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A dialogic approach to actor voice training: applying findings from Conversation Analysis to the work of voice coaches

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Abstract

This contribution explores the opportunities afforded by research on the prosody of naturally-occurring talk for the work of actor voice coaches. An analysis of actor voice textbooks shows that current actor education conceptualizes speech as a product of the individual speaker, with a focus on learning lines and soliloquies. However, some actor educators have called for 'a dynamic and spontaneous responsiveness to create real communication' (Gutekunst and Gillett 2014: 9). This aligns with research in the field of Conversation Analysis, which shows that prosody is a dialogic rather than a monologic domain of language. In natural conversation, speakers align prosodically with other speakers, thereby building a non-verbal bridge irrespective of the content of their talk. These insights have not yet been applied to actor voice education, where they have the potential to transform dialogue coaching. The paper provides an overview of conversation analytic work on prosody and juxtaposes this with a thematic analysis of how current actor voice training conceptualizes voice. Subsequently, it outlines areas for cross-fertilization with benefits for both fields.

Keywords: prosody, acting, conversation analysis, mirroring, responsiveness

Introductionⁱ

The work of actor voice coaches involves working with the actor's voice so that it is prepared to fill a variety of spaces safely, make sense of the text, and use their voice to communicate the text and emotional stakes of the character. This includes working on what linguists refer to as 'prosody', that is, the musical aspects of speech. Prosody work presents diverse challenges for voice coaches regarding the expectations of directors and of actors. For example, directors can complain that actors sound monotonous, even after a full vocal warm-up. However, actors can be reluctant to deploy prosodic features that are highly expressive since they can view such speech patterns as inauthentic or old-fashioned. Actors also

sometimes link prosody to their accent work, in that a small number of pitch patterns can help actors find and ‘anchor’ an accent. When a limited range of pitch patterns is used recurrently, this can result in a repetitive delivery without enough focus on the context of the dialogue. This paper suggests that underlying some of these challenges is a view of prosody as derived from the internal world of the actor and their character rather than from interaction with others. Through a thematic analysis of actor voice textbooks, we identify a gap between dominant assumptions of actor voice training, which have a strong focus on monologue; and the underlying principles of Conversation Analysis, which are inherently dialogic. We propose that cross-fertilization between the two fields can create valuable new impulses for actor voice training, and vice versa.

In the following, we briefly introduce Conversation Analysis and some basic findings on prosody from conversation analytic research. Subsequently, we present a review of nine textbooks for voice that are used in actor voice education today. Specifically, we ask how they conceptualize ‘voice’ by presenting a thematic analysis of their explicit claims and positioning. We end with the proposal of a ‘Responsive Voice’ approach to actor voice education.

Conversation Analysis: talk as inherently dialogic

Conversation Analysis (CA) is an approach to understanding social interaction that is prominent in Sociology, Linguistics, and related fields. A basic notion of CA is that almost everything we do in conversation is jointly achieved with others rather than being the product of a single person’s mind. One of CA’s seminal publications was Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson’s (1973) paper on turn-taking in conversation, which showed the intricate mechanisms by which conversationalists organize the back-and-forth of changing speakership. CA’s primary concern is with this back-and-forth, and with basing all understanding of what speakers do and say on what was done and said before. CA’s most important unit of analysis is the ‘sequence’, rather than on words or sentences. This means that CA does not place much emphasis on single utterances (or ‘turns’) but instead sees them in the context of prior and subsequent talk. The minimal sequence is the adjacency pair (Schegloff 2007), that is, a sequence of paired actions where a First Pair Part (e.g., a request) makes a Second Pair Part (e.g., compliance with the request) relevant. By adopting this inherently dialogic perspective, CA has revealed a myriad of ways in which

conversationalists collaboratively achieve social actions that may previously have been considered monologic acts, such as showing emotions (Hepburn and Potter 2012) or storytelling (Stivers 2008). While initial CA studies focused mostly on verbal content, researchers soon became interested in the role of the voice and the body. For the purposes of this study, we will briefly present some conversation analytic findings on the role of the voice in interaction.

The prosody of naturally-occurring talk

Much of what actor voice training subsumes under the concept of ‘voice’ falls under what linguists refer to as ‘prosody’, that is, the suprasegmental aspects of speech: pitch (intonation, pitch register and range), loudness, and time (tempo, rhythm, duration, pauses). Some definitions of prosody also include voice quality (e.g., creak, breathiness, whisper) (Szczepek Reed 2010a). In natural talk, prosody plays an important role in managing conversation, including turn-taking and sequence organization. It is important to note that it does so in interplay with other linguistic resources, such as lexis, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics; and with embodied resources, such as eye gaze, gesture, and body posture. Overviews of the role of prosody in naturally-occurring talk can be found in Walker (2012) and Szczepek Reed (2012a). For the purpose of this paper, we focus on a specific aspect of prosody, which is the role of prosodic mirroring for showing interactional alignment with other speakers. The topic of prosodic mirroring, or ‘matching’, has been studied widely in research on natural interaction (e.g. Goldberg 1978; Couper-Kuhlen 1996; Auer, Couper-Kuhlen and Müller 1999; Wells 2010; Gorisch, et al. 2012; Szczepek Reed 2001; 2006; 2009a; 2009b; 2010b; 2010c; 2012b; 2020). By prosodic mirroring we mean one speaker’s prosodic matching of another speaker’s prosody irrespective of words, syntax, or semantic meaning. For example, in the following extract from a conversation between two university students, Kat complains that she cannot get hold of a book she needs for her course.

