

The Theory and Practical Application of Sounds in Therapy

ROBIN STEELE



Sound and, in particular, the sound of the human voice, have been used since time began to quieten the mind and for healing. This is reflected in the use of mantras and chanting in Hinduism and Buddhism. Dance, movement, breath, voice and sound are used as therapeutic tools across many of the somatic approaches to therapy, to increase awareness, to support expression, to 'energise' and to calm and soothe. In this article, ROBIN STEELE describes Psychophonetics - a method that draws on the work of Rudolph Steiner and Yehuda Tagar - and uses the sounds of the human voice, sensing, body awareness, movement, gesture and visualisation as extensions to conversational counselling.

The power of sound and music are celebrated in many of the great spiritual traditions as an important tool to quieten the mind and open the heart. There is a long tradition in the use of sounds for healing. Many ancient cultures used the sounds of human speech for healing and ritual purposes, and mantras or repetitive chants are still common in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Sound can effect us on all levels – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual and there is increasing research that shows the use of voice, resonance and music can improve physical, emotional and mental conditions (Tomatis, 1991; Goldman, 1992; Andrews, 1994; Skille & Wigram, 1995; Maman, 1997; Heather, 2001 & Gaynor, 2002). These writers also show that modern science supports the belief that all matter comes from vibration or sound, and that physics continues to find evidence that the physical world is made up of vibrating energy. Sound is produced when an object vibrates and each organism exhibits its own vibratory rate and every object has its own unique resonant frequency. One example of how this is applied is in medicine where sound waves are now used to break up kidney and gall stones in the body. An overview of the positive results of scientific research into sound are described by Heather (2001, pp.20-37). More extensive and detailed research can be found in the work of Dr. Tomatis (1991) done over fifty years with more than 100,000 clients and Maman's (1997) research on the biological effects of sound on cancer cells and with people with breast cancer.

This growing interest in the use of sounds for healing can be seen in the

increasing number of music and sound therapy courses being established. One of the most powerful ways to explore the power of sound is through our own voice. The voice can transmit a healing intention more effectively than any instrument (Maman, 1997, Goldman, 1992 & Heather, 2001).

Psychophonetics

This article explores the use of human speech sounds as a mode of experience-awareness within a theoretical context of *Psychophonetics* counselling and psychotherapy. Some practical applications of sounds for self-awareness and healing are discussed, in particular, how sounds can be used to express inner experiences, leading to greater perspective, as well as being used as therapeutic tools for releasing blocks, for nurturing, healing and for transformation.

Psychophonetics (previously called *Philophonetics*) is a body-oriented expressive and artistic therapy that embraces the whole human being as body, soul and spirit. Developed in the 1980's by Yehuda Tagar, its theoretical and methodological roots are based in the spiritual work of Rudolf Steiner, in Anthroposophy and psychosophy, humanistic psychology and the

expressive arts. It is a methodology of experience awareness that applies Body awareness, Movement/Gesture, Visualisation and Sounds as extensions of conversational counselling by utilizing these nonverbal tools to access, explore, express, transform and to communicate human experience, from the individual's own point of view. *Psychophonetics* psychotherapy is a phenomenological approach to human experience that facilitates the client to become more conscious of their own knowing and way of being in the world.

'One way to deliver new faculties of self-knowledge is through the sounds of our inner landscapes, within the psyche ... and through conscious relationship to one's experience through sensing, movement, visualisation and sounds of human speech.' (Tagar, 1995, p.8).

Tagar (1996) identifies four major modes of knowing and communication that allow for direct experience and verbal communication: *sensing, gesture/movement, visualisation and sounds*. In the first phase of a counselling session, conversation, a common picture between the client and therapist is developed. This is regarded as a '*reflective dynamic of intelligence*' and is viewed as a '*second hand medium, a translation*' of experience. (p.13).

Human experience, according to Rudolf Steiner's (1994) model of the human being, is imprinted or registered in the 'subtle bodies' that lie somewhere between the physical body and the mind – in the ether or life body and the astral body (the body of emotions, desires, feelings). The memories of experience live here, at an unconscious level, an 'invisible reality' made up of 'processes, rhythms and formative forces' (Tagar, 1995, p.2).

