# The Mental Mechanism of "Eloquence and Conciseness": The Art of Mastering the Word as the Foundation of Communication and Thinking

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## Annotation

In this article I disclose in detail such a mental mechanism as eloquence and conciseness, which is an integral part of the communicative-cognitive framework of the personality. I show that in modern society, as in past times, people in communication with each other, in dialogues with groups of listeners and in written speech do not pay due attention to the beauty of the exposition of their thoughts and the conciseness of utterances. Drawing on the works of ancient philosophers (Plato, Seneca, Cicero), thinkers of the Modern era (La Rochefoucauld, Pascal), as well as on contemporary research in the field of the psychology of speech and neurolinguistics, I substantiate the thesis that the absence of the skill of eloquence and conciseness leads to misunderstanding between people, to conflicts and to an inability to grasp deep meanings. I pay special attention to the connection of speech with image-based thinking, showing that only through images can we truly understand and convey complex ideas.

Keywords: eloquence, conciseness, mental mechanisms, image-based thinking, rhetoric, speech culture, CCFP.

## A Word That Does Not Reach

In modern society, and in past times as well, people in communication with each other, in dialogues with groups of listeners and in their written speech do not pay attention to the beauty of the exposition of their thoughts, to the conciseness of utterances. People practically do not use figurative expressions in their speeches, despite the fact that the human brain understands and sees images very well. To describe a person's behavior through an analogy with the behavior of an animal means to convey to the listener the behavioral type more precisely than any abstract definition would do. People do not know how to declare their feelings beautifully. Public figures, politicians, those who have to speak before an audience or answer questions, often do not know how to set out their thoughts and emotions.

The Russian language is one of the most complex, but at the same time, in my conviction, the most beautiful of all the languages of the planet. Many words and turns of phrase were taken from French as far back as the time of Pushkin, who made a great contribution to our present-day Russian language. The ability to express one's thoughts the way Yesenin did in his poems was never used by society for practical application. People do not trouble themselves to master the skills of conducting dialogues and monologues the way the philosophers of antiquity did - Plato, Seneca, Confucius, Lao-Tzu. Often the absence in people of the skill of eloquence and conciseness leads to misunderstanding of each other, and this, as a consequence, lays the foundation for conflicts. And if we hear truly wise and deep speeches, far from everyone is capable of grasping their meaning - by reason of the absence of the skill of visualizing the images set out in these speeches [12].

Before turning to the philosophical foundations, I must explicitly designate the place of this mechanism in my model. In the CCFP system, eloquence and conciseness is MM-2, and it belongs to the supporting level, and not to the core [14; 15]. The distinction between core and support was introduced in the article on the structure of mental mechanisms [14] and substantiated in the article on epistemological recursion [15]. The core is six mechanisms that constitute the act of solving a difficult problem: MM-1, MM-3, MM-5, MM-6, MM-10, MM-11. Support is five mechanisms without which the core does not work, but which do not constitute the act of solution: MM-2, MM-4, MM-7, MM-8, MM-9. Eloquence and conciseness belong to the supporting level, because they do not create the solution, but make it transmissible. Without the ability to express a thought clearly, the researcher will be able neither to formulate a hypothesis, nor to convince colleagues, nor to enter into dialogue. But the very ability to express a

thought clearly does not yet guarantee that this thought will be the solution of a difficult problem. Eloquence is a bridge. A bridge does not create the bank to which it leads, but without a bridge one cannot get to the other bank.

**Truth Does Not Need Adornments**

The conception of eloquence as a high art requiring not only formal mastery, but also a deep understanding of truth, has its roots in ancient philosophy. Plato in the dialogue *Phaedrus* subjects to criticism the sophistic practice in which rhetoric was regarded as a purely formal art of persuasion, irrespective of truth. Socrates, the main character of the dialogue, remarks: he who does not know the truth but chases after opinions will, apparently, have an art of speech that is ridiculous and artless [3]. For Plato the true orator is the one who knows the truth about the subject of which he is going to speak. Genuine art of speech, he asserts, cannot be attained without the cognition of truth, and never will it become possible [3]. Thereby Plato rejects formal rhetoric and recognizes only dialectic - the art of thinking, which fills rhetoric with concrete philosophical content. People who are capable of thinking and speaking by means of the methods of distinction and generalization Socrates calls dialecticians [3]. Plato postulates the existence of an interconnection between the correctness of speech and the correctness of thinking. It is precisely this interconnection that lies at the basis of my understanding of eloquence and conciseness as a mental mechanism: by developing speech, we develop thinking, and vice versa.

