

Introduction

1. What does “orality” mean?

Besides written expression, orality or oral expression is the second largest area of language application. (Strictly speaking, it is the first in the history of mankind as well as with almost all individuals. The cultural techniques of writing and reading emerge only after a long phase of purely oral communication.)

Oral communication is comprised of the two aspects, listening and speaking: the receptive side (hearing/listening comprehension) and the productive side (speaking) or oral communication. This indicates that the promotion of listening comprehension plays an equal and important role in terms of the development of communicative competences.

The work in the area of orality has to observe its own rules but does not occur separately from the promotion of writing competence. Rather, the two major areas are connected in what can be characterized as a circular relationship. That which is practiced in the area of oral communication will subsequently benefit the written expression and a developed written competence has beneficial consequences for the differentiation in oral communication.

Among the specific characteristics of oral use of language are the following points, which are also important for work in school:

- In oral communicative situations, the interlocutors are normally in the same place at the same time. This facilitates the use of mimicry and gestural language and non-verbal, situation signals (e.g. pointing out a person nearby or the cloudy sky). These non-verbal means help to support comprehension and are useful and functional in light of the “fleetingness” of oral communication. This is quite different in written situations, where the steps of «writing» and «reading» take place in a time-delayed fashion and can be repeated as well by going over and re-reading a text. (Phone conversations or written chats, represent a special position, which is not subject of this discussion.)

- In terms of language, orality follows its own rules, which are different from written language. Thus, incomplete sentences, sentence fragments, repetitions, selective language switching (e.g. from the first language to the language of the school, or from standard language to dialect), associative jumps, etc., are considered normal and do not interfere in everyday conversations, or only in exceptional cases. In the case of “cultivated” oral expression, such as in a presentation in school, stricter norms apply that are more oriented toward written expression. Here too, it would be totally false to demand of the students that they speak in a manner “as if printed”. However, this should not mean to forego training speech situations where a deliberately cultivated oral style and motivating contexts (scenic representations, oral presentations, etc.) are practiced.

2. Promoting orality – and what this means for HLT

Oral expression plays an important role in language teaching, and this applies of course to heritage language teaching as well. The importance of this role is already apparent in that the major part of communication takes place orally (particularly in the lower level classes). In order to effectively participate in the daily lessons, students must be able to listen and comprehend while listening and, on the other hand, they must have acquired various productive abilities in the area of oral expression. The prominent position of orality is shown in the following overview of the language skill areas and fields of action:

	Receptive abilities	Productive abilities
Orality: primary, “innate” talents	listening (listening-comprehension)	speaking
Literacy: secondary acquired cultural techniques	reading (reading-comprehension)	writing

As a peripheral complement to the two major areas of oral and written competence, the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar should be mentioned. This occurs “naturally” and uncontrolled, but is also supported and furthered in school.

The construction of the cultural techniques reading and writing requires in most cases developed abilities in the oral aspects of listening and speaking. The majority of the children have acquired good competences in this regard at the age of entering school, at least in terms of everyday language use. It is self-evident that language instruction in the schools has nevertheless a whole range of developmental tasks at hand in the area of orality. The pertinent main aspects (didactics of conversation, narrating, presenting, etc.) are discussed in chapter 4a "goals and work areas in the field of oral competency". These main considerations are also applicable for HLT and constitute the foundation for the relevant teaching suggestions in the practice section of this publication.

In addition, there are a few peculiarities and special aspects in the promotion of oral competence in HLT, particularly in terms of phonetics, vocabulary and syntax, as presently discussed more specifically. Their cause is the side by side of dialects and standard forms in many languages, and the fact that many students only know their first language in the dialectal variety spoken at home. As a result, and a challenge for HLT and its stated goals of introducing the standard language, the following tasks and work emphases developed:

a) Careful introduction to the phonemes of the first language

This includes the introduction to and the acoustical training of particularly those sounds of the standard language which are either not known in dialect or not distinguished in dialect. For example, in the southern Slavic languages, the sounds or phonemes „tʃ“ and „tch“ are differentiated as in the German word „Hütchen“ (little hat), though the first is expressed in writing as <č> whereas „tch“ is expressed as <č>. In Albanian, the same distinction is made with the graphemes <ç> und <q> whereas in many dialects, this distinction (which is also difficult for foreigners) is not made. This means that special speaking and listening exercises are necessary. Their goal is to sensitize the ear of the children with sound discrimination exercises, as this distinction is also relevant for writing. Without this special training, the students would commit the same errors over and over again in their texts due to lacking differentiation. The following example from German instruction shows different spellings of words like „Kese“ (cheese) and „Medchen“ (young girl) instead of „Käse“ and „Mädchen“ by students who failed to differentiate between „ä“ and the long „e“. Acoustical sound discrimination exercises (which most students already know from their regular curriculum classes) can be implemented without problems. See the suggestions in #1 of the practice section. An especially appropriate context for this is the introduction of the particular graphemes in the first or second grade.

