

Self-talk. What does that mean?

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Well, if you're a sign language interpreter, maybe you've heard someone say, "Wow, that committee in my head is really busy today! They are evaluating and judging my work!" But what exactly does that mean? No one has really looked at that question. We don't know how often self-talk happens, we don't know if it's more positive or negative, we don't even know if it helps or hurts our work. That's why we decided to investigate the nature of self-talk in interpreters.

Methods

For our study, we created a survey on self-talk and sent it out to sign language interpreters. Our survey was based on a study by Hardy in 2006 that investigated athletes' self-talk. After distributing the survey we received approximately 500 responses. Ninety four percent of the respondents reported experiencing self-talk in their work. Let's discuss what we found.

Frequency

Here is a summary of our results. For **frequency**, that is, how often interpreters experience self-talk as they work, 41 percent of the respondents reported experiencing self-talk six or more times or even continuously as they work.

Valence

Secondly, we examined **valence**, that is, whether self-talk contained more positive remarks or whether their self-talk is more negative in nature. Sixty two percent stated that their self-talk is a mix of positive and

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negative comments. Twenty two percent said their self-talk tended to be positive and 14 percent said it tended to be negative.

Overtness

The third feature we examined was **overtness**, meaning whether self-talk was an internal process or whether it took the form of talking out loud or signing through something. Two thirds of the respondents said that self-talk happened both internally and externally.

Self-Determination

The fourth aspect, **self-determination**, refers to whether self-talk arises spontaneously during interpretation, without the ability to control it, or whether an interpreter is able to consciously control his or her thoughts and self-talk. Forty eight percent – about half of the respondents – said that they have a mix of spontaneously occurring self-talk and consciously generated self-talk. Twenty-nine percent of the interpreters reported always having spontaneous self-talk; however, 19 percent said they always control their self-talk.

Motivation

The fifth aspect is that of **motivation**. That means whether self-talk tended to inspire and motivate interpreters as they work or whether self-talk was de-motivational for the interpreter. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents said that they depend on self-talk as a way to motivate their work. Thirty-five percent said that self-talk always motivated them while two-thirds reported that self-talk can also be de-motivational.

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Function

Sixth, we asked about **function**, meaning what does self-talk do for interpreters? How does it even function in their work? I'm going to show you a table about how interpreters use self-talk in their work.

We also asked interpreters about the focus or topics of their self-talk. A high percentage of the respondents, 72 percent, reported that their self-talk focused on their errors, what they did wrong. Ninety four percent of the respondents said that the focus of their self-talk could be on topics other than what they were doing, meaning that they focused on topics other than their work.

In summary, the results indicate that the experience of interpreters' self-talk, whether it's called the committee in your head or little voices on your shoulders, is a widespread phenomenon among interpreters and that interpreters are able to analyze and discuss their own experiences with self-talk as they work.

Further, our results indicate that self-talk can both motivate and demotivate interpreters. Interestingly, interpreters reported that negative self-talk wasn't always de-motivational. It could be harnessed to motivate their work as well.