Simultaneously with this, in ancient culture there is formed the conception of laconicism - the art of speaking briefly and precisely, named after Lacedaemonia, Sparta, where such a manner of speech was elevated to a cultural ideal. Laconian speech was not simply brief, but served as a manifestation of such values as asceticism, military discipline and steadfastness in the face of the enemy [2]. Laconicism goes back to the Spartan system of upbringing, which prepared young people not only for war, but also for the ability to express complex ideas briefly and weightily [2]. This ideal was then perceived and rethought by philosophers: Socrates made brevity a pedagogical resource, and Plato used laconicism in his dialogues in order to lead the interlocutor to truth by means of precise questions [2]. Here it is appropriate to recall the story of King Philip of Macedon, who wrote to the Spartans, threatening: if I enter your lands, I will destroy your cities. The Spartans answered with one word: if [2]. This story has become a textbook illustration of laconicism. But it also shows its ambiguity: brevity can be a sign of strength, and it can be a sign of arrogance or poverty of thought. In one word a whole philosophy can fit, and nothing at all can fit.

The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote: the speech of truth is simple [7]. True simplicity is not equal to primitiveness - it requires a deep understanding of the essence in order to express it in a few precise words. Cicero, reflecting on the merits of speech, asserted: brevity is the best recommendation both for the speech of a senator and for an orator [5]. This utterance emphasizes the universality of the requirement of conciseness: it is important not only for everyday communication, but also for public speeches, and for political rhetoric. Cicero also emphasized that figurative exposition makes the subject of speech visible [5]. This observation is directly connected with what I am saying: the use of figurative expressions, metaphors, and analogies helps the listener not simply to hear, but to see the thought, to make it tangible. Without images speech remains abstract and difficult to perceive.

**The Measure Beyond Which Meaning Dissolves**

The French moralist philosopher of the 17th century François de La Rochefoucauld formulated one of the most precise thoughts about eloquence: true eloquence is the ability to say everything that is needed, and no more than is needed [1]. This definition emphasizes the most important aspect of eloquence: its measure. Eloquence is not verbosity, but precision and appropriateness. An excess of words, as La Rochefoucauld notes, dissolves the meaning, as water does wine [1]. His contemporary Blaise Pascal wrote: even the most brilliant speech becomes tiresome if it is drawn out [6]. This warning is especially relevant for modern public figures and politicians, who often say much but say nothing. Pascal also asserted: eloquence is the painting of thought [6]. A painting, and not a photograph: it does not copy the thought, but reveals its structure. And as a good artist knows what can be removed without destroying the image, so a good orator knows what can be omitted without losing the meaning.

Seneca in his *Moral Letters to Lucilius* often turned to the theme of speech. His aphorism "truthful speech is simple" echoes the Platonic idea that truth does not need embellishments [7]. However, this does not mean that simple speech is primitive speech. On the contrary, as the practice of the Stoics shows, simplicity requires great mastery: one must cut off everything superfluous so that the essence remains. We find an analogous thought in Gregory Skovoroda, the Ukrainian philosopher of the 18th century: truth has a simple speech [7]. This thought has a deep pedagogical

meaning: when we speak with children or with those who are not familiar with the subject, we must speak simply, but not primitively. Complex ideas can and must be explained in simple language, without losing their depth in the process.

**Two Languages of Consciousness**

Contemporary research in the field of the psychology of thinking confirms the close interconnection of speech and thinking. Psychologists of St. Petersburg State University have established that human thinking is carried out in two languages: the verbal-logical and the image-based. The first is responsible for analysis, the second for synthesis. A full-fledged translation from one language to the other, without losses of contentually important units of thought, is important for successful and productive thinking [4]. This discovery has a direct relation to my model. Eloquence is not simply the ability to speak beautifully. It is the ability to translate thought from the image-based language to the verbal one and back, without losing the meaning in the process. A person who possesses this art can not only express his thoughts, but also understand others' at a deeper level. Researchers have also established that a high level of understanding presupposes a close cooperation of the verbal and image-based components of intellectual activity. They have drawn an important conclusion: if you want to develop one thing, develop all together [4]. This fully corresponds to my approach, in which all mental mechanisms are developed as a complex.

In a study devoted to imagination as a higher mental function, it is noted that images of representation contribute to the development of vocabulary, and images of imagination allow one to carry out reasoning [9]. A child, like an adult, masters reality by means of imagination. It is precisely through images that we comprehend abstract concepts. When an orator uses figurative expressions, metaphors, and analogies, he addresses the image-based language of the listener's thinking. This makes speech not simply intelligible, but also experienced. The listener does not simply perceive information - he sees it, feels it, and remembers it. This is especially important when what is at issue is complex, abstract themes that are difficult to convey in words alone. Neuropsychological research shows that in the organization of speech processes an important role is played not only by the left hemisphere, but also by the right, without the normal operation of which speech describing image-based situations loses its semantic content [10]. Full-fledged, rich speech requires the participation of both hemispheres: the analytical left and the image-based right.

