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THE IMPROVISATION EXPERIENCE: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

ABSTRACT

Recent studies into improvisation have moved beyond treating it as a mere form of artistic expression. Being able to act off-script is now being regarded as a sought-after skill, one that can be actively taught. To me personally, researching improvisation in communication has both academic and practical value. I teach communication-related subjects such as communication psychology, negotiation psychology, and foreign languages. Improvisation in communication is in many ways similar to improvisation in music, theater, and dance. Our classes show that good improvisation involves overcoming one's anxieties in a collaborative, conflict-free environment. Improvisation helps overcoming barriers between thought and spoken language. For a successful improvisation to take place, the improviser needs to be open, willing to draw on their personal experiences and the shared emotions of the improviser and their audience. The aim of this study is to construct the social and personal portrait of an improviser based on their taking part in an improvisational communication skills workshop. The session was recorded, coded, and analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to reveal patterns, individual experiences, and idiographic detail. The study found three superordinate themes: **The Improviser's Self-portrait, The Improviser and the Audience, and The Improviser's Personality Traits**. The data collected allows the researcher to discern the improviser's individual traits, see the way they interact with the audience, and provide insight into the improviser's social group. The results help expand IPA's applicability and provide for a more nuanced understanding of improvisation, its role in social interaction, and the ways it can be taught. IPA allows the researcher to see an improviser's distinctive style, the way they employ basic improvisational strategies in communication, the range of instruments, and individual personal attributes that manifest themselves in an unscripted communicative situation.

Keywords

Improvisation in communication; Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); Workshops; Improvisation experience.

1. Introduction

With the growing recognition of its role in improving communication skills, improvisation is now being included in a wide range of academic courses aimed at educating students for professions in the liberal arts (Maheux & Lajoie, 2011) healthcare (Higgins & Nesbitt, 2021; Hoffmann-Longtin et al., 2018; Katzman, 2023), business (Mourey, 2020; Barbosa & Davel, 2022; Zenk et al., 2023), and management (Hodgkinson & Hughes, 2023).

Some authors even claim improvisation forms a crucial part of the managerial skillset (Fisher & Barrett, 2019; Masaitytė & Jurėnienė, 2022). Emphasizing the importance of engaged and creative learning, education professionals now use improvisation in the classroom to improve students' emotional and cognitive function (Lehtonen, 2012; Morales-Almazan, 2022).

Our understanding of improvisation is transforming: learning is increasingly being viewed as an improvisational process that includes various activities and open-ended discussions (Sawyer, 2004; Barker, 2019). Many researchers, especially those studying jazz and improv theater, consider improvisation to be a group process where each person's creative input is being elaborated on by other participants and incorporated into the final tune or performance (Duranti et al., 2021). This creates a feedback loop, where individual improvisational work contributes to the collaborative result, and the result acts as the starting point for a new individual improvisation (Verneert et al., 2021). In Management, the importance of developing one's improvisation skills is also being noted (Mannucci et al., 2021). Making use of improvisation in education and training requires understanding its various aspects. In my point of view, despite numerous prior, as well as personal research, improvisation remains an enigmatic phenomenon.

The prior research in question interpreted the data obtained from improvisational workshops through the grounded theory qualitative approach (Temezhnikova, 2022). The aim of the present study, however, is to analyze such an interview from a different perspective: the way improvisation makes an interviewee open up, and the way this experience is presented within the context of a specific performer's history and personality. This will be achieved by employing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

The hypothesis here is that IPA enables the researcher to analyze a person's subjective experiences revealed through improvisation; to see the way they build rapport with the audience, and to identify their personality traits.

The following research questions were formulated:

1. How does an improviser construct a self-portrait within a performance?
2. How the improviser manages audience attention and rapport?
3. And what personal characteristics of the improviser can be identified?

This study explores the phenomenon of communicative improvisation through the lens of IPA. The application of this method is demonstrated using empirical data. The concluding section offers implications for both scholarly research and professional practice.

2. Methodology

For this study, I employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative method that enjoys substantial recognition as a contemporary approach to research. The IPA framework mandates a comprehensive, multi-layered analysis of personal accounts, examining not only their explicit content but also their context, linguistic features, and underlying concepts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This process facilitates a deeper understanding of how participants derive meaning from specific situations, bringing the researcher closer to their authentic lived experience (Smith et al., 2022). A principal strength of the method is its holistic nature; for instance, the examination of discursive elements such as metaphors can provide a profound and vivid illustration of an individual's subjective world.

