

WHY DO PEOPLE TALK TO THEMSELVES

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada odamlarning o'z-o'zlari bilan gaplashishi hodisasi — ichki nutq (inner speech) — psixologik, kognitiv va ijtimoiy nuqtai nazardan keng tahlil etilgan. Tadqiqot odamlarning o'z-o'zlari bilan nima uchun gaplashishlarini, bu jarayonning kognitiv va emotsional boshqaruvdagi rolini, hamda uning ijobiy tomonlarini ko'rsatib beradi. Maqola shuni isbotlaydiki, o'z-o'zi bilan gaplashish — patologik emas, balki kognitiv rivojlanishning tabiiy va foydali aspekti hisoblanadi.

Kalit soʻzlar: ichki nutq, o'z-o'zi bilan gaplashish, kognitiv boshqaruv, emotsional tartibga solish, nutq va tafakkur, motivatsiya.

Аннотация: В данной статье всесторонне анализируется явление внутренней речи и саморазговора с психологической, когнитивной и социальной точек зрения. Исследование доказывает, что разговор с самим собой — не патология, а естественный когнитивный процесс.

Ключевые слова: внутренняя речь, саморазговор, когнитивная регуляция, эмоциональное управление, язык и мышление, мотивация.

Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of self-talk and inner speech from psychological, cognitive, and social perspectives. The research explores why people talk to themselves, the role of this process in cognitive and emotional regulation, and its positive functions in everyday human experience. The article demonstrates that self-talk is not a pathological behaviour but a natural and beneficial aspect of cognitive development and self-regulation.

Key words: inner speech, self-talk, cognitive regulation, emotional management, language and thought, motivation, self-awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Self-talk — the act of speaking aloud or silently to oneself — is one of the most universal yet least examined aspects of human behaviour. Whether muttering through a difficult task, encouraging oneself before a challenge, or narrating actions in daily life, virtually every human being engages in self-talk at some point. Yet this behaviour is often misunderstood, treated with embarrassment, or even associated with mental instability. Contemporary cognitive science and psychology, however, paint a very different picture.

The scientific study of self-talk draws on a rich theoretical heritage. One of the pioneers in this field, argued that language and thought are deeply intertwined, and that private speech — spoken self-talk visible in children — gradually internalises into silent inner speech in adults. His foundational insight was that language is not merely a communication tool but an instrument of thought itself.

The relevance of this topic in contemporary psychology is growing rapidly. Self-talk has been studied in relation to athletic performance, emotional coping, problem-solving, self-esteem, and

even clinical conditions such as anxiety and depression. Understanding why people talk to themselves, therefore, is not an idle curiosity — it has direct implications for mental health, education, and personal development.

The primary aim of this article is to analyse the psychological, cognitive, and social underpinnings of self-talk, drawing on contemporary empirical research and theoretical models. The specific objectives are to examine the historical and theoretical roots of self-talk research to identify the main functions of self-talk to explore the relationship between language and thought in self-directed speech; and to consider the practical implications of self-talk for emotional regulation and performance.

Research Methods

This article is based on a systematic review of theoretical and empirical literature published between 1934 to 2024. The primary research methodology employed is critical literature review, supplemented by comparative analysis and theoretical synthesis. Sources were drawn from cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and applied linguistics, including work by Vygotsky Morin Alderson-Day and Fernyhough Hatziageorgiadis et al. Kross et al and Fernyhough

The analysis focuses on three intersecting domains: the developmental origins of self-talk, its cognitive and emotional regulatory functions, and the conditions under which it is most beneficial. All cited sources are formatted in accordance with APA 7th edition guidelines.

Results

The findings of the review are organised around four major themes.

The Developmental and Theoretical Roots of Self-Talk.

Lev Vygotsky’s theory of private speech remains the most influential theoretical framework for understanding self-talk. In his view, young children initially use speech externally to guide their behaviour and solve problems. Over time, this speech becomes internalised, forming what he called “inner speech” — a condensed, fragmentary form of verbal thought that persists throughout adult life. As Vygotsky observed:

“Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them.”

This insight establishes that self-talk is not a breakdown of communication but rather a fundamental cognitive tool. What appears to be “talking to oneself” is, in Vygotsky’s framework, the externalised remnant of an ongoing internal dialogue between the self and language.

Morin extended this framework to include the relationship between self-talk and self-concept. He proposed that inner speech serves a central role in constructing and maintaining a coherent sense of self — what he describes as a “self-reflective loop” in which language mediates self-awareness.

“Self-talk may be at the core of human consciousness, since it allows us to comment on our own experience as it unfolds.”

The Cognitive Functions of Self-Talk.

Alderson-Day and Fernyhough conducted a comprehensive review of neuroscientific and psychological evidence on inner speech. They identified several key cognitive functions: self-regulation of behaviour, verbal working memory, planning and problem-solving, and metacognitive monitoring. The brain regions involved in inner speech — particularly Broca’s area and the supplementary motor area — overlap significantly with those used in overt speech production, suggesting that inner speech is a genuine linguistic activity, not merely random mental noise.