The 'subtle bodies,' are similar to the concepts of chi, prana, etheric, dream-body and other notions of the life body. Steiner (1982; 1983a; 1994) describes the nature of the human being, as comprising a physical body, life-body, sentient-body and self, or I. The life Body is seen as the source of the formative forces where memory is held. Tagar (1995) proposes that the material or substance of these subtle bodies is made up of vibrations, the same 'material' that constitutes sounds. Because of this, sounds have the capacity to resonate within the realms of the subtle bodies, and through this are able to access directly all of the unconscious stored memories and experiences residing there:

'...when all the sounds of human speech resound around a living human body, every aspect of one's inner experience, from every phase and level of one's life echoes and vibrates with them, like the strings of a piano with the sound of guitar strings nearby. Our subtle bodies, etheric and astral ...are like the resonance chamber of the sounds...The sounds are the hidden language of our inner life.' (Tagar, 1995, p.23).

Chopra (1991) confirms this and suggests that every part of the body holds the memory of all of our experiences within its cells. These atoms, cells and tissues are composed of very faint vibrations that hold DNA together, which Chopra contends are the strongest forces in nature.

Assagioli (1975), the founder of psychosynthesis, discovered through his therapeutic work that every sound or note can have physical and psychological effects. In the 1960s Hans Jenny, a Swiss scientist, spent over ten years conducting experiments to discover that sound has the power to cause geometric shapes to form on sand and to cause glass to shatter. By 1974 he came to the conclusion that:

'... each individual cell generates its own sound, groups of cells also generate their own sounds, as do the organs of the body and these are harmonically related to each other. Sound creates form and the entire human body has its own sound made up of all the sounds of its cells, tissues and organs' (Heather, 2001, p.21).

Assagioli (1975, p.240) remarked 'how much more powerful then must be the impact of this force (sounds) on the vibrating, living substances of our sensitive

in this case), Tagar (1999) proposed in 1986 that:

'Beyond cultural differences, there lies the universal human experience of the single sounds and the choice of a particular sound for the expression of a particular experience, is of a universal nature ... The sound 'T' is an expression of a range of very specific experiences. One has to experiment with the sound 'T' ... in order to become conscious of it: one has to sense it, feel it, act it and play with it. The sound

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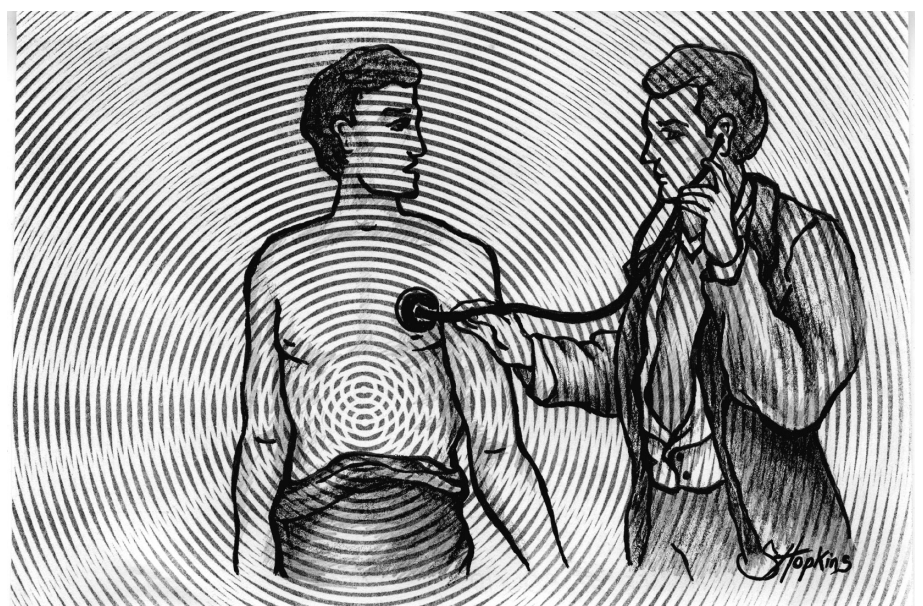
bodies!'

In utilising human speech sounds the focus is on the single sounds of vowels and consonants, as these are universal and underlie all languages, connecting to the most primal human sounds of expression before the formation of words – babbling. Tagar states in Crowley and Crowley (1992, p.290) that 'babies all babble in exactly the same way.' Just as babies spontaneously play, experiment with and 'express much of their inner experiences through the sounds themselves', so adults can reconnect with and renew 'this intimate relationship with the single sounds of language'.

