

Made-Up Language, Sound & / or Action in SUPERvision

Theoretical rationale and a practical guide to working with a translator

A SUPERvisee can explore a coaching (mentoring, training, facilitation, leadership...) experience through invented language, vocal sounds, gesture or movement while another person offers words for what they hear and see. This creative exercise can bring attention to feelings, bodily responses and relational patterns that are difficult to convey in a familiar account. Its value develops through the SUPERvisee's response to the translation and the reflective conversation that follows.



What You Learn From Using This

Used well, this exercise surfaces material that a familiar verbal account tends to smooth over. Specifically, it helps a SUPERvisee:

- **Notice embodied experience** that words alone often bypass, pace, posture, gesture, vocal intensity, a held breath.
- **Encounter another perspective** on their own material through the translator's tentative offer, then test it against what they actually meant.
- **Identify a relational pattern** in real time, such as an urge to rescue, direct or over-explain, that may echo in their coaching relationships.
- **Move from insight to a proportionate experiment**, a small, specific change they can try and review at the next SUPERvision session.

The rationale underneath all of this is straightforward: embodied, playful expression can make available what a polished, logically complete story tends to leave out.

Origins and Purpose

The closest theatre connection is Viola Spolin's gibberish work, including *Gibberish Interpreter*. These exercises place emphasis on physical and vocal expression, allowing meaning to be communicated through tone, rhythm, gesture and action. Spolin's approach provides a clear practical lineage for using invented speech with an interpreter.

In this SUPERvision adaptation, the SUPERvisee chooses a moment from practice and expresses something of their experience without ordinary words. The translator listens and offers a brief possible meaning. The SUPERvisee then returns to ordinary language to say what fits, what does not fit and what they now notice. This sequence supports exploration of the practitioner's experience and its implications for their work.

The Translator & Ownership of Meaning

“Translator” is a useful role name, but there is no shared vocabulary to decode. The translator offers a hypothesis shaped by their own experience as well as the sounds and actions they observe. The SUPERvisee retains authority over their intended meaning and can accept, amend or reject every interpretation. A mismatch can become a useful prompt for clarification, provided the translator welcomes correction.

This approach has an affinity with psychodramatic doubling, where another person offers expression for a protagonist's experience and the protagonist confirms, refines or rejects the offer. The SUPERvision exercise described here is an adaptation drawing on these ideas, it is not a complete psychodrama intervention.

Why This Can Support Reflective Practice

Embodied Experience Becomes Available for Inquiry

Embodied affectivity links emotional experience with bodily sensation, movement and interaction. Fuchs and Koch (2014) describe reciprocal relationships between a person's body, their environment and other people. This offers a rationale for attending to the SUPERvisee's pace, posture, gesture, vocal intensity and sense of movement alongside their verbal account.

For example, a SUPERvisee describing pressure to “deliver results” may make a rapid sequence of sounds while pushing both hands forward. Exploring that enactment could help them notice urgency, responsibility or an impulse to direct the client. These are possible meanings to investigate together. A movement does not have a universal emotional meaning, and the translator's bodily response needs checking with the SUPERvisee.

Play Creates Space for Experimentation

Winnicott's account of play and potential space provides a conceptual basis for exploring experience within a supportive relationship. Applied to SUPERvision, a playful frame can give permission to try an unfamiliar expression, tolerate uncertainty and discover a different way of relating to a dilemma. This is a theoretical application of his work rather than evidence that this particular exercise produces a specified outcome.

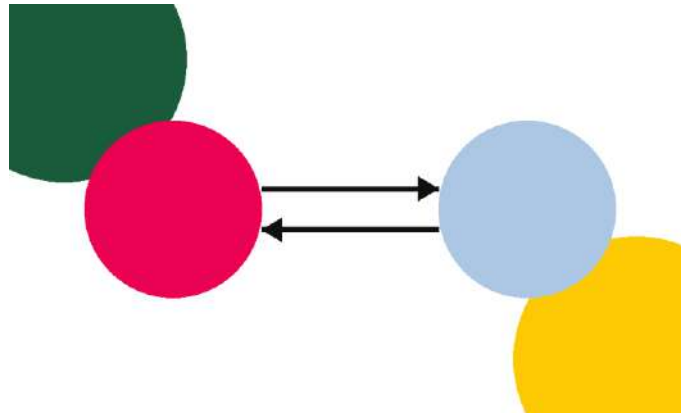
Invented language may reduce pressure to present a polished or logically complete story. Some SUPERvisees find this freeing, others feel exposed or self-conscious. The SUPERvisor partners with the person to choose an appropriate degree of play, expression and visibility. Humour can support connection when it arises naturally and everyone's dignity is respected.

