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## (MIS)HEARING ACCIDENTALLY ON PURPOSE: THE VENIAL DESOLATION OF SOUND(S)

*Abstract: Speakers of a kaleidoscopic myriad of equally mystifying and mesmerising languages across the board have done battle since time immemorial over the notions of clarity and precision of the 'spoken' output generated by dint of an either preferred or accessible linguistic mechanism. It comes as no surprise that the bone of contention is yet to be buried with the ever-deepening and widening margin of disparity neither taken in good part nor always seen as a 'licensed' variant.*

*Despite the ostensible cline to greater permissiveness, a recrudescence of deep-seated strait-laced prejudices can be observed while novel forms of communication are often dismissed as substandard and consigned to a peripheralised state of inescapable inexactitude.*

*The small-scale survey at hand takes a dive into the cognitive arenas of pervasive social media for the two-fold sake – mining a germane corpus and acquiring the toolkit to decipher novel semantic subsystems. The next port of call is a closer look at the backlash from academia and other 'authorised' communities, all the while keeping an eye out for reasonably sound grounds to justify these revitalised tendencies towards what, for a time, seemed an antiquated and obsolete convention. Use is made of the concepts pertaining to confirmation bias, heterophemy and more broadly why we mishear or choose to mishear each other ever so often.*

*Keywords: reality reshaping, novel linguistic systems, artful interaction, perisocial communions, prosumers, Hikikomori.*

### **1. The inception of an idea: the quagmire of happiness**

In the metaphorical ballpark spanning a staggering course of eighty years back in 1938, one of the athenaeum of scholarship nestled along the US Eastern Seaboard,

more specifically Harvard University, all but imperceptibly conducted, for want of a better streamlined catena, a happiness study. The findings are arguably, and perhaps unsurprisingly, unremarkable, common sense-level predictable and even intellectually anticlimactic. However, simplicity, after all, in the vast expanse of the unnerving unease of human existence, does merit due credit. In a proverbial nutshell, the purported inventory of 'a life well lived' comprises the following building blocks retooled as follows:

1. Loneliness is lethal – it is as pernicious as inebriation or tobacco abuse
2. Core relationships are tantamount to survival
3. The notions of empathy were largely perceived as either vague, unknown or irrelevant altogether
4. Somatic health maintenance routines are intertwined with the mind well-being of the mind
5. Healthy lifestyle habits and demeanour defined as adaptive coping mechanisms and stability<sup>1</sup>

Should the aforementioned research attempt be given blinkered credence, we may insinuate ourselves, fully on our own recognizance, down the rabbit hole of a yet another form of societal imperative of unrelenting happiness, and that, doubtless generates both inequitable pressure and unrealistically enervating expectations commodifying the sublime into a no-frills reified and, quite bluntly, paid service.

Thereby hangs a tale, and the tale is a highly multifaceted and hauntingly refined onslaught on the intricacy of the human mind flawlessly executed by unyielding overtures and forays into the exquisitely sensitive realms of our psyche.

These seemingly calculated attacks seem to target the unshielded flanks quite often epitomized in the concepts of connectivity – the chipped bond of dehumanized communication and the dire need to be granted into the halls of membership and belonging. This is by no means meant to detract from the silver linings of the study. It does, nonetheless, hover above a delicate inflection point between a well-meaning salubrious message redolent of solicited advice or corporate sermonizing geared at propelling the intended target to kick over the traces, move the goalposts and become prosumers in the new marketplace of hyper-peddling far beyond any Lewis Carroll's most outlandish imaginings.

The optics may ring dystopian, but the truth of the matter has ever only been the inevitable reality: always relative to each individual, subjective and irascibly elusive leading to communicative cross purposes and contention. It is for better

<sup>1</sup>These descriptors are specifically tailored to the research tenor of this particular paper, as has been previously indicated. For the original text, refer to the Harvard Gazette article provided in the references.

or worse objectively unknowable, yet resilient to a singular interpretation, and therefore the study briefly touched upon, should be seen as another attempt at decrypting the human condition with a view of shedding some much desired light on the demersal zone of this philosophical and linguistic conundrum. Since the Harvard scholars supplied the time-delineated empirical substantiation, it is safe to venture another hypothesis. Modern-day linguistic cohorts lean into the driving seat more confidently effectively taking the reins and morphing into prosumers – a word previously used in passing, but here firmly underscored. Prosumers are in pursuit of new communicative paradigms and the advent of Artificial Intelligence has merely accelerated the pace. The nucleation point of the societal nexus predates AI, in fact, the artificiality has long masqueraded as authenticity in the guise of social media personalities and myriad parasocial interactions that have emerged as surrogates for human-to-human in-person and on-site encounters.

