Web Forum and Social Network Speech as an Inner-Oral-Written Speech Blend

Andrei V. Paribok[1,*]

[1] *RUDN University, Moscow, Russia*
[*]*Corresponding author. Email: paribok6@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

Internet communication in its most recent and wide-spread varieties i.e. in specialized forums and social networks exhibits remarkable traits which can be interpreted as indications of a formative period of a new, forth mode of speech. Before emergence of this phenomenon, were known only three modes of speech viz. the oral, the written and the inner ones, were recognized. The members of this triad constitute a limited number of oppositions, either privative or not. In the article, these distinctive features are being listed. On its basis the traits of Internet speech are discussed. As a result, a hybrid nature of it is pointed out. E.g. the feature of the Internet speech as an enduring visible thing is shared with the written speech as well as an uncertainty of the author about his addressees. Its spontaneity and embeddedness in an encompassing situation is similar to that of the oral speech, although its immediacy results in a written text and is preserved. The privacy, which is generally felt and experienced by a participant of an Internet forum, and its violation can be a possible explanation of a marked phenomenon of increased aggressiveness.

Keywords: Psychology, Inner speech, Written speech, Web speech, Ontolinguistics, Vygotsky.

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet communication in specialized forums and social networks that has been intensively evolving in the current century is based on a specific communication environment. Many people indeed daily spend a significant portion of their personal time engaged in it, which is not only comparable, but in numerous cases significantly exceeds the time span devoted by an individual to ordinary oral face-to-face communication, as well as to reading usual written texts (it does not matter in this context whether these texts are available in traditional printed form or are read from a laptop screen or other gadget). This situation is especially characteristic in regard of the generation that has entered an active social life over the past twenty years and it will become even more pronounced in forthcoming decade. It seems appropriate to conceptualize this situation by articulating the most general question possible concerning the problem of specificity of Internet speech as such. To wit: how does it differ (and in what aspects) from the well known modes of speech (oral and written)? Should it be considered a kind of one of them, or is it a sort of combination of the features of both, with maybe an admixture of the third mode of speech used by everybody but not represented in communication, namely, the inner speech? A study of this latter was initiated by Jean Piaget [1] and continued by Vygotsky [2][1], who introduced a notion which will be named here by us "(three) modes of speech", viz. the inner, the oral and the written. But most valuable contributions of these classics were confined essentially by the field of psychology; the sociolinguistic and the encompassing anthropological aspects remained largely disregarded. We believe, however, that the phenomenon of Internet-speech is so complex that it deserves rethinking a conceptual frame of the mentioned three modes of speech. In this article we will make a brief attempt to move forward in this direction.

Nowadays, the studies of Internet speech certainly do exist in a significant amount. They are even to be found among the topics of students' essays. But this copious research is invariably

---

1. As an example of further development if the research in this field cf. [3]

focused on case studies and rather partial, secondary, technical aspects of this vast theme, i.e. Internet slang, phrase syntax in Internet speech, youth informal talk &c.

2. THE NEED OF A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

As a matter of fact, Vygotsky accepts Piaget's data and points out that the rapid disappearance of oral egocentric speech and its transformation into voiceless inner speech is a regular case at the age of seven or eight [2]. He neither discusses this issue in detail nor questions about its cause. But for us, the remarkable coincidence of this process of disappearance of the primitive egocentric speech with first two years of the primary school education is an occasion to suggest a hypothesis that this phenomenon is triggered and stimulated by the child's learning of written speech; first from its receptive part (silent reading is indispensable in classroom with some 20 pupils. Obviously, they do not loudly pronounce in chorus a text from the ABC or primer) and then from the active part as well (a pupil is not expected to be uttering words while he is writing, although it is always so with him in the very beginnings). Probably this training initiates a double process of deepening mutual separation of written and inner speech modes from the oral one: they seem to diverge in opposite directions. The active egocentric loud speech transforms into a silent inner talk with oneself, whereas the passive speech (i.e. a comprehending auditory perception of someone else's articulated voice) becomes a fundament of the transition to silent reading. Testing this hypothesis would be a rather cumbersome task. As a possible confirmation of its plausibility, a remark could be added concerning a historically well-known manner of composing occasional songs while riding on horseback or on a cart: a person sings about what is directly seen and (or) spontaneously comes to his mind. Of course, this manner is to be qualified as a continuation of egocentric speech in the adult state, since it does not rely on the presence of the addressee or listener. In the XIX century, this usage was attributed by Russian observant travellers in Caucasus exclusively to illiterate ethnic groups. A different kind of verification would be to find out whether and how egocentric speech continues to exist in those children who master reading and the rudiments of writing noticeably earlier than the beginning of primary school education. So, the three modes of speech most likely constitute a whole for a literate individual, and its components

enter in oppositions according to their distinctive features. A clarification of their interrelations would be not without interest for systemic reasons, since at present the majority of the younger generation, apparently, quite early master the Internet speech on forums and in social networks. And, if we take into account the phenomenon of mixing the characteristics of three previously known modes of speech in Internet conversations (it will be discussed further), it may turn out that a cursory mastery of it, for example, in primary school age, must also produce changes in the usage of written, oral and inner speech modes.

