

COMMUNICATION AND LONELINESS IN STUDENT ENVIRONMENT NOWADAYS AND IN ANDRIEVS NIEDRA'S PROSE

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ABSTRACT

The theme of communication and loneliness is currently emerging as one of the main themes affecting everyone in the existing political, economic, social, etc. situation. The research reflects one of the most important questions of today (compared to Andrievs Niedra's texts written more than a century ago): how to communicate in the conditions of the transition period in the student environment, how to recognize, compare, solve the feelings of loneliness. The aim of the research is to describe and compare communication models and the presence of loneliness in today's student environment and in Niedra's prose. To carry out the research, various studies of different countries (Latvia, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, etc.) on loneliness in the student environment have been reviewed, as well as the analysis of Niedra's prose texts from the perspective of psychoanalytical, postcolonial, new historicism and comparative approaches has been implemented, a survey has been conducted at Liepāja University. When surveying students on the current topic, results have been collated and conclusions have been drawn in a comparative aspect, which allows us to propose a hypothesis that communication models and perceptions of existential crisis situations related to loneliness issues always repeat, but especially in times of change.

Keywords: *Andrievs Niedra, communication, loneliness, students, transition period*

Introduction

Today, as before, the issues of communication and loneliness are topical in the student environment, because the division of social roles and communication with group members is important in the formation of a group, which can be the basis for the sense of loneliness. A survey of groups of students of the Baltic Philology, Culture and Communication specialty at the University of Liepaja on the issues of communication, loneliness, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism has revealed that the thoughts, feelings, emotions, psychological states are similar to the prose of Andrievs Niedra (1971–1942) written at the turn of the 19th/20th century. Of course,

the ways of communication and the possibilities have changed, especially in recent years, when due to the pandemic, lectures took place online. However, the communication models are similar. Therefore, the stories of Niedra can be used as a text to be analyzed in philological studies, both by providing an insight into the literature at the turn of the century and as a kind of the psychological opportunity to compare common and different communication models and situations of students of different times, to see the similarities of the transition period at the turn of the 19th/20th century and the 21st century, based on the work of the writer.

Niedra names the end of the 19th century as the main object of his creative work that marks the period of modernity, *fin de siècle* (from French – ‘end of century’ [fɛ̃ də sjɛkl]), which is considered to be a period of degeneration, but at the same time also the beginning of hope for a new start. Rikkardo Nikolozī (1965) describes this time as the “nervous age”. *Degeneration, neurasthenia, and the age of modernism* (Николози, 2019: 205). During the transition period at the end of the 19th century, there were not many intelligent Latvians with higher education. One of them was Niedra, who studied theology in Tartu (Dorpat) from 1891 to 1899, thus getting to know the students’ lives. The formation of the intelligentsia in Latvia is peculiar. Even though the representatives of the intelligentsia of Latvian origin can be found before the national awakening in the middle of the 19th century, the stratum of national intelligence emerged only when in the second half of the 19th century the socio-political and economic situation in the Baltics was changing, characterized by both the creative energy and economic prosperity of the society, as well as moments of crisis in the relations between the issues of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, communication and loneliness. In Niedra’s prose, one of the most characteristic personages is an intellectual who comes from a peasant environment, who has obtained the diploma of higher education and knowledge of an engineer, teacher, lawyer, theology, and other fields. In several prose texts, for example, in the story “Nespēcīgā dvēsele” [“The Feeble Soul”], some autobiographical features can be noticed, also in the comments of the “Nemiera ceļi” [“Roads of Unrest”] Niedra reveals the most important aspects of the study time depicted in his work.

Methodology

In the study the qualitative and quantitative methods have been applied in the student survey, the published materials on students’ loneliness in the Latvian, German, Russian languages have been looked upon, as well as the psychological, semiotic approach in text analysis, the work of philosophers, psychologists, literary scholars, such as M. Buber, J. Habermas,

J. Lotman (Юрий Лотман), R. Jakobson (Роман Якобсон), I. Išmuhametov, I. Skulte, O. Omarova etc. has also been studied and analysed.

