



## UNDERSTANDING YOUR INNER VOICES: DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY

Have you ever felt like there are multiple voices guiding your decisions, each pulling you in different directions? This phenomenon is central to Dialogical Self Theory (DST), developed by Hermans and his colleagues in the early 1990s. DST offers a fascinating lens through which we can view our self as made up of many different "I-positions," much like characters in a story or play, each with its own voice and perspective.

### WHAT IS DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY?

Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans et al., 1992; Hermans, 2001) presents the idea that our identity is not a singular, fixed entity but a dynamic narrative space where different aspects of ourselves interact. Think of your mind as a meeting place for various characters, each representing different parts of your identity and experiences. These characters dialogue with each other, influencing your feelings, beliefs, and actions.

### THE POWER OF "I" POSITIONS

Each "I-position" in DST represents a distinct voice in your internal narrative. These can be personal voices shaped by your history or voices of significant others that you have internalized over time. By recognizing these voices, we can better understand how we navigate our social worlds and personal challenges.

For instance, you might have an "I as a child" voice that reacts strongly to criticism due to past experiences, or an "I as a confident professional" that takes the lead in your work environment.

### MAPPING THE VOICES WITHIN: PERSONAL POSITION REPERTOIRE

The Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) is a tool used in DST to map out these voices (sample below). It allows you to identify and label your internal positions (derived from personal experiences and psychological aspects) and external positions (voices or perspectives internalized from interactions with other people and the social world). You can then assess the prominence of each voice, on a scale from 0 (not at all prominent) to 5 (extremely prominent), revealing which voices dominate your internal dialogue and how they interact.

Internal Positions	External Positions				Overall Prominence
	Mother	Father	Teacher	Friend	
Child	5	5	3	4	17
Fearful	1	5	2	0	10
Angry	3	5	0	1	11
<b>Overall Prominence</b>	9	15	5	5	



## DIALOGUE WITH YOURSELF

A key component of DST is engaging in an internal dialogue among these I-positions. This dialogue can be reflective, like reassessing past events, or anticipatory, imagining future scenarios. These conversations are crucial for self-awareness and growth. They allow you to negotiate between conflicting parts of your self, explore different perspectives, and make more informed decisions.

It's important to recognize that these dialogues, while reflective of your internal reality, may not accurately represent external truths. The voice you attribute to a family member, for example, might represent your perception of their views rather than their actual opinions.

## TRANSFORMING YOUR NARRATIVE

Through understanding and interacting with these diverse internal voices, you can begin to reshape your personal narrative. If certain positions are causing distress or are unhelpful—like a persistent inner critic—you can work to lessen their influence and enhance more supportive voices, facilitating personal growth and a more balanced self-concept.

## WRITING EXERCISE

To put this theory into practice, try the following exercise:

- ❖ **Identify Voices:** Close your eyes and listen. What voices come forward? Are they supportive, critical, nostalgic?
- ❖ **Characterize:** Note whether these voices are emotional, rational, or perhaps fearful. Where do they come from—a parent, a past version of you, a societal expectation?
- ❖ **Map It Out:** Using the PPR framework, draw a chart and position these voices as either internal or external. Rate their prominence in your current life narrative.
- ❖ **Reflect:** Which voices are dominant? How do they affect your life? Are they beneficial or detrimental?
- ❖ **Plan Changes:** Consider how you might want to change the dynamics among these voices to support a healthier narrative.

By engaging with the multiple voices within your dialogical self, you can gain deeper insights into your personal motivations and reshape your narrative in ways that reflect your true aspirations and values.

## REFERENCES

Hermans, H.J.M., Kempen, J.G., and Van Loon, R.J. (1992). [The dialogical self: Beyond individualism and rationalism](#). *American Psychologist*, 47(1), 23-33.

Hermans, H.J.M. (2001). [The dialogical self: Toward a theory of personal and cultural positioning](#). *Culture and Psychology*, 7(3), 243-281.