Basil Bunting, “Some Limitations of English” [written, perhaps, in 1930; published in 1932], *Three Essays*, edited by Richard Caddel, Durham: Basil Bunting Poetry Center, 1994.

p. 24:

An analytical language emphasizes the similarity between things and the differences between aspects of things. It thus tends to break down immediate perceptions and substitute a world made of up second thought. Such a language is a good medium for the kind of thought that makes material inventions: we owe most of our industrial machinery and much of our industrial organization to the tongue we speak, as well as the whole system of chemistry which enables us to invent and manufacture high explosives with which to persuade speakers of less analytical languages to acquiesce to our notions. But we have lost the benefit of a whole view, a unified conception, concentration, intensity.

It is comparable to the breakup of craftsmanship with its complex of deft motions which are not separated from one another in the mind of the craftsman into a series of simpler motions which can each be performed by a separate man and of these into still simpler motions which a machine can do. We lose contact with whole things and deal with items instead: and these items have a thinness of meaning, an absence of associations by comparison with the thing as a whole. We gain fluency and rapidity at the expense of solidity and completeness.

English is said to be the most analytical language in the world: it may well be the most diffuse. It is incapable of intensity (except by grace of rhythm and cadence: I am speaking of the words themselves at present in their normal grammatical arrangement). The connotations of its words rich in a long tradition linked with latin and french [sic both], are subject to a constant attrition. They are forever losing richness of meaning. Their denotation is narrow. […]

Simultaneity, interdependence, continuous crossreference and absence of simplification are characteristic of all fact, whether physical or mental or emotional. The dictionary has put great obstacles in the poet's path.

p. 25:

It is necessary for the poet to understand the limitations of the language if he is to overcome them. By the analytical bent of english [sic] we have lost the power of easily feeling either the unity or the diversity of phenomena. Our philosophy and our religion are bound to a stupid monism derived from the grammarbook. Many generations of users of the language conscious of this fact will be needed before we can so far reintegrate and deconventionalize our language as to become continuously immediately aware of the earth we live on or even get rid of the last derivatives of our ancestral pig-worship.

pp. 34-35, “The Poet's Point of View” (first published in 1966)

Poetry, like music, is to be heard. It deals in sound—long sounds and short sounds, heavy beats and light beats, the tone relationships of vowels, the relations of consonants to one another which are like instrumental color in music. Poetry lies dead on the page, until some voice brings it to life, just as music, on the stave, is no more than instructions to the

player. A skilled musician can imagine the sound, more or less, and a skilled reader can try to hear, mentally, what his eyes see in print: but nothing will satisfy either of them till his ears hear it as real sound in the air. Poetry must be read aloud.

Reading in silence is the source of half the misconceptions that have caused the public to distrust poetry. Without the sound, the reader looks at the lines as he looks at prose, seeking a meaning. Prose exists to convey meaning, and no meaning such as prose conveys can be expressed as well in poetry. That is not poetry's business.

Poetry is seeking to make not meaning, but beauty; or if you insist on misusing words, its 'meaning' is of another kind, and lies in the relation to one another of lines and patterns of sounds, perhaps harmonious, perhaps contrasting and clashing, which the hearer feels rather than understands, lines of sound drawn in the air which stir deep emotions which have not even got a name in prose. This needs no explaining to an audience which gets its poetry by ear. It has neither time nor inclination to seek a prose meaning in poetry.

[…]

Composers are not always the best players of their own compositions, not poets the best readers of their own verses, though the composer and the poet can always bring out something that might otherwise be lost. Some lack a voice, or have not learned to control it. Some are so immersed in the mechanics of their craft that they, for instance, make an exaggerated pause at the line's end and lose the swing of the metre. Some have mannerisms, such as the constant repetition of a particular cadence, producing an effect rather like the detestable noise parsons make in church. Such defects no doubt sicken some people of poetry readings.

Actors, on the other hand, have the defects of their profession. They cannot [34] bear to leave their beautiful voices in the dark, they must use the whole range on poems that need only a short scale. They are trained for the stage, to make the most of every contrast, and are apt to make poetry sound theatrical. Nevertheless, actors and poets alike, if they but speak the lines, will give you more of a poem than you can get by reading it in silence. […] [35]