In the discussion of the function and expression of the same sounds in words from different languages (the sound 't'

'T' will then be able to reveal its various characteristics. It will appear to be pointy, tight, penetrating, tough, strong, ticklish. It will make sense then why a word like 'tree' starts with 'T', while a word like 'post' ends with it. The first starts from its strong grip in the ground and ends in its free movement in the air above, expressed by the 'R' of 'tree'; the second comes into the ground from above, gets stuck in the ground, where it stays at rest. (p.143)

One of the major classifications of the sounds is by the basic elements. The European classification consisted of four elements: Earth, Water, Air and Fire, while the Chinese scale included five elements: Metal, Wood, Water, Air and Fire. Tagar (1997) has developed this further and included the sounds of



human speech, as the following scale of the elementally classified sounds:

Earth element: G, K, D, T, B, P (the plosives).

Wood element: Ng, N, M (the Nasals)

Water element: L, W .

Air element: R1, R2, R3, R4 (said in four different ways – Scottish, English, French or African accent)

Fire element: H, S, Sh, Z, Th, Ch, F, V, Ts (C), Tch, Dj, J, Y, Th. (the fricatives)

Light element: All the vowels (16). A (ah), E (eh), I (ee), O (oh), U (oo), Ä, Ö, Ü and the diphthongs: A-I (ai, ah-ee), A-U (ao, ah-oo) and O-I (oi, oh-ee), U-I (ui, oo-ee) and reversed.

This basic alphabet is culturally biased in the direction of the sounds we are most familiar with, but others are also free to add more sounds that come from their own experiences and from different cultures. Steiner (1960, 1982, 1983b) and Tagar (1997, 2001b) describe in more depth the spiritual and cosmic nature of the alphabet, and its application in healing which I will not go into in this paper, but is interesting to study further once a personal exploration, awareness and connection with the sounds has been established. Maman (1997) concluded from his experiments that the human voice has not only a physical aspect and emotional colour, but an added element not found in any musical instrument. This is a spiritual resonance that comes from the will of the person making the sound.

In exploring the sounds listed on this model I became aware that the following sounds have not been referred to – ch, q, x, y, and z. This is because they are a combination of other sounds. (e.g. q = k & w). On this basis, Steiner (1960) stated in 1924 and Tagar (1997) confirms that there are only about 35- 40 sounds world wide that form the foundation of all languages. These sounds can perform a variety of functions, including expressing inner experiences, releasing inner blocks, as tools for nurturing and transforming experiences. If we explore each sound we find they have a unique quality or characteristic. Speaking single sounds creates a particular shape of air flow through the mouth and nose that can be traced through joining the air flow with hand movements.

Crowley and Crowley (1992, p. 289), Steiner (1982,1983b) describe some of

the typical inner and outer expressions and responses that can occur while experiencing the sounds said aloud, and when expressed with the whole body:

A (ah) - opening, wonder,

U (oo) - narrowing, deepening,

K - breaking through a barrier, cutting, MMM – nurturing,

T – pointing, of incarnating,

D- consolidating,

G- guarding, fending off,

B- embracing, holding movement.

However, it must be remembered that although there can be a commonality of experience with each sound there are also individual differences in the experience of the sounds and in sound combinations. Newham (1999) in Heather (2001) supports this by saying that our voice reflects our sense of identity and the sound of our voice reminds us of who we are. The definition of personality comes from the latin words 'per sona', which means 'the sound passes through'. This can mean that changing our voice pattern can change the way we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us, and our voice can help us to express the different personalities within us.

Sounds have shapes, movement and direction (Tomatis, 1991; Tagar, 1999 & Jenny in Heather, 2001). The shapes made by experiences in the subtle bodies echo with the shapes created in us in response to sounds. Tagar's research found that this experience of the shapes is of the imprinted experiences in the subtle body, which can be sensed through bodily sensation, and expressed through bodily gestures, movement and sounds. For the practitioner, the skill of *sound-naming* is to find the compatible sound that creates the same specific shape of the already created and imprinted experience. For instance the shapes could be closed/open; straight/curvy; hard/soft; imploding/exploding ... etc.

Sounds also create forms and disperse them, allowing or preventing movement. In many healing traditions the life body (etheric, chi or prana) is seen as a sphere of energy in constant motion. Sickness is considered to be movement that is blocked, while healing involves the release of blocked energy into movement. Therefore the sound naming of the movement is as important as the sound naming of the form. Some examples

of types of movement are: heavy/light; fast/slow; contraction/ expansion; inward/outward; straight/round ...etc. These movements and sounds also have a specific direction, for example, upwards, downwards, pulling, pushing, from behind, from the front ... etc. (Tagar, 1999).

