

Living speech – or the bodily life of language

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Abstract

Speech is based on articulatory movements made by the vocal organs, in synchrony with other body parts. Hand movements, postural shifts and facial expressions are at play in the symbolic activity that speakers engage in as they “talk.” The primary forms of language are thus moving, living forms.

Foreword

Unlike English, Romance languages routinely refer to “foreign” or “modern” languages as “living” languages: *langes vivantes* (French), *lingue vive* (Italian), *linguas vivas* (Spanish), *llengües vives* (Catalan), *línguas vivas* (Portuguese), *limbi vii* (Romanian). Dutch and German speakers occasionally use similar phrases emphasizing the “living” quality of language: *levende talen*, *lebende Sprachen*. The title chosen for the original lecture-performance¹⁸⁶ was a pun on the “life” or “vitality” of language¹⁸⁷: *Langues vivantes en vie* (lit. “Living languages are alive / have a life”). The underlying logic was the following: language, whether spoken or written, is rooted in *bodily motion*. Movement is a sign of life. Language relies on movement. Language is life.

The present English version contains video captures from the original French lecture-performance. The script was written and translated by myself. The performance was choreographed by Jean Magnard, assisted by Mélissa Blanc. All the illustrations given during the performance are taken from a corpus of authentic co-speech gestures

¹⁸⁶ The lecture was delivered on the last day of the 21st RANACLES conference, held at the University of Bordeaux on November 29-30 2013. It was not just **delivered** but **performed**, bare-footed, on the main desk, inside a lecture hall. As might have been expected, this caused a sensation. But the audience was supportive and responsive, greeting the three performers with unusual warmth:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=takomU73y3k>

¹⁸⁷ *Vie* means life » in French. The derived adjective *vivant(e)* means “living” and the prepositional phrase *en vie* “alive.”

made by native English speakers during interviews: talk show hosts, writers, film actors, and linguists.

This illustrated adaptation is dedicated to Pr. Pavel Stekauer, who has expressed support for my attempt at blending *science* and the *arts*, ever since we first met in Bordeaux some ten years ago. As a distinguished morphologist, Pavel is aware of the challenge posed by the union of semiology, gesture studies and performance studies. His own research into linguistic form is even more creative and inspirational. His unique sense of descriptive accuracy has no equivalent but his own unique sense of humor.

Introduction



Figure 1 Opening

Our words are not “spoken” but “played out” on the social stage. We don’t just use our mouths to speak. We *perform language*. “We *engage* the wholeness of our bodies as we *present meanings to others*”¹⁸⁸ in a generous *semiotic offering*.



Figure 2 “in a generous semiotic offering”

Human languages are designed to be *performed*- and their form reflects this. There would otherwise be no stress, no tone, no stances, no gestures, no gaze activity, no facial expressions. A string of mechanical signals would be enough. “On-off. Dot-dot... dash-dot ... dosh-dash-dash-dot...” – a disembodied *morse code* – flat... linear... predictable - would do the job!

Neither would there be any need for “acrobatics”, “undulation”, “breath control”, “stances”, “imitation”, “variation”, “involvement of the miming body”¹⁸⁹ to convey our

¹⁸⁸ Jousse (1939) quoted in Sienaert (2013).

¹⁸⁹ Lecoq (1997).

experience of the world. There would be no “wholeness of expression.”¹⁹⁰ Language would be completely *lifeless*. Every word that I choose to *articulate* and *project* is part of a “movement framework”¹⁹¹.



Figure 3 Illustration & choreographic variation.
“There are two sides to English teaching:
teaching production and teaching comprehension”

Am I aware of the *life* that permeates the *living tongues* of men?

¹⁹⁰ Jousse (1976).

¹⁹¹ Laban (1963).



Figure 4 Illustration & choreographic variation.
 “What are we supposed to do when problems show up?”

The *life* that runs through me as I am speaking, the *life* that runs through your body as you are listening. The *life* that manifests itself in every utterance I produce, in every sound I articulate, in every meaning I *display*. A life so simple and elemental that is all too easily *frozen* and *forgotten*.

Life stand still!

(One) stilled life— (one) froze it. One forgot the little agitations; the flush, the pallor, some queer distortion, some light or shadow.

What was it then? What did it mean? Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp? Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?

Could it be that this was life?— startling, unexpected, unknown?¹⁹²

¹⁹² Adapted from Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927).



Figure 5 Choreographic variation.
 “Could it be that this was life...?”

As a *living human being*, teaching a *living language*, am I ready to be drawn into the *dynamics of gesture*? Am I willing to immerse my students into the on-going flow of inflections, oscillations and beats?