Loneliness is one of the most topical and serious social problems nowadays, addressed by lots of philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, poets and writers. The representatives of the School of Semiotics Lotman and Uspensky (Борис Успенский) mention in the article “On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture” that the “basic work” of culture is the structured organization of the human being’s surrounding world. “Culture is the generator of structuredness, and thus it creates the social sphere around the human being that, similar to the biosphere, makes life possible, that is true – not organic, but public life. However, in order to fulfil this function, there must be a structural “stamp” facility within the culture. This function is performed by the natural language.” (Lotmans, Uspenskis, 1993: 42). When being among people, contacting them, entering into a certain relationship (even escaping from contact is also a form of relationship not to get into contact), the “I” becomes oneself. Mikhail Bakhtin (Михаил Бахтін) (1895–1975) emphasizes: “*To be* means to communicate dialogically. When the dialogue ends, everything ends [...] Two voices – the minimum of life, the minimum of essence.” (Бахтін, 1986: 19). The dialogical relationship of human beings is not only one form of expression of the essence, but a manifestation that permeates the whole language and consciousness of mankind, all relations and forms of human life, everything that has meaning and significance. There are lots of definitions of loneliness, they reveal loneliness through self-perception, experience, human condition, human reaction to social relations. I. Išmuhametovs (Išgaley Išmuhametov) in the study “Loneliness: Theoretical and Empirical Aspects of Research” has collated the theoretical approaches to loneliness, as well as describes the views of various philosophers and writers on the problem of loneliness. An article has been published on the website of the University of Latvia entitled “Loneliness, Which Can Sometimes Be a Problem”: “It is a kind of cliché that we can feel lonely, especially lonely in a large crowd. Unfortunately, this is true and is spread among university students. In the study of the University of Latvia, [...] involving the first-year students of the University of Latvia, it was revealed that 16 % of students feel lonely. We can feel isolated or lonely being among our peers and knowing that we have much in common and unifying, but it is so. We feel even worse when everyone else seems careless, they behave casually, find friends quickly, join interest groups, a clutch of people you do not feel related to. For some people, loneliness is a confusing and new experience, although for some it is already familiar, and yet it causes dissatisfaction that the university has not lived up to their expectations. At university, loneliness is more common among freshmen.” (Vientulība, 2006) According to the Bleib

Gesund survey, 10–15 % of Germans are chronically lonely, 17 % of young people feel lonely all the time or oftentimes, 30 % sometimes, and 30 % need others to feel good. Therefore, loneliness is a phenomenon that lots of, if not all, people know. The reason for this loneliness is often a change in life. Lonely people feel excluded, abandoned, unloved and insignificant (Einsamkeit, 2022). Almost half of the UK students are lonely. 37 % of them even consider leaving their studies for this reason. Starting a university is a new stage in one's life. It is normal to feel sometimes as if you were standing in front of a mountain of new experiences that you have to do yourself. Now the situation has become even more complicated as online courses make it difficult to find new friends and socialize. For students who have previously struggled with their mental health, the current isolation can be an additional serious problem.” (Einsamkeit, 2022).

Findings

Openness to the world, desire and ability to communicate, relationship formation depends on various factors – a person's temperament, character, upbringing, environment, conditions, etc. The turn of the 19th/20th century – the transition period in Latvians' life influences the formation of human relationships and communication. What it is like in the stories depicted by Niedra during the transition period can be inferred from some of the possible communication models. Niedra's story “Nespēcīgā dvēsele” [“The Feeble Soul”] (1898) is a peculiar work of the transition period, in which communication at the turn of the 19th/20th century, as well as peculiarities of the language and comprehension, are revealed. The language is one of the possible sign systems that serves for the information transfer, coding and decoding. During transition periods misunderstandings often arise at the level of thinking and language. The main character of the story (whose prototype is partly the author himself) is the theology student Indriķis Kalējs, a typical representative of the transition period. The peculiarity and particularity of Kalējs is characterized not only by his strange appearance, especially the beard (half a page is devoted to the description of the beard, this is also the case for the author himself), but especially by the otherness in his thinking and language. Human being has a number of social needs, and only by satisfying them a human being can live a full life. One of them is the need for communication, the need to be an element in a larger “We” (Omarova, 1996: 9). The desire for contact urges Kalējs to communicate with others, find like-minded people, share his experiences, because “thoughts grow cold when they are alone” (Niedra, 1926: 64). He compares thoughts to a warm wave, to a light that opens the world. Kalējs “pierces” into one and the same thoughts and tries to dig up from them everything that happens and does not happen in the world; he