(1) KD: 00.03.51

- 1 Kat: the british LIbRARY doesn't even have it though. (1.1)
- 2 Dan: *↑WHAT – (0.7)
*squints
- 3 Kat: ↑YEAH – (0.8)
- 4 well because it's an aMERican;
- 5 Dan: OH yeah; (0.5)
- 6 Kat: BOOK.

Kat's claim that even the British Library does not hold the book she needs is met with a high-pitched *what* from Dan, which peaks at 322 Hz. Dan also squints (line 2), which has been shown to be an expression of disbelief (Marmorstein and Szczepek Reed 2023) and of a critical stance (Heller, Schönfelder and Robbins 2023). Kat's confirmation *yeah* is delivered with similarly high pitch at 337 Hz, as shown in Figure 1. The two turns *what* – *yeah* together form an adjacency pair, with Dan's expression of doubt as the First Pair Part and Kat's confirmation as Second Pair Part. Prosodic mirroring is frequently found with Second Pair Parts.

In contrast, new First Pair Parts often do not match the prosody of prior speakers (Szczepek Reed 2009a; b). This can be seen in lines 1 and 2 of the above extract: Dan's expression of disbelief is not an elicited Second Pair Part; instead, it begins a new adjacency pair. It does not match line 1 prosodically.

Repeating a previous speaker's prosody allows conversationalists to design their talk as continuing with a previous speaker's project and thus 'to create a bridge between two turns that could not be achieved by verbal means alone' (Szczepek Reed 2001: 41). This is especially apparent when prosodic mirroring mitigates next turns whose verbal content is potentially disaffiliative. The following extract comes from a dinner table conversation between two close friends. At line 1, Emma complains that she has no plans for life after university.

(2) R2 00.07.58

1 Emma: oh i wIsh i knew what i was going to <<h> dO with my LIFE->
2 (0.3) .hh hhh. (0.9)
3 Lucy: ↑↑yOU' ll be <<creak> ↓FINE->
4 ↑you' ll <<creak> ↓FIND something->
5 (0.4)
6 Emma: ↑↑OH i'm <<creak> ↓sUre i' ll work out sOmething to dO but->=
7 Lucy: =YEAH-
8 (0.5)
9 Emma: (just) wIsh i knew what it ↑WAS ↓right now-

In response to Emma's complaint, Lucy responds with a reassuring turn *you'll be fine* (line 3), whose intonation consists of a pitch step-up on the first syllable *you'll*, peaking at 313 Hz; a steep fall into creaky voice on the next accented syllable *fine*, whose lowest pitch is 160 Hz; and comparatively level pitch across the rest of the phrase. Her next phrase *you'll find something* repeats this pitch pattern with a slightly less pronounced step-up on the first

syllable and with a step down to 163 Hz (line 4). After a brief pause, Emma responds with what could constitute a verbal dismissal of Lucy's reassurance, as she lays claim to her own independent assessment of the situation *oh I'm sure I'll work out something to do* (line 6) (Heritage 2002). However, the disaffiliative stance that is potentially being put forward by the verbal content of her turn is mitigated by its prosodic design, which mirrors Lucy's earlier pitch pattern. Like Lucy, Emma produces a pitch step up on the first syllable *oh*, which peaks just above Lucy's first syllable at 337 Hz; then falls to a creak on the next accented syllable *sure*, whose lowest pitch is 166 Hz, matching Lucy's earlier low pitch; and then continues with level pitch (Figure 2). By mirroring Lucy's prosody, Emma shows that she is designing her turn as a response to Lucy's display of concern and is continuing the interactional sequence that Lucy initiated.

Figure 1

Figure 2

While prosodic mirroring can mitigate against potential disaffiliation, it is not directly linked to displays of interpersonal rapport or empathy, as Szczepek Reed (2020) has shown. Instead, prosodic mirroring appears to facilitate the joint accomplishment of an interactional sequence. With it, speakers can show that they are continuing the project a previous speaker has begun, irrespective of its affiliative status (*ibid.*). The mitigating role of cases such as Extract (2) appears to be linked to this sense of interactional cooperation.

Much more could be said about prosodic mirroring and the role of prosody in interaction more broadly. For the purpose of this paper, our concern is to state that participants in spontaneous, naturally-occurring conversation orient to each other prosodically. Prosody is thus a dialogic rather than a monologic domain of language (see also Cantarutti 2020; Couper-Kuhlen 2014). It allows speakers to align their talk, irrespective of the specific social activities they are involved in. This aspect of prosody is currently overlooked in actor voice education, where much focus is placed on the role of voice for expressing emotions or the sense of the text, and where it is mostly situated within the domain of the single speaker.