Another Voice Can Support Perspective Taking

Psychodramatic doubling provides a useful analogy for the translator's contribution, another voice can offer a candidate expression which the person then tests against their experience. In SUPERvision, hearing that offer can help a practitioner articulate an unspoken concern, identify an assumption or recognise that the other person has understood something differently.

The reflective value lies in the dialogue between expression, interpretation and correction. The translator can notice their own impulse to rescue, explain or make the story coherent. The SUPERvisee can explore what happens when they

feel understood or misheard. Both responses may illuminate relational habits relevant to coaching, while any link with the client relationship remains a hypothesis to examine.



Turning Expression into Professional Learning

Reflection & Experimentation

Schön's account of professional knowing and reflection provides a rationale for revisiting a practice moment and questioning familiar ways of responding. The enactment can make aspects of the SUPERvisee's response available to reflection. The subsequent conversation connects these observations with professional judgement, boundaries, the coaching relationship and a next step.

A useful sequence is to express the experience, hear a tentative translation, clarify its meaning and consider a small change in practice. The SUPERvisee might experiment with a slower pace, a clearer contract or greater tolerance of silence. At the next SUPERvision session, they can review what happened and whether the experiment helped.

Relational & Systemic Inquiry

The exercise can also invite attention to the wider setting. Who or what is being represented by the sounds and actions? Whose expectations seem present? What pressures arise from the sponsor, organisation, team or the practitioner's own standards? If the SUPERvisee chooses to enact a client or stakeholder, the portrayal represents their perception of that person. It cannot establish the absent person's experience or intention.

The SUPERvisor can attend to their own cognitive, emotional and somatic experience: the meaning they begin to construct, any feeling of urgency or uncertainty, and changes in breathing or muscular tension. A brief observation such as “I noticed I was holding my breath as the pace increased” can be offered with permission and explored for relevance. The SUPERvisee decides whether it helps their inquiry.

An Illustrative Example

A coach brings a session in which they felt responsible for keeping everything moving. They choose to express the moment through fast invented speech and repeated reaching gestures. The translator offers, “I have to keep this going or it will fall apart.” The SUPERvisee responds, “The keeping it going fits. What feels more accurate is that I am afraid the client will think I am unhelpful if I pause.”

The SUPERvisor asks, “What do you notice about that now?” The coach recognises how their concern about appearing useful shaped their pace and questions. They choose to revisit expectations with the client and allow more thinking time. This example shows how correction of the translation can support precise reflection and a practical experiment.

How Strong Is the Evidence

The cited literature supports the exercise's theatre origins and its conceptual links with embodied experience, play, psychodramatic doubling and reflection. These sources do not establish the effectiveness of this exact combination in coaching SUPERvision. Its potential benefits should be framed as possibilities, with usefulness assessed through the SUPERvisee's experience, learning and subsequent practice.

Facilitating the Exercise

Allow at least 15 minutes, including reflection. In a group, work with a SUPERvisee, a translator and a SUPERvisor who holds the process. In one-to-one work, the SUPERvisor can offer translations, taking particular care over the influence of their role and leaving space for correction.

1. Agree the Focus & the Way of Working

Invite the SUPERvisee to choose a manageable practice moment and say what they want to explore. Explain the exercise and agree confidentiality, a pause signal and the freedom to decline or change the method. Let them choose invented speech, simple sounds, movement, gesture or a combination. They can remain seated and keep the expression small and quiet.

