

Sociomental Characteristics of Modern Youth (According to the Results of Study)

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Abstract--- *The article informs about a complex study that has enabled to obtain and compare sociological, socio-psychological, sociometric, and sociomental characteristics of respondents. The goal of the article is to describe the results of this study aimed at searching for the methods and approaches enabling to develop such level of communicative skills that would enable a person to arrange multi-level structures of communicative-cognitive programs in his conscious adequate to those programs that are implicit in the perceived texts, to identify the primary, the secondary, the tertiary etc. in them and, as a result, to understand author's motives and goals (meaning). The study has involved semiosociopsychological methods enabling to differentiate the audience by communicative skills including the method of intentional (motivational-target) analysis of communication processes within a framework of semiosociopsychological paradigm. Special procedures enable, first, to arrange motivational-target structures of the works named by a respondent and, second, motivational-target structures of interpreting these very works; the comparison of the obtained structures gives the idea of the degree of understanding the author's intentionality and the peculiarity of "reflecting" main semantic dominants in the consciousness. In the end, we succeeded in comparing the parameters of socio-mental characteristics of the group of respondents under study with sociomental peculiarities of related socio-demographic groups starting from the 1970es. The results of study are associated with one of the conclusions that the skills of adequate perception are more developed in the students of humanitarian universities than in the students of technical universities; the level of development of communicative skills hardly changes throughout the time, in spite of the development of engineering, ways to obtain information, new and advanced technologies and other achievements associated with the representations of progress. Thus, the high level of communicative skills associated with human ability to orient adequately in the communicative processes should become one of the obligatory characteristics of people making socially significant decisions, bringing children and youth up and educating them.*

Keywords--- *Semiosociopsychology, Sociomental Groups, Communicative Skills, Youth, Representations of the World.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the discourse about the state of modern system of education, the pessimistic not to say the Cassandra's view of reality prevail at almost all the levels. Professors register the reducing level of communicative skills, the level of understanding the received information, in their students, which, in turn, makes them constantly reduce the requirements to the process of study. Could the permanent reduction of the level of communicative skills be a kind of signum temporis to which we should unconsciously give up? The study process often resembles the Hoffman theatre of everyday life: students pretend that they study, while professors pretend that they demand knowledge from them. To ease their voyage through the educational terra incognita, students search for short ways and methods to

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obtain the required level and quickly forget about educational problems and, thus, the state receives a person without necessary (or a priori declared) set of competences.

Nevertheless, the role of competences in the XXI century – the century of globalization, information society, and technical progress – becomes more significant. The competences raising the quality of human capital are necessary to maintain the potential of personality, finally for economic growth and improvement of the country's well-being. Besides, in the light of modern demographic processes, which are characterized by the reduced number of able-bodied persons in many countries, the quality of human capital becomes all the more important.

The main competences enabling not only to evaluate and analyze information from various sources, but also to use it require special skills and enlarged knowledge necessary in professional activity. At the same time, technological changes and socio-economic conditions stimulate these skills to develop constantly, and the level of formal education including the persons who left the system of education long ago possibly does not reflect and does not guarantee the necessary level of skills. Therefore, nowadays, the development and maintenance of competence during education throughout the lifetime is the important element of educational and socio-economic policy that provides sustainable and overall economic growth. The world science has many conceptions (or applications for conceptions) declaring some variant (mean, method of development) of the mental sphere of personality (intelligence, abilities to understand etc.). Nowadays, there are the following trends in scientific thought concerning the tasks and methods of personal development: hermeneutic trend associating the phenomenon of understanding with the accumulation of knowledge, the increment of meanings and interpreting (and declaring reasonability of the mass entry into the world of interpreting personality), and semiosociopsychological trend associating the phenomenon of understanding mostly with the awareness of the “equinoctial of motives and goals” (intentionality) of communicator without negating the value of interpreting skills, and, all the more, the accumulation of knowledge (and declaring mass approach to the world of understanding personality).