The paper posits that this is a corollary of the innate drive to cancel out the integrity-violating loneliness as evidenced to be the attested cause of health deterioration, but unwittingly, it sculpted a paradoxical universe of safe-distance pseudo-communication pushing the willing prosumers<sup>2</sup> farther away from one another at an ever-increasing gallop.

## **2. Me, myself and AI**

A germane digression at this juncture is in order. To dovetail nicely with the preceding remarks, the Japanese concept of Hikikomori is perfunctorily investigated. An interpretative, and indeed in most certain terms, no ironclad definition is herein embedded. It paints these behavioural mores as system of seclusion and to a certain extent self-excommunication due to insurmountable hurdles of everyday life. Form a cultural stance, there is no rhyme or reason to intrude into uncharted territory and claim expertise, with a modicum of hauteur and hubris it might be aptly asserted. This, however, is deemed necessary in order to amalgamated the already broached practice christened as parasocial relationships with Hikikomori and suggest a modified proposition of *perisocial* communions.

This would avoid tarring everybody with the same brush, more to the point, it would and in this paper does serve a demarcation line between the conventionalized and authentic patterns of ingrained societal comportment as compared to the

<sup>2</sup>For the purpose of this paper and in ease of clarity, this lexeme will be used interchangeably with speakers, learners and communicators.

novel inauthentic derivatives. This, yet again, does not go to show that perisocial communions are ersatz or erroneous, but that they are an echo, rather than a voice.

A point of particular concern and responsibility rests with the online *perisocials* and prosumers who stand to both gain and lose a great deal of cachet and credibility. The sequelea, to use a diagnostically medical term, are yet to be ascertained.

If a parasocial relationship is predominantly seen as a harmless, albeit, dehumanised, modality of fostering and belabouring under a delusion of connection, perisocial communions are purposefully and by design exploitative and misleading, thus amplifying and glorifying depreciation of the more conventional educational systems and shaping a new, culturally appropriated milieu of pseudo-Hikikomori annulment and asserting highly dubious authority. They are circular, peripheral and in their entirety unreliable self-aggrandizing constructs of superfluous reality.

In this instance, the otherwise self-serving *me, myself* adage, gives way only to the AI segment, but this is not the Artificial Intelligence. This is the more harmful, and a prevalent variant – artful interaction.

### 3. The venal peccancy of good intentions

In the hopeful order to mitigate the entropy and put some daylight between the overall sense of ramblings so that clear blue water can finally be discerned, an ad rem route will now be taken so as to manoeuvre round any eddies or nebulous ambuscades. An inch from that beeline, it would be almost remiss not to lend more colour with an apposite dichotomy in terms of how prosumers make use of technology:

1. Hedonic: focusing on satisfaction and positive feelings, all the while eliminating an iota of negativity
2. Eudaimonic: giving precedence to fulfilment in life, personal growth and purpose

While there is nothing necessarily wrong with the hedonic approach, it is patently deficient in meaning and authenticity and rich in pleasure, comfort and transient relaxation. Eudaimonic is, on the other hand, has the all-fired nerve to insist on the other side of the coin. This paper hypothesizes that prosumers opt for the former, and seldom consider the latter. This can be amply corroborated by dint of the personality schema derived from Transactional Analysis (TA):

1. Exteropsyché
2. Neopsyché
3. Archepsyché

In line with the TA nomenclature, exteropsyché is seen as the metaphorical parent, an outside force and source of influence. An external exponent. Neopsyché is the adult version of a human being. The self as it ought to be now, and archepsyché is the child section of the psyche, somewhat archaic and heavily dependent on earlier datasets. The endgame, of course, is to exert influence on the neopsyché and mould a subject to be fit for purpose.

