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Verbalization Vs Visualization: The Issues of Interaction and Communication

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ABSRACT

The article contrasts two technologies of distant education and scientific activity: visual (presentations) and verbal (by correspondence, Newtonian). The advantages and disadvantages of both technologies are considered, and a preference is given to writing aimed at thinking.

Key words: distant education, Newton-Leibnitz correspondence, workshop of activity-based technologies, science and education, oral and written speech.

One of the peculiarities of power and governmental practices in this country is that only unequivocal decisions are allowed, without considering alternatives at any stages, neither before nor after adopting decisions. Distance teaching enforced within the educational system due to the Covid-19 pandemic was the result of such unequivocal decision: to be delivered online with no other options allowed, notwithstanding the fact that there were alternatives which were probably more efficient in terms of productivity and cost reduction. One of these alternatives is considered in this paper.

The Covid-19 pandemic that had come upon everybody quite unexpectedly lead to a catastrophic primitivization in the areas of science, education and university life. A series of knockout punches:

1. started with replacing oral examinations by multiple choice tests in the desperate struggle with corruption,
2. continued by turning coherent speech of teachers and students into copy-paste presentations,
3. and switching from teaching and learning processes to fighting for positions in the rankings
4. finished with forcing teachers to become engaged in the research activities that substituted scientific papers with qualification papers where results had been a-priori known and described and no place was left for ad hoc, surprise or chance.

According to this logic of total visualization, the large-scale transition to online technologies was another step towards digitalization and turning people into robots and cyborgs.

Basically, the IT industry began to push forward their tools and impose the methods of teaching and scientific communication. Metaphorically speaking, this resembled a situation when a

navigator and an on-board computer decide upon the direction, route and speed of the automobile while the driver, this semipassenger, is just an awkward and unreliable agent of the navigator's will.

We, scholars and teachers, must hold our positions in the research and educational processes and technologies.

From the 17th century, the time when science emerged (Halileo) [1, 2], the key means of communication in the absence of scientific journals and conferences was correspondence between scholars, often sustainable and intense. Correspondence was the opportunity to debate, define priorities and primacies, refine pro e contra arguments, hold discussions which sometimes lasted for many years. Being engaged in personal correspondence was a permit into science which was not easy to obtain and not everyone could do it.

Of course, correspondence was not the only means of scientific communication. From the substrate of the university informational environment, the professorship who often combined research and teaching activities, fostered their assistants, helpers who were to become the next generation of scientists nurtured by regular communication within their departments and laboratories.

The most widely-known in the history of science was the correspondence between Newton and Leibniz [5]. This fact enabled our Workshop of activity-based organisational technologies at Moscow City University [4] to switch to the remote (but not online) mode of communication which we called *Newtonian seminar*.

The workshop comprises three theme-based seminars:

- Philosophy of old age
- Methodology of scientific research
- Humanism in education and science

The seminar in *Philosophy of old age* is organized in the customary online format in MS Teams. Unfortunately, this format is not at all attractive in terms of teaching.

1. one has to lead the discussion in the impromptu manner (other types of presenting are not encouraged), simultaneously with following the course of the presentation, keeping an eye on raised hands and messages in the chat which are often not related to the discussion, stopping unauthorized behavior of those participants who would switch, for example, the order of slides in the presentation, as well as watching over the overall technical state of the system – these are very tiresome and nervous tasks.
2. this format allows participants hide behind their avatars and be seemingly present in the discussion: one would address the avatar while there's nobody behind it.
3. there is no atmosphere of empathy, trust and involvement that are prerequisites and inspiration for free improvisation.

It is remarkable that many people start losing the skill of text writing when they replace reports by presentations forgetting that a presentation is not an alternative but an illustrative supplement to the text of the report. A few years ago there even appeared the so called poster reports – a large and complicatedly-arranged posters that imitate text reports: they are eye-

catching and impressive, but instead of being communicative they are translative and therefore require the presence of the author at the poster who would explain the flow of their visual art, answer public's questions and queries, etc.

The visuality of online lectures and seminars (webinars) that facilitates comprehension also works at the expense of verbalisation: we perceive 60–80% of data through vision while the seeming easiness of visual comprehension aggravates the information flow processing and identifying the important, the obscure and the new within it. Alas, we often watch a lot of things but do not see them, do not perceive them intellectually. The pace of verbal communication is much slower than that of visual communication, therefore verbal communication is more profound and content-rich.

The seminar in *Methodology of scientific research* is arranged in the Newtonian style the following way.

It is divided into several topics.

