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## The Psychological Mechanisms for Implementation of the Reflective Component of Preschoolers' Deliberated Communicative Activities

### Psychologiczne mechanizmy implementacji refleksyjnego komponentu rozważanych działań komunikacyjnych przedszkolaków

**Summary:** The article substantiates theoretically the importance of studies of deliberate communicative activities in the context of the information society and postmodern culture. The “I–the Other” communicative relations correspond to the reflexive level of communicative activities if these relations are developed only in an over-situational context and a situation of relationship uncertainty. The article states that communicative activities at the reflection level take place in intra-subjective and para-social relations between “Self” and the “Other”. The reflexive level of communicative activities contributes to transformation of “Self” through the establishment of mutual understanding by the means of such psychological mechanisms as symbolization, internal dialogue, reflexive decentration, actualizing co-existential relations with the “Other”. The article determines peculiarities of the genesis of preschoolers’ intra-subjective and para-social interactions with various partners (a favorite toy, an imaginary partner, an animated character).

**Keywords:** deliberate communicative activities; reflection; Self; the Other; intra-subjective and para-social interactions; favorite toy; imaginary companion; animated character

## INTRODUCTION

Determination of a role of the reflective component as a regulatory system in the genesis of communicative activities opens the prospect of this component study at preschoolers with typical and delayed development. Deliberated communicative activities on the "I–the Other" ("I–the Other Self") plane in the conditions of the information society and post-neoculture imply an agent's ability to perform not only direct, but also indirect communicative actions with different partners. These communicative activities are aimed both at information exchange, and at generation of "values-images" as a result of links between phenomena and acts of nature, people, culture, society. Therefore, the focus of our research on preschoolers' communicative activities should be shifted onto the "I–the Other" ("I–the Other Self") plane, including studies of the development of capabilities to understand mental states of the "Other", decentration of one's own subjectivity, tolerant attitudes to various values-semantic preferences in order to cooperate with adults and peers.

Communicative activities from the social-cultural point of view have a noumenal-phenomenal nature<sup>1</sup>. The phenomenal side is revealed through information processes that have a dichotomous character, that is, these processes determine the content of a person's inner and outer world and are triggered by the psychological mechanisms of an external and internal dialogue, contributing to mutual understanding, coordination and harmonization. The noumenal side is represented by internal communicative activities, causing creation of "values-images", which allow communicative agents to produce new meanings and values, contributing to the development of each of such agents and society as a whole. Interpersonal communication transits to intra-communication (an intra-personal type of interactions) at the reflexive level of communicative activities, since here takes place "identification" of a meaning, its transition from emotional to rational. At the reflexive level, through reflective decentration (para-social and intra-personal types of interactions), a person becomes able to put his/herself into a position of the "Other" and actualizes his/her ability to make value-meaning definition of this "Other", and hence, to determine a co-value and to achieve mutual understanding with this "Other"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See V.I. Grachev, *Fenomen sotsiokulturnoy kommunikatsii v sovremennoy khudozhestvennoy kulture: informatsionno-aksiologicheskiy analiz*, Doctor's thesis, Sankt-Peterburg 2008 [in Russian].

<sup>2</sup> I.M. Omelchenko, *The "I–the Other" ("I–the Other Self") Relation in the Deliberated Communicative Activity Genesis*, „Annales UMCS. Sectio N – Educatio Nova” 2017, Vol. 2, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/en.2017.2.217>, pp. 217–228.

That is why the purpose of our article is to find out the genesis and psychological mechanisms of the reflective component of communicative activities at the preschool age. The identified purpose requires solving the following tasks: firstly, theoretical substantiation of the research on intra-subjective and para-social relations between “I” and the “Other” (a favorite toy, an imaginary partner, an animated character) and definition of psychological mechanisms for its implementation; secondly, a review of researches revealing peculiarities of the genesis of intra-subjective and para-social interactions with various partners at the preschool age; and thirdly, determination of psychological mechanisms for implementation of the reflective communicative component at the preschool age.

