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**EXPOSING THE DIALOGICAL NATURE  
OF THE LINGUISTIC SELF IN INTERPERSONAL  
AND INTERSUBJECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS  
FOR THE PURPOSES  
OF LANGUAGE-AND-CONSCIOUSNESS-RELATED  
COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

***ABSTRACT***

This paper aims at elaborating the concept of linguistic self with regard to its twofold existence modes, namely as a physical person and as a mental subject, being shaped by external and internal dialogs in interpersonal and intersubjective communication. These dialogical encounters, constantly changing the reality of everyday life, are based, on the one hand, on the observable multi-textuality of narratives, and on the other, on the multi-voicedness of opinions. As such, it lays emphasis on the need for a holistic approach to human beings as a psychosomatic unity, taking part in cognition with their minds and bodies, and developing itself both in-and-with the physical and logical domains of their surrounding ecosystems. In view of the private and public character of the self, the author postulates to consider in future studies the achievements of personal and social constructivism.

**Keywords:** cognition, consciousness, intersubjectivity, language, the dialogical self.

**1. DEFINING THE NOTIONAL AND METHODOLOGICAL  
FRAMEWORKS OF THE STUDY**

The subject matter of this paper comprises the linguistic properties of the human self whose dialogical nature results from the fact that it takes an active part as a member of a society in observable interpersonal and assumable intersubjective relationships. Alluding to the notion of selfhood, borrowed from philosophy and psychology, the paper departs from the view about the two existence modes of communicating individuals: (1) the self as a subjective knower, or the “I”, and (2) the self as an object that is known, or

the “Me.” Accordingly, it points out to consequences resulting, for researchers of language communication, from the distinction between: (1) a mental subject, i.e., the “I” as an internally conceivable experiencing agent who formulates and interprets its thoughts in sign patterns, and (2) a physical person, i.e., the “Me” as an externally observable object of experience who sends and receives its messages through sign-processing activities. In this context, particular attention is paid to the diversity of the linguistic properties of human selves who are able to speak different languages and their varieties as the basic means of signification and communication. This statement entitles the author of the following paper to propose the concept of the linguistic self being accessible as an object of potential investigations on the basis of significative-communicative acts performed in different domains of its everyday life. In particular, the mental significative-cognitive processes of humans and their manifestations in social and cultural practices should be exposed through resorting to knowledge coming from cognitive sciences and semiotic phenomenology. Special emphasis deserves here a holistic approach to human cognition for which not only human mind is responsible but the whole body of a cognizing subject as a biological organism and psychological being. What underlies an examination is how human beings form themselves in-and-with-their-surroundings as a result of multivoicedness and varivoicedness of opinions or beliefs intermingling in their external and internal dialogs. This formation occurs when human selves are engaged not only in monological but also in dialogical forms of communication by the employment of narrative patterns, as, for example, personal-subjective narratives, social-cultural narratives, and metalinguistic or meta-scientific narratives.

Emphasizing the dialogical nature of human mind, this paper aims at showing how dialogs involve consequential exchanges of mutually influencing voices. The dialogical nature of the self is assumed to be a universal property of humans when they are aware of themselves in relation to others regardless of their culture and societal experience. Dialogicality is exposed as one of basic human features, which is relevant especially for therapists, clinical psychologists, brain researchers, literary scientists and semioticians of art, or theologians, taking into account such notions as transcendence, interaction, responsiveness, interchangeability of sender-and-receiver or author-and-addressee roles. Hence, from the perspective of transcendental dialogism, the human self is regarded as a complexity of multiple voices of internal participants who continuously communicate with each other and who anticipate even the responses to possible questions, thus emerging and developing thanks to such socially conditioned interactions.