When I experiment with sounds by saying them aloud and continuing or extending them, I come into contact with this elemental characteristic of each sound. For instance, *earth* sounds such as 'dddd, bbb or kkkk' can suggest to me the qualities of incredible resistance and denseness, as well as solidity, holding, enclosing and an ability to break through. As expressions of inner experience, the earth sounds evoke in me feelings of frustration, anger and unresolved struggle and effort as well as solid foundations. They can effectively express all that is blocked and being held back. The same sounds however, can also be used to release blocks. By exploding the sound I make to express an inner block such as anger, I experience a corresponding release of energy of what was blocked previously inside of me (eg. moving from sounding a blocked HUG/ or HUD/ into a released GAAH or DAH .. etc.). The release is even more effective if accompanied by corresponding physical gestures or movements. Sounds are most effective when they arise organically out of breathing into a gesture of a particular experience and physical movement with the whole body and sounding aloud. The particular sounds applicable for each person emerge as unique expressions of an individual's specific soul experience in that particular time and place.

The sounds related to the elements of *wood* and *water* (eg. n, m, ng, w and l) can be for me warm, flowing, caressing and nurturing. They can evoke experiences of being soothed, calmed and comforted. There seems to me to be a suggestion in these sounds that there is a certain fluidity about things. This is reflected in the common expression 'mmmm', when something is still being 'mmmulled' over, ponnndered ... mmmm...mmmabe..

The water sounds (w and l) for me can still be nurturing, but appear more light and open with more motion in them that involves the whole body. The gesture that

comes to me is a fluid wavelike motion. The sound 'lll' suggests something 'alive, living, like a waterfall' These sounds correspond to the life (or etheric) level of existence and the life processes.

The *air* sound 'rrrr' is an effective and fun way to enliven the energy when feeling tired, it travels and moves

the consonants. It is an interesting exercise to become aware of where the vowel sounds originate in the body and to explore how the expression of the vowels can possibly relate to and stimulate our faculties of imagination, inspiration and intuition (Steiner,1982). For instance, the experience of seeing

49) describes in more detail the nature of the different sounds in his paper 'Cooperating with the life forces from within', especially with regard to the connection between the characteristics of the elements and their corresponding groups of sounds. Tagar (2001a, 1997) concludes from his observation and experience that:

'The sounds of human speech, consonants and vowels, are forms of vibration which can directly echo and simulate the whole range of human experience, which live in the body in forms similar to the vibrations of speech. Every human experience, once expressed in a gesture, can find its precise counterpart in a particular combination of sounds of speech (2001a, p.2).

Tagar (1997) suggests that sounds are the deepest and most powerful mode of operation of our body of life and its forces. Assagioli (1975, p.260) supports this comment by saying that 'we trust that the magic of sound, scientifically applied, will contribute in ever greater measure to the relief of human suffering, to a higher development and a richer integration of the human personality.'

With regard to therapy, through working with body awareness, gesture and visualisation the sounds can then address and enhance the bodily memory of experience and access untapped inner resources. The capacity of sounds to resonate with specific imprints of experience makes them a powerful therapeutic tool as they can simulate the experience of invasion, of inner and outer pressures, impositions, abuse, criticism as well as the experience of protection, pain, release, nurturing and all aspects of desired inner strength. Sound therapy in combination with the other nonverbal modes is also effective for the practice of creating personal boundaries and for asserting one's own power, presence, rights, speaking and expression (Tagar, 2001b). The sounds give the client a range of tools for the exploration, expression and communication for change and improvement in their inner life. It is important to always approach this activity in a phenomenological way, this means that we are encouraged to 'study human experience and the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience' (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2),

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around, dispersing and scattering the energy, depending on how it is sounded. Combining sounds as 'brrr' (sounded through the lips) and shaking the whole body at the same time can be even more effective.

The *fire* sounds (s, sh, ha, f, v and possibly j and z) can represent to me a further enlivening and development from the air sounds. They have action, warmth, force and direction. Like fire, there is no holding them back, especially Hah, Shh, S. In exploring some combinations of sounds, for example - k-sh, w-sh - these seem to describe a process of breaking out from some form of resistance. The words 'crash' and 'woosh illustrate such a process. The sounds can always be explored further and will mean different things to different people according to their own experiences.

There are also a group of sounds that are useful for specific types of release and sometimes for naming certain types of attacking inner forces. They are the fricatives/explosive and steam releasing sounds, made by combining a particular earth sound with a particular fire sound and with no vowel sound in between them: For example, G-H; K-Ssss; T-Ch; T-Ssss; D-J; P-Fff; P-S; P-Sh; etc. (Tagar, 1999).