The conceptualization of ‘voice’ in nine current textbooks for actor voice coaches

Voice training is a hallmark of actor theatre education. It provides a robust foundation of technique for the actor to be heard and understood, and it offers a place for actors to explore the emotional implications of the voice in performance. In voice work there is much emphasis on warming-up the voice, since vocal technique and stamina are essential for the actor in any setting. In addition, there is an emphasis on the text and on communicating the sense of the text. This work often focuses on deriving sound, rhythm, and images directly from the text itself.

Below we present a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021) of nine voice textbooks for actors, focusing on their conceptualizations of ‘voice’. Amongst the many teaching materials that exist for actor voice education, we have selected a combination of highly influential works (Berry 1973; Linklater 1976/2006; Rodenburg 1992; Houseman 2002; Carey and Clark Carey 2008/2022)ⁱⁱ and more specialized approaches (Adrian 2008 (Laban); Bogart and Landau 2014 (Viewpoints); McAllister-Viel 2019; (*p’ansori*); Gutekunst and Gillett 2021 (Stanislavski)). All textbooks contain vocal exercises; in seven of them, exercise chapters represent the main part of the book (Berry 1973; Linklater 1976/2006; Houseman 2002; Carey and Clark Carey 2008/2022; Adrian 2008; Bogart and Landau 2014; Gutekunst and Gillett 2021). Rodenburg (1992/2022) consists of a first half of mainly prose text followed by a second half that is focused on exercises. McAllister-Viel (2019) combines discussions of voice pedagogy with practical elements. Our thematic analysis is based entirely on these published texts. We have not investigated voice coaching practice, for example, through interviews or observations of practitioners. This will be a project for the future. For now, we are interested in written works and their conceptual construction of ‘voice’.

Cicely Berry’s work was seminal in changing how the work of voice coaches was seen in theatre. Her book *Voice and the Actor* (1973) is a key text on how to work with actors to embody their text. Berry’s work focused on physicalizing voice and text work and throwing out preconceived notions of how to speak ‘correctly’. Many coaches continue in this vein, including Barbara Houseman. Her book *Finding Your Voice* (2002) uses a combination of technical voice exercises and embodied text exercises to help the actor find their own way of speaking the text. David Carey and Rebecca Clark Carey also continue Berry’s tradition in their books (e.g., *The Vocal Arts Workbook*, 2008/2022), which are

staples of the acting and voice classrooms. They approach the actor's voice through image, rhythm, and sense found inherently in the text, using exercises to activate these in the actor's performances. Kristin Linklater's book *Freeing the Natural Voice* (1976/2006) builds on many of these premises but offers a psycho-physical approach to working with the voice. In particular, Linklater looks to the inner emotional world of the actor to activate the voice as a primal response. Patsy Rodenburg's book *The Right to Speak* (1992/2022) similarly focuses on the psyche of the actor in relation to their voice, approaching communication through the idea of three circles or spheres of communication which have to do with the internal psyche of the speaker: an inward introverted space, a space for the actor to be present with themselves and their cast, and the personification of the ego in taking up space.

Some voice coaches integrate other acting and movement pedagogies to enhance voice practice. Adrian (2008), Bogart and Landau (2014), McAllister-Viel (2019), and Gutekunst and Gillett (2021) engage in this type of synthesis. Barbara Adrian's book *Actor Training the Laban Way* (2008) approaches voice through Laban, a method originating in dance, proposing responsiveness through physical movement. Anne Bogart's and Tina Landau's *The Viewpoints Book* (2014) expands their work on Viewpoints, which is a way of working with actors to respond to physical stimuli with a focus on movement and space, into vocal viewpoints. These invite actors to explore pitch, volume, and time through a series of repetition exercises. Tara McAllister-Viel's book *Training Actors' Voices* (2019) adopts an intercultural approach by combining existing voice pedagogies with the traditional Korean vocal art *p'ansori*. Christina Gutekunst's and John Gillett's book *Voice into Acting* (2021) incorporates the Stanislavski approach to acting with voice work to create a more dynamic understanding of voice work for the actor.

In the following, we identify six themes that arise from the analysis of the textbooks. Themes 1-5 convey a conceptualization of the voice and of voice work as located entirely within the domain of the individual speaker. They will be highly familiar to any actor voice coach who works in the tradition of prevalent approaches in the USA and the UK today. The themes are represented in their purest form in Berry (1973), Rodenburg (1992), Carey and Clark Carey (2008/2022), Houseman (2002), and Linklater (1976/2006). Additionally, they are very much present in Adrian (2008) and Gutekunst and Gillett (2021), and nuances can be found in Viel-McAllister (2019). Theme 6, which portrays voice as dialogic practice, was identified clearly in only two textbooks (Bogart and Landau 2014; Gutekunst and Gillett 2021) and is briefly mentioned in a third (Adrian 2008).

