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**THE PRACTICAL USE OF HALF-BOUND-FORM TEXTUAL IMPROVISATION (HBFTI) IN SPEECH TRAINING**

Doctorate thesis

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**THE PRACTICAL USE OF HALF-BOUND-FORM TEXTUAL IMPROVISATION (HBFTI) IN SPEECH TRAINING**

Abstract

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**Introduction**

The topic of my doctorate thesis is presenting Half-Bound-Form Textual Improvisation (HBFTI) as well as examining the practical benefits derived from the method I have developed in speech training. I made a summary of the theoretical and practical experience of my twenty years as a university teacher and organized this body of knowledge. My primary goal was to present acting students with a paper about speech (both spontaneous and on stage) that is straightforward, easy to understand, that can be utilized well over the course of their careers and provides them with a comprehensive overview of the topic.

As evidenced by the title of the paper, this method is only halfway fixed; the other half builds upon the linguistic presence of the students and the wealth of their mental lexicon, as well as activating the strategies needed to access it.

Language is a set of tools, and speech is the actuation of this toolkit. Speech as action, as a unique creative activity is accomplished through the individual application and utilization of language. HBFTI ensures the permanent interaction of speech and thought.

Executing the series of exercises is inconceivable without concentration, since during the body of speech is continually repeated, a thorough examination targets the acoustic structure and articulation gestures of the individual speech sounds focused on, followed by carrying out any corrections and then the retention of the muscle sense experienced during sensory perception.

My method was created by the cause-and-effect relation between three fundamental theorems:

1. In order to preserve the voice of the actor and have their speech make sense, the syllabic focus of the Hungarian language must be made an automatism; the criteria with regard to vowel production must be applied.

2. Thinking slows speech, and therefore the constant search in the mental lexicon and the simultaneous adherence to the given set of rules compels everyone to develop, through incessant self-correction, a well-articulated, intact-sounding and individualized body of speech stemming from the actor’s personality.

3. Creative thinking and continuous retention and recall is suitable for keeping acting students in an adequate state of concentration while they carry out the exercises; this state of concentration is the fundamental requirement of active stage presence.

From the very beginning, I had come face to face with the fact that permanent concentration and the compulsion to conform can make the muscles of the body excessively rigid. I sought to employ targeted techniques that are able to develop a muscle tone of adequate tension and at the same time also increase the efficiency of professional speech training. The joint use of the Alexander technique, sphincter gymnastics and voice therapy has proved to be appropriate to centre on the triumvirate of posture-muscle tone-voice experience, and make it the object of examination.

Prior to presenting the HBFTI exercises, the goal is to develop correct posture, sensory perception of coordinated muscle work (circular muscles and diaphragms) as well as perception of the elementary experience of voice. By co-opting gross and fine motor movement exercises, the body’s capacity for coordination increases, balance is improved and voice production becomes even. From a speech standpoint, it is very important to develop the ease of standing, walking and sitting, since only a body with flexible muscle tone can create the control of the psych-physical mechanisms in the organism and produce a sufficiently voiced speech sound.

My experiences thus far show that the combined use of the Alexander technique, sphincter gymnastics and voice therapy improves bodily sense and concentration, and strengthens the basis of voice production.

HBFTI exercises maintain a mental state of readiness, enable creative thinking, and at the same time, the continuous repetitions make it possible to apply the classic set of requirements in speech training: the targeted examination and correction of particular speech sounds.

**1.** **Posture-muscle tone-voice experience**

The interior muscle system will always move according to the emotional state, and if the mental burden is continuous, then breathing will accelerate and the body can get cramped. If breathing becomes shallow and rapid, it is the consequence of permanent tension. The higher tension levels of the diaphragm can give the impression that chest volume has decreased and the resonant area has contracted. This usually results in an increase in pitch and the loss of the fullness of voice. The laryngeal muscles start trembling, facial muscles become rigid and sound production becomes exaggerated. Introducing techniques that ensure optimal relaxation and create necessary muscle tension into the process of speech training is a necessity.

Pairing and combining the Alexander technique, sphincter gymnastics and voice therapy multiplies the efficiency of speech training: it helps in establishing correct posture, developing a flexible muscle tone and in encountering the elementary voice experience.

The entirety of Frederick Matthias Alexander’s body of work[[1]](#footnote-1) (1869-1955) was helpful for me in experiencing and developing correct posture. The aim of his method is that by the conscious development of our consciousness and self-restraint, we obtain greater freedom of movement and an effortless breathing technique.