weighs up every person's name and work according to whether it is "real" or "redundant". No one is able to follow his train of thought, not because it is complicated, but because of his strange language – "he speaks and uses pretty familiar words, but in the end, it turns out that he has meant something strange with one word or another, as no one uses the word like that." (Niedra, 1926a: 57). Kalējs' interlocutors neither understand him, nor he wants to explain them. Understanding somebody's expression means to orientate oneself towards the other, to find a suitable place for it in the existing context. Words of answers are supposedly layered on each word, understanding is contrasted with expression, just like a replica to replica in a dialogue. A human being perceives the world directly and indirectly – "through what it is and through what it appears to be; through the way we are eyewitnesses and through the way we are not eyewitnesses; through what is happening right in front of our eyes and what is happening somewhere else, in time and space, but what we can imagine, guess or get information about from our various sources of cognition." (Briede-Makoveja, 1999: 140–141).

Communication takes place in two dimensions – the ordinary and the spiritual space, so perplexity can also emerge. There are four types of loneliness in psychology: cosmic, cultural, social and interpersonal. Kalējs is a bright example of social loneliness. Social loneliness is based on a deliberate disregard, non-acceptance, exclusion of a group member, tendency to divide people into their own and strangers. Social loneliness also includes the loneliness of geniuses or summits, which manifests itself as spiritual superiority; surrounding people do not forgive people of another kind, outstanding personalities are often lonely, because equal interlocutors are almost impossible. The desire for communication, the thirst for people makes Kalējs to be among people who do not understand him, laugh at him, insult, mock him. The dialogue with the corporation member Fricis Vagars is created with the help of irony, play on words, misunderstandings highlight the otherness of the protagonist. Play on words or mocking is one of the entertainments of the members of the corporation "Baltija". The method of mocking is based on a conversation and attempt during it to deride or mock the interlocutor with three methods – calling the mocked one a beast, looney or convincing them that actually they are not students.

The dialogue with Vagars reveals opposing views, shaped like a struggle between two opponents. One of the more conceptual dialogues takes place in the pub after Vagars has tried to portray a fake friend, sending wine to Kalējs' house, so that Kalējs, as a weak person, would give in to such encouragement and get drunk. However, Kalējs understands the true intentions of the "friend", even though he cannot resist the temptation. At the beginning of the conversation, Kalējs walks around the room as usual,

Vagars stands by the window so that he does not have to get engaged in a direct contact, looking into the interlocutor's eyes. The window serves as the third participant in the communication, as a neutral zone.

The dialogue becomes gradually more tense, Kalējs takes the lead because he knows Vagars' true intentions. The two interlocutors seem to swap roles – Vagars starts nervously walking around the pub room, but Kalējs uses the other window to get a chance to talk to each other without looking.

