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THE ATTITUDE OF DIGITAL NATIVES TOWARDS
INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Sandra Veinberg (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Institute of Management Sciences, Liepāja University, Liepāja, Lielā iela 14, Latvia LV 3401; Email:
sandra@balticmedia.net

Abstract

Intrapersonal communication is an important element of the human communication process which embodies the essence of the process of communication. It is at the start of communication that impulses are perceived and processed for the needs of external communication. The study demonstrated that the same tools of communications techniques are observable both in intrapersonal communications and in tools that are characteristic of the communication process in general: from the perception of impulses to the translation and adaptation of the information that is received and an active or passive response to the informative material that is received. In order to study the particular features of intrapersonal communication, digital natives as an analysis group were used because they have an active day-to-day communicative experience. The author conducted a survey among young adults, asking them about their attitude to intrapersonal communication and their opinion on the importance of this form of communication in the complex process of human interpersonal communication for the purposes of the research. The survey established the frequency of the use of intrapersonal communication, times, topics, and content, and the importance of the inner dialogue. The survey proved that intrapersonal communication is a very intensely-used form of communication among young adults which introduces the next step - communication with the outside world. The study concluded that communication processes can also occur in a single person as a dialogue. Intrapersonal communications are a continuous process of which the recipient is aware only under the circumstances of an extremely strong impulse.

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1. Introduction

The ability to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings is the basis for all successful human interaction. Our academic consideration of human communication typically portrays it as occurring on three levels as categorised by the number of communicators involved - intrapersonal, interpersonal, and public communication (Vocate, 1994), and the research and focus of communications scholars until now has been almost exclusively on the latter two. Often intrapersonal communication has been equated only with an element on the interpersonal level (Honeycutt, 2003) and identified simply as communication involving only contexts but providing no substantive information itself, and not being a unique form of communication. Some researchers consider that intrapersonal communication is ‘just thinking and [it] was not appropriate for communication[s] scholars to think about thinking’ (Vocate, 1994, p. X). However, it may be the case that, within the process of ‘just thinking’, an individual also uses a communication technique which is characteristic of communications. We can begin to study this information flow using the analysis methodology that is characteristic of communications science. The fact that humans talk to themselves, especially in difficult circumstances, has been observed by many scholars but no agreement has been reached between these authors in regard to forming a process of evaluating, studying, and defining the information flow that can be named ‘just thinking’. There is no shared view on whether this process also applies to communications research. However, opinion on whether inner dialogue with oneself is really communication varies as the ‘communicator is both sender and receiver’ (Vocate, 1994, p. 5). In addition, Cunningham (1989) declared intrapersonal communication to be critical because we had failed thus far to clearly define it. He seems here ‘not [to be] talking about a form of communication but, more conservatively, about inner processing in general: cognitive, perceptual, and motivational episodes’ and therefore there are no grounds for referring to this process as communication’ (ibid), and thereby it is unfeasible to provide internal communication with a definition or to carry out scientifically-based research methods upon it. This doubt has pushed for a more specific basis by defining intrapersonal as being ‘all of the physiological and psychological processing of messages that happens within individuals at the conscious and subconscious levels as they attempt to understand themselves and their environment’ (Roberts, Edwards, & Baker, 1987, p. 2). Organismic communication occurs at the intrapersonal level, ‘such details, however, do not become symbolic components in human communication until an interpretive process has attached meaning to them’ (Vocate, 1994, p. 6). Defining the phenomenon of intrapersonal communication only as the transmission of stimulus and action upon the same in a single human organism may be correct in a very general sense, but it places communications scholars outside the process because communications scholars are not biologists. The next step is to determine whether the internal dialogue can be added to communication research. Linguists already explain self-communication as ‘the fusion of genetically determined speech with culturally determined language’ (Dance, 1994, p. 2) and discerns two forms of spoken language here: internal and external. Vocate goes beyond this and separates the occurrence of spoken language at the intrapersonal level into two operationally distinct phenomena: dialogue with the self (self-communication) which may be internal or external, and the process of coding thought into language or decoding perceived language (Vocate, 1994). For research in communications science both are interesting - self-communication and inner speech - because they are spoken language phenomena at the intrapersonal level. Finally, the author agrees that these elements of communication create a ‘living line’

(Klykanov, 2010, p. 84) which is the basis for any communications process. Communication is not a simple, mechanical process where the information is transmitted from Point A to Point B. It is a living string, a real drama involving a gamut of emotions in a process as communication is a vector with an unpredictable result. It is a flow of symbols in relation to 'the other', entering time and daring to begin interpreting symbols around one (Bakhtin, 1986; Klykanov, 2010). This means that the following deliberate/subjective transformation effects of the information flow which are characteristic of the communications process are observable on the level of intrapersonal communications: 1) a perception of impulses; 2) the accumulation and interpretation of the acquired content; 3) the generation of energy in order to activate or make passive the use and possible forwarding of the interpreted material; 4) providing a starting position for communicating with the external world by confronting self-interpreted content with external processes. Therefore, this can be seen as a creative process and can be analysed as such in this way.