Or should I stick to the *written word* and cling to *stable formulae*? Should I cultivate “lexical fields,” fix “rules,” describe “structures” as most linguists do? Should I *disembody* speech and *reduce all words to their letters*? Should I remove them from the living organisms that use them? Forget about vocal articulation and projection, about experience being “impressed” upon humans and “expressed” out of them (Jousse 1976)? Should I *underplay* how emotions and meanings are *played* and *replayed* on the interactional stage?

- *Puisque tu l'aimes, pourquoi tu ne le lui dis pas?*
- *Le hic, c'est que je suis timide.*
- *Evidemment !¹⁹³*

For everything *impresses itself upon* the speaker's body, then *expresses itself out of it* (Jousse 1976). Everything comes to life, everything acquires meaning through the human body. Even grammar does:



Figure 6 Illustration & choreographic variation.
The gestural grammar of concession: “Granted ...”

What sort of “grammar” do I teach? What is my conception of syntax? An “assembly line” where sentences are “put together”? Or a stage on which “a living being walks and plays out his understanding of the world”¹⁹⁴?

¹⁹³ Based on Calbris and Montredon (2011). “Why don’t you tell him you love him !” “The trouble is – I’m a little shy” “That’s just what I thought !”

¹⁹⁴ Jousse (1939) quoted in Sienaert (2013).

For example, how do I address “time and tense”? How do I instruct my students about the grammar of “past time reference” in modern languages? Do I restrict myself to “bases” and “affixes”, “main verbs” and “auxiliaries”, “aspectual markers” and “tense inflections”? Or do I broaden the perspective to include *kinetic activity* and *cognitive processes*? Grammar is also about how we remember, how we “look back” or “travel back” in time, how we metaphorically “revisit” and symbolically reenact past situations.



Figure 7 Illustration & choreographic variation.
The gestural grammar of time: “Back in...”

When discussing formal aspects of “questions”, should I restrict myself to the hard facts of syntax: “Q-words” and “subject-operator inversion”? Shouldn’t I also be observing the postures and gestures that spontaneously *mark* the “interrogative mood”? Aren’t questions tied to our social and mental life? Questions are not *asked* but *played out*. Questions we *form*, questions we *perform*!

None of the sentences we form could “live” and “work” in discourse without grammar. Syntax is a *life-giving force*: it brings utterances and sentences into being. Do we celebrate the vitality and fertility of syntax in our teachings? Do we encourage our

students to think of *grammar as life*¹⁹⁵? Do we invite them to look at the social performance of grammar on the interactional stage? Do we connect “valency” and “theta roles” to the inbuilt *dramatic structure of sentences*? Do we present “states” and “actions,” not just as “states” and “actions” but as *scenes* involving participants? Do we encourage them to act out some of these scenes, to create a space where sentence structure is integrated with vocal structure, tonal structure, and kinetic structure?

Everything I say is an *interpretation* of experience, in both a mental and artistic sense. My linguistic rendition of thought and experience is primarily based on *movement* as we are reminded by Jousse (1976) and Corballis (2002): *eye movements* (including eyebrow, eyelid and eyelash activity); *articulatory movements* (i.e. movements of the tongue, pharynx, palate, jaw, and lips); *bodily movements* (i.e. head movements, manual gestures, postural adjustments)... and *propositional moves*¹⁹⁶ (i.e. bringing forth verbal messages). The vocal and the gestural components of language cannot be separated:

¹⁹⁵ Langacker (2008).

¹⁹⁶ English translation of Jousse’s phrase *gestualité propositionnelle*. Jousse remarked that the word “proposition” is based on kinetic imagery, since it literally means “to position (place) before”. This is a more abstract, metaphoric type of movement, but a movement nonetheless.



Figure 8 Illustration & choreographic variation.
Co-expressiveness of word and gesture: “There’s a whole difference!”

Calbris (1989) conflates voice and movement into a single semiotic process: “phono-gestural activity”. McNeill (1992) insists on the co-expressiveness of *verbal* and *gestural* forms, calls them “inseparable,” and eventually refers to them as the “speech-gesture nexus.” The gestures that accompany speech are quite logically called *co-speech gestures*. The gestures that replace speech or called *emblems*¹⁹⁷.

Gestures are *global synthetic*. They compress and unify experience by packing different functions and meanings into single moves. McNeill’s classification of gestures is the most widely used. It distinguishes between: “iconics,” “metaphorics,” “deictics” and “beats.”

¹⁹⁷ Kendon (2004).



Figure 9 Illustration
Deictic gesture: “Did you hear that?”

