

FROM SCHOLARS TO PRACTICAL WORKERS

UDK 808.55
BBK III334.0,76
GSNTI 14.35.07
Code VAK BAK 13.00.01; 13.00.08

Yu. A. Vasil'ev

Saint Petersburg, Russia

SPEECH TRAINING AS A CREATIVE PROCESS

Abstract. The article deals with the new philosophy of speech training – a synchronized training of the sensory mechanisms of plastics, voice and speech reflecting the dialogic character of the performing art, uniting the deep processes of actual speech generation and demonstrating the unity of verbal and non-verbal influence upon the partners and the audience in the speech of an actor. The new approach to speech training of an actor includes four basic components. The first component is expressed by a specific creative sequence of learning the foundations of acting: feeling – movement – voice. What serves as the methodological basis of teaching in this case is not “training of voice, diction and breathing” but a desire to give birth to voice modulations as a response to internal impulses and external signals. The second component focuses on activization of sensory functions of the human organism in the process of development of the actor’s expressiveness of speech. Training presupposes the following stages: perception – imagination – influence. The third component concentrates on the synthesis of the actor’s expressiveness by means of the genetic unity between movement and speech. The methodological basis is made up by a triad formed by the three stages of development of real events (thesis, antithesis and synthesis): freedom – rhythm – expressiveness. The fourth component is connected with one of the central notions in the technology of scenic speech – with verbal action – and may be defined as verbal creativity. All the above-mentioned components display several stages of training: feeling of creative freedom – variability of mastering technical skills – improvisation in the process of realization of an utterance – dialogue in communication with the stage opponent.

Keywords: speech training; performing art; scenic speech; diction; drama; improvisation; method of speech creativity.

About the author: Vasil'ev Yuriy Andreevich, Candidate of Arts, Professor, Honored Worker of Arts of Russia.

Place of employment: Russian State Institute of Performing Arts, St.Petersburg.

Pedagogical practice and literature on speech training argue that the methods and techniques of speech development have changed very little in the recent 100 – 130 years. Improvements touch only technical (more often conservative) techniques of training the voice, breathing and diction of actors. Teaching has been based on training skills by the principle of mechanical repetition, “scales chanting” (on pronouncing sounds – syllables – sound combinations – words). The methods which are still popular now have been greatly influenced by the aim to train separate voice, diction and breathing skills. And work on expressiveness of scenic speech has been conducted with reference to “declamation” which radically differs from real actor’s creativity as it is primarily aimed at the reader’s own interpretation of the text and does not take into account the dialogic nature of the scenic art. Dialogue as the basic form of dramatic performance is disregarded by practical pedagogy of scenic speech. Conservative methods of training technique and expressiveness of speech do not include the natural birth of a voice and speech event and a live creative utterance. And even useful attempts to introduce new methods of speech training of recent decades, – such as complex method of scenic speech training, indirect development of technical skills of voice and speech, game method, and speech education in action – do not save the situation and do not resolve the main problems of speech education. All this is very close to theatricality and modernity. And it is this that directors of the new generation have in view when they express serious dissatisfaction with the quality of speech of dramatic school graduates. K. Bogomolov directly states in one of his interviews: “The worst thing is that in most cases young actors are not trained by masters, but by scenic speech pedagogues. It wouldn’t be so bad if they trained their students’ voice and diction, but they teach them declamation – and this is really a catastrophe. As a result, drama schools train people who speak with strangers’ voices and intonations, forgetting their own ones. To put it in a nutshell, graduates of drama schools receive actor diplomas but are not free people; they cannot speak in a normal quiet manner or design a process” [5]. If we take the progressive tendencies of development of dramatic art of the 20th – early 21st centuries and the power and organizing role of the art of direction in theatrical performance creation seriously, we

shall see that it is high time we formed a special system of training actors in “verbal creativity”. We need a system working towards harmonious synchronized training sensor mechanisms of plastics, voice and speech, reflecting the dialogic nature of dramatic art, uniting the deep processes of actual speech genesis and representing the combination of verbal and non-verbal levels of influence upon partner actors and audience the actor’s speech. We need a system of actual training scenic speech for the student, who strives to bring back the genetic memory of Speech Production as a once universal gift of Nature, evolution and an ancient school.

Taking into account all this, I worked out several components of a principally new approach to actors’ speech training. The first component is expressed by a specific creative sequence of acquisition of the fundamentals of the actor’s speech art: “feeling – movement – voice” [2]. What serves as the methodological basis of teaching in this case is not “training of voice, diction and breathing” but a desire to give birth to voice modulations as a response to internal impulses and external signals. I believe that it is necessary to get rid of operative treatment of speech and voice, of training voice, diction and breathing. The natural abilities of the student, their original skills are used as the basis for individual self-perfection and as a material for individual discoveries and self-education. Each lesson should open new perspectives for the student to try various techniques of making the body and speech organs free from unnecessary muscle tensions on themselves. For this end, it seems useful to introduce in training new terminology based on the so-called “blurred images” (a notion borrowed from psychology of the subconscious [6]). Evaluations and ideas connected with “blurred images” and being utterly subjective are a convenient means of studying subconscious responses and allow using “blurred images” in the processes of indirect influence on mechanisms of breathing, voice and speech during training based on activization of the subconscious.