3. MAIN DIFFERENTIAL FEATURES OF THE THREE SPEECH MODES

A most general. i.e. an anthropological frame of the three speech modes is the conceptual triad which has been long ago established in Asian intellectual traditions, such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Jainism, namely body, speech and mind (Sanskrit kāya-vak-citta). These seemingly ordinary, non-philosophical terms designate three dimensions of human existence. "Body" is a person's factual presence in the world regardless his intentions. "Speech" is the dimension of his active being in a common world shared with other consciousnesses, his manifestations aiming to be understood by them. Finally, his "mind" is his being for and by himself, an ontologically private dimension which is inaccessible for others' minds.

The language is an encompassing semiotic milieu of a human individual and therefore it includes three layers or modes. Each of them represents one of the three anthropological dimensions. The oral speech, being the primordial communication milieu, is the correspondence of the "speech" of the triad. The inner speech is evidently a representation of the "mind" dimension, whereas the written texts are things in the world, constantly present and independent there of their being read and understood. They are thus representations of the factual "body" dimension. The distinctive features of the three modes are deducible from the general concept of speech as an act in space and time, which becomes an event that is designed for understanding, that is, it has a sender, as well as one or more addressees. In a particular reduced case, the addressee coincides with the sender.

The description of these features starts with taking into account of what mediums are available to be applied and used in speech as a semiotic act. There are three semiotic milieus at the disposal of a

person, and they are based on voluntary movements from the active (producing) part and on perception in a particular sensory modality on the passive (receptive) part. The milieus are: sounds (auditory), visible colored shapes (visual) and bodily movements (kinesthetic).

The situation of oral speech is most obvious. In it, as it was established in linguistics more than half a century ago, there is always an interaction of the main auditory channel with the auxiliary, but indispensable, kinesthetic channel. In other words, without a soundless adjustment of the listener's speech organs, without reduced repetition-imitation of the speaker's articulations when listening to someone else's speech, the understanding is being hindered; sometimes, it does not happen at all. Let's introduce a clarifying explanation: any attempt to repeat (even without understanding the meaning, i.e. on a purely phonemic level), and then to write down a short segment (some dozen syllables) of speech which was carefully pronounced by somebody in a unknown language which is characterized for the listener by a distinctly alien, unusual articulation, encounter great difficulties, they are recognized as unsuccessful or even rejected as hopeless. This will be the case for a native Russian speaker when confronted with Adygeyan, Vietnamese or Tibetan speech. On the contrary, a task to listen, repeat and write down a completely meaningless sequence of syllables of the native language or a well-known language with familiar articulation will not present any difficulties. Not confining ourselves with linguistics, we can mention a special yoga technique: a person deliberately directs attention to his organs of speech and relaxes their zone [4]. Once the yogi is successful in this, the residual echoing of others' words gradually ceases, and he enters an experience of an inner controlled silence because the automatic murmur of the mind temporarily dies out.

The main channel of the written speech is vision. This is readily understood by everyone when trying to write or type in complete darkness or blindfolded. An indispensable auxiliary channel is the kinesthetic one: the process of shaping letters with a pencil when writing by hand; frequently drawing figures are being drawn as an important components of written text; the process of typing text in the earlier epoch on a typewriter, in our days on a computer keyboard or touch keyboard.

Finally, inner speech in its simplest form relies only on the kinesthetic channel, since it is a silent (as well as syntactically reduced) "utterance" "addressed" to oneself. This original and primitive version is not needed to be supported by an auxiliary channel. Still, the latter appears in its more complicated forms.

The next content-independent characteristic of these three modes, which is more crucial, is based on taking into account the addressee as well as non-verbal elements of the situation of the speech act, including the pace of activity i.e. actions performed by the participants as well as other possible changes in the surroundings. The oral speech always involves a joint participation of the speaker and one or more addressees (listeners) in a shared situation. We mean that a simple presence of other persons and audibility of the voice are not sufficient conditions. The most elementary form of it is a standalone remark, request, &c obviously linked with the current situation e.g. "Look, a fish is biting!", - says a fisherman to his fellow. Or, in a room: "Close the window, please!". No less often, this is a remark which starts or continues a dialogue in a conversation between two interlocutors. In a somewhat complicated form, it becomes already an utterance addressed to more than one listener and which each of them interprets it in their own way, for example: "Is everything understood by everybody? So be quick, to your places!" For those who were not assigned a working place in the collective activity that is going to be started, the meaning of this utterance remains vague, but it is not addressed to them. It is also significant that the time delay in oral speech is almost impossible or very brief. If one would say "Pour me some tea, please" and after a minute and a half would add: "With lemon and without sugar", this would not be one utterance, but two, and the second request may not turn out to be executable: a cup of tea with milk and sugar has been already poured.