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The evaluation of the level of people's competence including the detection of risk groups – persons who lack even minimal level of skills for the efficient functioning in various life spheres becomes important for developing the state social policy. Thus, there emerges objective need for developing instruments that not just give a valid diagnosis of a situation, but elaborate technologies of developing necessary skills. So far, modern scientific methods and approaches to the development of personality have not involved the task of developing sociomental sphere associated with the peculiarities of human orientation in communication processes and ability to understand adequately the author, interlocutor, pedagogue, and each other during communication and interaction. The importance and relevance of this characteristic becomes obvious since almost all the forms of human interaction with his life environment are also communication in a certain degree.

Sociomental characteristics became the subject of study in the project “Public opinion” (1969–1974, supervised by B.A. Grushin). The tasks were to study the peculiarities of information impacts on the behavior of audience and, for the first time, the term “group of consciousness” was declared in social science (nowadays, the terms “sociomental groups”, “groups according to the level of development of communicative skills”, and “groups

according to the peculiarities of perception” are more popular). That was also when the parameters of these groups (during the perception of social-politic media materials) were first indicated¹.

Thus, the task associated with searching ways and methods of mass sociomental development of modern youth, ability to understand the communicator and, therefore, each other, adequately in communication and interaction, to resist manipulative impacts and expansion of mass culture, and make weighted independent decisions becomes relevant. This task is crucial and important for the sustainability and stability of society.

The declared task is solved within a framework of semiosociopsychological concept universal for the analysis of any whole and completed communicative act. Such objective characteristic as the level of development of communicative skills is used to indicate the quality of original interactions. The procedure of its definition is strictly operationalized and reproducible². The relevance of this task’s solution is directly associated with the sustainability and stability of social development, the life quality of future generations: the success in the solution of the task under consideration will lead to positive shifts in the ability of persons, mostly young, to resist the expansion of mass culture, to understand the mechanisms of double standards that are so frequent in modern global information space, and, as a result, to make conclusions, to make decisions and act not under the influence of manipulative technologies but prudently, independently, with account for possible consequences and risks.

It is especially important to develop these qualities in youth, since its representatives become subject to various influences more often than the representatives of older generations due to the lack of life experience, youth-related ambition and under the influence of some semantic constructs established in modern public opinion. Such constructs declare, among other things, the priority, and even necessity of such personal peculiarity as the ability to interpret.

The opportunity not only to study but also to set a task of developing sociomental sphere of personality, i.e. personality capable not only to interpret, but, first of all, to understand adequately authors, pedagogues, parents, and each other in communication and interaction emerged due to Russian scientific discoveries. This is the semiosociopsychological concept of social communication developed in the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences³. We should especially underline that we speak not of the obligatory consent with the viewpoint of communicator, but of the ability to understand the semantic dominants of perceived communicative messages.

The **main goal** of the article is to describe the results of scientific study aimed at searching for the methods and approaches enabling to develop such level of communicative skills that would enable a person to arrange multi-level structures of communicative-cognitive programs in his conscious adequate to those programs that are latent in the perceived works, materials etc., i.e. to differentiate the primary, the secondary, the tertiary etc. in them and, in the result, to understand author’s motives and goals (meaning). According to the data of studies, without special training activities, this ability is innate only in 13-25% of people including the representatives of young generation, while others mentally “explore” the perceived either linearly, according to the principle of “accumulating” information or by “catching” particular facts, events, plotlines. The innovative character of study described is associated with large studying and learning abilities provided by semiosociopsychological concept and the ability “to throw a bridge“

from theoretical constructs to real practical actions and activities for developing sociomental sphere of our contemporaries.

In accordance with the specifics of semiosociopsychology, the notion “level of development of communicative skills” is used to define the quality of understanding. The meaning of this notion is wider than the meaning of a more famous term “communicative competence”, since it implies not only “knowledge” stock of personality (level of cognition) but also the ability for multilevel mental perception.

