

The problem of autocommunication in psychological practice

Autocommunication is a communication process which represents a particular form of human interaction with oneself. Autocommunication is a term used in scientific literature to describe communication from and to oneself.

The theoretical analysis shows that a number of concepts are used to describe this communication process. You can find various definitions of this phenomenon in different researches. There are “autocommunication” [Lotman, 2000], “intrapersonal communication” [Roberts, 1987; Aitken, 2002; Brewers, 2006], “internal dialogue” [Bakhtin, 1994; Kuczynsky, 1988, 1990], “intra-subjective communication” [Petrenko, 1988], “intra-psychic communication” [Freud, 1997; Perls, 1993, 2001].

A variety of these definitions happened during the evolution of psychological science. This variety reflects the stages of this movement.

The concept of “internal communication” means the delimitation of internal and external space. “Intra-psychic communication” refers to the classical science. Autocommunication is realizing inside the consciousness (psyche). It is the result of consciousness. Autocommunication performs an adaptive function. In information and communicative approach autocommunication is necessary for survival and adaptation to the environment. It can help to interpret a perceptual data for more effective being [Roberts, Edwards, Barker, 1987; Shedletsky, 1995; West, Terner, 2004]. Thinking is a form of intra-psychic communication [Barker, Kibler, 1971].

The idea of consciousness as a space of autocommunication is presented in researches of interactionism [Mead, 1964, 1967, Blumer, 1986; Shyuts, 2004]. Autocommunication is an interiorized form of social relations that shapes the structure of a human person.

The self, like the mind, is a social emergence (has a social nature?). This social conception of the self, Mead argues (entails) that individual selves are the products of social interaction. Autocommunication is presented as a self-interaction in the Blumer’s concept. Self-interaction is an internalized social process in which the actor interacts with oneself [Blumer, 1986]. The conscious and complete internal communication can be initiated in the inner world only when a problem appears [Schutz, 2004].

Recognition of the communicative nature of consciousness and dialogue as the main form of its (their’s?) existence is found in the researches of Russian authors [Bakhtin, 1994; Bibler, 2005; Kuczynsky, 1985; Vygotsky, 1996, 2005; Brushlinsky, 2006; Stolin, 1983; Orlov, 2002; Ulybina, 2001; Heresh, 1995].

Understanding of the internal dialogue as a mechanism which implements the processes of thinking appeared in researches made by Vygotsky and Piaget and developed in the works by Bibler (1981), Kuczynsky (1985), Abulkhanova-Slavskaya (1973). Kuchinsky has conducted experimental studies of internal dialogue while addressing the mental problems. Speech of a person solving a

problem out loud includes several points of view. The interaction of these several points generates an internal dialogue.

In the researches of some authors it is noted that autocommunication occurs between “imaginary companions” – different semantic positions on the same theme [Kuczynsky, 1988, 1990; Rossokhin, Izmagurova, 2000; Izmagurova, 2006]. Such communication also often arises when a person’s connection with the world is interrupted [Grof, 1997; Rossokhin, 1997; Muskhelishvili, 1997; Lebedev, 2002; Nalimov, 2007].

Several researchers identify the concepts of inner dialogue and inner speech postulating the fact of the genetic and functional dialogic human consciousness [Bakhtin, 1986, 1994, Vygotsky, 1996, 2003, 2005]. In contrast to this approach other authors by analogy with the external speech processes produce monologue and dialogue as the main form of inner speech [Strakhov, 1969]. Other authors say that inner speech is just a means of verbal expression of internal dialogue. Vygotsky used the term “inner speech” both to define a conversation with oneself and a process of expressing thoughts into words [Vygotsky, 1996].

The western researchers, analyzing the phenomenon of internal dialogue, use the term “inner speech” without distinguishing it from the inner speech. The foreign studies are grouped around several themes: the role of internal dialogue as information processing in studying activity, in anticipation process of the possible development of the current situation. The leading role of the internal dialogue in the flow of emotions and consciousness is accentuated in the western authors’ researchers [Wandel, 1990].

The american researcher Vokey considers autocommunication as a self-talk [Vocate, 1994]. The inner voice activity is divided into two types – inner speech and self-talk. The self-talk is a dialogue with oneself and the main function of inner speech is to encode thoughts by the language and decode the words perceived into the meaning. Self-talk (or internal conversation) can be pronounced by a person inwardly to oneself as well as aloud, whereas the inner speech is always silent and hidden. Self-talk is based on the process of encoding and decoding, that is on the inner speech. Thus, inner speech is a primary means of autocommunication. Speech is necessary to rationalize the meaning to which a person comes in the autocommunication process because words and concepts are necessary for understanding.

