



August 5, 2020

Current status of the Ryan Langdon interviews

We have now completed ten days of Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) with Ryan Langdon. We have accomplished what we set out to do and so have suspended DES with Ryan (at least for now). We thank Ryan for allowing us to make his experiences freely available.

Here's a summary of what we have found:

- Prior to sampling, Ryan thought that he had nearly constant internal monologue, essentially a narrator of his inner life and actions. DES suggests that that actually is rare—we found few or no examples of it.
- Ryan frequently innerly speaks, most often speaking the same words as he reads, types, or texts. (We summarized the characteristic of inner speaking in the July 19, 2020 Current Status.)
- Ryan has frequent visual imagery (DES calls this *inner seeing*), on a continuum of clarity/articulation ranging from clear and detailed to patches of color that are understood to be people or objects.
- Inner seeing sometimes involves Ryan internally speaking in the scene. Sometimes the innerly spoken voice is Ryan's own, even when it is another character in the scene who is actually speaking.
- Ryan sometimes experiences what DES calls *unsymbolized thinking*, the direct, before-the-footlights-of-consciousness experience of thinking without the simultaneous experiencing of words, visual imagery, or other symbols.

The bottom line: We have completed sampling with Ryan. He innerly speaks frequently while reading or writing. He has frequent visual imagery on a range of clarity and articulation. He occasionally experiences thinking without words, visual imagery or other symbols.

July 19, 2020

Current status of the Ryan Langdon interviews

We have now completed eight days of Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) with Ryan Langdon; we have made all eight interviews with annotated transcripts publicly available as they occurred. Ryan is becoming more and more skilled at capturing his experience as it was occurring at the moment of the beep.

For the last several sampling days (but actually since the very first day) we have been led to try to grasp what Ryan intends when he describes “initiated” vs. “passive” internal monologue. Ryan began day 8 by saying he had figured out between interview 7 and 8 that the passive monologue was what we had been calling “hearing.” Five out of day 8’s 6 samples included either initiated or passive internal monologue, which allowed us the opportunity to flesh out a description of this phenomenon. We discovered that it does *not* involve inner hearing.

Here’s our current understanding of Ryan’s internal monologue:

- Inner speaking (whether initiated or passive) *feels* the same as external speaking, but it does not *sound* the same as external speaking.
- Inner speaking (whether initiated or passive) does not involve hearing phenomena.
- Inner speaking (whether initiated or passive) has some speaking qualities: rhythm, cadence, word sequence, expression.
- Some inner speaking is initiated (Ryan feels like he is the creator or driver), whereas other inner speaking is passive (it happens without a sense of agency). (Ryan used this metaphor: Initiated inner speaking is like driving; passive inner speaking is like riding in the back seat—along for the ride).
- Initiated and passive inner speaking seem phenomenally the same except:
 - Ryan thinks passive inner speaking distracts Ryan from the task at hand (but RTH observes that the causation may be reversed—distraction creates passive inner speaking).
 - Inner speaking varies on a continuum of intensity, which may or may not be a graded way of elaborating the passive-to-active distinction. Active inner speaking is 100% intensity, whereas passive inner speaking can range from 0 to (perhaps) 100% (but maybe less).
 - Ryan says in general that low intensity speaking can be multiple/simultaneous, but we don’t have sampled instances of that.

The bottom line: We have completed eight days of sampling. Initiated inner speaking is similar to passive inner speaking except for the sense of agency.

July 3, 2020

Current status of the Ryan Langdon interviews

We have now completed six days of Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) with Ryan Langdon; we have made all six interviews with annotated transcripts publicly available as they occurred. Ryan is becoming more and more skilled at capturing his experience as it was occurring at the moment of the beep.

We still accept what we said on June 20: Ryan has fairly frequent inner words but rare inner monologue. In the sixth interview, we found it reasonable to conclude that Ryan sometimes experiences what DES calls “unsymbolized thinking”: the direct, before-the-footlights-of-consciousness experience of thinking without the simultaneous experiencing of words, visual imagery, or other symbols. This phenomenon apparently was present at samples 6.1, 3.1, 3.2, and maybe 3.5.