Traditionally, the studies with the use of semiosociopsychological methods and approaches involve the following sociomental groups: the group of adequate perception (high level of communicative skills); the group of partially adequate perception (average level); and the group of inadequate perception (low level). The procedure of identifying sociomental groups (differentiation by the level of development of communicative skills) is operationalized and reproducible.

The study has involved some actions and activities enabling to find practical solution of the specified goals and tasks: a series of complex surveys to study the parameters of sociomental groups among various socio-demographic groups of modern youth and to search for regularities and tendencies in the “world pictures” of the representatives of these groups; practical methods for various socio-demographic groups of modern youth developing sociomental sphere; experiments to evaluate the efficiency of elaborated methods. We have elaborated two variants of forms pursuant to the program within a framework of study (for various stages of study): a form for primary survey including traditional passport part; specially selected texts for interpreting (parable 1; A. Block’s poem *The Unknown*); block of questions revealing different aspects of respondent’s “worldpicture”, a form for the second survey including specially selected texts for interpreting (parable 2; V. Mayakovsky’s poem *Listen!*; a newspaper article “reference text”).

We have surveyed a total 213 persons within a framework of the study; the considerable part of them has been surveyed twice. Since the study is positioned as qualitative (by both used methods and procedures and labor intensity), such number of respondents is much larger than the volumes common for qualitative study. Most obtained results are relevant from the viewpoint of quantitative analysis as well, if we consider them as cluster relating to the socio-demographic groups involved in the survey, all the more, we have followed the condition of “minimal base group” implying no less than 25-30 units of observation by each of the independent variables).

III. RESULTS

The survey has involved a total 213 respondents: boys – 36%; girls – 64%, age: 15-17– 22%; 18-21– 68%; 22-25 – 10%; school students – 23%; university students – 77%; 9 form – 9%; 10 form – 11%; 11 form – 3%; 1 year of study in the university – 8%; 2 year – 11%; 3 year – 29%; 4 year – 26%; 5 year – 2%; place of residence: Bryansk – 14%; Moscow – 62%; Sarov – 14%; various cities – 10%; future specialty (students): PR specialist – 28%; journalist - 14%; manager – 5%; sociologist - 7%; technical and engineering employee - 23%.

The survey has enabled to obtain the following data about the parameters of sociomental groups among the respondents during the perception of works of various genres and various degree of complexity (obtained during the analysis of the interpretations of perceived works in the forms using the method of motivational-target analysis):

- During the perception of a parable: adequate perception (high level of communicative skills) – 47%; partially adequate (average level) – 26%; (low level) inadequate – 27%.
- During the perception of a poem (A. Block's *The Unknown*): adequate perception (high level of communicative skills) – 10%; partially adequate (average level) – 31%; inadequate (low level) – 59%
- During the perception of a newspaper text: adequate perception (high level of communicative skills) – 30%; partially adequate (average level) – 28%; inadequate (low level)

The greatest part of adequate interpretations was associated with the perception of a parable, and it is no wonder: the genre implies some edification (moral lesson), while it is much more difficult to “read” the motivational-target focus of a publicist article, and, all the more, a poem. It is enough to say that only each tenth respondent has demonstrated the understanding of A. Block's poem adequate to the author's design and only each third-fourth – of a newspaper article.

The characteristics of the representatives of various sociomental groups have been studied according to the data concerning the peculiarities of interpreting a parable: ability of mind to “go” all the way throughout the multilevel motivation-goal structure of a work (though not the most difficult to perceive) – it turned out that only a few persons possess this quality. The socio-demographic characteristics of the representatives of the revealed sociomental groups are represented below (we give only the data of the socio-demographic groups, the representation of which corresponds to the requirements of relevance):

The distribution according to the sex: we have revealed some retardation in the indices of adequate perception among boys – 45%, in comparison with girls – 48%.

The distribution according to the age: the group of 18-21 have had the best indices of adequate perception – 57%, then come the groups of 22-25 – 43% and of 15-17 – 17%.