This methodological approach is particularly well-suited to the study of improvisation. Defined as a spontaneous creative process, improvisation involves the novel synthesis of elements drawn from prior life experiences into a unique creation of the present moment (Coste et al., 2019). As such, it represents an ideal phenomenon for IPA investigation, being inherently constituted by the immediate expression and lived experience of personal meaning in real time.

Within the context of our training workshop on communication skills development, improvisation is experienced by each participant as a distinct phenomenon. This experience is intrinsically linked to their past life experiences, the immediate moment of improvisation itself, and their individual perspective. The workshop was designed to immerse participants in a process where they narrated aspects of their identity indirectly, through the mediation of objects. By symbolically appropriating these objects and highlighting elements that held deep personal resonance, they revealed significant dimensions of their self-perception. Video recording served as a critical reflective tool, enabling participants to analyze their own improvisational work. A detailed analysis of a single participant's improvisation was conducted to understand the nuances and complexities of constructing a self-portrait, interacting with the audience, and revealing personal qualities, thereby capturing the uniqueness of this process.

2.1 Research Context

The session in question, assisted by Pr. Bazarov Lomonosov Moscow State University's Faculty of Psychology, took place during one of its Negotiation Psychology workshops was embedded within the curriculum of the "Social Psychology of Negotiation" course offered to fourth-year undergraduate students at the Department of Psychology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, during the spring semester of the 2019 academic year. The participants comprised 20 students (7 male and 13 female) between the ages of 19 and 22.

2.2 Ethical Considerations

All these workshops were an integral part of the educational process and therefore did not require separate ethical approval. All of them were conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the local ethical guidelines of Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU).

All participants provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and no financial incentives were offered. Interviews were video-recorded with participant permission and transcribed verbatim. Confidential information has been removed. The data shown has been published with written consent.

2.3 Procedural steps

The intervention was structured around two dedicated sessions that combined theoretical grounding with practical application. This pedagogical approach aimed not only to develop essential communication skills but also to provide a structured platform for phenomenological observation and analysis of improvisational behaviors in a controlled academic setting.

Preparation: A significant preparatory phase ($\frac{1}{3}$ of total time, plus one week outside class) was dedicated to theoretical introduction and establishing ground rules (voluntary participation, confidentiality, "here-and-now" communication, respectful feedback).

Stimulus: Participants watched the short film Emilia Muller <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Om8e9494G-Q> (Marciano, 1993), which models an improvisation task where an actress describes the contents of another person's handbag as her own.

Task: Participants prepared their own bags (handbags, backpacks) with items they consented to disclose publicly. They then role-played a similar scenario, improvising a description of a bag's contents as if it were their own. It is important to note that the bag they received was assigned randomly, through a lottery.

Data Collection: All sessions (five in total within this training program) were filmed with participant consent using a tripod-mounted Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF5 camera. The opening question: What have you got in your bag? was known to the participants from their preparatory work. The subsequent questions and motivating comments were ad-lib. The English-subtitled video of the session can be found at https://youtu.be/CkU12Op_80A. Originally filmed as training tools for workshop analysis, these improvisation recordings later acquired academic value. The author suggests IPA could offer researchers deeper insight into improvisers' creative processes.

2.3 Data analysis

From the five recorded improvisation videos, the longest and most substantial fragment was selected for IPA. This video was characterized by its exceptional narrative density, rich detail, and elaborate storytelling structures.

The video was transcribed verbatim, and the data was analyzed using IPA, as recommended by leading experts in the field (Smith & Eatough, 2007)

The input data for the analysis included both the interview transcript and the video material.

The data was analyzed in accordance with IPA methodology (Smith et al., 2022).

1. The video is transcribed verbatim and marked. The participant's questions and answers are marked separately.
2. The transcript is checked against the video to verify correctness and inclusion of nonverbal movements, sounds, and pauses.
3. Culture-specific objects or topics are noted and commented on separately.
4. Incidents of the participant addressing the interviewer or the audience are noted and analyzed.
5. Subjects triggering strong reactions by the audience are highlighted.
6. Language showing the improviser's personal preferences is highlighted.