b) Vocabulary work

Words are on a linguistic level above the phonemes and graphemes. Here too, there are many kinds of differences between the standard variant and the dialects in the first language, as well as between the dialects. These should be discussed and possibly shown on a chart for visualization, as they have valuable potentials for language reflection and learning about one's language and its facets. Moreover, the standard language concepts should be introduced and practiced cautiously and gradually. It would be a good idea to provide the students with a notebook to write down words or phrases to build sentences, first orally, then in writing. The work with vocabulary, discussed here, represents an important aspect of language education in HLT and should be deliberately embraced and fostered. The reason is compelling, as many children and adolescents who grow up in the migration only have a very limited mastery of their first language, i.e. reduced to everyday vocabulary, oral use and dialect only. It is no wonder that many of them feel more confident in using the language of the immigration country in which they are being taught and furthered on a daily basis. HLT occupies a central position, and for children of educationally disadvantaged families it remains the only institution in terms of the important goal of making the first language available for a more sophisticated use. Orality – listening comprehension and one's own oral expression play a role here, the importance of which cannot be overestimated. It facilitates encounters and attempts to try new facets of language use which are mostly simpler and more anxiety-free than those in written expression. Thus, well reflected and planned learning arrangements to foster oral competence are of highest value in terms of the goal of acquiring good literal competences in the first language.

c) Expanded means of speech and syntax

Vocabulary work that only deals with stand alone words would fall short of the mark, without the previously referenced phrases, which naturally belong to the vocabulary of every language. These phrases must be learned, practiced and applied multiple times in order to become part of the students' active vocabulary. It is methodologically preferable to practice this first orally and then in writing. The same also holds true for the following two types of word groups, or language means:

1. So-called „chunks“ or set phrases, such as „I would like ...“, „may I please...“, „could you please ...“ etc. Chunks are of high value in everyday formulated communication situations. That children know these also in the standard variant of their first language is a prerequisite for their mastery. For training purposes, and practicing with playful situations, brief role plays are best suitable.

2. Moreover, as a means of speech with a particularly high value for school purposes, a series of frequently-used phrases should be available for implementation in descriptions, discussions, short presentation, etc. In terms of <discussions>, this would include language means and building blocks for sentences, such as “In my opinion, it is like this...”, “I don’t share this view..”, “I totally agree/disagree..”, “This is fundamentally right, but ...” etc. Such language means must first be compiled with the students. The recourse to the school language can be very useful, since it is already known to the students. The language means are subsequently written down and practiced extensively. The photographs from the Spanish HLT in London, depicted in the handbook “Foundations and backgrounds” (chapter 7 B.4), are a visualization of simple speech means which contribute a great deal to the building of first language competences. Exercise #12 in the Practice Part shows how the students can be supported with the building blocks of a sentence, which they can use to relate to one another in conversation, thereby strengthening the coherence of the discussion.

With the next higher language level – grammar with its partial components morphology and syntax – different requirements apply, depending on the first language and the differences between dialect and standard language. The Kosovar students have to learn, among other things, the special infinitive construction of the Albanian standard language, the South-Slavic ones have to contend with the correct application of the cases in the standard variant, etc. As a learning psychological overall guideline for a lasting acquisition of language, it is certainly the case that the students should first understand that which they should learn (which is best accomplished through discovery learning) and applied and practiced in multiple forms and phases. Orality plays an important role in this as well (for recognition and naming), but also in terms of dialogical, action- oriented practice and forms of application.

d) Cross-linking of first and second languages

HLT students know and speak not only their first language, but also the language of the school in their host country. They feel often more competent in the school language, which is not surprising in light of their daily interaction with it in their regular curriculum classes. In promoting the students’ first language in HLT, it is important to utilize all resources and competences which students have acquired from studying the school language. For instance, this includes a vocabulary which is often broader than their limited vocabulary in the first language, which centers around domestic and familiar themes. This means that vocabulary work in the first language can be linked and referred to the school language, where many terms and concepts are already present and clarified. This eliminates long explanations in the first language, and only requires the mediation and application of the term in the first language. This concerns primarily the more sophisticated, school-related vocabulary, which is essential for a good command of the language, but also the referenced expanded language means. These connections are also valuable in counteracting the highly problematic disintegration of vocabularies in the first language and school language (where children often retain the familiar-domestic vocabulary in the first language and master the more demanding school-related vocabulary in the language of the school). In a broader sense, these resources and previous knowledge can and should also be relied on in considering grammatical phenomena or the mediation of learning strategies (see also workbook 5 of this series). In all of these cases, orality as the medium of discussion and training plays an important role as well when the ultimate goal is an increase in literal competences. It is obvious that this medium can only be fully used if the acquisition and development of oral competencies has been duly supported and practised with the necessary time and attention.

3. Goals and structure of this publication

The present volume is closely related to the didactic publications 1 and 2 of the series “Materials for heritage language teaching”. Whereas volumes 1 and 2 comprise suggestions for teaching writing and reading in the first language, the present volume is devoted to the vast area of orality. This includes sub-aspects of listening/listening comprehension and speaking, as shown in the overview. Contrary to the areas of reading and writing, this is not a matter of cultural techniques which have to be mediated in school from the ground up, but rather an extension and building of competencies that are related to daily life, which almost all children have acquired in their pre-school