By conscious self-control, the functional errors of the organism can be eliminated:

- the energy loss associated with muscle tension decreases

- the cramped rigidity of the muscles relaxes

- the stooped posture straightens

- the spine remains continuously and optimally extended

- the body does not gravitate passively, but moves with ease

- gross and fine motor movements become coordinated

- disruptions in the respiratory and circulatory systems cease

- the capacity for concentration increases

- the circular muscles of the body contract and relax synchronously

- the basis of sonority is strengthened (the area of the lower abdomen and the pelvis)

During regular exercises, the sense of motion associated with a relaxed posture is created, which can be described by the following impressions:

- the neck belongs to the spine, not the head

- the shoulders belong to the back, not the arms

- the pelvis belongs to the back, not the feet

I have condensed attaining a loose and relaxed posture and the importance of creating the adequate muscle tone into a sentence that has now become emblematic: It is not the head that speaks, but the whole body!

In order to make the bodily muscles appropriately flexible and ensure that the voice has a body, so that it is not only the resonating chambers of the head that dominate, and the speech voice is made to resonate deeply and carry far, circular muscles (sphincters) must function in unison. With systematic practice, these muscles can be strengthened, improving posture, activating the swinging force and reinforcing the basis of voice production. I was able to combine Paula Garbourg’s sphincter exercises with Evemarie Haupt’s voice therapy exercises marvellously. My goal is to have the prospective actors experience the elementary volume in order for them to dare, without inhibitions, to identify with the extensions of their own bodies: their voices.

The broad theoretical and practical body of knowledge in voice therapy can be utilized exceptionally well when teaching phonation, since it is built on the following principles:

- establishing an equilibrium between bodily, spiritual and mental forces

- the openness of the capacity for perception (observation, senses)

- developing intentional safety

- maintaining the ease of a straight posture and of mobility

- developing refined breathing

- attaining the liveliness of free, relaxed and uninhibited voice production

Weak muscle tone in the area of articulation will cause low muscle tone in the two most important sphincters (the urethra and the circular muscles of the rectum, i.e., the lower sphincters). Lisps, inadequate rolling of the “*r*” and deficiencies in pronunciation are all the consequences of the weak muscle tone in these areas! It was astounding to realize how effectively the synchronous functioning of the sphincters helps a healthy, rich and resonant voice come into being. The low muscle tone in the basis of sonority results in an overly strong tone being created at the level of the larynx. This is when the impression that I have previously mentioned can be experienced: it is the head talking, not the body. If the larynx becomes tense, the speaker is forced to use more and more air in order for their speech to be audible and comprehensible despite their muttering, but instead of balancing out the voice, it becomes increasingly unpleasant, airy or compressed.

However, the combined use of the Alexander technique, sphincter gymnastics and voice therapy makes it possible to regain the elementary volume, and thus the voice returns to itself, the registers meld together and all resonating chambers vibrate in harmonious unison.

**2.** **The prerequisites of correct voice production**

When we speak, our organs of speech (lungs, windpipe, larynx, vocal folds, pharyngeal cavity, nasal cavity, oral cavity, uvula, palate, teeth, tongue, lips and the brain) are always in motion and the production of sounds is continuous.

Sound production entails several phases, and all of these define the quality of the sounds. Speech sounds are usually made by breathing out: starting from the lungs, the air goes through the windpipe and meets the vocal folds at the larynx, which are moved into the position required for creating the sounds in question by the two arytenoid cartilages. The vocal tract modifies the sound produced in the larynx as a resonator; it creates obstruents (when producing consonants) and sonorants (when producing vowels).

In order for individual speech sounds to be organized into speech during continuous sound production and to be able to fulfil the multifaceted role of speech, the following set of requirements must be met:

1. Biological requirements: intact speech organs, intact hearing and intact functioning of the nervous system

2. Societal requirements: the environment where the process of socialization takes place

3. Psychological requirements: intact emotional and mental life

The competence of the speech trainer also entails steering the vocal production of the students into a healthy direction, relieving unnecessary muscle tension and ensuring the optimal positioning of the entire body as well as the larynx. Only a relaxed body with good muscle tone can produce a voice rich in resonance that can encompass a large area.

The criteria of effortless voice production:

- deep breathing

- giving off voice without exertion

- exploiting the resonating chambers in the body to the full

- intelligible articulation

- nuanced cadence

- uniform voice production within the full vocal range

- minimal exertion when producing low- or high-pitched sounds

Maintaining the health of the voice and daily vocal exercise has special significance for acting students and actors alike, both in their professional and personal lives.

**3.** **Developing balanced muscle tension in the body in order to optimize voice production**

The actor, owing to their profession, counts as a professional speaker, which involves both bodily and mental exertion. Because of this, they must know and control their body perfectly, aid it and keep developing it.

The first step in the process of developing a correct posture is relaxing the muscles and observing the body in different positions: standing, sitting, walking, fine motor movements, and gross motor movements, jumping and running.

Correcting excessive rigidity or perhaps muscle laxity in the body is extremely important in order to enable establishing the ideal tension of the body and creating the feeling of comfort; this is called “eutonia” based on the Greek word. *Eutonia* denotes a state of corporeal and spiritual equilibrium that is able to balance out too much and too little muscle tension.