## METHODS

The conceptual basis for understanding the reflection component in the structure of deliberated communicative activities includes different scientific approaches: existential-ontological approach; hermeneutic phenomenology; regulatory approach, in which the genesis specifics is determined.

Theoretical methods included formal-logical analysis of various aspects of the problem under study, the logical-deductive and axiomatic methods, and ascension from abstract to specific.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The “awareness” term is broader than the concept of an “awareness function”. If awareness means expansion of consciousness in general, then the awareness function is a separate aspect of awareness, namely: cognitive adjustment to a position that is different from one’s own. The work of A.V. Galuza<sup>3</sup> proves that the awareness function means a capability to imagine “Self” from the position of the “Other”. Virtually all four-year old children with typical development can imagine themselves in the position of the “Other”. A prerequisite for emergence of the awareness function is the differentiation of images of perception and images of representations.

Thus, the basis of the awareness function at the preschool age is decentration, contributing to “values-images” creation; this decentration is a result of communications and mutual understanding with the “Other” in the information society and post-neoculture.

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<sup>3</sup> A.V. Galuza, *Formirovaniye funktsii osoznaniya v kontse rannego i nachale doshkolnogo vozrasta*, Candidate’s thesis, Sankt-Peterburg 2005 [in Russian].

A.S. Sharov<sup>4</sup> considers reflection as the basic psychological mechanism of human self-organization and he defines in his study of self-organization methodological foundations the “boundary” category, revealing its meaning for an agent’s intentional activity. According to the personal approach, reflection “acts as a semantic centre of a person’s internal reality and all his/her life activities as a whole”<sup>5</sup>, so the author seeks to elevate the status of this concept, considering it not as a function, but as internal work, an active process to generate new meanings, to develop subjectivity and personality in general; an internal dialogue becomes the main mechanism under such conditions.

In the context of our study, intra-subjective and para-social types of interactions are the key ones in which the mechanism of an internal dialogue is actualized. Intra-subjective interactions and relations (“I–personalized Other”) are represented through communications with a favorite toy or an imaginary companion. Para-social interactions and relations (“I–symbolic Other”) are manifested at communicative relations with animated characters as models of agents. The leading external factor of preschoolers’ subjectivity development is real dialogic interactions with another person as a holder of subjectivity, since these interactions are reciprocal. However, it becomes possible only through mediation of an internal (reflexive) dialogue to go beyond the limits of own subjectivity into the space of values and meanings, serving as a source of a full-fledged communicative relations with the “Other”.

Proceeding from the above, the study of communicative activities at the level of the reflective component will demonstrate preschoolers’ ability to interdependence and mutual understanding, to achieve meaningfulness (existence of value-meaning forms) and integrity. Here appears a “sense of the whole”, demonstrating links of a child with other people and reflecting existence of many levels of such links, corresponding to communications on the existential, social and individual levels.

V.A. Ivannikov<sup>6</sup> emphasizes that changes in meanings of actions and their volitional regulations occur not only in real communicative situations, but also in imaginary ones.

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<sup>4</sup> A.S. Sharov, *Ontologiya psikhologicheskikh mekhanizmov refleksii*, „Vestnik Omskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta” 2006, [www.omsk.edu/article/vestnik-omg-pu-25.pdf](http://www.omsk.edu/article/vestnik-omg-pu-25.pdf) [access: 11.09.2018] [in Russian], pp. 112–120.

<sup>5</sup> A.V. Rossolin, *Refleksiya i vnutrennyy dialog v izmenennykh sostoyaniyakh soznaniya. Intersoznaniye v psikhoanalize*, Moskva 2010 [in Russian].

<sup>6</sup> See V.A. Ivannikov, *Psikhologicheskiye mekhanizmy volevoy regulyatsii*, Moskva 1991 [in Russian].