Buber (Демидов, 1995: 16) distinguishes three types of dialogue – real, technical and monologue, disguised as a dialogue. The monologue disguised is something like a discussion, when speakers are driven by a desire to assert themselves, to stand out, to make an impression of themselves, to strengthen their position, to gain victory in the dialogue. Niedra's work is characterized by a monologue masked as a dialogue, because the author expresses his views with the help of heroes in the style of sermons typical of the pastor. Vagars calls himself a man of the future, as opposed to Kalējs, who was born under the waning moon. The dialogue grows gradually into Kalējs' monologue: "Deep there in the soul of this crowd lie unknown forces. You just need a voice with the so-called wake-up call. [...] Everything can be done by a caller's voice invited by God ... no matter where it comes from, if only it expresses what is asleep in everybody, like seeds in a grain." (Niedra, 1926a: 121) Vagars is also overwhelmed by Kalējs' inspiration and enthusiasm, and he promises to become the caller's voice, to make every effort to work for the good of his people, and not to dedicate himself blindly to the ideas of cosmopolitanism. The idea of nationalism, especially emphasized in neo-nationalism, is most vividly highlighted in the story "Nespēcīgā dvēsele" ["The Feeble Soul"] in the revelation of I. Kalējs' views. His sharp opposition to cosmopolitanism, to "picking up crumbs under a stranger's table, creeping along unfamiliar footpaths beaten by others," manifests itself in an intensified way – like hatred, fanaticism. The most characteristic feature of the paranoid psychopaths described in psychology – the stubborn, obstinate defence of an idea, disregard for anything, as a result of which conflict situations arise – is clearly highlighted. In quarrels no evidence helps this kind of people, they do not accept compromise, because they see everything in the light of their hypertrophied ideas. The belief in one's opinion as the only right one becomes apparent in the affected speech, which later passes into the so-called the hysterical circle. The inability to convince the interlocutor of his justice, inability to find an echo for his thoughts, "mirroring" in the dialogue partner exacerbates the nervous excitement to the extreme. The dialogue is finished and the conflict situation is resolved by Vagars who uses the method of student corpus – slaps Kalējs across the face. He falls to the ground in convulsions, but after a short time gets up and goes home.

To some extent, this dialogue continues after several years, when Vagars presents his newspapers “Kosmopolīts” [“Cosmopolitan”] and “Populārā Zinātne” [“Popular Science”].

It is difficult for Kalējs to gaze upon the collapse of his ideals, because he has always advocated nationalism actively as opposed to the cosmopolitanism proclaimed by Vagars.

Deformed contact traumatizes the human psyche, evokes negative emotions. However, even unfavorable communication is more preferable than a complete isolation, in which the characters of Niedra’s stories often end up.

Lotman in the article “On Two Models of Communication in the Cultural System” (Лотман, 1973: 227–244) deals with the interconnection of culture and communication. Instead of the model proposed by Jakobson, Lotman expands the “I–He” and “I–I” model.

In the “I–He” model, the information is known to “me” and unknown to “him”, while in the “I–I” model, when the information is passed on to oneself, the second “I” is equated to a third party. The difference is that in the “I–He” system the information is exchanged in space and in the “I–I” system in time. The transmission of information in the “I–I” channel is not immanent, as it is influenced from the outside by additional codes and suggestions that guide the contextual situation. A typical example is the influence of rhythmic movements, sounds (clatter of wheels, rhythmic music) on the person’s inner monologue. Lotman cites a number of examples where different fantasies arise from a steady rhythm (riding a horse). (Lotman, 1973: 229)

In Niedra’s prose, a large part of the inner monologues take place while the protagonist is on his way. “The mail horses trotted monotonously along the sandy road. Kalējs, wrapped up in his dust coat, squeezed into the corner of the wagon, closed his eyes and indulged into his thoughts.” (Niedra, 1926a: 69) The steady, monotonous rhythm of the cart reinforces the desire to communicate with oneself, to find answers to questions. Evaluating the past from the present, Kalējs decides how to act in the future. “No, it is better when I go to the desert again for some years, where I am with my heart. It is good that I am fleeing away from all this superfluity, listening again to my heartbeat. I don’t care I was made a coward, a man without any feelings of honour! It all remains outside; what people think of me does not make me either better or worse. There, in the crowd, my own unheard scruples resound. In solitude, the soul revives, its wings regenerate.” (Niedra, 1926a: 70) The philosopher Jakobson thinks, “In addition to the linguistic contact, that builds a bridge over the spatial distinction of its members, there is a linguistic communication that is manifested in terms of time, i. e., it ensures the continuity between the person’s past, present and future.”

