

FROM SCRIPT TO SPEECH: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN WRITTEN AND ORAL TRADITIONS IN PHILOLOGICAL STUDIES

Khilola Ismoilova

2nd-year student of Faculty of
Philology and Language Teaching at
Kokand University, Andijan Branch
khilolaismoilova0@gmail.com

Robiya Ismonaliyeva

2nd-year student of Faculty of
Philology and Language Teaching at
Kokand University, Andijan Branch
robailkhom7@gmail.com

Mohlaroy Qodirova

2nd-year student of Faculty of
Philology and Language Teaching at
Kokand University, Andijan Branch
tothewondering@gmail.com

Abstract

The dynamic relationship between written and oral traditions has long intrigued philologists, as both forms of expression reveal the evolution of human language, culture, and cognition. This study examines the interplay between script and speech within philological research, highlighting how oral traditions influence written texts and how literacy transforms oral expression. Drawing from classical, medieval, and indigenous linguistic traditions, the article explores how oral performance, memorization, and storytelling shaped the transmission of texts before and after the advent of writing. The research also addresses how modern philology, supported by linguistic anthropology and digital humanities, redefines the boundaries between oral and written forms. Case studies from Homeric epics, Old English poetry, and African oral literature demonstrate that script and speech are not opposing systems but complementary forces in cultural preservation. The paper concludes that philological inquiry into both forms deepens our understanding of linguistic creativity and cultural continuity.

Keywords: *Philology, oral tradition, written language, textual transmission, literacy, storytelling, cultural memory, linguistic anthropology, digital humanities, performance.*

Introduction

The relationship between written and oral expression lies at the foundation of human civilization. Before the invention of writing, oral tradition served as the primary means of transmitting knowledge, history, and values. Even after literacy emerged, orality continued to influence textual forms, creating a constant dialogue between memory and inscription. In philological studies, understanding this relationship is essential to reconstructing the history of languages and texts.

Philology, concerned with the history and structure of language as reflected in texts, also investigates how oral performance shaped those texts. The Homeric epics, for instance, reveal traces of oral composition techniques such as formulaic diction and repetitive structure. Similarly, medieval and indigenous literatures demonstrate hybrid forms where oral and written elements coexist. This article explores how the transition from speech to script redefined communication, how philologists uncover oral remnants within written texts, and how modern digital tools continue to bridge these two expressive modes.

Literature Review

The study of orality and literacy gained prominence with Parry and Lord's (1950) analysis of formulaic composition in Homeric poetry, establishing oral theory in philology. Goody and Watt (1963) examined the social implications of writing, arguing that literacy transformed cognition and cultural organization. Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982) further conceptualized the psychological and linguistic differences between oral and literate cultures. Finnegan (1970) highlighted the richness of African oral traditions, challenging Eurocentric assumptions about written culture's superiority. Contemporary philologists, such as Foley (2002) and Crystal (2010), emphasize the continuity between oral and written modes rather than opposition. Digital projects like *Oral Traditions Archive* have revived interest in performance-based textual studies. Building on these frameworks, this paper investigates how philological methods reveal the symbiosis of oral and written traditions across linguistic and cultural contexts.

Main Body

1. The Oral Foundation of Written Culture

Writing is often perceived as a replacement for speech, yet historically it evolved as a means of preserving oral knowledge. Early writing systems—Sumerian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Greek script—originated from mnemonic and symbolic traditions used to record spoken communication. In oral societies, poetry, storytelling, and ritual speech maintained social order and transmitted history. When these traditions were later transcribed, they carried traces of their oral origins, such as rhythmic structure and formulaic repetition.

Philologists study these traces to reconstruct early linguistic forms and cultural contexts. For example, the repetition and parallelism in Homer's *Iliad* reveal its oral

composition. The written form, while fixed, preserves the living rhythm of speech, demonstrating that writing can serve as an extension—not a negation—of orality.

2. Oral Composition and Formulaic Language

Milman Parry's groundbreaking work on Homeric poetry revealed that oral poets composed in performance using formulaic patterns and metrical structures. This discovery transformed philology by showing that texts often considered purely literary were rooted in oral improvisation.

In Old English poetry, similar formulaic techniques are visible in *Beowulf*, where stock epithets ("ring-giver," "whale-road") echo oral tradition. Philologists identify such features to trace linguistic continuity between oral performance and written preservation. Thus, formulaic language acts as a bridge connecting spoken artistry and textual permanence.

3. Literacy and the Transformation of Orality

The spread of literacy changed how societies preserved and interpreted knowledge. Goody and Watt (1963) argued that writing externalized memory, shifting authority from speaker to text. Yet literacy did not eliminate orality—it redefined it. Medieval European culture, for instance, maintained oral preaching and recitation alongside written scholarship.