Exercises may become useful only in case they help activate the sensor mechanisms of man, develop the natural need of unified action of body and word and consolidate emotional-volitional impulses of utterance. With this purpose in view, training should include vibration exercises (vibration of lips during passage of

airflow), impulse exercises, and touch the zones of inner speech and inner perception-knowledge. Exercises based on musical-rhythmic formation of utterance may also become useful. For example, our purpose is to teach the student to open the speech resonators wide in the vertical direction. We can use the downward movement of the wrist, action of the knees, their elastic tension, the feeling of a load on the shoulders and the imagined opening of the speech resonators from the middle of the back. Rhythmic combinations with the syllable “*da*” are quite suitable here. The student should necessarily feel the vertical articulatory movements on the syllable “*da*” with all his/her body. Any psycho-physical actions are suitable: teasing, making fun, calling, etc. Then we can include in our training words and notions with the stressed syllable “*da*”: *dacha, dama, net styda, udar, prodat*!; “*dannoe izdanie — zadatok nazidaniy*”; “*redaktorsha kudakhtala nad daktilem*”, etc.

Complex training of articulatory, energetic and resonator systems should be conducted alongside with gestures and plasticity training. It is necessary to supplement the wrist movements with the work of most subtle movements of articulatory organs, to combine the work of wrists and knees with sweeping movements of the lower jaw and the body of the tongue. The work of the body, arms and legs should be trained in combination with the development of voice and resonator system. This work is plastic, esthetic and creative.

While training, special attention should be paid to the development of cantilena in plastic movement and speech. Cantilena embraces breathing, voice, articulatory movements and plasticity of the body. Resonance exercises for the voice should take into account the properties of the exhaled airflow and make the sound of the actor’s voice resonate in space. All exercises are aimed at awakening emotionality of future actors. Clever emotion, emotional ear, and clear manifestation of empathy are present in every student’s audition. The method of “unobtrusive” acquisition of speech and voice skills is based on the principle of variability.

The second component uses more complex techniques which form the basis of the first component: it is a genetic relationship between movement and speech and the aim of activation of sensor functions of the organism in the process of

development of the actor's speech expressiveness. At the same time, the following new topics are introduced: dependence of speech function on the phenomenon of perception, motivation for "utterance" production, the principle of "vertical orientation", the principle of balance, improvisation techniques and methods of organization of dramatic speech in the rhythms of time and space [1]. Training presupposes the following stages: "perception – imagination – influence". Training diction and voice is transferred into the sphere of creative communication. Much depends on the interaction with the partner. Paired training, improvised learning dialogues, scenic dialogues smoothly transfer from one stage of training into another and tune the students in the dramatic mood of speech art.

Intensive musical-speech training emotionally supports the mastered skills and creates a wonderful artistic atmosphere during lessons. The musical character of body, voice and speech reflects the artistic search of the directed theater of the 20th century and orients the students towards synthesis of actor's creative art. The principles of the game method turn out to be close to musicality. Game becomes one of the most effective methods of development of both technical skills and speech will, inner and outer emotional mobility of the student-actor. Exercises with objects (body bars and jump ropes) which become part of the creative action of a future actor at the lessons of speech, make up special cycles. The objects function not as supports in training voice and speech, but as an equal element of influencing the partner and the audience. These objects educate the rhythmic character of speech and facilitate the sound of the voice in space. A specially designed system of usage of training material is aimed at the transfer of the mastered skills of speech technique into the sphere of speech and voice expressiveness. Any authored text is oriented towards theatricality. An authored text is used as an actor's utterance, but not as a monologue. Theatricality presupposes participation of the partner in scenic action, and that is why training includes paired and group exercises. Education of true-to-life scenic speech is a most difficult task of speech training; that is why improvisation becomes an urgent demand of teaching creative speech. Improvisation ability allows the actor to demonstrate urgency and lightness of speech. Improvisation issues from the partner –

therefore exercises comprising versatile bodily-verbal improvisations may prove especially useful.

