

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This paper considers aspects of language that are discussed in two papers by Donald Meltzer – ‘The interaction of visual and verbal language in dreams’ (1980), and ‘Temperature and distance’ (1976), in the hope of defining more specifically the nature of the ‘deep grammar’ of psychoanalytic communication in the consulting room – termed by Bion (1970) ‘the language of achievement’, after Keats’s definition of a ‘man of achievement’ as one who has ‘negative capability’. How and what may be happening when states of mind are being communicated, apparently on a verbal level, yet as is often acknowledged, the words express very poorly the real quality of the emotional conversation. We know that poets can use language on two levels – the discursive (surface grammar) and the presentational (deep grammar), which is conveyed through musical diction; hence the durability of the art form. But what is the poetry of psychoanalysis? where does the meaning reside? Is it even possible to convey it verbally to anyone else outside the session?

From vocal origins to symbolic container

In her classic work *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) Susanne Langer differentiates between ‘discursive’ and ‘presentational’ symbols. The former are culturally received or fixed, notational symbols used in everyday speech; the latter are evolutionary, autonomous and artistic, and may or may not be verbal. According to her description of the song-and-dance origins of language, the purpose of ‘presentational’ symbols is to reflect lived and felt experience, rather than to exchange information. Langer’s aesthetic theory was founded in the first instance upon an investigation of the expressiveness of music, which she links with the innate human capacity for symbol formation in general, including language. She points out that the ear is always open, a perpetual voluntary receptor, whether asleep or awake. From the most primitive stage in development onward, innate awareness of a listening ear stimulates outgoing sound; as soon as some ‘experience has occurred to the vociferous little human animal’ it demands to be heard (p. 45). There is an ‘underlying idea’ which unites both the projecting voice and the listening ear.