Consequently, this scientist argues that comprehension and changes in meanings of communicative situations occurs gradually due to changes in a real situation introduced by other people, then by the child him/herself, and only then changes created on an imaginary plane appear. Thus, there is a gradual transition in the structure of communicative activities from inter-subjective communications, caused by an existing communicative situation, to the intra-subjective and para-social ones, which, by the nature of their implementation, act as a reflection (value-meaning formation). Namely, thanks to intra-subjective and para-social communications, preschoolers become capable of achieving understanding and mutual understanding with the "Other" on the over-situational plane of human existence.

An important role in generating values and meanings in the structure of the reflective component of communicative activities belongs to the psychological mechanism of symbolization.

Understanding and adequate interpretations of symbolic images become an important part of any communicative situation, necessary for the full realization of the reflective component of communicative activities. Therefore, mutual understanding between agents of communicative activities appears only if each of the participants not only recreates the real cause-and-effect links and relationships, but also identifies the secondary symbolic meaning generated by creative activities of a person or humanity at all<sup>7</sup>.

S. Juszczyk<sup>8</sup> in his scientific studies points out the remarkable role of symbolization in global-world interactions. E.A. Sergienko<sup>9</sup> adheres to analogue views on symbolization as a psychological mechanism through which communicative activities are implemented. The researcher notes that awareness (generation of meanings, personal meanings, values) is implemented at the level of the cognitive function. The regulatory function is actualized in emotional experiences, indicating attitudes to an event or a situation and leading to possible changes in "Self". It is only through this regulatory function as a mediator that the communicative function is activated as a focus on the significant aspects of the reality, combining the "Other" and "Self" into a co-existing unity.

Thus, understanding is possible only in the presence of meanings; creation of meanings and behavioral changes and control are possible only through

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<sup>7</sup> See V.V. Znakov, *Psikhologiya ponimaniya: Problemy i perspektivy*, Moskva 2005 [in Russian].

<sup>8</sup> S. Juszczyk, *Fields of Impact of Social Media on Youth – Methodological Implications Acta*, "Technologica Dubnicae" 2015, Vol. 5(2), pp. 80–86.

<sup>9</sup> E.A. Sergienko, *Sovremennaya tendentsiya v psikhologii razvitiya: perekhod k obshchim modelyam*, „Mir psikhologii” 2016, № 1 [in Russian], pp. 40–53.

emotional experiences, and, accordingly, a person's attitudes ensure selectivity and a certain nature of communicative interactions. At the same time, the mentioned functions are implemented at different levels of psyche in accordance with an agent's developmental level.

Para-social and intra-subjective types of interactions help trigger a key function and, at the same time, a mechanism of awareness – reflexive decentration (the ability to “be Self and the Others”). Reflexive decentration is actualized through mediation of values, the mechanism of symbolization, internal dialogues when an agent transforms his/her living experience through emotional experiences, since he/she begins to “look at him/herself with the eyes of the Other”, and therefore approaches reconciliation of personal and social meanings of a communicative action in a situation of uncertainty.

### 1. Intra-subjective interactions (“I–personalized Other”)

Intra-subjective communicative activities are based on a person's ability to imagine a partner and to “communicate” with him/her when he/she is really absent. At the same time, a representation of one person in the consciousness of another, who also has consciousness, is a prerequisite of development of the corresponding level of social communications. Different meanings, expressed by partners, belong to one person – a holder of intra-subjective communications. Therefore, the described type of interactions cannot be attributed only to reflection. The task of reflection is awareness of living experiences and creation of a certain meaning, but intra-social communicative activities as partners' interactions involve generation of new meanings. Not only is a reflective effect important in this case, but also the generative one. In addition, a problem is initiated during intra-social communicative activities; to resolve this problem, a communicating child needs not only to realize it, but also to actualize an image of another person in his/her mind. In this case, the child analyzes in his/her internal dialogue possible, including opposite, variants of problem solution in order to choose an optimal one.