2. Problem Statement

So far it has been established that intrapersonal communication takes place within a single person for the purpose of clarifying ideas, analysing a given situation, or reflecting upon and appreciating something. It has three aspects: self-concept, perception, and expectation, and it involves different levels of communicative activity: internal discourse, verbal communication, and written communication. It is a communication process. Although it occurs within one person, it is essentially a dialogue that takes the shape of a monologue which, more or less, is continuously ongoing in one's head and is 'similar to everyday speech' (Jones & Fernyhough, 2007, p. 391). In order to determine how the dialogue in this method of thinking occurs in the human mind, an analysis target group in the form of digital natives was chosen. Digital natives are special people that grow up in the digital age (Prensky, 2001) and in their socialisation process they have mainly used only digital source materials (in the form of a smaller or larger screen). The members of this population group are especially active communicators because not only do they consume information on a daily basis, they also participate in its publishing and translation. It is important to note that Prensky's original paper was not a scientific one. He has since abandoned his digital native metaphor in favour of digital wisdom, which some authors reject, of course, by stating that the concept of a 'digital native' is a myth. This statement can be agreed with if the skill to use digital technology is being discussed. The younger generation uses technology in the same way as older people, of course but, if we look at the readiness and ability of this population group to participate in public and private communication, it is strikingly obvious that they are capable of communicating more actively and intensively than recipients of the older generation. They have grown up surrounded by computers, video games, and instant messaging with smartphones, from an increasingly younger age. The result is that twenty-first century students think and process information differently and more intensively because texting and instant messaging may weaken human creativity. A generation of digital natives is creating its own social network in its virtual world. Due to these extremely intensive communications skills, digital natives create a new culture of communication, a new language, and new abbreviations which are used for writing messages. They prefer to be active and to work autonomously (Shteptura, 2018).

3. Research Questions

There have been relatively few studies in the field of communications science on intrapersonal communication as a dialogue. 'Intrapersonal communication is a relatively new phenomenon for communications study and still lacks the grounding of a sound theoretical base' (Vocate, 1994, p. 6). The areas that have so far been studied more often include: 'communication with one's self, and this may include self-talk, acts of imagination and visualisation, and even recall and memory (McLean, 2005). Eight basic components of the communication process, i.e. source, receiver, message, channel, feedback, environment, context, and interference are analysed as [being] transactional, but all [of] the interaction occurs within the individual (Shedletsky, 1989). Some authors analyse intrapersonal communication through the application of the classic research (rhetoric) techniques (Nienkamp, 1994). However, the majority of communications sciences still consider this process to be transmissive and, in this case, the source (sender) and receiver is the same person. So the feedback works without any interruption and only one 'person' is involved, often for the purpose of clarifying ideas or analysing a situation. Since the communication process consists of four steps, it seemed important to determine how the gathering of informative impulses, the interpreting of the gathered factual material, and the generation of a new message takes place within the borders of intrapersonal communication. In this research, attention was drawn to two factors regarding the specifics of intrapersonal communication: a) whether digital natives are aware of the process of intrapersonal communication and how they understand this process: as a monologue or rather as a dialogue; b) whether digital natives recognise intrapersonal communication as a preparation process for external communication and whether they are capable of explaining the prerequisites for the activity or inactivity of external communication. With the help of this study an attempt was made to spot the reasons for the differences between different individuals in their ability to communicate at an interpersonal level and whether this is determined by the maturity of intrapersonal communication.

4. Purpose of the Study

Aim of this study was to determine the respondent's attitudes towards internal communication and it proved that internal communication is perceived by the respondent as the silent, internal dialogic process and often continues as external dialogue, addressed to self although others may hear it. The study shows new aspects of interpersonal communication, it can be the first step in process of human communication and can be seen as a preparatory process for intrapersonal communication. In psychiatry the academic belief regarding intrapersonal communication is that talking to oneself can be used to avoid silence (Jordania, 2009), but this study proves that the dialogue with oneself does not begin in a moment of silence. It is constant, ongoing. However, one can hear it better in silence. The next aim was to start comprehending how intrapersonal communication is determined by the law of the conservation of energy, ie. whether an energetic external impulse creates an adequately strong chain reaction in the chain of intrapersonal communication.