The interplay of hedonic approach and neopsyché is the junction where our so-called influencers and online social media *pedagogues* take the stage. This paper, although, almost by stealth homes in on the phonology and phonetics of English, or, as the author reclassified those two levels of linguistic analysis as Sound Science to better fit in the multimodal idiosyncrasy of this research. The selection and sifting of the online creators to be discussed revolved round the use-view axis based on a survey completed by the final year English majors in the English Department of the University of Banja Luka. This survey was designed to garner feedback regarding the questions to be given in full and to ensure data reliability, the survey was administered three years in a row.

1. Do you look up words online?
2. If so, do you only use free-access dictionaries?
3. What other sources do you use?
4. Could you name one or more online creators whose pages or channels you follow?
5. Do you find them useful? If so, please explain why?

Overall number of respondents was fifty, and this being a qualitative paper, the findings are narratively delineated.<sup>3</sup> All fifty respondents gave the number one question feedback in the affirmative, and the findings coincide vis-à-vis question number two. The divergence is detected at the third query. Thirty responded in the affirmative, and twenty denied resorting to other sources. Based on the responses to question number 4, the following names are extracted:

1. Dr Geoffrey Alan Lindsey
2. Erik Singer
3. David Ley
4. English with Lucy
5. British English Teacher Roy
6. ETJ English
7. LetThemTalkTV
8. Improve Your Accent

<sup>3</sup>The author reserves the right to use the quantitative findings for other research projects.

The list is not exhaustive nor definitive; it is representative only in terms of the median scope of the names supplied via the survey. The first three names on the list appear to be trained and qualified linguists or language specialists in possession of valid credentials. This can be verified through their CVs and official institutional websites. However, when it comes to the remaining creators, the description of their education or other relevant qualifications leaves a lot to be desired. A disclaimer is necessary since the search for the information came back inconclusive, so no claims can be made, but the content can be analysed and further determination upon closer inspection is pending. At first blush, all the videos, except those by the first two author appear impressionistic and in the realm of touch-and-go and sometimes more than just haphazard. The specifics of the analysis will be outlined in a new paper however, this is a cautionary tale and is not to be taken lightly. In a world consumed with AI-phobia, an ancien régime in the guise of perisocial communions and artful interaction seems to have gone deafeningly loud, but the ever-growing cacophony of variegated voices, it is almost unnoticed, and that should give us pause.

#### **4. The way forward and a peroration for now**

The spectre of insidious online denizens can neither be thwarted nor disregarded. It should likewise not be held up to obloquy or ridicule, but a watchful and critical eye must be kept, vigilant and vocal. The planetary interconnectedness is an inevitability, either to the chagrin or glee in equidistant measure. The societal pressure of 'forever happiness', mediated forms of bonding, our true or real Hikikomori and countless perisocial communions all come in the shape, form, guise and disguise of language. Audition or the sense of hearing constitute one of the most rudimentary and inexplicably crucial entry points into our reception, perception and subsequently cognition. What we hear, how we hear it and from whom all roll into one inextricable whole that shapes who we are. Sustaining the guard rails and protecting our firewalls is the first duty and order of any and all business. To that end, those who create in the vastness of digital dominion are accountable for the well-being of not only prosumers, but ordinary recipients with no skin in the game, but all at extremely high stakes. This is one of many research endeavours that fall into place of the greater matrix, so that chips do not fall where they may, but where they must.

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### (NE)NAMJERNO (NE)TAČNO TUMAČENJE PORUKE: BEZAZLENA PUSTOŠ ZVUKA

#### *Rezime*

Rad posmatra fonetiku i fonologiju iz interdisciplinarnog, društveno-humanističkog ugla. U ovom multimodalnom pristupu težište je na analizi relevantnosti velikog istraživanja o sreći na Univerzitetu Harvard, zatim fenomena usamljenosti, nastanka novih parasocijalnih zajednica, čiji je naziv modifikovan u ovom radu. Istraživački pogled usmjeren je, takođe, na stvaraoca sadržaja na mreži uz osvrt na pozitivne i negativne aspekte njihovog rada, posebno ako se uzme u obzir nedostatak kritičke oštice. Rad je ujedno i poziv na razmišljanje o amalgamu objedinjenih oblasti i tema.

► ***Ključne riječi:*** parasocijalne zajednice, usamljenost, sreća, stvaraoci sadržaja, fonetika, fonologija.

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