Conclusion

Language scholars should all think of themselves as “observer of life”¹⁹⁸. And language instructors should never be afraid of manifesting the “physicality of speech”¹⁹⁹ to their audience. This is why we have come today to *perform language* in front of you.

Movement is everywhere *around* us and *within* us. “Babblers” and “wrigglers” we are born. Social “movers” and “vocalizers” we eventually become²⁰⁰. Speakers are never mechanical transmitters and receivers: they are *embodied communicators* and *moving social cognizers*²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁸ Murphy (2012).

¹⁹⁹ Schechner (1988).

²⁰⁰ Birdwhistell (1970).

²⁰¹ Langacker (2008).

Language is part of a greater “body motion communication system”²⁰² which allows us to *represent* our situated experience of the world, dramatically and symbolically.



Figure 10 Choreographic variation.
“Dramatically and symbolically”

There is no limit to what word and gesture can jointly express. There is no thought, no event, no experience that may not be *played out* and *viewed*. From children’s rhymes to scholarly presentations, our speech is made up of lines that we *deliver on the interactional stage*²⁰³, of meanings that we *perform* and *display*²⁰⁴. Our words and movements are living semiotic structures. *Vita in Gestu!*²⁰⁵

²⁰² Birdwhistell (1970).

²⁰³ Goffman (1959, 1964).

²⁰⁴ Streeck (2009).

²⁰⁵ Jousse (1976).

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Pavol Štekauer – Already a Sexagenarian?

Back in 1999 in Bratislava, when Dr. Štekauer presented me with a copy of his seminal and ground-breaking book, still hot off the press, under the title *An Onomasiological Theory of English Word-Formation*, it was evident that I had gotten a precious scholarly gift from an already prominent Slovak Anglicist.

What may not have been so evident was that within two decades, Professor Štekauer would go such a long way in linguistics – literally all around the world. During this time he has made his mark as an exquisite scholar, author and editor of numerous linguistic monographs, bookchapters and articles, alongside his academic pedagogical work at several universities.

As the first Slovak to do so, he has made an unprecedented contribution and opened new horizons in Anglicist linguistics on an international scale. At the same time, together with his colleagues, he has been an important initiator of international cooperation in linguistics in general and in English word-formation, especially lexical morphology.

In numerous multinational projects and within several conferences attended by scholars of theoretical linguistics from a wide range of countries, Professor Štekauer, as we all know, has literally brought much of the Anglicist linguistic world together. It is namely thanks to him that, for a number of years now, the city of Košice has been one of the world's "universal" capitals in the field.

Personally, I owe him much gratitude for his encouragement, for reviewing my research and for giving his invaluable advice, for many personal encounters in Košice at the conferences, doctoral examinations and defences of dissertations, and, last but not least, for all the inspiration he has provided me.

Now that, dear Palo, you have reached your 60s, I would like to wish you a lot of energy for continuing to make the Anglicist linguistic world prosper in Slovakia, and in our native language I wish you:

*Dobré zdravie, mnoho ďalších úspechov vo vedeckom bádani
a veľa tak vzácneho osobného šťastia!*

Ada Böhmerová

When we were offered an opportunity to make a contribution to this volume, we were again struck by the idea that time flies faster than you think it does - it has been fifteen years since we met Pavol! He was then one of the first professors employed at the newly launched English Department at the State Higher Vocational School in Krosno, Poland, running linguistic courses and a B.A. seminar. As non-linguists, we do not feel we are the right people to comment on his professional expertise, but we must say that Pavol remains one of the most amiable and respected persons and scholars we know. What we perhaps value most is his sincerity and modesty, which makes him an excellent companion and work mate - never would he refuse to help, assist or advise if one was in need. He did not think twice to spend an hour at the post office helping us fill out documents in Slovak when one of our formal doctoral duties deadlines was approaching. Anyone who knows Pavol will certainly appreciate his own brand of humour. He is not the most talkative person, but his flashes of mellow humour can put everybody at ease. He can be very generous as well. Having left his newly bought corduroy jacket in the staffroom, he proposed that we should sell it at the local market place in Krosno, which we regret till this very moment - it would have fetched a good sum of money! Lastly, to add a very personal touch, Professor Štekauer was the person who encouraged us to start doctoral studies at UPJS in Košice, assisting us all the way long with all sorts of formalities. For offering us an opportunity to obtain a doctoral degree, we are most grateful to him. Thanks a million, Pavol!