## 2. TOWARDS A UNIFIED CONCEPTION OF THE LINGUISTIC SELF

### 2.1. Substantiating the notion of the linguistic self

The notion of the linguistic self has been proposed in some of my articles and conference papers which are currently worked out in a newly prepared book *Linguistic Dimensions of the Self in Human Communication* (to be published by the Adam Mickiewicz University Press in Poznań) reporting on steps of my argumentation which allowed me to propose the notion of the linguistic self that is approachable from the viewpoint of the significative-communicative acts performed by humans in their life-worlds, expounding on selected philosophical outlooks on man and his mental endowment responsible for the emergence of language. In particular, the subject of deliberations constituted such terms as conceptual and methodological tools, as (1) the ecology of organisms from biology, (2) existence and transcendence from phenomenology, (3) the distinction between the physical and logical domains from human linguistics, and (4) forms of beings of the subject and modalities of their expression in verbal and nonverbal means from existential semiotics (cf. Waśnik, 2017).

In this context, attention is paid to the multiplicity of linguistic properties of human selves, able to speak different languages and their varieties which constitute for them most important systems of signification and communication. It is assumed that the linguistic self is accessible as an object of potential studies solely indirectly on the basis of significative-communicative acts that it performs in different domains of its everyday life. Concluding about mental significative-cognitive processes of humans and investigating their manifestations in social and cultural practices presupposes resorting to the knowledge about human cognitive processes and theories elaborated in semiotics. Indispensable is the awareness of the holistic nature of human cognition for which not only human mind is responsible but the whole body of the cognizing subject as a biological organism and psychological being. The evolutionary-phenomenological-semiotic approach to the study of communication in general proposed by Jordan Zlatev (2009) cannot be passed over for consideration of linguistic and communicative properties of human individuals. Discussing the achievements of the philosophy of biology and philosophy of mind, Zlatev has presented a hierarchy of levels at which the organization of meaning occurs in semiotics; in this hierarchy, the linguistic self is located at the top the semiotic ladder.

The first level constitutes here biological organisms as living systems (that function only within an *Umwelt*) are distinguished by *autopoiesis*, i.e., the ability of self-organization,<sup>1</sup> at the second level, the minimal self is

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<sup>1</sup> Against the background of Jordan Zlatev's reference to the term *autopoiesis*, being widely known from the common work of Chilean biologists Humberto Romesin Maturana and Francisco Javier Varela García *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, edited in 1980, it is worth adding that it has been introduced by Maturana, in his report from 1970 under the title "Biology of cognition," "Biological Computer Laboratory Research Report." Cf. Maturana, 1980 (1970).

equipped with the ability to act intentionally in its directly perceived natural *Lebenswelt*, at the third level, the enculturated self acts in a culturally mediated *Lebenswelt*, and finally, the linguistic self, situated at the fourth level, resorts to manipulating “a conventional-normative semiotic system for communication and thought” (Zlatev, 2009, 186). As Zlatev claims, “spoken, signed and written languages (and derivative forms, such as mathematical and logical notations) are [...] the only ‘conventional-normative semiotic systems’ that are known” (2009, 187) to humans. As a result of this belief, life and language are to be placed on the opposite poles of the four levels. Consequently, the four levels might be shown in the hierarchical order as embedded layers in the terms of ontological emergence or logical implication, where each of them rests on the previous level as well as makes possible the attainment of the next. And therefore life emerges from consciousness, consciousness from sign function, sign functions from language, and equally language implies sign function, sign function implies consciousness and consciousness implies life (cf. Zlatev, 2009, 189, especially Figure 3 there). With reference to Zlatev’s typological proposal, one has to explicitly notice that both reflexivity and dialogicality of the self can develop only along with language, even though all semiotic processes, commencing with the biological level, are tightly interrelated in the formation of self-awareness.

## **2.2. Approaching human selves as persons and subjects in physical and logical domains**

While focusing on language as a relational property of communicating individuals who take part in group communications, one departs from the assumption that its basic function is to establish homogeneous communities of meaning cognizers and meaning knowers, as well as meaning producers and meaning interpreters among communication participants. Since the linguistic properties of people may be deduced from communicative interactions that can be observed and inferred on the basis of observations, it is possible to isolate such properties of language that unite the particular human selves as communicating individuals in their natural and socio-cultural environments into communicating collectivities, based on the realization of their common tasks. The fulfilment of communicative tasks depends in fact on whether individual selves take an active part as members of societies in (1) observable, i.e., physical, interpersonal relationships, and (2) concluded/assumable, i.e., psychological, intersubjective relationships (details are discussed in (Wąsik, 2007; 2010b)).