If the body relaxes, the lips, the tongue, the uvula, the larynx and the muscles of the lower jaw relax with it. Breathing relieves tension as well. When breathing is exerting, our tension increases, especially in our shoulders. We pay conscious attention to breathing, to the relaxed position of the shoulder and the chest. Breathing exercises make the diaphragm flexible; they expand the cavities of the breathing organs and deepen breathing. Conscious application of breathing exercises helps everyone to maintain their calm and independence in stressful speech situations.

Circular muscles (sphincters) form a muscle system that serves as the point of origin for the fundamental processes of life. The harmonic contractions and relaxations coordinated by them create breathing, digestion, blood flow and all muscle movements. There are no parts of the human body not influenced by the circular muscles. In a healthy body, all circular muscles contract and relax at once. If circular muscles fail to work together, the muscle tone of the body is not appropriate. Whenever the body is not flexible and the spinal column is not straight, the sound of speech becomes lifeless.

In childhood, the capacity to learn speech relies significantly on the development of the motor system. All irregularities in the development of the motor system will affect the learning of speech and later the quality of the activity of speech and the hygiene of voice production.

The critical period, i.e., the interval of time in which our brain is especially plastic and sensitive to environmental stimuli and is capable of rapid development, is different with each nervous system. True attention and concentration is very important for long-term plastic changes. Plasticity is an inseparable part of childhood, while competitive plasticity is more characteristic of adulthood, which means that the brain focuses on retaining only the information that is genuinely important for itself. Childhood plasticity is an intermittent, but continuously active function, and persists until the cerebral changes that take place in adolescence.[[2]](#footnote-2)

An environment constantly rich in stimuli and physical exercise increases brain activity and maintains the system of balance. We distinguish gross and fine motor movement processes. *Gross motor movement* includes all movements in which the entire body takes part: jumping, spinning, running, climbing, catching a ball etc. *Fine motor movement* appears first of all in the continuous and coordinated movement of the fingers and hands. Speech in particular calls for a great measure of sophisticated fine motor movements as well as good perception of movement. Dexterity in the speech muscles as well as the perception of their movements is developed from infancy through continuous use and practice. There is an especially close relationship between the dexterity of the motor system and that of the mouth and tongue muscles.

**4.** **The acoustic requirements of stage speech**

The intonation of stage speech differs from everyday speech in many ways, since the actor – as a professional speaker – seeks a greater degree of sonorant production in order to have their voice encompass a larger space; this requires a more coordinated articulatory activity and conscious strengthening of the basis of sonority.

The tonality of speech performed on stage is more elaborate than the melodic range of everyday speech. Imre Montágh writes, “The idea behind producing sound on stage is that the strongest voice must be obtained with the least amount of muscle work. The actor must not shout, but must nevertheless be heard well. This can be attained when breathing becomes perfect, resonance is the strongest and the voice becomes more forceful without gaining pitch.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

All this is made possible by the methodology that unites phonation and stage speech training. Phonation is a branch of phonetics that teaches the fundamental technical knowledge of voicing a text based on acoustics, plastic articulation and perception. However, voicing a text would be impossible without recognizing and comprehending its structure. Stage speech training prepares one for developing interconnected voiced parts of texts into coherent and intelligible speech. We might also say that phonation focuses on the segmental sound structure of speech, while stage speech examines the functions of suprasegmental sound structure.

Producing suprasegments during speech is less conscious than producing a sequence of speech sounds. This means that in a process of speech production, we plan the production of segments first, while suprasegments are relegated to a secondary importance. The speaker usually corrects all recognized errors of the segmental structure; however, supervising suprasegments works to a lesser degree, while corrective processes hardly ever do.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In the process of learning one’s native language, intact hearing has key importance in the processes of speech perception, speech comprehension and speech production alike. The four main levels of speech processing are the following:

1. Hearing: during which our hearing organ perceives, amplifies and transmits sound stimuli into the cerebral cortex, where final processing happens.

2. Speech perception: identifying speech sounds, sound connections and series of sounds.

3. We perform semantic and syntactical analysis during speech comprehension: meanings of structures in the given language as well as that of words, expressions, sentences and units of text undergo a process of understanding.

4. Interpretation: we connect processed information to pre-existing knowledge and experiences previously stored in our memories using our associations[[5]](#footnote-5).

Auditory concentration exercises have an important role in my teaching method: first in retaining the pronunciation criteria of individual speech sounds and then in developing attention that is focused in several directions. There are several fragments of text at once that acting students hear, receive through their auditory channel and identify, and in the end, they will be able to even tell which fragment of text was sent to them by which colleague through their vocal channel.

In human experience, attention, selection between stimuli and information processing plays a central role. Attention is about perception, learning, memory, thought and inner motivation. Attention helps arrive from perceptions to sensitivity, comprehension and the development of discernment.

In the system of the cognitive process, attention is third behind sensing and perception. Acoustic attention can be perfected: the will is one of the most steadfast pillars of enhancing concentration. Only those who are able to focus on the task deemed most important at the time and can remove themselves from everything not immediately relevant are truly capable of concentration.