THEME 1: The free and natural voice vs. the blocked and habitual voice

The distinction between a ‘free’ and ‘natural’ voice on the one hand, and a ‘blocked’ and ‘habitual’ voice on the other permeates the seminal textbooks (i.e. Berry 1973; Linklater 1976/2006; Rodenburg 1992; Houseman 2002; Carey and Clark Carey 2008/2022). A detailed analysis of the ‘natural/free voice approach’ can be found in McAllister-Viel (2019: 42-88), which includes a historical overview, and which integrates it into Korean *p’ansori*.

The distinction between the ‘free’ and the ‘blocked’ voice underpins a desire to differentiate the actor’s performance voice from their everyday way of vocalizing, which is perceived as not allowing enough room for expression. An early depiction of the voice as requiring liberation is Berry’s (1973) description of ‘vocal tensions and limitations’ (p. 11) of which the actor’s voice must be freed. Later textbooks place the origin of the free voice in the actor’s childhood, expressing a desire to return to the voice of child-like innocence and freedom from vocal habits. An example of this stance can be found in Rodenburg (1992/2022):

The natural voice and its potential are what we came to the world with at birth – a free and wonderful voice. ... Our first experience of natural voice was in that initial primal scream ... But life batters and restricts us in such ways that most of us settle into what I term an habitual voice: a voice encrusted with restrictive tendencies that only awareness and exercise can undo and counteract. The natural voice (a ‘free’ or ‘centred’ voice) is quite simply an unblocked voice that is unhampered by debilitating habits. (Rodenburg 1992: 23)

In line with this approach, Rodenburg’s (1992/2022) chapters 3-6 are entitled ‘The roots of habits’; ‘The growth of habits’; ‘Settling into habits’; and ‘Deep habits and release’.

Similarly, Houseman’s (2002) introductory chapter presents the child’s voice as a vehicle for expressing inner states that is later corrupted in the process of growing up:

Our voices naturally have the potential to express our inner thoughts and feelings ... When we are very young our voices are strong, free and connected. The reason for this is that we trust ourselves. We have a clear connection with how we feel and we have the freedom and confidence to express this - without doubt, judgement or effort. Over the years we often lose this trust in ourselves. (Houseman 2002: xiii-xiv).

Following on from this perspective, the work of the voice coach is to release the actor's voice from the social conventions of everyday usage and return it to a state where the actor's and their character's inner life can be expressed with purity. The liberating aspect of this work is most clearly stated in Linklater's (1976; revised edition 2006) seminal textbook *Freeing the Natural Voice*:

This approach to voice is designed to liberate the natural voice and thereby develop a vocal technique that serves the freedom of human expression. ... The emphasis here is on the removal of the blocks that inhibit the human instrument ... To free the voice is to free the person. (Linklater 1976/2006: 7-8).

In the above textbooks, the conceptualizations of the adult voice as blocked present the process of freeing it as a primarily mental one, with little explicit mention of how this might manifest in the body. A more recent textbook by Carey and Clark Carey (2008/2022) relates the freeing of the voice to the body rather than the mind of the actor:

All of us have habitual ways we use our muscles – breathing muscles, postural muscles, muscles of the 'voice box' and speech muscles included. These habits are built up over a long time. They are not necessarily wrong, but sometimes they inhibit the voice's full expressive potential. ... You ... need to free yourself of restrictive tensions which keep you locked in old, inefficient patterns. You can then experience a new pattern – one which will allow you to express yourself with greater ease, range and precision. (Carey and Clark Carey 2008/2022: 6).

While the notion of the free vs. the habitual voice is most clearly put forward in the seminal works quoted above, some of the more specialized textbooks also conceptualize the voice in this way. Under a section heading entitled 'blocked breath', Gutekunst and Gillett (2021) speak of a 'natural' and 'free' breath: 'While the healthy baby breathes deeply and freely in an automatic way, life's experiences alter impulses from our nervous system, and patterns are programmed into us even if they are dysfunctional' (p. 82). Adrian (2008) mentions 'habits' that 'began at birth' (p. 78) and can 'cause you not to recognize your impulses or, if recognized, to distrust them' (p. 25). Bogart and Landau (2014) state that 'habit and fear too often engender a narrow range in an actor's physical and vocal exploration' (p. 105). Finally, Tara McAllister-Viel (2019), the only book that explicitly discusses the 'natural/free' approach to voice, integrates it into what she calls an 'intercultural/interdisciplinary voice training approach' (p. 47). Thus, to varying degrees, all nine textbooks adopt the view that the

actor's adult voice is blocked and constrained by acquired habits, and that it needs to be freed and returned to its natural state.

The view that in mundane conversation the adult speaking voice is not very emotionally expressive implicitly assumes something that Conversation Analysis also takes for granted, namely that in everyday interaction, prosody does not express 'pure' emotions. In CA, this combines with a social constructionist view of inner states and leads to a view of the voice as a vehicle for *interactional* rather than purely *expressive* work. The voice textbooks take from it the need to return the voice to being a vehicle for the pure expression of inner states, as seen in Theme 2.