To be exact, regardless of forms of communication, communicating individuals are, on the one hand, linked by sound waves playing the role of verbal messages as meaning bearers, as well as their surrogates being in turn transformed again into sound waves in the process of their reception, which

are accessible to empirical observation and experiment. That is to say, when people are engaged in the activities of sending and receiving messages, the existence of communicating collectivities is connected with the expenditure of certain amounts of energy that is measurable. On the other hand, communicating individuals enter into mutual intersubjective relationships when they cognize and interpret the meaning of verbal messages in the same or similar way in accordance with their referential value. These relationships between human selves as subjects are dynamic in nature; they find their reflection in the minds of communication participants in the form of changeable linguistic knowledge about the concluded reality (cf. Wąsik, 2007). For estimating the agency role of communication participants, it is relevant to allude to the distinctions between the physical domain of empirical facts and the logical domain of theoretical notions (cf. Wąsik, 2010a)—proposed in the book *From Grammar to Science* (1996) by Victor Huse Yngve, an American physicist and promoter of the so-called human linguistics—in terms of which (1) the linguistic meaning bearers and (2) the ways in which communicating individuals refer the meaning bearers to the extralinguistic reality, i.e., understand and interpret them can be (or are) investigated adequately. In accordance with methodological and practical consequences resulting from Yngve's investigative postulates, the parallel distinctions between observable and concluded linguistic properties of communicating individuals as well as between observable and concluded interpersonal and intersubjective relations are treated as belonging to the physical and logical domains of human communication.

Following the tradition of psychological thoughts, it seems legitimate, at this point, to refer to the inferable relationships between communicating individuals as to intersubjective relationships and to the perceptible relationships as to interpersonal relationships, while considering the two aspects of the human self, that is, the self as a mental subject, and the self as a person. Anyhow, such knowledge about the nature of human self appears to be decisive for understanding the communicative performances of communicating individuals.

### **3. REVIEWING ASPECTUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SELF IN THE LIGHT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL LEGACY**

To consider the features of the dialogical self, in the next part of this paper, as the combination of continuity and discontinuity of internalized multiple voices of self-other interrelationships or interchangeability of speaker-hearer roles, one has to make reference to William James, acknowledged as a father of psychology, who managed to practically explain the two existence modes of humans as psychosomatic beings and to present the idea of the social self originally in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), and then in

*Psychology. The Briefer Course* (2001, first ed. 1892). Exactly, he defined the human self in keeping with its two aspectual dimensions: (1) the pure *ego*, i.e., the self as a subjective knower, or the “I,” and (2) the empirical self, i.e., the self as an object that is known, or the “Me.” According to James, a mental subject as an internally conceivable, experiencing agent who formulates and interprets its thoughts in sign patterns, who sends and receives its messages through sign-processing activities, is always aware of him or herself, i.e., of his or her personal existence (as a physical person, i.e., as an externally observable object of experience). The mental subject acts towards constituents of the self that arouse the feelings and emotions (self-appreciation); the acts to which they prompt are, from the perspective of the subject, self-seeking and self-preservation. The social character of human existence exposed by James has, in his opinion, its implications for the formation and maintenance of one’s concept of the self, and definitively has consequences for human communicative behavior.

According to James, the self as a person consists of (1) the “material” self (all physical objects that one strongly identifies with and considers as belonging to oneself, such as one’s body, possessions, immediate family, etc.), (2) the “social” self (self-concepts which arise in social interactions, and result from the adjustment of an individual to particular social contexts) and (3) the “spiritual” self (the inner, most intimate aspects of one’s self, such as personality traits, attitudes, beliefs, and values).