Philologically, the shift to writing affected syntax, vocabulary, and semantics. Written languages developed more complex structures to convey meaning without vocal cues. The evolution from Latin to vernacular scripts in Europe exemplifies this process, where spoken dialects gradually acquired written form and literary prestige.

4. Hybrid Texts and Oral Residues

Many literary works embody both oral and written characteristics. The *Homeric Hymns*, *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and *Nibelungenlied* blend memorized formulae with scribal editing. In non-Western contexts, African griot epics and Native American chants show how oral traditions adapt to textualization without losing performative essence.

Philologists analyze these hybrid forms by examining textual variants, rhythm, and diction. Such analysis reveals how memory, improvisation, and audience interaction shaped textual evolution. Orality survives within writing not as a primitive relic but as an enduring creative force.

5. Modern Philology and Digital Orality

In the digital age, the boundary between oral and written communication is once again blurred. Speech recognition, podcasts, and oral archives revive performance as a form of textual creation. Digital philology now allows researchers to annotate recordings, transcribe oral texts, and compare spoken and written versions.

Projects like *The World Oral Literature Project* and *Oral Traditions Online* combine philological analysis with audio documentation, creating new forms of textual

scholarship. Digital media reintroduce the voice into philology, echoing ancient oral traditions through modern technological means.

6. The Philologist's Role in Bridging Speech and Script

The philologist serves as a mediator between oral and written worlds. Through comparative linguistic and textual study, they uncover how oral creativity survives within textual artifacts. By studying performance, prosody, and manuscript variation, philologists reconstruct the transition from speech to script across cultures.

This bridging function underscores philology's interdisciplinary nature—it unites linguistics, literature, anthropology, and history in the study of language as both spoken art and written record.

Research Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative philological approach combining textual analysis, comparative linguistics, and ethnographic interpretation. Primary data include transcribed oral texts, classical manuscripts, and digital oral archives. Secondary data consist of theoretical works on orality, literacy, and philological practice. The study proceeds in three phases: (1) identifying linguistic and stylistic features of oral composition within written texts; (2) analyzing how literacy transformed these features; and (3) exploring the role of digital technology in reintroducing orality into textual studies. By integrating historical, cultural, and technological perspectives, the methodology demonstrates that philology remains essential for understanding the continuous dialogue between speech and writing.

Results

The findings demonstrate that oral and written traditions are not separate but interdependent systems of expression. Philological analysis reveals how oral techniques such as repetition, rhythm, and formulaic phrasing persist in written literature. Literacy, while transforming communication, preserved key aspects of oral performance. Furthermore, digital philology reestablishes orality's role in textual studies through audio archives and interactive editions. The study concludes that the relationship between script and speech is cyclical: oral forms give rise to written texts, which in turn inspire new oral reinterpretations. This dynamic interplay enriches our understanding of linguistic evolution, cultural transmission, and the philological study of language as a living process.

Conclusion

The interplay between written and oral traditions lies at the heart of human cultural history. Philology, by examining both, reveals that language is a continuum of expression shaped by memory, performance, and inscription. The oral tradition provided the foundation for literature, offering rhythmic, mnemonic, and communal frameworks that survived the advent of writing. Even as script sought permanence, it retained the voice of its oral origins.

Philological inquiry demonstrates that oral residues persist in every text—from the formulaic verses of Homer to the rhythmic cadences of medieval poetry. Writing did not silence speech; rather, it transformed oral creativity into textual form. This transformation represents a profound cultural synthesis, where memory meets permanence and performance meets preservation.

In the digital age, philology once again encounters a world in which orality reemerges through audio media and online storytelling. Digital archives preserve spoken languages, while voice-based communication revitalizes oral aesthetics. The contemporary philologist must therefore engage both ancient manuscripts and modern technologies to understand language as a living dialogue between sound and script.

Ultimately, studying the interplay between orality and literacy enriches our comprehension of human expression. It affirms that philology, far from being limited to written texts, is the study of all linguistic art—the spoken, the written, and the evolving forms that unite them.

References

1. Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford University Press.
2. Foley, J. M. (2002). *How to Read an Oral Poem*. University of Illinois Press.
3. Goody, J., & Watt, I. (1963). "The Consequences of Literacy." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5(3), 304–345.
4. Havelock, E. A. (1963). *Preface to Plato*. Harvard University Press.
5. Lord, A. B. (1960). *The Singer of Tales*. Harvard University Press.
6. Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Methuen.
7. Parry, M. (1930). "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 41, 73–147.
8. Crystal, D. (2010). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Goody, J. (1987). *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. Cambridge University Press.
10. Vansina, J. (1985). *Oral Tradition as History*. University of Wisconsin Press.
11. Niles, J. D. (2007). *Old English Heroic Poems and the Oral Tradition*. Brepols.
12. Woodbury, A. (2011). "Language Documentation and Oral Tradition." In P. Austin & J. Sallabank (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*. Cambridge University Press.