THEME 2: The voice as pure expression of an inner reality and truth

All of the seminal textbooks make a direct link between the voice, once it has been freed from socialization and habit, and the inner state of its speaker. The actor's voice is seen as transmitting inner reality and truth, in aid of the overall work of the actor as '[expressing] a reality, the truth of human experience. ... Our voice is a key means for this expression.' (Gutekunst and Gillett 2021: 1). A nuanced distinction can be made between those texts that see the voice as transmitting an inner state and those that construct it as embodying that state. For example, Berry (1973) states that 'the voice is the means by which you communicate your inner self' (p. 12). More specifically, Rodenburg's (1992) conceptualization of the 'free voice that can ... express every nuance of thought and feeling' and 'unmasks words and the truth' (p. 21) associates the sociolinguistic indexing of identity with a speaker's display of emotions, attitudes, and personality through the voice:

As we open our mouths to let sound and words pour forth, we frequently reveal the deepest parts of ourselves. Not only do we divulge class, background and education but also our perceived status in the world, our fears, our denials and in some crucial instances our very souls. (Rodenburg 1992: 2).

From this perspective, the voice carries attitudes ('our perceived status in the world'), emotions ('our fears'), and 'our very souls' in the same way as it transmits the – learned and therefore 'habitual' – accent markers of social identity ('class, background and education'). Along similar lines, Houseman (2002) conceptualizes the voice as 'the bridge between the inner and outer worlds' and as '[reflecting] the inner world with great accuracy' (Houseman

2002: xiii). In these textbooks, the voice is presented as a transmitter of inner states and emotions.

Other writers go further and present the voice as the embodied reality of the self: ‘Work on the voice ... is work on the self’ (Carey and Clark Carey 2008/2022: 1). Adrian (2008), writing about the ‘shape shifts of your body and voice’, states that these ‘initiate in your core and radiate out to become the physical manifestations of your attitudes’ (p. 95). Linklater (1976/2006) portrays the ‘natural voice’ as ‘transparent, it reveals, not describes, inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously. The person is heard, not the person’s voice’ (Linklater 2006: 8).

A nuanced approach to an inner ‘truth’ can be found in Viel-McAllister (2019), who distinguishes between text interpretation in the ‘Western’ tradition, where the actor is expected to become one with their character, and oral storytelling in the Korean *p’ansori* tradition. In the latter,

the storyteller is ever present as performer ... To portray a character “truthfully” is not dependent on a “correct way” of embodying authorial intent, or the “feeling” of “truth” a student actor has when intentionally collapsing her own experience with that of the character. (p. 187)

From this, Viel-McAllister (2019) develops a voice pedagogy that draws on Korean street vendors’ calls to identify the ‘particular vocal culture’ in a market as well as the ‘soundscape that is “Korean”’ (p. 201). Here, there is a withdrawal from an individualistic understanding of vocally expressed ‘truth’ and a turn to voice as an expression of the ‘sound of a nation’ (pp. 193-194).

Themes 1 and 2 combine to construct the concept of a voice that must be freed from socially acquired habits to communicate directly the truth of human emotion or other inner conditions. This focus on the inner world of the actor and their character reveals an inward-looking conceptualization of the voice, and one that is concerned with the expression of the self. Related to this is Theme 3, which concerns not the voice as such but the broader notion of communication.

THEME 3: Communication as expression of the self

Several of the studied textbooks reveal a conceptualization of not only the voice as a vehicle for a true expression of the self, but also of communication as primarily an expression of inner states. Here, communication is seen from a monologic perspective rather than as dialogic interaction between two parties. For example, Houseman (2002) introduces her book by stating

That is the purpose of this book: to support each actor to ... find their own power and expression so they can fully communicate their thoughts and feelings subtly, flexibly and excitingly. (p. xiii)

Similarly, Carey and Clark Carey (2008/2022: 1) write ‘this book ... will give you the skill to express yourself with greater ease and success – to communicate thoughts and feelings with precision and authority.’ Communicating *something* (‘thoughts and feelings’) rather than *with someone* is also apparent in Linklater’s (1976/2006) emphasis on emotional expression:

The natural voice would ideally function to communicate the thoughts and a continuum of feelings of a hypothetical human being who is uninhibited, open, sensitive, emotionally mature, intelligent, and uncensored. ... we communicate what we feel. (Linklater 2006: 18).

On some occasions, the textbooks mention or imply communication with the audience. For example, Berry (1973) warns that ‘an overbalance of head tone does not communicate to an audience’ (p. 16), and Rodenburg (1992/2022) mentions ‘communication’ in the context of ‘[touching] someone with words’ (p. 27). Viel-McAllister (2019) asks her students to ‘include the listening audience as performance participant’ (p. 200) by asking themselves not “‘Who am I?’” but “‘Who does it sound like I am?’” (ibid.). However, with the exception of Gutekunst and Gillett (2021) (see Theme 6), the term ‘communication’ is not used in the context of dialogue with other actors and scene partners.

The concept of communication as monologic and as an expression of inner states reveals a perspective on speech as residing purely within the domain of the individual speaker, as shown in Theme 4.