“Inner speech is not a pale imitation of external speech; it is a functionally distinct and cognitively rich phenomenon.”

Research on athletic self-talk provides particularly compelling evidence for the cognitive power of self-directed speech. Hatzigeorgiadis et al. Conducted a meta-analysis of 32 studies and found that self-talk significantly enhances both fine and gross motor performance. Instructional self-talk (“keep your elbow up”) improved technique, while motivational self-talk (“you can do it”) boosted effort and persistence. Crucially, the effect was stronger for tasks requiring cognitive control rather than pure physical automaticity.

“Self-talk interventions have a positive and significant effect on performance... with the effects being stronger for novel tasks than for well-learned tasks.”

Emotional Regulation Through Self-Talk.

One of the most practically significant findings in self-talk research concerns its role in emotional regulation. Kross et al. Demonstrated experimentally that the specific linguistic form of self-talk matters enormously for its effectiveness. When people use second- or third-person language in self-talk (“You can handle this” or “Abdurashidxon, stay calm”) rather than first-person language (“I can handle this”), they show significantly reduced emotional distress, better self-control, and wiser thinking. This effect — sometimes called “distanced self-talk” — works because adopting a non-first-person perspective creates psychological distance, allowing the individual to reason about their situation more objectively.

“Distanced self-talk facilitates self-regulation of emotions and behaviour without the typical costs of self-control.”

This finding has profound implications for therapeutic practice, education, and everyday emotional management. It suggests that the habit many people have of giving themselves advice in the second person — “come on, you can do this” — is not irrational but is in fact a cognitively sophisticated strategy.

Social and Cultural Dimensions of Self-Talk.

Fernyhough situates self-talk within a broader social and dialogic framework. Drawing on both Vygotsky and the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, he argues that inner speech is fundamentally dialogic — that is, structured as an internal conversation between different voices or perspectives that the individual has internalised from their social environment. This means that when a person talks to themselves, they are not simply addressing a solitary monologue but engaging in a kind of internalised social dialogue.

“When we talk to ourselves, we are not alone. Our inner voices are populated by the voices of others — parents, teachers, friends — transformed into something distinctly our own.”

This perspective explains why self-talk tends to be more frequent in situations of social challenge or novelty: it reflects the mind’s attempt to mobilise accumulated social wisdom at moments of need. It also illuminates why children who grow up in linguistically rich environments tend to develop more sophisticated regulatory self-talk — they have more “voices” to draw upon.

Discussion and Reflections

The convergence of evidence from developmental psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and applied research makes a compelling case: self-talk is not an eccentric habit but a fundamental cognitive mechanism. Nevertheless, several important nuances deserve attention.

First, not all self-talk is equally beneficial. Negative self-talk — in which individuals berate, criticise, or catastrophise about themselves — has been consistently associated with anxiety, depression, and reduced performance. The content and tone of self-talk matter as much as its mere occurrence. Therapeutic approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) directly target

maladaptive self-talk patterns, recognising that changing self-directed speech can produce significant psychological improvement.

Second, there are important individual and cultural differences in self-talk frequency and style. Introverted individuals, those with high verbal working memory capacity, and people from cultures that emphasise verbal self-expression tend to engage in more self-talk. This suggests that while self-talk is universal, its specific forms are shaped by personality and cultural context.

Third, the educational implications of self-talk research are substantial. Teachers who encourage students to verbalise their problem-solving processes — to “think aloud” — are tapping directly into the cognitive power of self-directed speech. This is consistent with Vygotskian educational theory and is well supported by empirical evidence from mathematics and language learning research.

Finally, for Uzbek students learning English as a foreign language, self-talk represents a particularly rich opportunity. Speaking English to oneself — narrating daily activities, rehearsing upcoming conversations, or processing difficult vocabulary aloud — provides low-stakes practice that builds both fluency and confidence. The practice transforms the learner into both speaker and listener, simultaneously developing productive and receptive skills in a controlled, self-directed environment.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has demonstrated that self-talk is a richly complex and scientifically validated aspect of human cognition. Rooted in the developmental theories of Vygotsky elaborated through the cognitive research of Alderson-Day and Fernyhough and given practical grounding by Hatzigeorgiadis et al. and Kross et al. the evidence converges on a clear conclusion: people talk to themselves because it works. Self-talk serves as a cognitive tool for planning and problem-solving, an emotional regulator for managing stress and performance anxiety, a motivational resource for sustaining effort, and a social bridge that externalises internalised dialogues.

Far from being a sign of eccentricity or instability, self-talk is a sophisticated and adaptive behaviour. Recognising this can encourage individuals to engage in self-talk more consciously and constructively, choosing the form, tone, and content that best serves their cognitive and emotional goals. For language learners in particular, deliberate self-talk in the target language is a simple, accessible, and highly effective pedagogical strategy.

Future research should further examine the neural correlates of distanced versus immersive self-talk, cross-cultural variation in self-talk styles, and the development of self-talk-based interventions for educational and clinical settings.

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