The participants of the seminar receive by email a full text of a report on the current topic supplied by appendices (texts that supplement the report). During the following month the participants are free to comment the report and its appendices by inserting personalized comments in the body of the text or after it, commenting the comments of others, asking questions and answering them, and adding to the report by their own reports/presentations.

A month of intense discussions by email between the "corresponding members" is concluded by a reflective assembly of the flow and results of the correspondence discussion. The materials are subsequently handed over for editorial and correctional processing, and the participants move on to the next topic.

Such Newtonian format of the seminar enabled to make it international and involve colleagues from Ukraine, Latvia, and Estonia in the discussion.

The seminar in *Humanism in education* which is not scheduled or financed but has existed for two years already is currently rebuilt into a Newtonian format which is different from the previous one.

There is a syllabus for the whole seminar (4 sessions held once in 6 weeks, from Friday evening to Sunday evening, a marathon that lasts for about 27 hours). The schedule of each session resembles schedules and structural projects of O*rganisational Activity-based Games* and similar activities[1].

[1] Organisational activity-based Games (Russian: организационно-деятельностные игры, ОДИ) originated in the 1970s within the Moscow's Methodological Club that was part of the intellectual, philosophical and scientific underground of the Soviet Union. These games involved about 3 million people (1% of the USSR's population) and were an important factor of the Perestroika and "the new thinking" [6].

The seminar starts with an inception report on the topic of the session followed by individual discussion or discussions in small groups (2–3 people) of the subsequent topics of the session (1–2 hours per discussion) and then the key results of the discussions are submitted for plenary correspondence (2–3 hours per plenary discussion). 3–4 topics are discussed during one weekend (including the final follow-up of each topic). A session may include watching and discussing a film selected according to the topic of the session, as well as methodological consultations and discussions based on the requests of participants.

This is a very intense but feasible and, most importantly, high-performance and efficient form of a Newtonian seminar provided that the results of such sessions include not only developed texts or clusters of texts, but also the participants themselves and the workshop as a group of participants: this type of activity enables to sift and refine the creative heart of a scientific team. The results of each session in the form of texts are formatted, edited and corrected to finally become a section of a joint monograph or a collection of articles. In fact, during several months of the workshop that engaged 7–9 participants there have been published and prepared for publication 6 collections of articles and 2 monographs: these texts are actively read and commented within as well as outside the workshop.

Undoubtedly, these are only two types of remote verbal communication, and more can be developed. One of the ultimate advantages of these types of seminars is the switch from verbal to written communication. In contrast with the methodological tradition, where oral speech enforced by volent emphasis and charisma is the main form of communication, written thought-communication is more responsible and promoting cognition and understanding ("a thought that does not provoke another thought is not a thought" [3]), both of them, however, can be accompanied by schematization. In this regard, it is essential to point out three substantial aspects:

1. the grammar of oral speech is very different from written grammar by word order, verb government, oral speech is characterized by intonation and stress; the grammar itself is an expression/reflection of logics while oral speech is usually alogical.
2. It is the written speech (speech, not language) that may be difficult and requires effort from most people, much more effort than spoken blah-blah, written speech is closer to cogitation than oral speech oriented at chaotic thinking (=fussing of thoughts and images)
3. "Manuscripts don't burn" (and either are not peer-reviewed or returned): all archives of the Moscow's Methodological Club of the 1950–1980s comprised by voice records of oral presentations had been transcribed into written speech. Those which had not been transcribed disappeared and got lost irreversibly: seminars by correspondence cannot be so easily lost.

The practice of text exchange makes texts readable instead of today's widespread practice of burying scientific texts in the RSCI and e-library.ru – a common grave for texts, lonely and unread by anyone.

Besides, this practice can grow/jell into a new educational technology because it actually generates an inner dialogue in readers' minds and demands a written answer which requires more intellectual effort than passive reading or visualization regardless of how illustrative and expressive it can be. This returns us back to Plato's dialogues, where a thought of one collocutor

triggers a thought of the other. This educational construct has already been well-mastered within the Workshop of activity-based organisational technologies, including writing essays, adding comments to essays, comments to comments, etc.

Unfortunately, both online technologies and Newtonian seminars are mainly oriented towards communication with its strict logics and conceptual frameworks, but they lack the colours and experiences of classroom-based education and interaction in general, such means of interaction as sympathy and empathy, mimics, gestures, intonation, taste and flavour nuances, the vibes of touch and pre-touch, the unified situational and energy field. This leads to a natural conclusion: science and education must return to lecture rooms and laboratories, and "re-places" – places of recreation, relaxation and reflection, such as cafes, pubs, restaurants, clubs, etc., so as not to lose their essence.

Education, especially humanitarian education, should be delivered in the atmosphere of interaction, while communication relates more to scientific work.

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