These parts of the self are not static but develop dynamically in effect of communicative events in which he or she acts so that the image other people hold of them is reinforced and maintained. The *I* and *Me* aspects of one’s self constantly alternate between each other in the ever-changing, personal, and continuous stream of consciousness.

It is worth summarizing James’s proposal of the division of the self into two dimensions, the *I* and the *Me*. The *I* dimension is equated with the self-as-knower which has three features: continuity, distinctness and volition, where: (1) the *continuity* of the self-as-knower is characterized by a sense of personal identity, that is, a sense of sameness through time; (2) the feeling of *distinctness* from others, or individuality, also follows from the subjective nature of the self-as-knower, and (3) the sense of personal *volition* is reflected in the continuous appropriation and rejection of thoughts by which the self-as-knower proves itself as an active processor of experience. In turn, the *Me* is equated with the self-as-known which is composed of the empirical elements considered as belonging to oneself. What many researchers emphasize in this dimension is the fact that the empirical self is composed of those features which the person can call his or her own, namely “not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account” (quoted after: James, 2001, 44).

#### 4. PORTRAYING THE DIALOGICAL MANIFESTATION OF THE HUMAN SELF AS A COMMUNICATING SUBJECT

From among most interesting proposals of depictions of human subjectivity in social encounters with others, an approach to the self as a semiotic structure, is worthy presenting, proposed by Norbert Wiley in his book *The Semiotic Self* (1994). Wiley defines the self as a semiotic triad and its continuous interpretation. In Wiley's view (1994, 17), the self as a semiotic triad consists of the following three sets of three interrelated elements: (i) a sign, or meaning bearer, an object, and an interpretant, as well as (ii) the present, the past, the future, and also (iii) the *I*, the *Me*, and the *You*. Moreover, since it contains signs of, e.g., ethnic, religious, social identity, it may be as regarded as a continuous process of interpretation, in which the present self interprets, mostly linguistically, the past self for the future self. Interestingly enough, Wiley's (1994, 14) view of the self refers to the American tradition of pragmatism as well, and in particular to Charles Sanders Peirce's (1931–1958) idea of the sign as a unity and a triangular relation between its three parts, i.e., the perceptible meaning bearer, the represented object, and the interpretant.

The three perspectives in the study of meaning, differentiated, *inter alia*, in the discussion about methodological approaches to the study of meaning presented by Jordan Zlatev (2009, 177–178) that are connected with the use of “subjective,” “intersubjective” and “objective” methods, characterize also the linguistic performances of communicating selves; they are communicated not only by personal pronouns. Pragmatically, they serve for the expression of values and attitudes toward self and the others and the so-called life position—while using the term introduced significantly earlier by Eric Berne, a Canadian-born psychiatrist, known as the creator of transactional analysis and the author of *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relations* (1964). In the transactional analysis, the human self, in other words “the moving self”, continuously moves between the three adapted ego states, such as the Adult who is concerned with transforming stimuli into information, and processing and filling this information on the basis of previous experience, the Parent who seeks to enforce borrowed standards in a judgmental and imitative way, and the Child who reacts abruptly on the basis of prelogical thinking and poorly differentiated or distorted perceptions (cf. Wąsik, 2010, 139–151).

Among the various conceptualizations of the human self that remain in conformity with the theory of the self as a subject and object with precision expounded by James, a particular attention deserves the notion of the dialogical self. The dialogical nature of the human self is assumed to be a universal property of *homo sapiens*, who is, regardless of its cultural and societal embedding, aware of itself in relation to others. This view has been also

supported by Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, contemporary American psychologists in the following way: “The way people [...] most naturally or effortlessly perceive and understand the world is rooted in their self-perceptions and self-understandings, [...] that are [...] constrained by the patterns of social interactions characteristic of the given culture” (Markus, Kitayama, 1991, 246).