5. Research Methods

For the purpose of developing an understanding of internal communication by youngsters and seeing the connection between internal and external communication, a non-proportional stratified sample of the population of young adults was used. [A total of] 215 students took part in the survey. All of them were asked to fill out a questionnaire. The average age of the participants was 25.5 years. All of them were students at Liepaja University and RISEBA in Riga (in March 2016), for the purposes of gathering the data, including the sample site.

The author used content analysis to analyse the results (Berelson, 1952; Westerståhl & Johansson, 1985; Krippendorff, 1980). Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Symbolic Interaction Theory were also used for the purpose of analysing results, as research on internal communication has so far been influenced by sociogenetics theorists, George Herbert Mead and L Vygotsky (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), and is therefore used in this study to ensure the processing and interpretation of the data that has been obtained.

6. Findings

The first stage of the survey established that intrapersonal communication is a very frequently and intensely used type of communication. A total of 60% of respondents use it often, daily, while 39% use it sometimes, and only 2% claim to use it rarely. None of the respondents claimed not to use intrapersonal communication at all in their lives. This means that intrapersonal communication is an inexcusably insufficiently-studied form of communication that is dominant in people's daily lives. They did not question the statement that inner speech is a form of communication rather than that of the context of one's perception of external impulses. This proves the assumption that internal communication is a 'flow of speech - one which is an entwined, dialogically structured, social activity' (Shorter, 2000, p. 149), and is consequently a communicative process.

Due to the fact that young adults who participated in the survey communicate with themselves often, it seemed important to find out when they felt the need to start an internal conversation: in their daily lives, on a philosophical level, or when they are in a certain emotional state. The study proved that the internal conversation can take place simultaneously when solving certain problems (85%), on a philosophical level when evaluating and generalising (65%) and while in a certain emotional state (62%). This finding was relatively unexpected as, so far, it has been believed that a conversation with oneself often begins due to a certain emotional state. The survey proved that specific challenges rather than emotions or silence create the preconditions for intrapersonal communication. However, one cannot rule out the possibility that daily challenges trigger a certain emotional state and, therefore, the starting situation for intrapersonal communication may be complex (having more than one stimulus at a time).

The fact that students find a dialogue with oneself to be very necessary at a moment at which problems need to be solved is proved by Vygotsky's (1999) theory and his conception that the human mind, unlike other minds, is mediated by symbolic artefacts. Students use their 'psychological tools' on a regular basis in order to adapt to the challenges of the outside world, which means that internal communication takes part in terms of understanding one's external communication regularly and actively as it ensures the interpretation of external impulses into a language which is understandable to oneself and an active,

nurturing transformation of external impulses into a personally meaningful experience. For instance, the student begins an internal conversation for the most part when deciding what to do - 86% - and planning what to do next - 76%. An assessment of a particular situation is an important reason to start an inner dialogue (73%) and the recipient understands themselves as a participant of the dialogical process.

A time map which shows at what time of the day students start communicating with themselves most and least frequently. Students are very rational and talk to themselves about work and problems with public transport (57%), or with being behind the wheel (43%), and in the evening, after work (23%).

Conversation with God is a complicated concept. In this case the author tried to find out whether this form of communication was a monologue or a dialogue; principally how often these conversations with God took place, along with the 'when' and in connection with what. According to the results, 16% communicate with God often, on a daily basis, while 23% do it rarely, 30% do it sometimes, and 31% only do it for the most part 'when it's necessary'. All of the respondents were Christians; however, 23% of them pointed out that they communicate with an abstract God 'who exists and lives in heaven' rather than Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, or any other character from the Bible. This is the point at which the survey finally touches upon the first level of the intrapersonal communication-internal discourse. This also includes prayer, contemplation, and meditation. It was not author's aim to find out what conversations with God may have been about; however, several categories of the most common conversation topics in prayers were suggested: whether one prayed for oneself or for others and what one prayed for. The majority of respondents said that they prayed both for themselves and for others (86%), and the most common topic was the prayer to help regain spiritual balance (56%) and to gain protection in difficult situations (43%). Many of the survey's participants prayed for both at the same time. A 'Conversation with God' was chosen as the first form of internal communication 'content' test in this study, as prayer and meditation is a conversation (dialogue) with a greater force and occurs within internal communication. This conversation was applicable to all participants in the survey, regardless of whether they were religious or not. The results of the survey prove that each digital native had a different conversation partner (the difference being one which was suitable to the individual in question, and the partner being God), and they adjusted it to themselves just as the same process is commonly handled in the classic communication process. What we perceive in the world around us is not a direct and faithful representation of that world itself, but rather an enhanced version based upon very limited data from that world (Wright, 1994).