The vowel sounds are different from

a beautiful sunset and the feeling that arises within may be enhanced by responding aloud with the sounds 'aaah', 'oo' or an extended 'w-ow' or with whatever sound/s that come naturally with that feeling.

This articulation may serve as a beginning of being inspired to paint the scene or to write a poem or to imagine a future holiday or to realize intuitively that it is time to go and live by the sea ... The point is that by engaging in an exploration of the different vowels this activity could help to identify more clearly what is being evoked within one's soul life through this experience of the sunset. It may be a yearning, a knowing or maybe excitement for a future possibility. The sounds can be a source of release and of healing in our life body as we experience them as events taking place within us, as subtle vibrations. The following poem is inspired from an experience of sounding and moving the whole body with 'shhh'.

'Shhh ...' (sounded with extending, rising & falling of the sound, on the breath)

*I am the warm winds,
I am the shifting sands
I grow and change forever,
The landscape expands*

From the psychotherapeutic perspective, Tagar (1999, 1997, pp. 47-

so that the freedom and uniqueness of each person's experience is respected.

The following examples describe the client's experience of using sound as part of their therapy:

Marilyn: 'On this particular day there was a difference in my nurturing, (imagined/visualised) my heart was first covered in a woven blanket of love and warmth, which was pink and gold, and this then replaced with a pure gold blanket and it was ultra fine like fine toffee, but was soft not brittle, that covered my heart and yeah, it felt, was really lovely. The sound (I sounded) was a warm high vibrating energy 'MMMMMM' sound, with a central point to it but also vibrating graduating out, that was very nice and then after a couple of days of nurturing my heart, this beautiful pink colour surrounded by exquisite perfumed rose petals, I could visualise and smell the petals. I had some wonderful sessions nurturing my heart, I can smell, a divine smell absolutely. A warm gentle feeling sound 'MM' came with feeling.

...I could see the colour yellow with that sound and it's dancing, so the sounds changed which was interesting because there was a difference in the changes, it felt like the heart had been healed, so with that healing the joy was able to manifest itself and be in there. Until the heart had actually been healed and been given these nurturing sounds and the love that it required it couldn't experience joy. The sounds made a big change for me.'

Zeus describes his experience of using the whole body when speaking the sounds of 'Gah', and 'D' during part of his therapy process:

'I think using the body makes a big difference, because it's not just a conversation, you are actually participating and what you do is you, you are not told how to do it, it's just what comes out of you in each situation. It's just invigorating and feels that once I've released the block and set up the boundary I do find I come back within myself.'

During Margaret's twenty hours of labour she seriously considered taking a painkiller, but changed her mind when she remembered her learning from the therapy sessions, to accept the pain and not fight it. When she joined it with her breathing and sounding 'om', 'uhhh', and other fluid, open sounds, she could endure her contractions and ride with

the experience. 'I was meeting each moment with sound and by the time I had sounded out the sound fully, the pain had passed.'

The experience of the therapist

Perhaps, more so than in many other mediums, the therapist who chooses to use their voice or non-verbal communication tools in their therapeutic work, must attend to their own development first. Heather (2001) describes research by John Diamond that proposes the purpose of speech is to raise the life energy of the listener so that he/she is benefited by the communication. From his research in 1983, Diamond suggested that about 90% of professionals who use their voices as their therapeutic tool 'will not be able to raise the life energy of their client – their voices are non-therapeutic'. (Heather, 2001, p. 35).

Eggers (2003) emphasises in her study that if the therapist is using nonverbal communication tools in therapeutic work then the therapist must first experience, and make an in depth connection with, these tools and their own issues and experiences. Without attending to their own experience and development, the therapist may be limited in their ability to reproduce a transitional space whereby the client can become increasingly integrated, intra-personally and inter-personally.

Conclusion

Steiner predicted in the 1920's that pure tones will be used for healing before the end of the 20th century, while Nostradamus foretold the healing of cancer through pure tones and Edgar Cayce also predicted that the medicine of the future would be sound.

Perhaps the future is now?

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AUTHOR NOTES

ROBIN STEELE is a Ph.D. candidate at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, WA in the final year of completing her research on 'A phenomenological and longitudinal study of clients' experience of therapeutic change in Psychophonetics holistic psychotherapy'. Her supervisor is Professor Dawn Freshwater, Professor of Mental Health and of Regional Professional Studies at ECU. Robin is a Philophonetics (Psychophonetics) counsellor and psychotherapist, in private practice for twelve years, a trainer and supervisor. She is a teacher and supervisor working in early childhood, and a facilitator for personal development groups.

Comments can be sent to: Lifeways@bigpond.com