THEME 4: Speech as the act of an individual

Themes 1-3 lead to a fourth aspect of voice, speech, and communication more broadly, which is that they are seen as the domain of the single emotional, cognitive, and physical individual. This theme is implicit in the themes above but also in the absence of exercises for partner work in most books. The language of the individual - their emotions, their intentions, their self – dominates many of the introductory chapters.

An example are Carey and Clark Carey's (2008/2022: 1) introductory remarks that 'working with this book will help you to use your voice so that it fully and accurately represents your intentions ... It will give you the skill to express yourself.' Houseman (2002) writes about the importance of finding one's '*own voice*' (emphasis in the original) rather than copying others, because 'our voices naturally have the potential to express our inner thoughts and feelings (...) powerfully and accurately' (p. xiv). Regarding the actor's vocal delivery, Berry (1973) tells them to 'listen for the possibilities within himself (*sic*)' (p. 123), while Rodenburg (1992/2022) places much emphasis on the 'individual's sense of self-esteem' (p. 17).

The notion of the individual self as the domain of the voice can also be a physical one. For example, Linklater (1976/2006) describes her aim as 'a voice that is in direct contact with emotional impulses, shaped by the intellect but not inhibited by it. Such a voice will be a built-in attribute of the body' (p. 8). The voice as primarily located in the physical body of the individual actor is also apparent in the many exercises that make up the majority of the textbooks' content, which focus on breath, articulation, pitch range, and resonance, but also on bodily positioning and movement. When it comes to examples from dramatic texts, the dominant forms are soliloquies and poems (e.g., Berry 1973), which demonstrates a perspective of voice and speech as individual and therefore monologic domains.

Viel-McAllister (2019), who details the integration of a 'Western' approach with Korean *p'ansori*, again contains a more nuanced perspective. On the one hand, *p'ansori* involves only a single performer who vocalizes for multiple characters and perspectives. Their communication is with a drummer, who always accompanies *p'ansori* performances, and who sometimes makes brief interjections; and with the audience. There are no dialogue partners as such. In this sense, the performer's voice is not in dialogue with other co-present voices. However, in a more abstract sense, Viel-McAllister's (2019) conceptualization of breath differentiates between 'mainstream Anglo-American voice pedagogy', where 'breath is understood in relation to the physical and psychological self' and 'Eastern practice', where

‘the actor can transcend ego-identification and form “one body” with the audience in which the practitioner’s self is obliterated in favor of “absorption” and “communion”’ (p. 129). This ‘sense of communion and togetherness’ (p. 135) is created through a different breathing technique, which involves ‘concentrated focus and heightened awareness in the performer that can be “read” on the actor’s body by the audience’ (p. 169). This in turn ‘contributes to meaningful storytelling’ (p. 135). Thus, while Viel-McAllister’s (2019) conceptualization of voice and breath is still monologic in the sense that it does not incorporate spoken interaction with others, it is also not individualistic in the way the more established approaches are.

THEME 5: Responsiveness as monologic practice

A fifth theme that emerges from an analysis of how the textbooks conceptualize voice is that of responsiveness; specifically, responsiveness as a monologic practice. In most textbooks, responsiveness is presented as the voice being responsive to inner or outer impulses rather than other people and their utterances. The following quotation from Gutekunst and Gillett (2021) demonstrates the concept:

The voice is *essentially* a tool of communication for the human being and the actor in particular. In everyday life, it responds to imagination, impulses, wants and needs. To integrate voice and the acting process, the key question is: *what is the voice responding to?* This will depend on the circumstances in the script and the impulses the actors have created and received, as well as the initial words on the page. ... The voice should respond in a fully integrated way to the experience of the actor as the character while communicating the text. (Gutekunst and Gillett 2021: 4, emphasis in the original).

In line with the notion of communicating *something* rather than *with someone*, responsiveness is approached by asking *what* the voice responds to (“to the experience of the actor as the character while communicating the text) rather than *who* it responds to. Linking back to the notion of the ideal voice as the ‘primal scream’ (Rodenburg 1992: 23) of the child at birth is the notion of responsiveness as ‘animal instinct’. According to Linklater (1976/2006), it is only by re-connecting with a deeply buried instinctual responsiveness that the voice can accurately reveal what is inside:

The voice is prevented from responding with ideal spontaneity because that spontaneity depends on reflex action, and most people have lost the ability and, perhaps, the desire to behave reflexively. ... Deep in the unconscious mind, the

animal instinct to respond emotionally to stimulus is largely conditioned out of us as children. (Linklater 2006: 19).

Similarly, Gutekunst and Gillett (2021: 12) cite Berry's later textbook *The Actor and the Text* (1993), as describing 'a lost primitive response' (p. 19). Carey and Clark Carey (2008/2022) conceptualize breathing as a responsive activity. Breath, which 'is your voice' and is 'emotional and expressive', is described as '[connecting] our creative, intellectual, conscious selves with our instinctive, primal, unconscious selves' (p. 35). They provide exercises to make the breath 'full, free and responsive' and into one that 'moves with a character's own impulses' (ibid.) The textbooks' conceptualizations of responsiveness can distinguish between responsiveness to internal impulses, as described in the previous quotation, and to external ones.