2. Warm Up & Express the Experience

Try a brief, neutral warm-up if useful, such as expressing the experience of waiting for a kettle to boil. Then invite 30 to 60 seconds of expression around the chosen practice moment. The translator attends to rhythm, pauses, intensity, gesture and their own response. Avoid using imitation accents or caricatures of real languages and cultures.

3. Offer a Tentative Translation & Check It

The translator gives one short offer at a time: “The words that come to me are...” or “Would ‘I want more space’ fit anything you were expressing?” First-person language may be used by agreement. The SUPERvisee returns to ordinary language and says what fits, what needs changing and what should be discarded. Make room for “none of that fits”. Avoid multiple interpreters layering assumptions onto the same enactment.

4. Reflect & Integrate

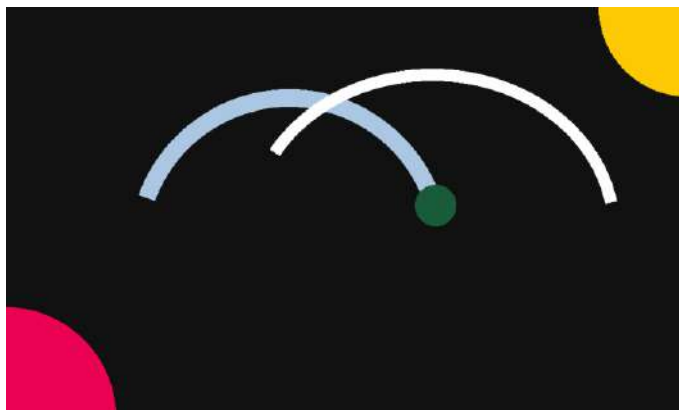
Ask one question at a time and allow thinking space. Useful questions include “What did you notice as you expressed that?”, “What happened when you heard the translation?” and “How does this connect with your coaching?” Explore an implication for practice, then agree one proportionate action or experiment and how it will be reviewed.

5. Close the Roles & Check Readiness

Explicitly finish the enactment and the translator role. Invite participants to return attention to the room, their usual voice and a comfortable posture. Check how the SUPERvisee is feeling and what support they need before moving on. If distress increases, pause the exercise, restore choice and remain within the agreed professional scope.

Access & Ethical Care

Offer alternatives such as drawing, an object, written metaphor or ordinary conversation. Sensory preferences, mobility, speech differences, culture and neurodivergence can influence what feels accessible, agree adaptations individually. Avoid assumptions about eye contact or body language. Keep client details anonymised, avoid recording without explicit agreement, and use action methods within the SUPERvisor's competence. Maintain the focus on professional reflection and appropriate onward support if personal therapeutic needs emerge.



Top Tips for SUPERvisors Using This

Working One-to-One

- **You are both translator and SUPERvisor** so name that dual role explicitly at the start, & be especially careful your offer is a genuine hypothesis, not a steer toward what you expect to hear.
- **Slow down more than feels necessary.** Without a third person holding the process, it is easy to move from expression straight into your own interpretation without enough pause for the SUPERvisee's own noticing.
- **Offer only one translation at a time**, and resist the temptation to build a fuller story before checking your first offer against the SUPERvisee's experience.
- **Keep your own reaction visible but light.** A short, genuine observation about your own response can be more useful than an elaborate interpretation.
- **Have a lower-key alternative ready**, since the absence of a separate process-holder means you will need to manage both roles if the SUPERvisee becomes uncomfortable.

Working with a Group

- **Choose the translator deliberately**, rather than defaulting to the most confident voice in the room, rotating the role also builds the skill across the group over time.
- **Brief observers explicitly on their role.** Silent witnesses can affect a SUPERvisee's sense of exposure, agree in advance whether & how they will contribute afterward.
- **Protect against pile-on interpretation.** Once one translation has been offered and checked, resist other group members adding further readings unless the SUPERvisee invites it.
- **Use the group's shared witnessing as data**, what several people noticed in the room, held lightly, can add useful texture once the SUPERvisee's own account is established.
- **Build in more time for closing.** With more people present, returning everyone, not just the SUPERvisee, to an ordinary working frame takes longer & matters more.

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