Being interested in human psyche and culture, Markus and Kitayama propose to distinguish between universal and culture-specific properties of the self. In their estimation, the universal properties of the self-concept provide the individual with some awareness of his/her internal activities, such as dreams and continuous flow of thoughts and feelings, private to the extent that they cannot be directly known by others. Hereto belong, especially (1) the possession of the private (inner) self, (2) the understanding of oneself as a person being physically distinct from others, (3) the existence of a universal schema of the body that constitutes a support for individual identity in time and space, etc. Culture-specific properties of the self, developed on the basis of the universal ones, depend, however, on sociocultural backgrounds, and therefore may be the cause of intercultural conflicts. Accordingly, intercultural conflicts, being observable as tensions or struggles between groups, are indeed expressions of unobservable mental states of individuals who act as supporters of certain political movements, representatives of certain regions, countries, ethnic, and religious communities, etc. However, external conflicts are mostly manifestations of mutual aversion and hostility among individuals who identify themselves with their territory, history, language, customs, and traditions, but who are insufficiently prepared to confront their values with the values of others.

Entering into interpersonal contacts, human individuals may thus feel threatened facing the events on a global scale, especially those which appear to menace their rights, liberties, and sense of security. Intrapersonal conflicts caused by the clash of internalized cultural values with unexpected experiences gained in new conditions can be considered in terms of intrapersonal communication or internal dialogism. Anyhow, the possession of the private or inner self, an understanding of themselves as physically distinct and separable from others and the existence of a general schema of the body that provided one with an anchor in time and space as well as some awareness of internal activity, such as dreams, continuous flow of thoughts and feelings, which are private to the extent that they cannot be directly known by others, are pondered as universal properties of the self-concept.

The true concept of the dialogical self comes from Hubert J. M. Hermans, a Dutch psychologist. It has appeared as early as in 1987 with regard to the human individual who is engaged in an internal dialog and then has been put forward 1992 with reference to a person embedded in narrative activities (cf. Hermans, 1987; 1992a; 1992b). This topic *in medias res* regarding the



title of the publication as such has been subsequently summarized and enriched by historiographical source in the author's joint publication with Harry J. M. Kempen and Rens J. van Loon (1992).

The dialogical structure of the self has been uncovered and analyzed by Hermans in his very numerous (probably a few dozen when not hundred) works which he published by himself and together with other authors in several languages (not only in English). According to Hermans, the human self constitutes a complexity of multiple voices of internal participants who continuously communicate with each other and who anticipate even the responses to possible questions, thus emerging and developing thanks to such socially conditioned interactions. The dialogical nature of the self is understood as a universal property of humans because they are aware of themselves in relation to others regardless of their culture and societal experience. Exposing the dialogical functioning of the human mind, Hermans maintains that dialogicity: "implies interchange of mutually influencing voices" (1996, 31).

Elaborating his conception about the way of internal development of a human individual from informational processing to dialogical interchange, Hermans was particularly inspired by the notion of the self, defined by William James in (*Principles of Psychology* 1890) and the concept of dialogism as well as the metaphor of polyphonic (i.e., multiple) voices proposed by Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, a Russian literary critic, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (coming originally from the Russian text of 1929).<sup>2</sup> As Hermans argues, whereas in James's depiction, there are several characters (cf. also Hermans, 1996), which he sees as belonging to its *Me* dimension of the self, for example, "my wife and children, my ancestors and friends", Bakhtin's proposal to accept the idea of a "polyphonic novel" means that there are "several authors or thinkers, that is, characters [...] put forward as independent thinkers, each with his or her own view of the world." In summarizing words, he notices that what exist in a literary work "is a plurality of consciousnesses and worlds instead of a multitude of characters and fates within a unified objective world." In developing his dialogical view of human mind, Hermans has borrowed from Bakhtin the conviction that the author of a novel may organize and contract in "a fully developed dialogue between two relatively independent parties [...] temporally dispersed events [...] into spatial oppositions that are simultaneously present." What has appeared to

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding the criticism and interpretations of Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), see the first translation of 1963 original text collected and published in Russian: M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, translated by R. William Rotsel (1973, cf. also 1963; 1929) and the next one: M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, with an introduction by Wayne C. Booth, (1984, cf. also 1929). As Emerson writes in his Editor's Preface on page xxix: "The text translated here (*Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*, Moscow, 1963) is the much-expanded second edition of a book by Bakhtin which appeared more than thirty years earlier under the title *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art (Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*, Leningrad, 1929)."