According to the operationalized theoretical-empirical concept of the study of intra-subjective communicative activities of preschoolers with typical and delayed development, we have chosen a favorite toy and an imaginary companion as the partners in interactions; these objects correspond to the socio-psychological type of “the Other: I–the Other as a part of I” (the personalized “Other”)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> E.V. Rjaguzova, *Sotsialnaya psikhologiya reprezentatsiy vzaimodeystviya „Ja – Drugoy”*, [http://elibrary.sgu.ru/uch\\_lit/844.pdf](http://elibrary.sgu.ru/uch_lit/844.pdf) [access: 10.09.2018] [in Russian].

The specificity of reflective component development, manifested in intra-subjective interactions with a favorite toy, for children of the middle and senior preschool age is outlined in a number of works.

E.N. Vasina<sup>11</sup> considers identification and reflection as the main mechanisms of preschoolers' interactions with their favorite toys; identification and reflection are general mechanisms of self-consciousness and are studied in mutual relations. Identification appears before reflection, and reflection, in turn, can act as a consequence of identification processes. We should note that reflection is a later formation emerging in preschoolers. Essential types of identification are: internal and external. They together form the mechanism of consciousness formation in early ontogenesis, and, in the context of our study, the mechanism of deliberated communicative activity formation.

In her work, O.A. Ustinova<sup>12</sup> mentions a favorite toy as a partner of an intra-subjective communicative activity in correlation with an internal dialogue and understanding of the "Other" significance that launches self-changes of "Self". She has empirically proven that five-year-old children are able to determine their "own" inner world, which they associate with their favorite toys, and six-year-old preschoolers already assign different moral qualities to these toys, such as conscience, kindness, pride. At the same time, the high level of self-changes is characterized by the emergence of understanding of the value of "own" inner world and the world of the "Other". Children compare their "own" inner world with socio-cultural values. This type of transformation is characterized by the child's awareness of his/her self-image, his/her qualities, by appearance of gender and temporal ideas about him/herself. The average level of changes is characterized by the fact that children distinguish their "own" inner world, endow it with social characteristics, but the "Other" is perceived as a value in a situational context. The low level of changes in self-image components means that children begin to distinguish "own" inner world and the world of the "Other", but the "Other" is not perceived as a value.

The genesis of the reflective component of communicative activities is examined by different scientific researches using the model of intra-subjective interaction with "an imaginary companion" imagined by children of the middle and senior preschool age. The role of such an imaginary companion in the genesis of an internal (reflexive) dialogue is partially revealed by C. Fernyhough, K. Bland,

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<sup>11</sup> E.N. Vasina, *Otrazhennoye Ja v strukture samosoznaniya*, Extended abstract of candidate's thesis, Moskva 2006 [in Russian].

<sup>12</sup> O.A. Ustinova, *Razvitiye „obraz-a-YA” posredstvom vnutrennego dialoga rebenka s mirom*, „Sibirskiy pedagogicheskiy zhurnal” 2010, № 6 [in Russian], pp. 257–264.

E. Meins and M. Coltheart<sup>13</sup>. The aforementioned scholars have found that an internal dialogue of children creating imaginary friends is potentially associated with a better ability to interpret aural stimuli. For authors, this discovery has shown that such children have a better susceptibility to verbal imaginary experiences. Such susceptibility is associated with a high level of internal dialogue development, as it was confirmed by the studies of P. Davis, E. Meins and C. Fernyhough<sup>14</sup>. These authors observed 5-year-old children during their free play in order to find out if there is a relation between existence of an imaginary friend and the children's ability to an internal dialogue. Preschoolers with imaginary friends have shown a higher tendency to be engaged into specific (hidden) interactions (through a whisper or lips motion accompanied by unclear sounds).