Aristotle asserted: clarity is the main merit of speech [8]. This assertion, seemingly obvious, is violated in the modern world at every turn. Politicians, officials, businessmen, even scholars often speak in such a way that they are difficult to understand. They use complex terms, long sentences, abstract formulations - and all this instead of saying simply and clearly. D.E. Rosenthal, the outstanding Russian philologist whose name has become a synonym for the linguistic norm, distinguished ten obligatory features of good speech: correctness and precision, conciseness, simplicity, logicality, clarity, purity, liveliness, richness and euphony. He emphasized: if you want to be understood, find the needed words; if a thought is not fully formed, not matured, it will sound imprecise and unconvincing. If you want to be intelligible, express yourself more clearly and simply, be logical and consistent. If you want to be remembered, make your speech bright, figurative, and alive [8]. Rosenthal also emphasized the importance of observing linguistic norms: cultural speech is normalized speech; in oral form it must correspond to the currently existing norms of pronunciation, in written form - to the norms of orthography and punctuation [8]. This reminder is especially important in the era of the internet, where linguistic norms are often ignored.

**Brevity That Is Not Equal to Emptiness**

Laconicism as a principle of speech finds its roots in Spartan culture, where economy of words was understood as a manifestation of control, discipline and rigor [2]. This conception of brevity as a virtue passed into Greek rhetoric and philosophy. Plato used brevity in his dialogues in order to guide interlocutors toward truth. Socrates made brevity a pedagogical device based on precise questions [3]. In Roman rhetoric laconicism reached its flourishing with Seneca, who included it in his Stoic philosophy. In the *Moral Letters* Seneca uses brevity to express philosophical truths with astonishing clarity, removing everything superfluous. For him economy of words was a direct manifestation of Stoic self-mastery: speech must reflect the inner order of the personality [7].

In the Renaissance laconicism experienced a rebirth thanks to neo-Stoicism. Justus Lipsius, the key figure of this movement, integrated laconicism into his philosophy. In his treatise on the epistolary art brevity is regarded as a moral principle reflecting honesty and virtue, and not simply as a rhetorical device [2]. Erycius Puteanus, a pupil of Lipsius, systematized his ideas, turning laconicism into a formal theory of eloquence, where the deepest ideas must

be compressed into brief but very capacious expressions [2]. In the Spanish Golden Age Baltasar Gracián brought laconicism to its limit in his *Pocket Oracle* (1647), where each phrase represents a maximally compressed but at the same time capacious moral instruction. Gracián's works are not simply texts, but methods of the reader's active co-participation, who must reconstruct the meaning on the basis of the author's brief indications [2].

However, laconicism was and remains an ambiguous concept. In the Renaissance, simultaneously with the admiration for Spartan speech, laconicism was often ridiculed as barbarism unworthy of a true orator. Here it is appropriate to recall the story of Philip of Macedon and the answer of the Spartans, of which I have already spoken: one word can be a sign of strength, and a sign of arrogance, and a sign of poverty of thought. Brevity without depth is not laconicism, but a stump. Laconicism becomes a virtue only when behind it stands a thought that there is nowhere else to fit.

**The Loss of Speech Culture**

In modern society we observe a widespread loss of speech culture. People speak carelessly, use clichés, borrowings, slang, without thinking about the precision and beauty of expressions. The public speeches of politicians often represent a set of empty phrases and promises. The mass media, especially internet publications, abound in errors, clichés and contentless texts. This situation has deep consequences. As Rosenthal noted, neglect of literacy and the widespread trampling of norms cannot but provoke indignation [8]. And this is not simply a question of aesthetics. The absence of speech culture leads to misunderstanding, conflicts, and manipulation. When people cannot express their thoughts precisely, they resort to emotional rather than rational arguments. This is especially dangerous in politics, where imprecise formulations are used to avoid responsibility.

One of the most alarming tendencies of modernity is the loss of image-based thinking. People are less and less capable of creating and understanding images. They perceive information superficially, without thinking about its depth. This makes them vulnerable to manipulation. Research in the field of neurolinguistics shows that image-based thinking is closely connected with the right hemisphere of the brain. Without its normal operation speech describing image-based situations loses its meaning [10]. When we cease to use images in speech and thinking, we impoverish not only language, but also our ability to understand the world and each other.

It is interesting that modern digital communications - social networks, messengers, blogs - have partially rehabilitated laconicism. The limited number of characters in Twitter and the short formats in TikTok and Instagram force users to compress their thoughts to the limit. Platforms with a character limit force users to compress ideas into extremely brief forms, reviving brevity as a means of communication [2]. But this new laconicism often proves to be empty. Short phrases deprived of depth do not convey complex meanings. They are more like slogans than thoughts. That is precisely why it is so important to develop not simply brevity, but meaningful brevity - the ability to convey a deep thought in a few words.

