

# The Importance of Group Vocalising

(based on *The Origins of Language and the Power of the Voice* Lyz Cooper)

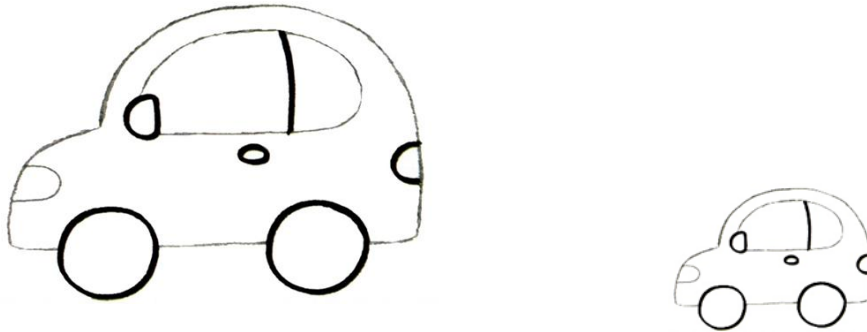
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## Background to human vocalising

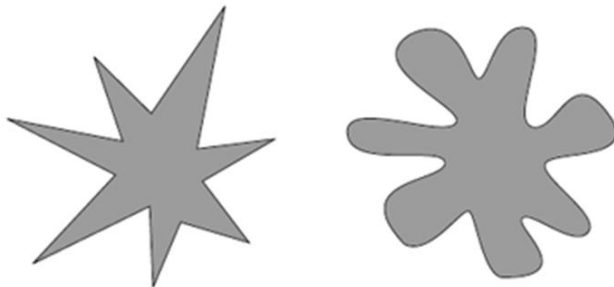
- 4.5 million years ago we would not have had complex language but would have made sounds similar to those that apes make today.
- Early vocalisations would have been basic calls to let each other know when they were happy, angry or when there was danger. They probably would also have had mating calls and sounds to soothe their children as well as identification sounds so that they could call to their loved ones when they were out of sight.
- The Vervet monkey, for example, has different calls for 'snake', 'leopard' and 'eagle' and when they hear these calls, take the appropriate shelter. Although we don't know for sure, it makes sense that early hominids would have done the same.
- The remains of ancient tiny inner ear bones, called 'ossicles' have been found which tell us that our early ancestors were more sensitive to higher pitch sounds than we are today. Although most of us are not quite as sensitive to high pitch sounds as we used to be, we are still more sensitive to high frequencies – especially in the 2,000 – 5,000 Hz frequency band, which explains why we find the cry of a baby or police siren so penetrating, as they fall within this band. It is likely that millions of years ago, our warning cries would have been high pitch just as our screams are today - they would have been perfectly placed in our hearing spectrum to not only draw our attention, but to send a quick shot of adrenaline through our systems.
- Somewhere between 2.5 and 1.8 million years ago something very interesting happened – the brains of our early ancestors got bigger. As the shape of the skull changed, so did the range of vocal sounds. There is evidence to suggest that bigger brained hominids lived in larger communities, which now meant they had more individuals to communicate with, and in order to do this effectively they needed to develop a wider vocabulary.
- It is likely that we also developed a form of vocal 'grooming' to show our appreciation for each other and to flatter group members we wanted to impress. This early form of conversation may have enabled us to be liked by the dominant members of the community and would have been a great way to work our way up the social ladder.
- This early form of chatter would have been necessary for survival
- Bonding was essential and vocalising together is a bonding experience (ask someone who sings in a choir!)
- Take groups of Wolves, for example - they howl to bond with each other, to know where each member of the pack is and perhaps just for the heaven of it!
- primitive sounds we would have made would have brought us together, kept us together and enabled us to find the best mates

## The significance of the different types of sounds we make

### Mim or Mam?



### Booba or Kiki?



- The way we perceive sound is more than just hearing – it is about sensation and the way it moves us physically. When you make the sound 'i' as in 'mim' your larynx rises, the back of the tongue moves up slightly and the tongue pushes forward, leaving less room in the mouth. Whereas when you make the sound 'a' as in 'mam' your larynx drops, leaving more space in the mouth. It therefore makes perfect sense that we would use a smaller sound to represent a smaller object and a larger sound to represent a larger object.
- Minimum and maximum, minute (as in tiny) and massive, minute (as in time) and hour are all examples of size, time or space being represented in sound.
- As with the 'Bouba Kiki' effect, sharp looking or sounding objects would probably have been represented by more sharp sounding consonants and round, soft things more vowels
- As well as larger objects being represented by vowels it is likely that longer time frames would also be represented by vowel sounds - 'hour', 'year', and 'eon' for example. In contrast consonants are the linguistic and energetic representation of contraction and shorter time frames in our language - 'second', 'minute', 'tick' are such examples. Due to the expansive nature of the vowels, they have long been thought of as powerful and sacred sounds.
- To create a high pitch the vocal folds need to be long and thin, which we perceive as a kind of tension and for lower pitches to be produced the vocal folds are short and fat which we perceive as a relaxation of the larynx.
- This sensitivity to high pitches plus the physical feeling that we get when we make high sounds cause us to become excited when we hear high pitch sounds and will also use high pitch sounds to communicate excitement, anger, fear, speed or urgency to others. As a result, the use of pitch can be an effective way to relax or excite the system