(Jakobson, 1999: 97) The dialogue with oneself (in thoughts and out loud) on the way, not only physically moving, but also in thoughts while travelling, merging the present, past and future, ends as the road becomes harder: “The road got harder. The horseshoes clattered more joyfully and the rider cracked the whip. The area of Ezeraine was said to be nice, so Kalējs began to look at it.” (Niedra, 1926a: 70). Rhythm helps to talk to oneself, Kalējs often paces rhythmically to sort out his thoughts. In autocommunication¹, in a situation when a human being turns to oneself, either in the form of a diary or in a conversation with oneself, a different relationship is formed than in the communicative system “I-He”. If information is transferred in the channel “I-He”, but the sender does not change during this act, then “I-I” manifests itself as a transformation of values that transforms the “I” itself, in the process the sender and at the same time the recipient change. There can be two main types of autocommunication – internal conversation, mute, silent and vocalized, spoken out loudly. The lack of communication with other people encourages the protagonist of the story “Nespēcīgā dvēsele” [“The Feeble Soul”] Kalējs to talk to himself, these conversations are emotional, saturated with the revelations of the author’s ideas. Kalējs’ dialogue with himself has been created in an interesting way, in which he talks loudly to himself, addressing himself on behalf of him, using the plural 1st person form “we” and the singular 2nd person form “you”. “So, Kalējs Indriķis! he finally said while standing up: now we have a man-to-man talk, but openly.” (Niedra, 1926a: 110). The dialogue sounds like a question (in the form of “you”) and the answer (in the form of “we”), it continues for three pages, because Kalējs is in the “moisture of speech” – a bottle of wine helps to unleash thoughts and see oneself as two sides of the personality. To some extent, this dialogue with oneself is a reduplication of the personality. In the dialogue with oneself, the so-called hidden dialogue, when there is no real interlocutor, but each word responds and reacts to that invisible interlocutor, can be well noticed. The language as a means of intrapersonal communication also promotes the protagonist’s actions, as well as plays out the objections and questions of the imaginary listener.

- First of all: how long will you have enough money for red wine?
- There can be no quarrel between us that we will not switch to simpler drinks. Well, after Yuletide; Vagars, for his part, will no longer send us wine. Alright. What can we write in the meantime?
- If it goes well – the first, critical and methodological part of “Reliģija un ģenialitāte” [“Religion and Ingenuity”].” (Niedra, 1926a: 110)

¹ The term ‘autocommunication’ has been introduced by J. Lotman in his article “On Two Models of Communication in the Cultural System” (1973).

The dialogue grows from a solution to everyday problems into a philosophical speculation, the author uses the similarity of the glacier of the ice age, which pushes stones, in order to depict Kalējs' reflections on the ideal and the task of life. "Covered with moss, crumbled, but you're still dreaming of how to drag a scratch in limestone. You feel yourself how the glacier, the world propels you and thousands of other stones." (Niedra, 1926a: 111). Kalējs asks himself lots of questions that cannot be answered until he begins to feel sorry for himself: "... I feel sorry for you, Kalējs Indriķis! [...] hunched, exhausted, with a bad stomach you sit here in your darkness and write some of those superfluous thoughts about even more superfluous things." (Niedra, 1926a: 112).

The conversation with oneself ends with the conclusion that the ideals of the past are dead, the present is hopeless. Kalējs sits down at the table and starts writing – still the same article "Reliģijas ģenialitāte" ["Ingenuity of Religion"]. In Kalējs' language, when talking about topics close to him, something strange resounds, a picture sparkles, an interesting comparison appears, the rhythm helps to create autocommunication. "Formerly, there was no music in Kalējs' language. But now, by some miracle, a special rhythm has come to it; and the voice rose and sank as if on the waves of the sea." (Niedra, 1926a: 92) Autocommunication can help organize your thoughts, find answers to questions, it can be creative. One of the situations of the communication model "I-I" is the lonely human being's contact with things close to them. In a room, which is like an isolated microenvironment, Kalējs is looking for shelter during the Midsummer Night, because he feels misunderstood and lonely in the crowd. Without being able to communicate with others, he tries to do so with books. He takes a book, opens it, but the aversion towards it and towards oneself, the bitterness towards the world and destiny gnaws at the soul. Despair, chaos reigns both in Kalējs' soul and in his actions, thoughts, gestures – he scurries about the room anxiously and tries to sort out his disintegrated thoughts, looking for the answer in books: "Then he grabbed one of his books and started hurriedly to flick it through, read for a moment and sank into thoughts, read somewhere else, and thought again. His face brightened up immediately. He quickly jumped to his feet and began to flick through another book with his trembling hands, swallowed, so to say, with his eyes a couple of pages, and became even happier." (Niedra, 1926a: 87). Kalējs' search is interrupted by a call to dinner. However, he continues to look for answers to such important questions: "Why don't I have enough strength, strength of loneliness? ...What kind of water of life am I really looking for?" (Niedra, 1926a: 86).