Herman as particularly productive for his theory is the idea that the “construction of narratives in terms of a polyphony of spatial oppositions” in which “both interior and exterior dialogues” reveal “a multiplicity of perspectives” in terms of the “intersection, consonance, or interference of speeches” being present “in the overt dialog with the speeches in the heroes’ interior dialogs” that “are everywhere present” with reference to the “irreversible multivoicedness and varivoicedness of the theme” (1996, 245).

While it is true that Hermans has made his name famous with regard to the conception of the “dialogical self,” the question arises for the external observer of the distribution of scientific ideas how it could have occurred. Another question concerns the actual merit of the Dutch scholar himself. The answers may be found in the occurrence of parallel conceptions developed at the time when the dialogical view of interpersonal communication, and related theory of speech genres, represented by the followers of Mikhail Bakhtin (1986), was opposed to the monologist philosophy of language in which utterances of single performers were analyzed in the light of a pragmatic theory of indirect and direct speech acts, initiated by John Langshaw Austin (1975) through *How to Do Things with Words*.

## **5. CONSEQUENCES OF DIALOGISM FOR FURTHER STUDIES OF HUMAN COGNITION AND COMMUNICATION**

In the context of dialogicality of mind characterized in terms of polyphony of voices accompanying the development of the individual as a social being through his or her participation in various environmental circles of culture and education, it seems essential to additionally postulate the application of the perspectives of personal or social constructivism, and psychophysiological epistemologism (derived from the theory of knowledge or knowledge acquisition). What might be recommendable in the applicative domain of constructivism, following George Alexander Kelly (1955), is the acceptance of the assumption that subjectively perceived meanings of personal selves expressed in verbal forms may determine the character of their social behavior. The value of social constructivists, in turn, derived from the conceptions of Peter Ludwig Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), lies in the assumption that particular human individuals as organisms functioning with their environments shape, through interindividual communication, the reality of their life, the so-called human lifeworld, which is as such not identical with the real physical world. Combining both personal and social constructivism in one framework, radical scientific constructivists, as, *inter alia*, Ernst von Glasersfeld (1995), stress the role of cognizing selves who construe their scientific theories as models that are helpful in the apprehension of reality. By this, they mean that scientists as mind-dependent persons

are only able to strive towards a subjective ordering of their experiential world while having no access to the objective world as far it exists beyond their ability of perception.

As closely related to personal constructivism, one has to take into consideration the perspective of experiential epistemologism assuming that every organism internalizes knowledge about the external reality in a subjectively differentiated way depending upon its physiological aptitudes and psychological capacity for cognition. Recalling here the viewpoint summarized and popularized in selected representative works of Alfred Korzybski (1933) and Gregory Bateson (1979), one can state that any epistemology is a personal thing; if there is a collective knowledge (or wisdom) than it results from interpersonal communication.

Finally, in reference to the dialogical structure of human consciousness, emerging and developing thanks to social interactions, the further studies on human communication from a cognitive perspective should expound on the ways and possibilities of understanding and interpreting verbal utterances of communicating selves engaged in the roles of experiencers, interlocutors, observers and narrators. Their personal-subjective constructs are disseminated in the form of reported speech thus contributing to common understanding processes only as types of intersubjectively shared experiences. What they mean is in fact not contained in words but rather determined by the distance between them as communication participants who talk otherwise about themselves, about those with whom they communicate and about those about whom they communicate. It is their intentions which are attached to their utterances when they act according to their feelings and emotions, beliefs, attitudes, needs, and values in specific situational and social contexts.

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