The quality of speech depends on good breathing technique. Appropriate breathing is at the basis of good health. In the case of an incorrect and unstable posture, breathing is also insufficient and shallow.

Each person breathes differently, and most of them have no idea that the most perfect type of breathing is mixed deep breathing. The truth is that it is much more difficult to wean acting students off automated shallow breathing than it is to rid them of an incorrect articulatory gesture of a misplaced speech sound. I try it anyway, but I consider deepening their breathing to be the most important. I do not concentrate on the abdominal region; I stand behind them and check muscle movement in the external and internal muscles of the lower ribs. I compress the muscles with my palms and I allow them to push my palm away with the coordinated muscle movement of the intervertebral muscles and the sphincters. Many are incapable of pushing my palm away using their intervertebral muscles, but once I make them aware that the circular muscles of the urinary tract and the rectum also take part in the muscle activity, they immediately manage to actuate the intervertebral muscles. My experience is that the degree to which body awareness, self-control and self-correction is developed stands in direct proportion to the ease and depth with which acting students breathe.

Correct posture, freedom of movement and effortless, deep breathing is the prerequisite for creating a positive disposition.

Voice is how the successful balance of opposite forces manifests (air pressure and muscle tension in the vocal folds). A free-flowing, ringing, rich voice means an inner assent of life. Our voice is produced in the larynx. If we are terrified or if we are anxious, our voice starts quivering. Our voice always reflects our current dispositions in life. One must not squeeze, but allow the sound waves to carry the voice. If we feel well, then our voice becomes bright and we give ourselves to its unhindered flow.

The human body’s resonators amplify the voice produced by the two vocal folds. Our greatest resonator is the thorax, while the resonating chambers of the head are the following: the oral cavity, the maxillary sinus, the nasal cavity, the accessory sinuses of the nose and the frontal sinus. The resonance of the thorax mainly provides force, while the resonance of the head cavities provides the timbre and ring of the voice. In case of correct voice production, all sounds have an appropriate mix of head and chest resonance.

If we do not experience the flow of our voice elementally, if we do not sense that wide resonating chamber that rises arch-like at the back of the soft palate, and our voice just keeps sounding off without end, bringing with it a sense of wellbeing, then we have never truly revelled in our own voices, since we cannot be aware of its incredible force and musicality.

*The complex process of the speech activity* can be divided into four relatively distinct units: breathing, voice production, pronunciation and expression. The continued success of quality work is dependent on consistency. Acting students must always know and sense how much they have developed in two weeks, in a month, two months, three months, where they are at in a given moment, what mistakes they have managed to eliminate, which voicing exercises have helped them during their stage work, and so on.

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| 1. *The goals of breathing exercises:* |
| developing completely silent inhalation (1: 5-7) |
| the role of abdominal muscles, the diaphragm, the intervertebral muscles and the lower sphincters in developing mixed deep breathing |
| coordinating the uniform dilation of the midsection |
| developing the air allocation safety of the diaphragm |
| developing the unhindered, forceful, lengthy and uniform rhythm of exhaling  the amount of air used corresponds to uniform voice production |
| becoming aware of pauses |

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| 1. *The goals of voice production exercises:* |
| the conscious refinement of the middle voice register consisting of 4-5 notes |
| developing a forceful and richly resonant chest voice devoid of exertion |
| eliminating voice production that is raspy or airy, throaty, or is produced with a squeezed larynx |
| relaxing the neck, the laryngeal muscles and the sublingual muscles in order to bring the voice forward |
| the bidirectional broadening of the voice register |
| learning to increase volume without cramping |
| establishing the evenness of voice production in the entire register |

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| 1. *The goals of pronunciation exercises:* |
| developing the relaxed opening of the mouth |
| getting rid of closeness, lax soft palate functioning, incorrect production functions of stops and fricatives |
| establishing the exact tone and duration of vowels |
| cleaning up consonant pronunciation (*sz, z, c, s, zs, cs – r*) |
| consolidating the correct pronunciation of sound clusters |
| turning the careful pronunciation of the ends of words into routine |
| developing a lively and clear rendering of the text |
| establishing a regular speech rhythm |

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| 1. *The goals of pronunciation exercises:* |
| developing a proficiency in interpreting texts |
| making the performer’s phrases known |
| tone exercises: using light, dark and muffled tones |
| studying emphasis connections |
| introducing variations in intonation |
| accomplishing reversals and amplifications without cramping |

The straightforward set of requirements outlined by Imre Montágh that aids practical training and enables acting students to methodically check their performance is perfectly suited to my expectations as well[[6]](#footnote-6). I have tried to make it a straightforward system for acting students.

