

Importance of inner speech for self-awareness

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Four sets of empirical evidence suggesting that language (inner speech) plays a fundamental role in consciousness (self-awareness):

1. Clinical evidence

- Loss of inner speech following a stroke interferes with self-awareness (Moss, 1972).
- Conscious experience & inner speech return in parallel as recovery occurs in patients suffering from cortical damage (Ojemann, 1986).

2. Correlational & experimental evidence

- Validated measures of inner speech & self-awareness positively correlate (Morin & al., 1993; Rivest & Khawaja, 1995; Siegrist, 1995).
- Highly self-aware individuals use inner speech more frequently in comparison to less self-aware individuals (Siegrist, 1996).

→ This suggests that the more one focuses on the self the more one talks to oneself (about oneself).

3. Developmental/comparative evidence

- Language is fundamental to theory-of-mind development (Astington & Jenkins, 1999; Pascual & al., ASSC6).
- (Non-linguistic) Primates are incapable of making inferences about others' mental states (Povinelli, 2000; ASS6).

→ Both theory-of-mind & mental inferences presuppose self-awareness and require language; thus self-awareness too necessitates language.

4. Neuropsychological evidence

- Inner speech & self-awareness seem to share a common neurological basis -- the left inferior frontal gyrus (Morin, 1999; see Craik & al., 1999; McGuire & al., 1996).

Nature of the link (Morin, 1990-95): Why would inner speech be important for self-awareness?

Hypothesis A: Inner speech can reproduce social mechanisms contributing to self-awareness.

- Mead: with inner speech we can incorporate others' potential views of ourselves in self-talk & gain an objective vision of ourselves.
- Cooley: verbal comments made by others (self-information) might imprint on our own inner speech a propensity to address such remarks to ourselves.

Hypothesis B: Inner speech can "translate" self-information into a verbal representation; this creates a distance between the observer & self-information which facilitates self-observation.



Hypothesis C: The process of acquisition of self-information (self-awareness) is a "problem" that inner speech can help solve:

- Clear definition
- Articulating fruitful strategy
- Focusing attention on problem
- Reinforcing oneself (when solution is reached)
- Adjusting strategy (when difficulties arise)

Hypothesis D: Inner speech allows the use of a rich vocabulary about oneself -- this helps to differentiate subtle physiological sensations/emotional responses & deepens self-understanding.