Written speech, on the contrary, is composed under the assumption that there is no non-linguistic situation shared by the author and his addressee(s). Moreover, this speech produces a certain pair of independent additional situations: the first is the process of its composition, and second, its reading. Further, from the active part it is mostly being accomplished without any or sufficient knowledge about the persons of its possible readers and their quantity. By the way, this fact is an explanation of a well-known cultural norm which prescribes the secrecy of personal correspondence. It was established for special conditions, because evidently there is no need to formulate a norm if it is not known in advance that a violation of the

desired state of affairs is quite possible. Finally, the time span between composing a text and reading it varies widely from a few hours to many centuries.

Another characteristic of written speech is the inclusion in it of non-linguistic messages, such as drawings, figures[2], &c.

In a case of a discrepancy of differential features that distinguish one speech mode from another, it is not the semiotic milieu of performance and perception that should be considered prevalent. More decisive is the relation of a speech act to time and situation. So, the alternating display of written notes to each other by pupils in the classroom or in the case when the participants of the dialogue are separated by a transparent sound-proof screen, it is necessary to recognize the oral nature of speech carried out in the visual environment.

The inner speech is addressed by an individual only to himself, that is, according to the intention of a person, it has no other addressee than himself. In the most elementary case, it does not have an addressee at all. It is not a message, but only an inner act as e.g. a certain reasoning or planning, which without any delay, along with it, or immediately after completion, is transferred into a clarity of understanding, into decisions and actions. If we ask ourselves, in what situations a person uses inner speech, which sometimes turns into egocentric, we can assume that this is done out of a desire for better concentration, for clarity. The assumption is confirmed by the following facts. a) A methodically well-developed technique in yoga meditations. In the initial phase of attempts to achieve concentration, the yogi whispers or says something quite voiceless to himself with inner speech (For example, "inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale" when entering the contemplation of the respiratory cycle [5]. Or "earth, earth" in a concentration on the earth element [6]), and after a while, as the concentration on the designated objects increases, they are discarded. b) The phenomenon of an increasing usage of inner speech and its frequent transition back to egocentric oral speech in old age, when such a talk with oneself is also a way to maintain concentration and call oneself to order. More complex forms of inner speech appear in situations that involve a time gap between the deployment and fixation of a text in the inner speech and using its results in a later occasion. First, a person can formulate the result of his inner speech in a short text that he memorizes.

Maybe these are the key points of a planned rather complex route around the city or a list of purchases in different stores in a mall with a reminder of the order of their visits. In an even more cumbersome case, inner speech results in written down material - for example, brief notes on a piece of paper before a public speech that no one but the author understands; or very short memos for oneself, intended for later deployment in a written text. In such cases of the inner speech, the sender and the addressee actually no longer coincide, and the difference from oral and written speech is seen in that they do not co-exist: the sender has changed and turned into the addressee.

Depending on the education and upbringing received in a particular era, it also happened that the norms and standards of oral or written speech penetrated into the inner speech. This is the primary explanation for the phenomenon of diaries, which in some cases later turned out to be interesting and important texts [7], [8]. Finally, the main feature of internal speech is drafts. A brilliant example of a draft which is regarded as a classical text are Wittgenstein's "Philosophical investigations" [9]. It makes sense to consider the draft as a fixed stage of the process in which the speech is still internal, but is aimed at becoming oral or written. A confused, blurred and strikethrough draft [10] remains clear only to the author for a long time, because no one except the author is able to restore the time sequence of changes in the text of the work, the process, and in general is mysterious to the unintended reader, to whom the draft is given purely spatially.

The last distinguishing feature of the forms of texts is the sender's attitude to random errors or violations of the norms of the language. In internal speech, the question of violations does not make sense. In oral speech, errors are almost unavoidable, usually tolerable, but depending on its variant, they require or do not require correction. In writing, it is required to correct all errors before sending them to the addressees or a secondary correcting text ("List of typos", "the corrected version is true", etc.).