As a part of the non-classical paradigm, autocommunication is considered to be an interaction or dialogue of the personality’s “elements”, images of self and a person’s social roles. The functions of intrapersonal communication are to ensure consistency and integrity of personality on the basis of self-determination and self-identification [Shibutani, 1998; Rogers, 1994; Maslow, 2004].

The idea of multiple personality develops in psychotherapy practice which give an assumption that a person’s psychological well-being is determined by the peculiarities of one’s autocommunication or internal dialogue. Researchers note the absence of fundamental differences of autocommunication from usual communication with a conversation partner [Assagioli, 1997, Bern, 1993; Vizgina, 1987; Ruffler, 1998].

In the late non-classical paradigm a person is the subject of cognition and self-cognition. In the process of intra-subjective communication a person redistributes one's activity between "me cognizing" and "me cognized" [James, 1991]. "Whatever I think about, at the same time I am always more or less conscious of myself and my personal being. However, it is me who is conscious, so my consciousness is somewhat dual – partially cognized and partially cognizing, partially it is an object and partially it is a subject. It is necessary to distinguish these two sides" [James, 1991].

In Russian authors' researches it is found out that the autocommunication is considered from the position of the subject of communication and activities [Merlin, 1982; Leontiev, 1999; Lomov, 1999; Andreeva, 2001; Bodalev, 2001]. Autocommunication forms in communication and activities and accompanies them in the form of inner speech [Petrenko, 1997; Leontiev, 2005]. "The possibility of voice communication with other people during a joint work leading to the formation of autocommunication, internal dialogue with oneself that, according to Bakhtin, is the basis and the mechanism of consciousness ..." [Petrenko, 1997]. It retains the inherent communication tools and features, but its main role consists in the generation of new knowledge, which in itself implies a person's alteration as a subject of communication [Panferov, 1990]. Activity is organized and developed with autocommunication [Andreev, 2004]. Building of the activity plan happens in communication. A person clarifies goals and objectives, the specific object of activity and one's potential as its subject. He assesses the conditions and requirements of the external world in which one's activities are implemented and agrees one's activities with other people.

The tendency to unite a human and the world into one system is found in post-non-classical paradigm. Psychologists can see a detailed image of the space in which autocommunication implements: living space [Levin, 2000], trans-subjective space [Uznadze, 1998], multidimensional world [Leontiev, 1983], semantic field [Vygotsky, 1984], life-world [Vasilyuk, 1995], construction of worlds [Asmolov, 1995], subjective reality [Slobodchikov, 1995], multidimensional space of life [Klochko, 2005], the communicative world [Cabrín, 2005].

The importance of autocommunication lies in finding by a person one's essential characteristics in collaboration with the world. "From the moment of birth a person is in constant interaction with one's life-world, with the world in which there are potential meanings of one's existence that are to be opened and found by the person. The world contains both threat and danger, and positive possibilities and alternatives of which a person must make a choice, and in the process of this election, the person builds oneself" [Leontiev, 1999]. Human interaction with the world is refracted through the autocommunication in which a person opens the senses, defines and builds oneself. Within these theories a person is a part of the world, the part that not only actively reflects and reproduces this world but also converts and constructs it.

We have conducted a theoretical analysis which showed a gradual complication of the representations of the autocommunication phenomenon. Using of various

theoretical and methodological tools led to identify different meanings and functions of autocommunication.

We have conducted an empirical research of autocommunication. The theoretical and methodological basis of the research are the principles and provisions (positions?) of the general theory of communication, Klochko's systematic anthropological psychology and Cabrin's communicative approach.

The main materials of empirical research of autocommunication are the data of modelling method of communicative world (Cabrin), spontaneous diary entries and reflective self-reporting, data of self-actualization test (an adaptation by Gozman), the data of the personal differential method (an adaptation by Bekhterev's Research Institute), the data of graphic projective test "Self portrait" (an adaptation by Romanova), the data of method for investigation communicative and characterological personality traits (Umansky).

The study involved 475 persons (256 women and 219 men) - representatives of services, psychologists and civil servants aged from 27 to 42 years. Statistical analysis of the results was performed using the computer program Statistica. Correlation and cluster analysis, analysis of variance and analysis of significant differences in Student's t-test were used. Qualitative analysis methods (content analysis and a method of interpretation of projective tests) also were used.

As a result, structural and functional characteristics of autocommunication have been found. The functional characteristics are those functions that it performs in different situations. The structural features include themes, forms, partners and means of communication. Such a communicative form is the basic model of communication in most communicative theories [Sokolov, 1996; Pocheptsov, 2001, Sharkov, 2004; Yakovlev, 2006].

The functions are found in the analysis of autocommunication theme, which is a meaningful characteristic of this process. Topics as personal statements of meaningful content expressed in human speech reflect the specific needs, interests, meanings and values of a person. The main topics that constitute an autocommunication are the inner world (32%), relationships (25%), individual philosophy (12%), professional activity (11%), creativity (10%) and the world order questions (10%).