The third component concentrates on the synthesis of the actor's expressiveness by means of the genetic unity between movement and speech, stemming from the laws of rhythmic organization of poetic and prosaic speech and facilitates the skills of intonation-logical, tempo-rhythmic, emotional-perceptive and semantic structure of the utterance [4]. The methodological basis is made up by a triad formed by the three stages of development of real events (thesis, antithesis and synthesis): "freedom – rhythm – expressiveness". Rhythm is seen in this respect at a deep level – as a basis of any verbal or plastic action, any artistic creation, be it a work of painting, music, architecture, or any element defining the artistic integrity of the performance. Ration is an antithesis of rhythm. The harmony between rhythm and ration and their synthesis in the art of speech of the dramatic actor brings about the feeling of joy. The cognition of the rhythmic structure of scenic speech is a gradual process. A tennis ball is introduced in training. This unpredictable game item becomes both a stimulator of activity and a uniting object at the same time. If at the initial stages of speech training movements performed the role of a training support, the topic "speech and movement" gradually rises to a new level – both speech and movements are seen in a united complex of the actor's expressive means. Physical movements, gestures, plastics, diction, voice, breathing, intonation, and speech and movements tempo-rhythms – they all become elements of the actor's expressive means. All together, they create the harmony of acting expression – absence of any of them makes creative activity a shade duller. Training rhythmic organization of scenic speech is designed taking into account this peculiarity. The link "rhythm – ration – joy" may be regarded as a methods principle of training.

The fourth component is connected with one of the central notions in the technology of scenic speech – with verbal action [3]. Mastering voice, diction and scenic word potential should proceed from the simplest voice and breathing exercises to scenic dialogues. Semantic value of breathing and rhythm of scenic existence, its musicality and physical texture become rather important. The actor's expressiveness

emerges together with that of the partner and develops in combination with scenic time and space. Mastering expressiveness is directly connected with the original development of relationships of acting with these theatrical dimensions. The student gets used to independent creation, alteration and, which is still more important, variation of temporal and spatial circumstances under which he/she acts on the stage. The material for constructing theatrical time and space may include movement, sounds, shouts, words and speech in all multiplicity of its forms. By the end of the training course, the students are given a chance to develop such complex levels of acting as processual perception of the partner and matching one's acting to that of the partner. Improvisation becomes part of each lesson. Any training model should grow into creation of the student's own variations of acting and scenic text (in the broad meaning of the forms of this text – playing and sound, first of all verbal ones). Activity of expressive means is associated with the phenomenon of perception of everything and everyone around the actor and influence upon everything and everyone close by. As a result, the students are led to understanding a speech unit as an utterance. In its turn, each utterance makes a link in the chain of other utterances.

All the above-mentioned components represent several stages of training: feeling of creative freedom – variability of mastering technical skills – improvisation in the process of realization of an utterance – dialogic nature of communication with the stage opponent. The dialogic nature brings speech training extremely close to scenic conditions. This fact transfers training into the sphere of contact interaction characterized by: a) joint paired training; b) rhythmic of interaction; c) expressiveness of dramatic dialogue. The methodological sequence of training is based on the following pedagogical formulae of the author: “feeling – movement – voice”, “perception – imagination – influence”, and “freedom – rhythm – expressiveness”. All this creates the conditions for live real-time communication both on the level of paired exercise and scenic dialogue. Variability of training rejects the outdated manner of declamation of the actor's lines and solves the problem getting away from “pre-learned” intonations. This fact defines the urgency of the method of “verbal creativity”; it also determines its relationship with the modern understanding of

acting as a natural and a versatile in physical manifestations scenic life in the conditions of theatrical space and time, – in those conditions that can be true to life, but very often are utterly conventional.

References

1. Vasil'ev, Yu. A. Stsenicheskaya rech': variatsii dlya tvorchestva / Yu. A. Vasil'ev. — SPb., 2007. — 432 s.
2. Vasil'ev, Yu. A. Stsenicheskaya rech': variatsii dlya treninga / Yu. A. Vasil'ev. — SPb., 2005. — 342 s.
3. Vasil'ev, Yu. A. Stsenicheskaya rech': golos deystvuyushchiy / Yu. A. Vasil'ev. — SPb., 2010. — 46 s.
4. Vasil'ev, Yu. A. Stsenicheskaya rech': ritmy i variatsii / Yu. A. Vasil'ev. — SPb., 2009. — 416 s.
5. Konstantin Bogomolov: «Nasha teatral'naya shkola gubit molodykh artistov» [Elektronnyy resurs] : interv'yu s Zhannoy Zaretskoy. — Rezhim dostupa: <http://www.openspace.ru/theatre/events/details/23841/?expand=yes#expand>.
6. Shapiro, D. I. Ob ispol'zovanii «rasplyvchatykh obrazov» kak sredstva izucheniya neosoznavaemoy psikhicheskoy deyatel'nosti / D. I. Shapiro // Bessoznatel'noe: priroda. Funktsii. Metody. Issledovaniya. — Tbilisi, 1978. — T. 3. — S. 667—673.