The analyzed video fragment lasts 28 minutes, resulting in a transcript of over 4,000 words. The Table 1 illustrates the coding process using the beginning of the interview as an example, at the 3:47 time mark

Table 1. Excerpt of IPA Coding and Interpretation Process

	<i>Transcript</i>	<i>Descriptive codes</i>	<i>Linguistic</i>	<i>Interpretative codes</i>
<i>I.</i>	<i>What's in your bag?</i>			
<i>P.</i>	<i>Just anything and everything?</i>	<i>clarifying question</i>	<i>This phrase conveys a hint of surprise and doubt</i>	<i>Requesting clarification from the interviewer. Although the participants are initially familiar with the training rules, the question itself is procedural in nature. Such an appeal can be seen as a way of establishing contact with the interviewer and as a means of gaining additional confidence in subsequent actions.</i>
<i>I.</i>	<i>You have a rather unusual bag. At least we haven't seen one like it before.</i>		<i>supportive statement, a little compliment</i>	
<i>P.</i>	<i>Well, yes, unisex. I just really love the color brown, I love leather. Actually, it wasn't originally mine, it was a gift—from my boyfriend. He carried it for a short while. I asked for it, and he agreed to give it to me. Well...</i>	<i>The improviser instantly shifts her attention to the bag, gently running her hand over it, as if demonstrating how much she likes it. The gesture appears convincing. She then unfolds the story: how the bag came into her possession, how it immediately appealed to her, and how it fits into the current unisex fashion trend.</i>	<i>Agreement with the interviewer 2 x love</i>	<i>This represents a strategically effective move by the improviser, reflecting her flexibility and resourcefulness. The contents of the bag and its owner remain unknown, and categorizing it as unisex expands the scope of potential interpretations. Additionally, this provides insight into the improviser's personal preferences.</i>
<i>I</i>	<i>And every time you take it with you, do you remember him?</i>		<i>The question is not very well phrased, as the verb 'remember' focuses on the past.</i>	
<i>P.</i>	<i>I think about him all the time anyway. We're still together, so it doesn't remind me of him any more than he himself does.</i>	<i>The emphasis on the present tense and current relationships in the response indicates to the interviewer</i>		<i>Personal life at the present moment</i>

		the improviser's willingness to discuss her personal life.		
I.	What is he like? Tell us. Your boyfriend.			
P.	(Laughs) Well... should I describe his appearance or...	clarifying question		The combination of laughter, a smile, and a clarifying question can be interpreted as a readiness for further work, a momentary pause, and a way to establish contact with the improviser according to the training procedure.
I.	Okay, let's say his appearance.			
P.	Well, he is tall, older than me. Much older. I'm not entirely comfortable to talk about it. He's 65. He's a businessman. We moved in, like, three years ago. We've been traveling a lot, living together... We love each other, and all. But what's next for us is, well...	The main point in the description is the age difference in the couple. The man, as a Russian businessman, symbolizes financial means, including the ability to travel.	2 x older not comfortable to talk	Starting the training with the topic of personal life captures the audience's attention ; the discussion of unequal relationships resembles a talk-show format and is accompanied by the improviser's reflection and readiness for potential disapproval from the audience. This is a strategically strong move.
I.	Don't you find such an age difference strange?	The question turned out to be somewhat ineffective and resembled a talk-show format; the interviewer was caught up in a general sense of surprise. It would have been better to redirect the focus, for example, by asking where they traveled and what they enjoyed.		
P.	(Sighs) Well, I don't, but my social circle probably does, and it does kind of put pressure on me.	She perceives society's reaction as pressure on her position.	A sigh conveys an emotional state and helps to organize thoughts.	The improviser sighs, showing that she is struggling, and likely uses this as a way to signal to the audience not to follow the example of her close circle, not to pressure her, and to allow her to make decisions independently.
I.	Well, you must have some reasons to be with him. Tell us, what's he like by himself?			
P.	Once again?	clarifying question	The intonation conveys a slight reproach or fatigue with the recurring situation	Mild dissatisfaction with the training procedure and the repetitive questions on the same topic
I.	What is he like as a person?			
P.	Well, Oh, he's a typical guy for his age. He's pretty stern, quite strict—he's always trying to correct me or tell me what to do. But he's also really easy to get along with and is always up for doing something.	It's a general, non-detailed portrait of an adult with youthful traits.	generalization «typical»	The description creates the impression of a father figure who is protective, open to new experiences, and developing; from this perspective, personal life is perceived as harmonious.
I.	And do you like being constantly controlled?			
P.	Yes, that's what I was looking for, that's what I wanted, so that's why, accordingly, it turned out to be such an age difference. Well, of course, sometimes thoughts about age cross my mind, after all it's not... Maybe, as my parents, my brothers and sisters say, I should look for someone more or less suitable in age. But this is, like, my decision, I don't know yet if it's to spite them or	She explains why she is in a relationship with a partner who has a significant age difference, despite differing opinions from others, emphasizing love as the primary factor	was looking for, I wanted	A positive response to the question about the necessity of external control, combined with reflection on relationships, allows the improviser to conclude the discussion while simultaneously