Responsiveness to inner impulses

Underlying the portrayal of responsiveness as instinctual is an understanding that its target is the inner world of the actor and their character. For example, Houseman (2002: xiv) states that the voice should 'reveal our inner responses'; and Gutekunst and Gillett (2021: 11) see 'language as dynamic, imaginative response to inner impulses'. Rodenburg (1992/2022), linking responsiveness to breathing, states that 'the free and lower breath gives us access to our feelings. Actors who don't breathe easily and low have to push for all their emotional responses and are quickly fatigued' (p. 130). Here, responding is seen as an internal, and thus individual and monologic process.

Responsiveness as internal reaction to external or textual impulses

Responsiveness can be described not only with regard to feelings and internal experiences but also with regard to external stimuli: 'The voice ... can reflect the inner world with great accuracy, revealing each actor's unique response to character, situation and text' (Houseman 2002: xiii). Responsiveness to both internal and external stimuli is seen as revealing 'the inner world' (ibid.) of the actor and their character. As before, the question is to what, not to whom, the voice is responding. Emotions, aspects of the scene, and the text can all elicit

internal responses that are made available to others through the actor's voice. Other actors and their utterances are not mentioned.

THEME 6: Responsiveness as dialogic practice

A final theme that emerges from our analysis is 'Responsiveness as a dialogic practice'. This theme is prevalent in 'The Viewpoint approach' to acting, proposed by Bogart and Landau (2014), and it can also be attributed to Gutekunst and Gillett (2021), who focus on the Stanislavski approach. Adrian's (2008) textbook on the 'Laban Way' is mostly in line with the above-described foci on individuality and inner impulses but contains one exercise related to responsiveness as dialogue. Since this theme is closely related to our proposal below, we will unpack the textbooks' engagement with it in some detail.

Bogart and Landau (2014) provide a practical introduction to The Viewpoints approach to theatre, which takes a collaborative, non-hierarchical perspective on performance. The book presents an explicit move away from the purely psychological ('solipsistic') focus of other approaches and seeks to strengthen ensemble acting:

“When a rehearsal boils down to the process of manufacturing and then hanging desperately onto emotion, genuine human interaction is sacrificed. Emotion induced by recollection of past experience can quickly turn acting into a solipsistic exercise. The Herculean effort to pin down a particular emotion removes the actor from the simple task of performing an action, and thereby distances actors from one another and from the audience. ... Viewpoints and Composition suggest fresh ways of making choices onstage and generating action based on awareness of time and space in addition to or instead of psychology.” (Bogart and Landau 2014: 16-17)

While the text itself does not explicitly conceptualize voice or speech as dialogic, there is ample room for such a perspective. Chapter 9 of the book includes an exercise for what we might call mirroring prosody. In the exercise called 'Repetition' (p. 109-110), two people are asked to take on the roles of 'leader' and 'repeater'. 'Using a three-syllable gibberish word, Person A generates a series of sounds using pitch, dynamic, tempo and duration in an Expressive fashion. Person B repeats exactly.' Subsequently, the exercise progresses to repeating some aspects of Person A's prosodic delivery but not others ('Start with repeating pitch ... but changing dynamic'). In a later exercise, actors are asked to give 'special attention and responsiveness to what the other initiates' (p. 111) and invited to 'experience the necessity of listening and responding':

Are the vocal choices really a response to the other person? How much of the speaking seems premeditated or automatic? When the actors are truly sensitized to each other's choices and adjustments, then the work really begins. It is valuable ... to experience the necessity of listening and responding" (p. 112).

This perspective is applied to different 'vocal viewpoints', such as pitch, dynamic, tempo, and silence. In each case, 'the choice of [viewpoint] should emerge as a response to the dynamic offered by a scene partner' (p. 113). This dialogic notion of responsiveness differs from the monologic concepts of other approaches in that actors are encouraged to respond to scene partners and their utterances, rather than to internal or external stimuli. Here, the outcome of responsiveness is not the monologic expression of an inner truth but the dialogic accomplishment of an ensemble performance. It is worth noting from a practitioner's perspective that Viewpoints is an acting methodology most prevalent in USA actor training, and that currently, the work with vocal viewpoints is rarely used in the voice classroom or by voice coaches generally.

Another textbook that explores responsiveness from a dialogic perspective is Gutekunst and Gillett (2021).ⁱⁱⁱ Early on, the authors mention 'connection to others' (p. 2) and define 'communication' as follows:

We need to *interact* with other people, creating a dynamic and spontaneous responsiveness to create real communication, giving and receiving, in performance – as opposed to learning how to say lines in a particular pattern without really listening or reacting to others.' (p. 9)

The book's promotion of 'organic acting', where actors 'experience' rather than 'pretend', strives to 'prompt *spontaneous responses* to other people and events and find that elusive quality of *being in the moment*' (p. 3, emphasis in the original). Later in the book, three exercises target 'interacting and responding to others' (pp. 152-155). They include throwing a ball while responding to a previous thrower's 'intonation, pitch range and resonance' (p. 154), and repeating another's line from one's own point of view. In their introduction to these exercises, the authors argue that 'experience can only occur if we listen and respond [to our partner], do actions that are reactions, adapt spontaneously to each new impulse' (p. 152).