The distribution according to activities: the university students have given adequate interpretation much more often – 55% than school students – 22%.

The distribution by the level of education: we have revealed the dynamics of the growing quality of interpreting (adequate perception) depending on the level of perception: 9 form – 11%; 10 form – 25%; 1 year of study in the university – 33%; 2 years – 52%; 3 year – 56%; 4 year – 62%.

The distribution depending on future specialty: the ability to adequate perception has been demonstrated in the following order: future PR specialists – 68%, sociologists – 64%, journalists – 45%, technical and engineering employees – 44%, managers – 40%.

The distributions between the characteristics of the “worldpicture” and parameters of sociomental groups have also been studied with respect to the parameters of sociomental groups during the interpreting of a parable, i.e. according to the most advantageous variant for a respondent.

Personal representations of the desirable: the group of adequate perception focuses mostly on personal success (63%) and global, panhuman values (24%) than the representatives of other sociomental groups, while family values have more often been priority for the representatives of the group of inadequate perception - 52%.

Personal representations of the undesirable: the group of adequate perception declare the unwillingness of obstacles for personal success (65%) more frequently than the representatives of other sociomental groups, while the representatives of the group of inadequate perception more often declare the unwillingness of obstacles for household values (21%) and family values.

Personal representations of the “world around”: the peculiarities of perceiving the “world around” in the representatives of the group of adequate perception and the group of partially adequate perception are practically identical: light, optimistic tones in 59% of the representatives of the group of adequate perception and 60% - in the group of partially adequate perception; neutral tones in 29% of representatives of the group of adequate perception and 30% - in the group of partially adequate perception. In the group of inadequate perception, pessimistic tones and fear of the world around are manifested more frequently (27%) than in other groups.

The knowledge and interest to the problems of modern Russia: the number of answers to the question about the problems of modern Russia is the highest in the group of adequate perception and the lowest – in the group of inadequate perception. The same regularity has been found when monitoring the dynamics of the decreasing of the problem list.

Social significant edges of respondents’ “worldpictures” in the study involved such integral characteristics obtained during qualitative analysis as the level of development of sociocultural interests. For this purpose, we have included the block of questions in the form that reveal the peculiarities of relations between the respondents and sociocultural environment: address to the press, TV, radio, Internet, cinema, computer games, fiction literature, the names of the favorite sources of information, particular works, characters. The complex of obtained data during the analysis of forms (which has been conducted collegially, like during the differentiation by sociomental characteristics) has enabled to make a decision about the level (high, average, low) of sociocultural interests of a respondent. Such qualities as the variety of interests, address to various genres and sources of information and knowledge of both modern and classic works have been treated as the main criteria. When studying the dependence between sociomental characteristics of interrogated respondents we have registered that the high level of sociocultural interests is almost equal in the group of partially adequate (17%) and adequate (16%) perception, while in the group of inadequate perception, this index is 4%. Thus, the group of inadequate perception has the greatest share of respondents (54%), whose level of sociocultural interests has been defined as low.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

The main conclusion according to the results of the survey is associated with the assumption about the advantages of “worldpictures” of the representatives of the adequate perception group (with a high level of communicative skills). The next conclusion is derived from the previous one: the search and elaborations of the methods and approaches to the development of communicative skills are social significant. Therefore, we have

conducted the experiment on the development of sociomental sphere (level of communicative skill) in modern student within the framework of the project.

A part of surveys has been conducted in the student groups within a framework of disciplines on social communication. This has enabled to interrogate the same respondent twice and to give him a complex of theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the interval, i.e. to carry out an adequate experiment. In the interval between the first and second stages of questioning, the students have received a small complex of lecture and practical data of the general principles of the method of motivational-goal analysis. According to one of the hypothesis of the described study, acquaintance with this method develops sociomental sphere of personality (communicative skills), since it enables to “see” the latent structure of communicative-cognitive programs focused on the author’s intentionality in the perceived work.