The window as an exit to the outside world attracts his attention – "he was looking through the window over the garden past the grove in the

distance, where at the edge of the horizon the forest was wrapping itself into dusk.” (Niedra, 1926a: 87). The window is also an exit to another – the inner world, through glass as a transparent type of mirror there is a typical opportunity to look into oneself. Kalējs’ thoughts find an echo in oneself, the thoughts take him to a childhood friend in the past. Therefore, the window serves not only as a means of merging space, but also time. The protagonist addresses his childhood friend, catches sight of the Midsummer light over the forest and perceives it as a message, in response to his greetings and questions. Like the winter solstice, Midsummer’s Eve is also a sacral timespan in the profane flow of time, and at such a special time, the glow of Midsummer fire is no longer just external – it reflects into the protagonist’s eyes, and he finds his “fern flower” – the answer that is the task of his life. In this communication, the difference between a person who speaks to oneself and to the same person after a moment is clearly manifested – Kalējs has completely been transformed, the joy, excitement and peace radiate from him.

In situations when a human being experiences loneliness particularly bitterly, various compensatory or protective reactions, behaviours and forms of communication can develop, in which dialogues with phantom partners, personalized animals, objects, images, etc. play an important role. “For a human being to go into loneliness it means to invite oneself on a journey in which they notice themselves and their world.” (Raudive, 1940: 227) – writes Raudive in the book “Dzīves kultūrai” [“To Life Culture”] and points out the most essential differences between a lonely and an isolated human being: “An isolated human being feels desperate, a lonely human being is calm and enlightened. An isolated human being sees a meaningless emptiness in front of them, a lonely human being – images of their inner world. In isolation, a human being is unable to think or work, but in solitude all great thoughts and remarkable deeds arise. The isolated one seeks the society to fill the meaningless emptiness of their life, the lonely one meets up with people to share their spiritual wealth. The isolated one needs another’s help, the lonely one is the one who helps the other.” (Raudive, 1940: 224).

Conclusions

Today, young people use a variety of technologies to communicate. However, they acknowledge that they also feel lonely in communication. As part of the research, a survey of students was conducted at the University of Liepāja to find out whether the feelings of loneliness are relevant today and whether it is possible to compare them with those described in Niedra’s prose at the end of the 19th century. The theoretical research dedicated

to the problems of students' loneliness and communication shows that mostly the feelings of loneliness, exclusion, alienation, isolation occur in groups of freshmen. Young people today use various technologies to communicate, but they also admit to feeling loneliness when it comes to socialising. The research involved a survey of students at the University of Liepāja over several years (2015–2021), working with students of Baltic Philology, Culture and Communication and Writing Studies, and discussing the theme of loneliness in Latvian literature in lectures. It was found that the feelings of loneliness described in Andrievs Niedra's prose at the turn of the 19th/20th century are similar and actual also today. The survey asked: Are communication and loneliness issues relevant to you as a student? Are literary works (of different genres) able to create feelings of communication/loneliness? Do you need to talk about them in literary studies? Should the discourse of communication/loneliness be discussed more in literary studies now? Students admit that especially in times of change (such as the current Covid-19 and the Ukrainian War) similar to the end of the 19th century, when an intensive transition from feudalism to capitalism took place in Latvia due to socio-political, economic, psychological, etc. problems, the communication patterns and feelings of loneliness are similar, so when looking at work dealing with these problems in literature studies, one can get to know the literary work of the period and compare one's own and literary characters' feelings, thus finding similarities and differences, and possibilities how to react in communication situations. In Niedra's stories "Nespēcīgā dvēsele" ["The Feeble Soul"] and "Vilis Vālodze", similar to other author's prose work, the raised models of communication (including autocommunication) and feelings of loneliness are described using approaches of communication, psychology, semiotics, etc. The characters depicted in Niedra's prose encounter loneliness as a negative experience that characterizes the inability to form "normal" relationships with other members of the society during the transition period.

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