

The Psycho-Physical Embodiment of Language

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Abstract

Objectives: To study the effect of language on the physical body. The three populations that are a part of my ongoing research at Yale University are classical actors, classical singers, and People Living With Parkinson's Disease. My research is conducted at Yale School of Drama, the Yale School for Sacred Music, and Yale Hospital. To effect positive change that can be retained and repeated, the use of language is of utmost importance. My research explores the most successful ways to use language to encourage the embodiment of psycho-physical change.

Methodology: I use the Alexander Technique in order to work with participants. The method is a 130 year old technique commonly used in performing arts institutions for many decades. It has been increasingly used in medical settings. The technique uses touch and verbal instruction to point out tensions and stresses in the body, teaches how to stop unproductive physical habits, and then develop new, improved ways of functioning including improved posture and balance, easier breathing, and more easeful movement. In October 2026 I am conducting a medical study at Yale Hospital with Dr. Veronica Santini, the head of the Parkinson's department. We are studying how the Alexander Technique can help People Living With Parkinson's.

Results: With more poised physical alignment and efficient breathing, an actor or singer's relationship to language and text improves markedly. As the body releases and balances, the verbal instruction from the teacher helps the performer make concrete, positive changes within their physical selves to enable them to perform more effectively and with more ease. For the Person Living With Parkinson's, posture, balance, and movement are critical - falling is a real possibility. The teacher uses verbal instruction to help the PLWP embody the linguistic instructions, and develop new constructive ways of moving and functioning. The method also aids the PLWP in formulating their thoughts and speaking more effectively.

Discussion: While performers and persons living with a neurodegenerative disorder may seem like diverse populations, the training of these groups share many similarities. For both groups, clearly defining verbal instructions that bring about positive physical changes is vital. With repetition and practice, the participants can organically embody the language, so that mental/verbal instructions and the physical self can become aligned for the improvement of daily functioning.