Digital natives are characterised by collective communication activities which are more compact than those of other population strata. For instance, characterised by intense listening to music on a daily basis on a phone or mp3 player. Therefore, the next question in the survey related to the use and consumption of music via internal communication. There was a probability that the majority would not select the internal playback of music in this section of the survey. However, the survey proved that the most common activity among students when talking to oneself was singing to oneself (89%). This finding was somewhat surprising because it seemed that the large selection of music in the headphones would have annulled the need to sing to oneself. Only 1% of respondents claimed that they never sang to themselves. On this communication level interpretive perception was observed which is 'a blend of internal states and external stimuli' (Pearson, 2006, p. 32), and leads to the conclusion that affective responses are observed which are manifested as 'a person's emotional response to a situation, object, or [another] person', which

in this case is music heard somewhere. Moreover, it is chosen based on the ‘definition of the situation’, as youngsters are more subject to the pressure of collective taste than adults, thereby demonstrating social behaviour.

The survey proved that a sense of humour is important in intrapersonal communication where 43% sometimes laughed at themselves in order to get out of a problematical situation or problem. A total of 33% did it often, 10% did it occasionally, and 10% never. The results show that 63% believe that self-irony and a sense of humour ‘help to find a balance’ (63%). A total of 50% believe that a sense of humour and self-irony ‘helps in not getting upset with other people or circumstances’, and 27% of the respondents believe that they ‘help maintain self-esteem’. Only 4% of the digital natives believe that there is no need for self-irony or a sense of humour, and that they only ruin one’s mood. On the whole, then, a sense of humour and self-irony helps students to protect themselves from criticism. But what about the positive aspect - self-praise? According to the survey’s results, students use self-motivation and self-praise irregularly in intrapersonal communication. The majority of respondents praise themselves sometimes (57%), whereas 23% do it only rarely. Only 10% of respondents motivated and praised themselves often and on a regular basis. A total of 7% of respondents thought that praise should be given by others as they see better and, therefore, one does not need to do that oneself. Only 3% never praised themselves in their own minds. The majority shared the opinion that intrapersonal communication helps one to collect one’s thoughts (86%), helps to find harmony within oneself (50%), and prepares one for external communication (50%). A total of 96% believe that intrapersonal communication (if it is organised) improves communication with the outside world and helps one to participate in the processes of external communication with other people, the media, the authorities, institutions, and organisations. A total of 3% disagree, and 8% have no opinion on the issue. The impulses behind such communication includes daily situations, problems, anger, and disappointment. In these moments intrapersonal communication becomes a necessity. Something that cannot be ruled out is the possibility that it also takes place in other situations that young adults do not register or even notice. Therefore, the external impulses that trigger intrapersonal communication must be strong ones in order for a young adult themselves to notice them. It is possible in this very position to actualise the energy charge factor because internal communication may also be triggered by internal impulses. It is not inconceivable that this topic can be studied further by using the logic of physics regarding energy transformation from one state to another. It cannot be excluded that the known white matter (25%) and the unknown grey matter (75%) also influence the thinking process and allocate a different reception speed to various informative impulses. Perhaps these generation-related rules of intellectual energy are the ones that determine why people perceive and react to one and the same informative irritation in such different ways.

7. Conclusion

Up until now it was believed that communication was only possible between at least two individuals. This approach is obsolete because the process of intrapersonal communication is also possible within a single individual. The recipient themselves understands this as a participant of the dialogical process.

Inner dialogue with oneself is a communication process that deals with the perception, reading, accumulation, and interpreting of impulses, and the formation of a new informative charge for a

confrontation with the external world. During this process, energy is either attracted or not attracted, which determines the readiness of the source to communicate outwards or to refuse to communicate.

Inner dialogue is not only a passive observation of the information received. It is also an active process because it carries out the accumulation, interpretation, and forwarding of the acquired facts. It is this last step - the readiness of the recipient to confront the interpreted opinion with the external world - that indicates that what we are dealing with here is a process of communication.

Digital natives are special people who grow up in the digital age and are a special secondary socialisation group which differs from the context of the rest of the population with an especially active use of communicative feedback. The use of intrapersonal communication amongst this group is active and is also relatively and sufficiently conscious.

The starting situation for intrapersonal communication may be complex (having more than one stimulus at a time).

Relatively large share of respondents talks to themselves on a regular basis, praising and motivating themselves as well as talking to God, humming to themselves, or being critical and favourable to themselves.

Self-assessment by way of internal conversation takes place in a slightly contradictory fashion. Defence strategies have been developed due to the fact that negative impulses dominate as conscious triggers of intrapersonal communication. They manifest themselves in intrapersonal communication in the form of self-irony and a sense of humour.

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