The sixth sampling day was unusual for Ryan in that it did not include any instances of inner seeing. Visual imagery had been frequent on previous days. How that should be understood remains to be seen.

The bottom line: We have completed six days of sampling. Prior to sampling, Ryan had thought his inner experience was dominated by internal monologue; that apparently is not the case. He does innerly speak, but he also has frequent inner seeings that exist along a wide continuum of clarity and experiences thinking without words or visual imagery, which DES calls “unsymbolized thinking.” Prior to sampling, he had been unaware of either of these two phenomena.

June 20, 2020

Current status of the Ryan Langdon interviews

We have now completed five days of Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) with Ryan Langdon; we have made all five interviews with annotated transcripts publicly available as they occurred. Ryan is becoming more and more skilled at capturing his experience as it was occurring at the moment of the beep.

Prior to sampling, Ryan had thought he had frequent or constant internal monologue, a running verbal narration of his activities. Our object is not to gotcha-decide whether Ryan was right or wrong but to clarify important issues. If “internal monologue” is meant in its common usage (like Wikipedia’s “An internal monologue, also called self-talk, inner speech, inner discourse or internal discourse, is a person's inner voice which provides a running verbal monologue of thoughts while they are conscious”), then Ryan’s internal monologue is rare: there have been only two samples in that ballpark, both on the fifth day (in sample 5.3 he says “I have to figure out what it is first,” giving himself instructions as he takes a test; and in sample 5.5 he says aloud, “I don’t even fucking remember what happened!” as a commentary about the previous beep). But if internal monologue is meant to include *any kind* of internally spoken words, then it occurs about half the time: Ryan innerly speaks while reading or typing (2.1, 2.2, 3.2, 5.1) and as part of visually imagined conversations (2.4, 3.4, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6). That’s 11 out of 24 samples so far (discarding, as DES always does, day 1 samples as training).

His experience continues to be populated with frequent visual imagery, which occurs along a range of clarity/determinateness from sample 4.1’s nearly entirely inchoate to sample 4.6’s fully clear and detailed inner seeing. Prior to sampling, Ryan was unaware of the predominately visual nature of his experience.

The bottom line: We have completed five days of sampling. Prior to sampling, Ryan had thought his inner experience was dominated by internal monologue; that apparently is not the case. He does innerly speak, but he also has frequent inner seeings that exist along a wide continuum of clarity and experiences thinking without words or visual imagery. Prior to sampling, he had been unaware of either of these two phenomena.

June 6, 2020

Current status of the Ryan Langdon interviews

We have now completed three days of Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) with Ryan Langdon; we have made all three interviews with annotated transcripts publicly available as they occurred. Ryan seems to be becoming more and more able to capture his experience as it was occurring at the moment of the beep.

The third sampling day is remarkable in that Ryan is confronting a deeply held presupposition about the nature of inner experience in general and Ryan's own inner experience in particular. Recall that the genesis of this study was Ryan's understanding that "everyone has an internal monologue in their head. All my life, I could hear my voice in my head and speak in full sentences as if I was talking out loud. I thought everyone experienced this." The third day's sampling suggest that words and sentences are *not* central to Ryan's own experiences.

In two of Ryan's third-day samples (3.1 and 3.2), he experiences explicit thinking without words or visual imagery. In another (3.5), he has some sort of understanding that takes place without words. In another (3.3), Ryan is looking at words as he highlights them, but the words have no semantic value—instead that are simply entities that are seen only for the lined-up nature, geometric forms to be highlighted rather than semantic words to be understood.

Words do occur as semantically meaningful aspects of experience in two of the third-day samples. In sample 3.2, he is reading a text and is innerly speaking it as he reads. In sample 3.4, he is engaged in an imaginary conversation that is part of an imaginary interchange. But even those are not examples of the internal monologue that Ryan believed, prior to sampling, was omnipresent in his experience.

Is the third-day sampling the exception or the rule? We don't know.

The bottom line: We have completed three days of sampling. Prior to sampling, Ryan thought he had frequent or constant internal monologue. The third-day of sampling suggests that that may not be the case. More sampling is required.