Thus, such children have demonstrated a higher level of internationalization, and a higher level of social and communicative development, in contrast to their peers who had no imaginary friend.

Compared to their peers, preschoolers with imaginary companions can have a higher level of social understanding of "the Other" (that is, they are better aware of the mental states of people and use them to predict their behavior in social and communicative situations<sup>15</sup>), because they show a higher level of co-operation with peers and adults<sup>16</sup>.

M. Taylor<sup>17</sup> insists that the awareness function is the key characteristic of communicative activities; he argues that preschoolers having imaginary friends are less shy, as well as they are able to better focus their attention and look at things from the point of view of another person.

Development of the reflective-meaning and reflexive-value functions of communicative activities at the preschool age is examined in the work of Norwegian scientists M. Giménez-Dasí, F. Pons and P.K. Bender<sup>18</sup> on the model of interaction

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<sup>13</sup> C. Fernyhough, K. Bland, E. Meins, M. Coltheart, *Imaginary companions and young children's responses to ambiguous auditory stimuli: Implications for atypical development*, "Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry" 2007, Vol. 48(11), pp. 1094–1101.

<sup>14</sup> P. Davis, E. Meins, C. Fernyhough, *Individual differences in children's private speech: The role of imaginary companions*, "Journal of Experimental Child Psychology" 2013, Vol. 116(3), pp. 561–571.

<sup>15</sup> P. Davis, E. Meins, C. Fernyhough, *Self-knowledge in childhood: Relations with children's imaginary companions and understanding of mind*, "British Journal of Developmental Psychology" 2011, Vol. 29(3), pp. 680–686; M. Taylor, S. Carlson, *The relation between individual differences in fantasy and theory of mind*, "Child Development" 1997, Vol. 68(3), pp. 436–455.

<sup>16</sup> D. Singer, J. Singer, *The House of Make-Believe*, Cambridge 1990.

<sup>17</sup> M. Taylor, *Imaginary Companions and the Children Who Create Them*, New York 1999.

<sup>18</sup> M. Giménez-Dasí, F. Pons, P.K. Bender, *Imaginary companions, theory of mind and emotion understanding in young children*, "European Early Childhood Education Research Journal" 2014, Vol. 24(2), pp. 186–197.

with an imaginary companion. It has been found out that girls of the senior pre-school age and children with imaginary companions have a higher level of emotional understanding of the "Other" than boys of junior preschool age or children without an imaginary companion.

Thus, the performed review shows that preschoolers with imaginary friends have a higher level of understanding of the "Other", and therefore, it helps them to form co-existing relations with adults and peers on the basis of co-values in the chronotope of culture.

## 2. Para-social interactions ("I–the Other in culture")

Modern media development causes formation of new types of interactions and co-existence in the information society. Para-social interactions and relations are a new type of communications between children or adults and virtual characters. The psychological-pedagogical angle of para-social interactions (on the model of animated characters) is revealed in scientific works devoted to the problems of playing on the basis of a cartoon plot and modelling of deliberated communicative relations with the "Other" within the structure of such games.

The work of M.A. Shakarova<sup>19</sup> proves that a developed form of role-playing game can be constructed on the basis of modern animation series. In this case, a series that has in its centre human interactions and relations and presents a large number of characters and their functions, contributes more often to initiation of a role-play game than series where these relations are vague.

Thus, the described structure of a game plot is a resource of a child's perception of meanings existing in human relationships and communicative actions and, consequently, acceptance of these meanings, which facilitates transition of interpersonal communications into intra-personal ones. In essence, para-social interactions in the name of animated characters in games with adults and peers emphasize the polarity of transitions between "own" and "others" and contribute to solving not only the role conflicts but also a child's internal ones.