**The Word as an Instrument of Understanding**

Eloquence and conciseness are not simply words. They are instruments of thinking that help us not only to express, but also to understand. One of the most effective instruments is the use of figurative analogies. To describe a person's behavior using an analogy with the behavior of animals allows one to convey the behavioral type to the listener more precisely. When we say: he is like a lion, she is like a fox, they are like wolves - we instantly convey a whole complex of qualities that are difficult to explain otherwise. Research in the field of the psychology of speech confirms that images play a key role in the development of thinking and speech. Images of representation contribute to the development of vocabulary, and images of imagination allow one to carry out reasoning [9]. The richer the image-based language, the richer the thinking. The more developed the imagination, the deeper the reasoning a person can construct.

The traditional school teaches children to memorize ready-made texts and answer questions according to a template. This develops neither eloquence nor conciseness. On the contrary, it kills the living word. For the development of eloquence the practice of live communication is necessary: discussions, debates, public speeches, the writing of essays and stories. It is important that children not simply learn the material, but discuss it, argue, seek arguments, and express their thoughts [12]. As Plato noted, the true orator must know the truth about the subject, and not simply exercise himself in formal rhetoric [3]. For the development of image-based thinking it is necessary to use analogies, metaphors, and comparisons. Children can be taught to describe the behavior of people through animals, natural

phenomena, and objects. This develops not only speech, but also the ability to see connections between different phenomena. Research shows that for the development of thinking and speech the cooperation of verbal and image-based components is important [4]. Therefore the exercises must include both verbal and visual tasks: the description of pictures, the creation of pictograms, and stories based on pictures [13].

Conciseness requires the ability to single out the main thing and to cut off the secondary. This can be trained through exercises: the retelling of a long text in a few sentences, the formulation of conclusions, and the creation of aphorisms. As La Rochefoucauld taught, true eloquence is the ability to say everything that is needed, and no more than is needed [1]. Eloquence is impossible without a rich vocabulary, and a rich vocabulary is formed through reading. Researchers note that the reading of long texts and fantasizing with reliance on an object helps to revive the image-based components of thinking [9]. The reading of classical literature, philosophical texts, and poetry is not simply a pleasant pastime, but a necessary condition for the development of thinking and speech [12]. For the purposeful development of eloquence and conciseness, rhetoric as a separate school subject is necessary. As I showed in the article on new subjects [13], rhetoric teaches not only to speak persuasively, but also to listen, to ask questions, and to conduct a dialogue. It makes conscious those skills that in other subjects are developed intuitively.

**How to Measure Progress**

In accordance with the principle of dynamic diagnostics, which I substantiate in the article on the diagnostics of mental mechanisms [16], the assessment of the development of eloquence and conciseness must be not static, but procedural. We assess not whether the student is able to speak beautifully, but how his ability to express thoughts precisely and briefly has changed over the past six months. What is assessed: the precision of formulations - how precisely the student conveys his thought, whether he avoids ambiguity; conciseness - is he able to single out the main thing and cut off the secondary; figurativeness - does he use metaphors, analogies, and comparisons to convey complex ideas; adaptation to the audience - is he able to change the style of speech depending on the listener. How to track dynamics: record the length and structure of utterances, note how many times the student used figurative expressions and how appropriate they were, compare how the student retells one and the same text at different periods of time, assess how far the student is able to adapt his speech for different listeners.

An example of a diagnostic task: tell about your favorite film in two minutes, then retell the same thing in thirty seconds, preserving the main thing, then explain what this film is about to a five-year-old child. What is assessed is not the correctness of the answer, but the precision, conciseness and adaptability of speech. For the collection and analysis of data on the development of eloquence and conciseness, artificial intelligence can be used - for tracking dynamics, identifying patterns and proposing individual recommendations [16].

**A Bridge That Must Be Built**

Eloquence and conciseness are not simply beautiful words. They are instruments of thinking that allow us to understand the world more deeply and to convey this understanding to others. They are based on the ability to see images, to establish connections, and to single out the main thing. And they, in turn, develop these abilities. The absence of the skill of eloquence and conciseness leads to misunderstanding, conflicts, and a superficial perception of the world. People who are unable to express their thoughts precisely become easy prey for manipulators. People who are unable to understand images are incapable of grasping deep meanings.

That is precisely why the development of eloquence and conciseness is one of the key tasks of my pedagogical model [12]. It is not an additional skill, but a necessary part of the communicative-cognitive framework of the personality. Only having learned to speak beautifully and precisely will we be able truly to understand each other and to build a society based on trust and cooperation. The word is a bridge between minds. And if the bridge is poorly built, people remain on different banks, even when they stand side by side.

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