Each phonation exercise is at the same time a concentration task that trains personality. It begets in the acting student the indispensable skill absent which they could never set off on a career as an actor: it teaches them to pay attention to several things at once. On stage, they will no longer have to concentrate on their speech, since producing a voice of superior quality will have already become an automatism and will have been incorporated into their personality. What will matter from this point onwards is the abandon of playing and maintaining the concentrated state of the actor’s presence. Exercises for warming up the voice as well as text improvisation tasks that develop linguistic ability must never be suspended by a self-conscious actor who regards themselves with a critical eye.

**5.** **The status of the actor’s voice in the act of performativity**

Speech cannot be separated from acting, just as applying dramatic text to the stage cannot be accomplished without the actor’s speech voice. Throughout voicing the dramatic text, the actor strives to make their speech poignant, expressive and comprehensible; they strive to raise their intelligence and inventiveness to the greatest degree; they also try to break away from clichés, but at the same time, they attempt to reveal the most universal of character traits. They try to make group interaction easier during the rehearsal process so that they can show where their role belongs with ease and free of inhibition. The only textual tool dramatic texts have for depicting situations and characters is speech and the manner of speaking.

Contemporary artistic theatre dismantles the conventional layers of meaning in everyday cadence. Stage speech is not only an information-carrying medium, but also a tool for portraying the personality traits of stage characters that have an individual vocal identity with diverse sonority; one often removed from realistic representation. Unnatural sound combinations expand the acoustic space of the text that has been made audible, and the artistic manifestation of stage speech result in the multiplication of meanings. The prerequisite for receiving this sonority, modified in a manner that cannot be associated with everyday communication patterns, is comprehension.

The 1960s brought a significant shift in the arts; the borders of the different artistic branches became traversable, and this change could no longer be described with the conceptuality of traditional aesthetics. The definability of artistic works defied the theoretical assumptions and goals of artistic hermeneutics, which emphasized that an artistic work must be understood.

The process of interpretation and comprehension in the viewer takes place in a unique fashion; their senses decode the message of signs and sign systems idiosyncratically. The viewer is not only a being of thought and emotion, but one of action as well, and one who plays a defining part as an immediate participant in the events.

Human spatial orientation in closely linked to sensing oneself; an intimate correlation forms between humans and their environment. The human sense of self is composed of the visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory, tactile and thermal aspects of perception, and their evolution may be stimulated or hindered by the environment. Theatre is an exceptionally appropriate place to show off different artistic genres simultaneously: literature, visual arts, music, song, dance, pantomime, video and cinema can all be represented inside the space of a single theatre performance. This versatility, this complex system of signs subjects the viewer’s intellectual-emotional and creative intelligence alike to continuous stimuli.

Can we say about the theatre show that it is only performance? Why, a theatre show is an artistic work that takes place inside a clearly defined framework and within a finite, constrained space in which randomness and improvisation play little part due to all gestures and movements on stage having been deliberated upon and refined, while relations of cause and effect have been clarified and established during rehearsals! The notion of impermanence is nevertheless tied to the idiosyncrasy of the show, since there can never be two shows with the exact same substance.

Performativity is not a single “act”, but always the repetition of a certain norm or set of norms, and “to the extent it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

When stage play has left the stage, the spectators offer immediate feedback to the players, because that which they have seen has had a provocative effect on them, making participation and involvement inevitable. In the first chapter of her book, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*[[8]](#footnote-8), Erika Fischer-Lichte describes the performance entitled *Lips of Thomas* (1975) by Marina Abramovic in detail. This performance had overwritten the hitherto familiar and calm behaviour of reception in art appreciation in such a radical manner that viewers were compelled to intervene and carry the bleeding and suffering artist off stage.

Rules previously thought to be impossible to subvert had lost their validity. Faced with such events, a new system of interpretation was needed. Performance pieces no longer feature plots depicting fictional worlds or role-play; there is no audience in the traditional sense, and yet, there still is theatre. The traditional creator-receiver relationship has changed in its corporealness, its spatiality, its temporality and its sonority. Erika Fischer-Lichte has allowed for the new definitions of theatre. Theatre is not only the forum of cultural communication, but it is also a cultural institution, an unusual form of art that works with the human body, the human voice, with light, music and language.

The issue of performativity has been present in cultural studies for more than two decades. Fischer-Lichte has organized the terminology into a coherent system in which the mutual bodily presence of actor and spectator determines the result of performativity.  
  
 **6.** **The barriers and bridges of spontaneous speech**

Speech is not a hereditary talent as many other innate human abilities (hearing, sight, movement etc.), but a human skill acquired over the course of much learning and practice, developing alongside the evolution of the human intellectual and emotional universe over the course of continuous communication between people. When we speak, the quality and force of our voices as well as the extent to which our speech is plainly understood sends a signal to the outside world about the cognitive, affective and behavioural state of our personality. This primary signal is decoded by the brain of whoever enters into a communicational relationship with us. Speech is the product of the most highly organized matter, the human brain, created by the operation of the central nervous system.