We have chosen the following works for the second stage of questioning: parable 2 (About the encounter with a tiger) and V. Mayakovsky’s poem *Listen!* We should say that the semantic edification in the parable 2 is difficult to catch: almost the entire text consists of circumlocutions and allegories. The meaning of Mayakovsky’s poem, though it is quite known, is also difficult to understand, since both content and motivation include several levels. Nevertheless, the results of the analysis of forms indicate positive dynamics. The comparison of the results of perceiving the parable 1 (at the beginning of the experiment) and the parable 2 (at the end of the experiment, i.e. after special training) has shown that the indices of adequate perception remain stable (57%); however, the indices of partially adequate perception increase (from 21% to 26%), due to the decrease of the indices of inadequate perception (from 23% to 17%).

The comparison of the result of perceiving A. Block’s poem (at the beginning of the experiment) and V. Mayakovsky’s poem (at the end of the experiment, i.e. after special training) has shown positive dynamics at all the levels of analysis: the indices of adequate perception have increased (from 17% to 25%); the indices of partially adequate perception have increased (from 34% to 43%), the indices of inadequate perception have decreased (from 49% to 32%) (which is a positive fact).

In the project, we have succeeded in comparing the parameters of socio-mental characteristics of the group of respondents under study with the sociomental peculiarities of related socio-demographic groups (unfortunately, we have no data of the students themselves) starting from the 1970es.

The works offered to respondents for perceiving and interpreting included so called “reference text” – a newspaper article devoted to production and economy, which had been used several times in the semiosociopsychological studies: in the above mentioned project “Public opinion” and in the later studies of A.V. Zhavoronkov. The same article has been offered to modern students; moreover, these students have already participated in the experiment, i.e. after special training activities aimed at developing communicative skills. The students have been requested to understand the communicative intention of the author (to answer the question about the main thing that he wanted to say, express, render). Being fixed in the text, the author’s communicative intention does not change, in spite of changed socio-economic situation etc. However, we would most like if the number of people manifesting the skills of adequate perception change (increase). However, the data of the parameters of

sociomental groups “then” and “now” are not very comforting: the adequate understanding of the meaning the offered article was demonstrated by 35 % of the university-educated respondents of the 1970es (data from the book Dridze T.M. *Tekstovaya Deyatelnost v Strukture Sotsialnoy Kommunikatsii* [Textual Activity in the Structure of Social Communication]. Moscow. Nauka. 1984) and 30% of the modern students of elite universities.

The **main conclusions** of the study involve the following statements.

1. The survey has actually involved the students of elite Russian universities, therefore, we can assume that in case of a wide-scale study (covering all the groups of young students including technical schools, colleges, and fee paid universities), the data of the parameters of sociomental groups will be lower. We have not set this task in the project; however, the obtained results allow us to denote an issue relevant from the viewpoint of all-round development of modern youth.
2. School and university education, even in case of humanitarian specialties, does not focus on the development of the level of communicative skills (sociomental sphere) due to traditions, training programs, communication concepts popular in the society, and the state of scientific thought. Nowadays, this is rather the result of family influence or natural gift (ability, talent), and semiosociopsychological concept of social communication sets and proves the task and possibility of its development.
3. The skills of adequate perception are better developed in the students of humanitarian universities than the students of technical universities, and in is not the first time when this ratio is registered in semiosociopsychological studies⁴; we can assume that the notorious IQ coefficient, which is traditionally higher in the representatives of technical professions, is not the analogue of the level of development of communicative skills (quality of understanding communicative processes) and, therefore, we should develop both these things.
4. The high level of communicative skills associated with human ability to orient adequately in the communicative processes should become one of the obligatory characteristics of people making socially significant decisions, bringing children and youth up and educating them.
5. In most cases, the level of development of communicative skills (sociomental sphere of personality) hardly changes throughout the time, in spite of the development of engineering, ways of obtaining information, new and newest technologies and other achievements associated with the representations of progress. We see the task of its mass development as one of high priority for achieving adequate civilizational changes.

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