Compensatory function (4,3%) – autocommunication is initiated in order to continue the dialogue and compensate for a shortfall of positive communication. Through internal dialogues a person compensates the excess of "negative" interpersonal communication or lack of the "positive" one.

Self-isolation (4,7%) – autocommunication is necessary to avoid negative communication.

Emotive function (4,1%) – emotional discharge and assessment of the situation are realized in autocommunication.

Self-therapy (4,8%) – autocommunication is required for implementing self-help and self-support in difficult situations.

Social perception (4,3%) and differentiation (3,9%) – perception of other people, perception of their evaluation and social comparison including self-assessment and

comparison of a person's position with those of other people are in autocommunication.

Social reflection (6,2%) – autocommunication is necessary to understand how people perceive and evaluate themselves and others.

Elimination of cognitive dissonance (4,5%) – autocommunication is necessary to resolve interpersonal conflict.

Communicative anticipation (5,3%) – autocommunication is necessary to plan and simulate activity and communication, to rehearse behavior and “live” situations.

Predictive analysis (5,6%) – autocommunication is necessary to understand the experiences, for acquisition and dissemination of new knowledge and skills and solving problems and issues.

Moral regulation and development (5,4%) – autocommunication is necessary to analyse a person's compliance to one's conscience requirements and one's transformation as a result of this comparison. It implements as a self-criticism and self-training, self-praise and self-charge.

Epistemological function (6,4%) – autocommunication is necessary to implement learning and self-discovery.

Introspection (6,7%) and self-determination (5,4%) – autocommunication is necessary for introspection and self-determination, it is necessary to make a decision upon oneself and make a responsible choice.

Understanding (7,7%) – autocommunication is necessary for understanding and self-understanding.

Personal growth (7,1%) – autocommunication is necessary for self-transformation and self-development.

Existential function (4,5%) – autocommunication is necessary to know the inner world, a soul, a meeting with self, the discovery of self, awareness of the essential characteristics, evidence of existence and the search for meanings.

Formation of the world (3,4%) – autocommunication is necessary for the formation of an individual world view and philosophy of life.

Autocommunication can perform multiple functions at once, but as a rule, one of them can be leading. Moreover, many functions of autocommunication demonstrate its relationship to interpersonal communication.

The forms of autocommunication are dialogue (57%), monologue (31%) and polylogue (12%). The dialogue initiates when the necessity of solving a problem appears. The dialogue makes it possible to see the problem from different standpoints and to identify possible options to solve it. The dialogue leads to the emergence of a new meaning about the problem. It helps to see a person expressing one's attitude to the situation and to see one's reflections on the issue. It also makes obvious the determined sequence of statements, each of which expressing their point of view. In the monologue one semantic position reflects.

The monologue can be a means of calming, comforting, one's behavior assessment and expression of the relationship to the words and deeds of others. A person captures the final results of the thinking process with the help of monologue.

Polylogue is basically a dialogue when in “conversation” between two partners there is a third person who can perform the functions of observation and expression of emotions.

Partners of autocommunication are the person (53%), the image of the real (30%) or a fictional one (17%). Partners can perform different functions depending on the topic and purpose of communication. For example, a dialogue with real or fictional partner helps to express the own idea more accurately and to determine one’s position. They can serve as monitoring, evaluation and analysis.

While researching the reasons for avoiding of autocommunication have been found: fear of loneliness (42%), meetings with one’s conscience (36%) and understanding the autocommunication as an unnatural process (22%). We can say that they are psychological barriers for understanding and solving problems.

The analysis of textual materials suggests that respondents do not want to be alone with themselves because of their fear to get clear that their real life differs from their dreams and goals. Another reason for avoiding of autocommunication is the fear of meeting with one’s conscience and updating of guilt resulting from the awareness of the real or perceived inconsistencies about oneself and one’s conduct in comparison with one’s own moral standards. Finally, some people believe that autocommunication is an unnatural process, they do not know that this kind of communication exists being a condition of normal mental activity [Grimak, 1991]. In suppressing of autocommunication usually intensifies interpersonal communication.

External manifestations of autocommunication are mimicry (58%), gestures and movements (25%), external verbalization - the so-called “thinking aloud” (17%), when people voice some fragment of their thoughts. Symptoms show a person’s emotional state and detail one’s reactions to one’s own statement. A person can blush with embarrassment, cry, reacting to one’s own thoughts and pale from fright caused by one’s own reasoning, etc. The most common cases of such manifestations are changes in expression and complexion, gestures and movements (nodding, head winding (wagging?), waving with a hand, shoulders shaking, head grasping, foot stamping, walking back and forth), wailing, tears or a smile, laughter and sighs.