The end result of the speech planning process is speech production, during which we transform willed communication into articulatory movements. The products of the articulatory gestures are conveyed through the air as acoustic signals, and their processing takes place at different levels of the decoding mechanism. A number of transformations happen during this: the original thought, the content and the form are retained in the articulatory movements (in sonorant production or perhaps without any vocal fold function, in the actuation of the different organs of speech production), and then, in a way that can be described using the parameters of time, frequency and intensity, they arrive, converted to acoustic waveforms, at the area where hearing is processed. This is the gate of speech processing from where the processes of perception begin.

In order for the student to decode in the appropriate areas of the brain the content and form that the speaker intended to convey, mental representation (visualization) needs to be identical. Mental representation can be manifold: thoughts, ideals, desires, perceptions, conceptions; within these, the specifically *linguistic* is a mental representation that contains the signs and functions of the individual stockpile of knowledge. Without this, speech processing cannot happen. The decoding mechanism leading from hearing to interpretation is extremely complex and is based on the coordinated activity of several processes.

Speech and language are closely linked notions and cannot be separated: language is a toolkit, and speech is its actuation. The description of these two notions is connected to the name of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who was the creator of modern 20th century structural linguistics and whose oeuvre establishes language as structure. Saussure introduces a terminological distinction to separate the notions of language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*): he replaces the expressions *concept* (or meaning) and *sound-image* with the terms *signified* and *signifier*.

Language is understood to be the system of grammar rules and words whose basis is intellectual performance. Speech is an action of execution that uses the muscle system. Language and speech can be compared to planning and execution. Language ability and speaking ability refer to two distinct functions, and therefore are connected to two processes of learning: primarily, to intellectual skill (correct words must be incorporated into the thought process as quickly as a communication needs it); and secondly, to the exceptionally rapid and complex muscle interplay needed so that speech may form out of the syllables and word order pronounced. Speech is thus the verbal manifestation of thoughts formulated in language. “Language is concrete, no less so than speaking (...). Besides, linguistic signs are tangible; it is possible to reduce them to conventional written symbols, whereas it would be impossible to provide detailed photographs of acts of speaking [actes de parole]; the pronunciation of even the smallest word represents an infinite number of muscular movements that could be identified and put into graphic form only with great difficulty. In language, on the contrary, there is only the sound-image, and the latter can be translated into a fixed visual image.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Most of the research into the process of producing spontaneous speech or live speech is done by psycholinguistics. The examination of live speech has also had an important role in developing the series of exercises in HBFTI, since the Half-Bound- Form contains both preparation (the fixed image of speech sounds) and spontaneity, i.e., the unfettered reactions of linguistic presence. Speech voiced from a written source allows for a much more straightforward and palpable area of study than involuntary speaking, the reconstruction of which is only possible via acoustic recordings. However, one notices from the outset that their text structure, sentence construction and tonality are different. Let us review the most typical properties of live speech and written language:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Live speech | Written language |
| historically and ontogenically fundamental | it was created from spoken language and became permanent over time |
| speech predates writing by several thousand years; the capacity for speech is an inborn human ability | writing must be taught artificially |
| voiced form | graphic form |
| it happens without preparation, it is spontaneous, it requires immediate text creation and quick thinking, and as a consequence, language behaviour is less refined and more instinctual | it allows time for thought, thus enabling a more conscious and refined linguistic shape; rules may be followed more strictly, construction is more though-out and precise |
| it is connected to time, ephemeral, one-off | it is connected to space, static, permanent |
| it is changing, constantly transforming | it affords permanence and prestige to language |
| it is the tool in everyday circumstances of conveyance and communication | it is the prescribed example of linguistic perfection |
| writing and speaking are the two differing but equally prestigious manifestations of language;  writing and speaking interact with each other | |

The most common forms of spontaneous speech: dialog, conversation, narration, semi-interpretative speech as well as textual improvisation. There are very significant differences between the articulation and acoustics of texts that are read and those that are created spontaneously.

Voiced speech is evidently preceded by the thought of speaking, since formulating a thought is the result of two processes:

1. The speaker makes a broad outline of what they want to speak about. Planning is done in the form of images, and linguistic determination appears to take shape.

2. The speaker gives linguistic shape to certain speech acts, begins selecting the words to use form the mental lexicon, and plans the main milestones on the time-line of the text spoken.

Spontaneous storytelling and recounting events is extremely useful: “The characteristic melody patterns of the tale originate from everyday speech; they are the musical formulations of certain common intonations. We can, however, also say that by modifying emphasis and word order, they stand out from everyday speech and gain a certain measure of independence.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Throughout my teaching career, my primary goal has always been to aid unique, one-time individuality in blossoming. The goal of individual imagination exercises is also for voiced verbal manifestations not to be a barrier for prospective actors, but a bridge, first of all towards their own soul, and second towards their peers and the audience. Because those who do not have sufficient imagination are cut off not only from the deeper realities of life, but from their own souls as well. And throughout their lives, actors strive to conquer the territory linking their soul with their intellect. They who study speech study thought. Everything depends on the inner preparation of the individual, since internal disposition plays a part in all emotions.