Ewa and Bogdan Wolski
Krosno, Poland

Professor Štekauer is an expert of repute in his field. However, he never talks about his achievements in front of his students. He does not belong to those teachers who list all their publications and mention all their achievements at the first lecture to introduce themselves. No, Professor Štekauer is very much to the point and does not waste the words in any situation – so at the first lecture of the Introduction to Linguistics, he started directly with the basic linguistic notions. Although the lectures were well-structured and the explanations clear, at the beginning, all the first-year students felt lost in the ocean of linguistic terms and theories, which we began to combine into a compact picture, as a puzzle, only after several years... Only after those years could we understand how well-structured professor's textbooks are, and only when writing our own theses and articles could we discover professor's publications in renowned publishing houses and journals. Professor Štekauer's humble attitude makes his students discover his linguistic achievements on their own, which means that those who do not continue with linguistics may never discover them. However we, his PhD students, have been on an inspirational journey of discovering professor's theories and publications, and our respect towards Professor Štekauer has deepened this way. Professor may not talk much, but he is always very direct when any problem is discussed, and always very helpful when any advice is needed.

Dear Professor Štekauer, thank you for your help and for all the knowledge you have passed on to us. May many more PhD students benefit from your experience and expertise in the coming years.

PhD Students of the Department of British and American Studies
Faculty of Arts
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice

I have known Professor Pavol Štekauer for over 10 years. It has been my pleasure also to work with him. His scholarly expertise and academic experience are highly appreciated. He has always been a professional, in every sense of the word. He is the kind of person who respects others; he has never shown superiority to younger researchers with far fewer credentials or academic achievements. He is the kind of person who can be considered a model of modesty. Professor Štekauer is supportive, full of respect for everyone around him, always ready to cooperate, never complaining.

Dear Professor, on your birthday I would like to wish you all the best! Many further achievements, success, good health, the best of luck and the appreciation you so much deserve.

Agnieszka Uberman
Institute of English Studies
University of Rzeszów, Poland

To Sir, with Respect and Gratitude!

I'm one of those who took classes from Professor Štekauer during their undergraduate studies and/or consultations during their PhD. studies, and at that time had I no idea how much they would be influenced by his input. I must admit, over the years, I have experienced a certain development in my feelings towards him: from anxiety and apprehension to respect for and appreciation of his way of thinking.

My first memories of Professor Štekauer involve a quiet figure with a straight face, in a knit sweater and corduroy pants. During all my studies, visiting his office was quite an intimidating experience, even more so on the day of the exam. In contrast to others, he made short work of examining. Pick a question, brainstorm for five minutes and answer within two minutes, or vice-versa – I am not sure now after all those years; either way, the whole thing did not last more than seven minutes. You either knew or did not. My first exam in English, and I left the room totally frustrated. Looking back, I realize I started my undergraduate studies completely unprepared for what I was to face. I knew nothing of Old English declension (of 'stān'), of 'signifiant', or of 'onomasiology'. Even worse, I was absolutely unready to process the information and think the way he wanted us to. It took me quite a while to transform my mind and understand his perspective.

Years later, when working on my PhD. project, I asked Professor Štekauer for a consultation to get his opinion on the design of the project. I approached the door; knocked; when invited, stepped in; sat down in the closest available chair; and breathing nervously, waited for what he had to tell me. No small talk, a couple of sentences pointing out the weak points of my project, and the meeting was over. I had always known him as a man of few words, yet words that made a lot of sense. This time, though, I was able to take advantage of his expertise; so, a slight apprehension was now mixed with great respect.

From my perspective, Professor Štekauer's mindset, determination, and high standards have always made him different from others. Every now and then I meet people who justify their statement saying, 'This is just the way I think, you know, because I've taken Professor Štekauer's classes.' As the saying goes, people come into our life for a reason, for a season, or for a lifetime. Since I've been turning to him, and

his books and edited volumes, for insight and inspiration for twenty-five years, I would say that Professor Štekauer has come into my life for a lifetime.

Alena Kačmářová

Pavel Štekauer, Professor at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary

I got to know Pavel Štekauer in June 2009 in Budapest. He was visiting Károli University where he had been offered a job, as the Department of English Linguistics, one of the two departments in the Institute of English Studies, was planning to strengthen its profile in linguistics. Little did we know at the time that in three months' time I would become Pavel's boss – my appointment as head of department by the Rector had not been foreseen.

Our first academic year was somewhat complicated by the fact that Pavel had to start out working with us as an associate professor (docent), as according to Hungarian regulations, in order to obtain a full professorship, one has to go through a complicated assessment process conducted by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. A part of this process was another process: that of the official acceptance of Pavel's PhD degree by the Hungarian authorities. One actually starts wondering why within the EU degrees are not mutually and automatically accepted ... Luckily, I succeeded in seeing this process through at the end of which, in the summer of 2010, Pavel was conferred full university professor status by the President of the Hungarian State.