Finally, Adrian (2008), who introduces the Laban technique, focuses mainly on the individual and their body and voice, but one exercise asks actors to improvise with their voice, and to 'respond vocally to each other moment to moment' (p. 120).

Opportunities for cross-fertilization: The Responsive Voice

The worlds of actor voice training on the one hand and Conversation Analysis on the other offer each other natural opportunities for cross-fertilization. Both are interested in understanding – in a deeply granular way – the mechanisms and embodied manifestations of human interaction. Both work with recorded representations of speech and dialogue (text, audio, video), and both have a strong motivation to discover the role of voice in human conduct. For Conversation Analysis, the work of actors can offer lessons in adopting a participant perspective from within. Actors' commitment to making sense of and embodying another person could inspire new perspectives on understanding participants' experience of social interaction. Conversely, actor voice education can potentially benefit from conversation analytic findings and perspectives on the interactional use of voice. We have briefly described prosodic mirroring, which is one of several ways in which everyday conversationalists use voice responsively. We have then presented six conceptual themes that emerge from current actor voice textbooks: the free vs. the blocked voice; the voice as expression of an inner truth; communication as expression of the self; speech as the act of an individual; responsiveness as monologic practice; and responsiveness as dialogic practice. The two conceptualizations of voice/ prosody appear fundamentally opposed: actor voice coaching views voice as originating from, and expressive of, the single individual. Conversation Analysis understands it as originating from discourse, shaped by and in turn shaping other voices.

We propose that in addition to the existing and very successful work on text, emotion, character, and situation, actor voice work considers dialogue as a resource for shaping vocal performance. Listening to the *vocal* delivery of their scene partners will allow actors to respond *vocally* to their partners' *vocal* impulses. Such responsiveness will create a vocal bridge between dialogue partners, resulting in a dialogue performance that supports the interactions and enacted relationships between actors and characters. Some voice coaches and directors might recognise in this the illusive 'active listening' that is so often requested of actors (e.g., Crumlin 2022; Schiffman 2013). It refers to directors' frequent sense that the actors are only speaking their lines without listening to each other. However, as we have seen, voice coaching is not currently in a position to address this. We suggest that a Conversation Analysis-inspired perspective on voice can support voice coaches in more accurately guiding

actors in their listening skills to create more natural, embodied performances. This approach, which we call the ‘Responsive Voice’, and which we develop in Whitaker and Szczepiek Reed (in prep.), can sit comfortably alongside more established approaches. It does not interfere with work on individuals’ expression and their understanding of text but offers an additional perspective on their interaction with dialogue partners. If we frame the voice as responsive, then the voice becomes a resource for the actor to use in dialogue, which is where most actors will primarily use their voices

Our proposal reaches beyond previous applications of Conversation Analysis to acted dialogue, which include Stucky’s (1994) analysis of pauses in dramatic discourse, Jucker’s (2021) investigation of the conversational features of TV and movie language; and Chepinchikj’s (2022) interaction analysis of scenes from Woody Allen’s films. It is also distinct from conversation analytic studies of theatre rehearsals, such as Schmidt’s extensive work in this area (e.g. 2018; Schmidt and Deppermann 2023) but also Milde’s (2012) proposal for a ‘spoken artistic discourse analysis’ (p. 2) for theatre practice, and Löfgren’s analysis of depiction in opera rehearsals (Löfgren 2023; Löfgren and Hofstetter 2023). Rather than applying the analytical tools of Conversation Analysis to dramatic discourse, we propose that Conversation Analysis as such provides a fruitful conceptual perspective for voice professionals.

The points we have raised are likely to be applicable to other domains, including language use other than prosody (articulation, accent, word choice, grammar), embodied actions (gesture, gaze, touch, position, mobility), participants’ spatial configuration, and their manipulation of objects. In all of these domains, participants in naturally-occurring interaction orient to their co-participants. The affordances that this way of conceptualizing interaction offers to actor education are considerable and present an exciting opportunity for future exploration.

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Figures

Figure 1: Pitch matching. Extract 1, lines 2-3.

Figure 2. Pitch matching. Extract (2), lines 3-6.

ⁱ We are grateful for feedback from four external reviewers. We were especially excited to receive reviews from Christina Gutekunst and John Gillett, whose work we cite extensively below. Their in-depth clarifications of their approach were very helpful. All errors are ours.

ⁱⁱ Among the most influential voice trainers of the last century one must also list Catherine Fitzmaurice and Arthus Lessac. They were not included in our review due to an absence of published writing in the case of Fitzmaurice; and paucity and lack of availability of writing in the case of Lessac.

ⁱⁱⁱ In their review of this paper, the authors explain that: "For us, an integrated voice means [a voice fully embodied, free and easy as a means of expression], but crucially a voice that is integrated with the actor's own authentic self, other actors, the action, character and the circumstances, as part of an embodied and experienced character."