Para-social interactions with animated characters must necessarily be played in a two-stroke game or in theatrical activities. If they are implemented through the specified types of activities, they will act as a source of decentration that launches inter- and intra-communications with other people (an internal dialogue). Here, a collision of contradictory points of view takes place that motivates

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<sup>19</sup> M.A. Shakarova, *Analiz vliyaniya struktury syuzheta i sodержaniya kulturnykh tekstov na razvitiye syuzhetno-rolevoy igry sovremennykh doshkolnikov (na primere multiplikatsionnykh serialov)*, Extended abstract of candidate's thesis, Moskva 2012 [in Russian].

an agent to transform the meanings of images, concepts and representations, to develop the ability to imagine oneself in the place of the "Other", which plays an important role in the development of co-existential relationships.

Thus, the performed research proves that animated series that have in their centre human interactions provoke more often preschoolers' story-role games. The most advanced type of game interactions (a role in relations) is more common in games based on an animated series with a large number of characters performing various functions associated with a variety of different plot devices. Under such conditions, animation partners, as symbolic and artistic images of the "Other" in culture, launch a dual internally and externally directed communicative action.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above statements, we consider it is necessary: firstly, to determine and explore the reflection component of conscious communicative activities, which involves studying the structure of intra-subjective ("I—the Other as a part of I") and para-social ("I—the Other in culture") interactions<sup>20</sup>. Research on preschoolers' intra-subjective interactions will clarify personalization of the "Other" in preschoolers' inner world. It involves the study of psychological mechanisms of identification and reflection. Identification will reveal how a child understands the "Other", and reflection will reveal peculiarities of awareness of the value of the "Other", which triggers mutual understanding. Para-social interactions during modelling in a game or theatrical activities will serve as a source of symbolization and decentration, which launches inter- and intra-communications with other people (an internal dialogue) and allows a child to generate new "values-images" to promote mutual understanding between "Self" and the "Other".

The developed theoretical concept of the research on the reflective component of communicative activities will become the basis for studying not only the intra-subjective and para-social types of interactions, but also intra-subjective relations with the "Other in culture" (with peers and adults). Future scientific studies will focus on the empirical research results concerning the psychological mechanisms (identification, reflective decentration, symbolization, verbalized internal dialogue, cognitive and social decentration) implementing the reflective component of communicative activities.

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<sup>20</sup> I.M. Omelchenko, *Operationalization of the study of the "chronotope of communication activities of children with developmental delay" concept*, "Tiltai. Bridges. Brücken" 2015, Vol. 72(3), pp. 75–83; *eadem*, *The "I—the Other" ("I—the Other Self") Relation...*

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**Streszczenie:** W artykule uzasadniono w sposób teoretyczny znaczenie badań celowych działań komunikacyjnych w kontekście społeczeństwa informacyjnego i kultury postmodernistycznej. Relacje komunikacyjne „Ja-Inny” („Ja-Inny Ja”) odpowiadają refleksyjnemu poziomowi działań komunikacyjnych, jeśli rozwijają się one tylko w sytuacji ponadsytuacyjnej i w sytuacji niepewności relacji. W artykule stwierdzono, że działania komunikacyjne na poziomie refleksji zachodzą w wewnątrzsubiektywnych i paraspołecznych relacjach między „Ja” a „Innym”. Odruchowy poziom działań komunikacyjnych przyczynia się do transformacji „Ja” poprzez ustanowienie wzajemnego zrozumienia za pomocą takich mechanizmów psychologicznych, jak: symbolizacja, dialog wewnętrzny, refleksyjna decentralizacja, aktualizowanie relacji egzystencjalnych z „Innym”. Ponadto w opracowaniu określono specyfikę genezy interakcji subsubiektywnych i paraspołecznych przedszkolaków z różnymi partnerami (jak np. ulubiona zabawka, wyimaginowany partner, postać animowana).

**Słowa kluczowe:** przemyślane działania komunikacyjne; refleksja; „Ja”; „Inny”; interakcje subsubiektywne i paraspołeczne; ulubiona zabawka; wyobrażony towarzysz; charakter animowany