Thus Pavel has been with us for almost six years now, and has been teaching Morphology, Semantics, Lexicology, Introduction to English linguistics at the BA level, and Linguistic theories at the MA level, as well as doing a workshop in linguistics for BA students. We hope that he will soon also be teaching in our multidisciplinary doctoral school, which is under accreditation at the moment.

Because of his other academic obligations, Pavel can only come to Budapest once in every two weeks, so we do not see as much of him as we would like to! I believe that there were two steps in his "naturalization" as a Károli professor: the students very early on started referring to him as "Pavel tanár úr" (Professor Pavel) instead of the normal Hungarian way of using the professor's surname, which would be: "Štekauer tanár úr". Why is this so, I wonder? Maybe because we Hungarians are used to the part of the name coming first being the surname? Or maybe because "Pavel" is easier for us to pronounce than "Štekauer"? Or maybe both? What ever the reason,

“Pavel tanár úr” sounds in a nice (and not in any manner offensive) way. The second step came in 2013, when, in the course of one of the (by that time usual) teacher parody performances by our students, “Pavel tanár úr” also had an alter ego who was acting as if he were the professor ... I laughed when I saw this, and I thought: well, Pavel is really one of us now!

Dóra Pődör
Vice-Dean for Accreditation and Quality Assurance
Head of the Department of English Linguistics
Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Budapest, Hungary

Of all the linguists I know personally, Professor Štekauer is the one I respect most. I admire him both as a scholar of world-wide reputation and a pedagogue who has been successful in training students to continue his line of work. In spite of his academic brilliance and fame, he is always kind and generous to younger colleagues and willingly supports their interests and ambitions. On behalf of all Ostrava Anglicists, I would like to congratulate Professor Štekauer on his 60th birthday and thank him for his continuous academic inspiration as well as his genuineness and sympathy. Let me wish you many happy years to come.

Miroslav Černý
Department of English and American Studies
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Czech Republic

Broadly speaking, academics fall into three categories. One: the insane or the disordered in mind. Normally madness is accompanied by persecution mania. Overstimulation of these individuals must be avoided. When spotted run as if your hair was on fire. Two: The zombies. Their lives are consumed by studying and they can kill you with boredom. When I was a young assistant at the University, ignorant of academic matters, I made the mistake of asking a colleague about his field of research. "Nevermore," as Poe's raven says. Three: The eccentrics. These deviate from conventionality but retain judgment, have unusual knowledge but do not overwhelm you with it.

Happy birthday, my dear eccentric friend.

Nieves

All we need in life is a good family and nice friends. With you, I can say I didn't know you very well even after years of co-working until the moment we started to commute together. I had the chance to reveal your lovely personality, striking sense of humour, amazing friend, always remembering you, the early bird.

I know you don't like any fuss around you, in spite of it I dare to wish your birthday and years to come be an unforgettably momentous occasion every day and may your deepest and wildest dreams come true (as far as I know there are many).

Hopefully in our case, friends don't get old, but get better with age.

Best wishes on your special day. Happy birthday!

Edita

Dear Pavol,

This is a landmark year for you and I should like to contribute – however modestly – to making it as memorable as it should be. I believe you would agree with me when I say that being an academic is almost entirely motivational. Ours is in many ways a dog's life, and this is rarely understood by those outside Academia. Yet there is no doubt there is also a good side to it. With some hindsight, I have learnt to consider myself an enormously privileged person if only because my profession has made it possible for me to travel widely and meet so many interesting people from all across the world.

My cooperation with the English Department at Košice's Pavol Jozef Šafárik University started quite by chance in 2008. To cut a very long story short, Košice has since become my second academic home. Throughout this time, I have managed to meet most of the Faculty and learnt about the Department. In its short history, this Department has come a remarkably long way, actively cooperating with academics from abroad, staying at the forefront of research and education in Slovakia with cutting-edge projects and initiatives and organising irresistible conferences. In so many respects, many of us now believe that Košice lies at the crossroads of English Studies in Central Europe. And it was your vision, Pavol, that made this possible, filling in a gap when it was most badly needed, and surrounding yourself with just the right choice of people.

True, the English Department and its achievements would not be what they are without your colleagues, but there would be no English Department without you. Let me thank you for having welcomed me into the big Košice family and wish you every success for many years to come.

Many happy returns!!!

Very best,

Igor

PS I hope you will not mind my publicly sharing this picture. It is my way of saying that Palma has been missing you.

