

Attunement to the Prosodic Language of Therapy: Understanding the Transitional Voice
and its Implications for Psychoanalytic Theory and Practice

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Abstract

Aside from the voice's ability to be a powerful communicator, little is known about the role of the nonverbal voice in the therapeutic encounter and its contribution to the therapeutic process and outcome. Ostensibly, utterances are generated and processed by therapists and patients on both conscious and unconscious levels, suggesting that the mind reaches far beyond the word content to hear a variety of underlying nonverbal messages. Prosodic elements of speech, such as voice quality, pitch, rhythm, and intensity, are known to effectively convey and actively produce thoughts, feelings, and emotions independent of dictionary word meanings and active conscious experience.

Therefore, the purpose of this presentation is to elucidate the prosodic voice in terms of its theoretical relevance and pragmatic application to the therapeutic encounter. Specifically, the author proffers that the prosodic voice is a powerful communicator of affective meaning, holding potential to reveal uncensored or unconscious information. The author stresses that *how* something is said may be more important or informative than *what* is said with words. Along these lines, the author explicates the concepts of prosodic alliance, prosodic transference, and transitional voice. Attention is given to the way in which a therapist's voice and its prosodic properties may be used as a transitional object for patients to psychically hold onto for comfort and security as the therapy unfolds. The author concludes that psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapists should seek to hear and understand the latent, prosodic language of their patients as well as the manifest, verbal content.