**7.** **Introduction to the system of Half-Bound-Form Textual Improvisation (HBFTI) exercises**

Half-Bound-Form Textual Improvisation (HBFTI) is positioned along the axis between spontaneous speech and speech voiced from a written source. This position cannot be pinpointed, since the rules and requirements of HBFTI alter with each set of exercises. HBFTI is semi-restricted speech; the speaker prepares for it and for the activation of their imagination and mental lexicon.

The set of exercises becomes gradually more complex. The fundamentals of the system are the sequences based on the opposition of vowels: I-Í, E-É, A-Á, O-Ó, Ö-Ő, U-Ú, Ü-Ű, as well as the speech sounds of the Hungarian alphabet: A, Á, B, C, CS, D, DZ, DZS, E, É, F, G, GY, H, I, Í, J, K, L, LY, M, N, O, Ó, Ö, Ő, P, R, S, SZ, T, TY, U, Ú, Ü, Ű, V, Z, ZS**.** (If we cannot create a word using the speech sound that comes next, we leave it out.)

Memory begins with retention. Our brain acts, it remembers something that we retained previously, either involuntarily or on purpose. Memory is the ability of the brain to store and retrieve information.

Memory capacity is usually divided into two categories based on the duration of storage. Attention plays a crucial role in short-term memory, its capacity being only a few seconds.

Long-term memory is dominated by understanding and emotion. Its successful operation depends on the individual’s knowledge thus far, the topic and the amount of data. “From a neurological standpoint, it can be said that if an event in the past is recalled with the specific information of the circumstances at the time of learning, we remember.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Long-term memory can span from minutes to years.

My goal with HBFTI is to activate the long-term memory of the students even if they must sometimes construct and memorize strings of words with no logical connection between them. On the other hand, retention, storage and recall are aided by the fixed set of rules and the static order of speech sounds.

The two forms of retention are the results of mechanical processing (memorizing by rote) and cognitive processing (based on thought and awareness). When we remember, we attempt, for all intents and purposes, to restore a prior cerebral state in order to go back to when the information was recorded, i.e., the memory impression came to be.

Recalling stories and events is done via cognitive processing; memory is usually associative, with one trace of memory following the other and activating each other in sequence. Memory evolves and can be developed consciously. Repetition improves understanding and recall as well.[[12]](#footnote-12)

HBFTI exercises stimulate the triad of retention, storage and recall in equal measure. We can recall the sequence of sounds with ease, there is enough time at our disposal for creating associations and activating memory. The process of retention involves different types of memory:

1. Recollection that has become reflexive points to knowledge that we have gained by having an experience, but this knowledge has already become separated from the actual experience we had once had. We are driven by habit, which we have induced by much repetition (texts, musical pieces learned)

2. In contrast, evocative recollection is directed towards a certain concrete experience that we had had (for example, we recall all elements of the set and the props of a scene on stage with ease because it has been branded into our memory).

When performing HBFTI exercises, we use recall by alternating between mechanical and logical memory according to the situation at hand.

And in the case of HBFTI, the goal is just that: to create a state in which thinking can become a creative activity, where passive vocabulary too can be actuated and the act of creating representations manifesting in speech can be accomplished.

If we motivate someone, then we stimulate them to behave in the way we desire. We induce them to replace their old behaviour with a new one. The more precisely we formulate the state to be attained, the stronger the motivation.

In the case of HBFTI, my motivation system has developed along the following criteria:

1. Improving targeted areas of speech activity as a result of lowering the average speaking velocity (correcting breathing, voicing, pronunciation and expression)

2. Coordinating the processes of retention, storage and recall

3. The importance of motivation and of creating representations

4. Activating the mental lexicon and accomplishing creative thinking

The storage of linguistic and speech signs begins with acquiring our mother tongue and lasts until the end of our lives. We have a storage system in our brains in which we store the various units, rules and ways of operation of language and speech. We apply these on certain levels of speech production (in the process ranging from the intent to speak to pronunciation), speech perception (the activity of speech processing), in the process of acquiring the mother tongue and also when we read. This storage system is what we dub the mental lexicon.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The mental lexicon is a sort of “cerebral dictionary” whose defining elements are words. The mental lexicon is always connected to the individual; neither its size, nor its function can be described with constant parameters.

The mental lexicon consists of three areas that constantly shift their borders, are in contact with and respectively, turn into one another: the active part (or active vocabulary), the passive part (or passive vocabulary) and the vocabulary being activated.

During HBFTI exercises, bodies of speech are born that are half planned, half spontaneous; these also contribute to attaining the goals of phonation, and at the same time stimulate linguistic creativity as well. Wilhelm von Humboldt, a classical proponent of the unity of language and thought linked the concept of individuality with its uniqueness and ineffability. His formulation, according to which man is something more and also something other than his language and his actions, and additionally, than his emotions and thoughts, holds true to this day.[[14]](#footnote-14) And experiencing this *something more and also something other* in particular represents the challenge when performing the exercises.