4. INTERMIXTURE OF THE SPEECH MODES IN INTERNET SPEECH

Let us now consider the phenomenon of Internet speech and its peculiar features. We will designate by this term the texts of communication on forums and in social networks, since undoubtedly typical texts of internal speech that fall into the Internet

---

2.   E.g. Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit

environment (compressed, unintelligible diaries or drafts) do not differ in any specific way.

Social networks (USA Facebook, Russian VKontakte, &c.) provide for a distinction between private conversations (chats) without outside access and open statuses, addressed to all who please or to very many. On this basis, chat is a reliable analogue of oral speech without witnesses, and messages and discussions in the feed are more akin to the written speech. The rebukes "Please do not interfere in someone else's conversation!" which are quite normal for offline oral speech situations are therefore felt inappropriate in public discussions and come across rather rarely.

Stylistically, the texts of forum speech are widely variable. Novice participants or people who are professionally skilled in writing usually imitate the forms of the written speech; still, the colloquial style is predominant, and it is nothing else than the oral dialogic register, which doesn't exclude non-literary, rude, aggressive, derogatory and offensive expressions and dialogue strategies used in trolling and flaming. The phenomenon of excessive aggressiveness of internet speech occurs and is experienced in various language segments of the web - in Russian, English and even Tajik (Persian), which I witnessed myself (I speak Persian). The last case is strange enough because the national Persian norms of language behaviour while addressing unacquainted persons are respectful. I'm inclined to suggest the following explanation. The situation of writing and reading texts from the screen of a smartphone or laptop is basically not sharable. The person engaged in it feels "at home", he remains within the borders of his privacy, in his familiar and comfortable environment (that is, this is a situation of inner speech usage). His irritation and partial loss of self-control is due to his feeling that boring, wicked and stupid strangers are constantly violating his personal borders.

A dialogue saved on the forum, or any of its branches, can be unexpectedly joined by new participants both during the time of its unfolding or even when it had been terminated a long time ago. There are numerous cases of new comments appearing many months later. Because of this possibility, even if there is a moderator (besides, effective moderators are rare), there emerge various shifts in the topic. Different threads lead away from it, each in its own direction. This blurring of meaning is the result of a combination of features of oral and written speech, the latter being more decisive.

However, on the other hand, there is also a similarity with oral live speech. In fact, Facebook provides an opportunity for the user to share a "memory" and re-publish some of his posts in the feed which were published, some three years ago. Such posts do not necessarily contain anything immediately actual: for example, these are illustrated publications on the topics of classical fine art. Therefore, we could expect no less lively discussion three years later, since among several thousand friends and subscribers of a popular and widely read Facebook user only a minority of those readers who might have been interested in the publication had an opportunity to come across it and participate in discussing it. And yet, the number, size and content of comments are always scanty compared with those in occasion of the initial publication.

The pictures which accompany textual comments can be sometimes (not always) regarded as a shared equivalent of mental visual images. So, it's a feature of the inner speech. But in other cases they resemble illustrations in a written and printed text.

Users learn Internet speech in the same manner as they learned oral speech in their childhood, that is, they simply get gradually involved into it. No special teaching techniques have been observed, which are, on the contrary, indispensable for an individual's mastering of written speech.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, our brief overview of web speech characteristics demonstrates an interpenetration and reciprocal influence in its milieu of the features of all three speech modes. The theme surely deserves further research by the linguistic, psychological and sociological methods.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Andrei V. Paribok.

REFERENCES

[1]   J. Piaget. Genetic epistemology. NY: W.W. Norton, 1971.

[2]   L. Vygotsky. Thinking and Speech. Translated from the Russian by Eugenia Hanfmann, Gertrude Vakar and Norris Minnick.The MIT Press, 1962.

[3] A. N. Sokolov. Inner speech and thought. Author's abstract of the dissertation for the doctor of Science degree (in psychology). Moscow, 1967 (in Russian).

[4] The Yogasūtras of Patanjali together with the Vyāsabhāṣya and Vācaspatimiśra's ṭīkā (In Sanskrit). Pune, 1904. Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, 47 (in Sanskrit).

[5] https://tipitaka.org/romn/cscd/s0102a.att7.xml (in Pali)

[6] Budddhaghoso. Visuddhimaggo. Ch. 4 pathavīkasiṇaniddeso. https://tipitaka.org/romn/cscd/e0101n.mul4.xml (in Pali).

[7] The Meditations of Marcus Antonius Antoninus. Translated by George Long . NY.

[8] The Reflections of Lichtenberg selected and translated by Norman Alliston. Swan Sonnenschein, 1908

[9] L. Wittgenstein. Philosophical Investigations. Translated by G.E.M. Anscomb. Basil Blackwell, 1953.

[10] S.M. Bondi. Pushkin's drafts. Articles written in 1930—1970 years. Moscow, Prosveshcheniye, 1978 (in Russian).