Speech affects us not only by its content but by its tone. Although the sounds themselves have no meaning, they do have aesthetic effect and expressive force. Prosody of speech means the suprasegmental sound structure of speech.

Producing suprasegments during speech is less conscious than producing series of speech sounds. We plan the production of segments first, while suprasegments are relegated to a secondary importance. We produce suprasegments with the same speech organs and at the same time as segments. The emphasis relationships, intonation, volume, pitch, tone, tempo of speech and the pauses interposed are non-linguistic signs of communication, but if we apply these musical means of expression consciously during our speech activity, then by their application we can make our message more straightforward and we can create a more multi-layered speech.

**8.** **HBFTI exercises**

The experiences that I was left with during the application of the exercise series are the following: HBFTI ensures the permanent interaction of speech and thought. The required rules that have been developed consistently might, at first glance, appear to be barriers that limit individual verbal manifestation. However, without a set of rules, the game loses its purpose, since it will have no stake. The stakes in the performativity of acting are meticulously executing text interpretation as an intellectual act, and its concrete realization as an artistic act. This process may be the first step in experiencing half-bound form textual improvisation exercises.

Thinking slows the tempo of speech, which means that one can pay more attention to and achieve a higher degree of conditioning in the syllabic focus central to the Hungarian language. While the fundamental requirement for successfully learning how to read is phoneme awareness, the basic requirement of precise articulation is turning pronunciation focused on syllables into routine.

The self-evident and widely accepted belief among professionals that fully audible vowel production rich in sonorants is paramount on stage becomes obvious to students. Consonant cluster voicing and its examination also takes place during HBFTI. HBFTI exercises teach precise segmentation and coordination. The ponderousness stemming from a perfectly memorized text and the safety of a text constantly repeated aloud vanishes. The speaker thinks, activates their mental lexicon, creatively chooses the appropriate word, expression or sentence from it and at the same time pays attention to the voicing of the text as well. After some time has passed and execution attains a higher level, mental attunement also optimizes the balance of air pressure and muscle tension. Students become capable of speaking in their middle register, using good muscle tone, displaying an even voice performance and sustaining uniformly, and even stopping sounds become more massive.

When performing the exercises, students stand or sit in a circle, talk and move. The ease and relaxedness of movement is an important criterion in the harmony of stage presence that connects speech and action. The acting student initiating the exercise indicates the next student using a pointing gesture or by throwing a ball, and the process is repeated. A series of creative acts begin, as well as awareness of the outside world and our own inner processes. The prerequisite of receptiveness is openness. Being receptive always means that we are ready to accept something new.  
  
**Conclusion**

HBFTI offers a chance for the practical examination of the process of sound production, the conscious perception of muscle activities that take place during the articulation of speech sounds and for experiencing the possibility of creative thought.

What sits at the root of my method is the development of advanced body awareness: correct posture experienced during sense perception, building up a flexible muscle system and experiencing sonority awareness confidently. Neither an overly rigid, nor a laxly muscled body will be able to produce a healthy voice with full resonance.

My experience is that the most effective method for developing and maintaining the appropriate muscle tension in the body is the amalgamation of these three methods: the Alexander technique, sphincter gymnastics and vocal therapy.

Interposing the cyclically repeating series of gross and fine motor movements into the set of HBFTI exercises helps in sustaining a state of concentration, in coordinating movements of the right and left sides of the body and in maintaining balance. The centre of gravity is positioned in the lower abdomen; the basis of sonority is reinforced.

While the exercises are being done, the constant repetitions enable examining the articulatory gestures of certain speech sounds that are based on coordinated muscle movements in great detail, retaining muscle memory and memorizing impressions.

Perceiving muscle impressions with the senses and activating the mental lexicon during the development of HBFTI exercises take place alternatingly in the beginning, and then simultaneously, as technical corrections become skills.

The combined use of the Alexander technique, sphincter gymnastics and vocal therapy multiplies the effectiveness of speech training: it maintains a dynamic state in the body and it enables loose, cramp-free voicing.

The set of increasingly complex exercises in HBFTI creates a balance of challenge and ability and aids the coordinated functioning of action and intellect. The set of rules is straightforward, and the goal is attained when a new body of speech is created; this can either be a sequence of words, a personal account using five words given or even a fictional story. If it succeeds, feedback is entirely positive from both acting students and teacher, and this benefits the confidence of the author of the body of speech. Personality development and voice development interact with each other: as confidence increases, the capacity for resonance increases as well.

Constant control: checking posture, balancing out muscle functions, precision of pronunciation, the grammatically correct and phonologically nuanced formulation of the body of speech created; all these aid in maintaining awareness of ourselves and guarantee that we will preserve the state of active attention.

HBFTI exercises harmonize the state of intellectual readiness with the set of requirements involved in teaching phonation. The entirety of their didactic, technical and creatological usefulness comes to light when performing the exercises.

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