	<i>if I just love him very much, but I think I did everything right.</i>			<i>demonstrating leadership in communication and a good level of communicative skill.</i>
I.	<i>Uh-huh. What's that you have?</i>	<i>Realizing that the discussion of relationships has come to an end, the interviewer moves on to a new topic.</i>		
P.	<i>(Laughs) After such a conversation, switching to describing a tablet is just... here, a tablet, it has a case... all about him, all about him. Here. A regular tablet, I use it constantly, I watch series. Just today. . I've been watching This Is Us while getting ready for this interview. It's a TV series. Very well made, you know. You should totally watch it.. I don't even know what to say. I use it, type notes in lectures.</i>	<i>A tablet for entertainment and learning</i>	<i>Repetition «all about him, all about him» I don't even know what to say (It refers to a tablet.)</i>	<i>Although the improviser consciously concluded the discussion, she remained emotionally engaged with the previous topic, highlighting its significance. The emotions conveyed in the account of personal life were also transmitted to the audience. The improviser gives the interviewer recommendations on which series to watch, talks about her leisure preferences, and uses a gadget for studying.</i>
I.	<i>How do you type? Isn't it uncomfortable? Do you have a special keyboard?</i>	<i>The item isn't the improviser's; we know that, and the question is just to test her communicative reaction</i>		
P.	<i>No, why? Right on the touch keyboard, it's very convenient. I open it, like this, take it and type like this, it's comfortable for me. I make presentations, photos, before I had a phone with good quality, I took photos with it. Then I started using the phone and somehow used it less, but I still always carry it with me. It doesn't take up much space, and when I take it, the bag becomes noticeably heavier.</i>	<i>The tablet's functions are easy for the improviser to show: she demonstrates them quickly and clearly, and the tablet is small but has some weight</i>	<i>Convenient, comfortable for me</i>	<i>Data about the improviser, her study habits, and leisure preferences.</i>

The list of themes had been undergoing constant revision and clarification until it was narrowed down to its final form (Table 2).

3. Results

As a result, three superordinate themes were identified (see Table 2). **The Improviser's Self-portrait** tells us how the person presents themselves to the public through talking about the contents of the handbag. **The Improviser and the Audience** tells us about the ways the improviser can communicate with the audience, hold their attention, and respond to it.

The Improviser's Personality Traits gets us to know the improviser better and to see the personality traits that show up in improvisational communication.

3.1 The Improviser's Self-portrait

The improviser produces various items, talks about them, and through them, we get to learn about her, see the image she presents for us, the audience.

On the one hand, this is an expression of her unique personality, but on the other hand, there is a lot of common ground with other students of her age. She is from Krasnodar. She came to Moscow to study, lives on the MSU campus, travels home with a certain airline collecting frequent flier miles. She has a favorite beauty parlor and looks after her hair and nails. She visits *the Shokoladnitsa café* chain from time to time. Her eyesight is 20/50. She has had an injury and is using a walking stick. She plays *Grand Theft Auto*. She views technology as a necessary component of modern life and studying, but thinks one should write crucial information down by hand. She keeps a sizable, for a student, sum of cash and often lends to her friends. She attends church occasionally. She has a special thing for dark-colored, bulky, unisex leather clothing and accessories. Her favorite superhero is Superman, a cool hero who uses superhuman skills for the good of humanity.

3.2 The Improviser and the Audience

This came in two major variants: interacting with me as the workshop's leader (this was the first time I met either the improviser or the other participants), and interacting with the other participants observing the improvisation. The improviser inquiries about the workshop's procedure, commenting on it and the things asked of her, supplies both rhetorical and leading questions, recommends me things, like watching *This Is Us* (a popular TV series about ordinary people, someone we could empathize with: people having the same problems and traumas, goals and aspirations, as we).

When engaging with the audience proper, the improviser touches upon things common to the entire group, the daily realities of student life; this is done in a graceful, humorous manner and elicits appreciative smiles. Nevertheless, she starts with a tricky subject: her relationship with a much older man. She is somewhere in her early twenties. Her boyfriend is 65. This is something much more common among celebrities and socialites. It piques the audience's curiosity. What lies behind this relationship: love and mutual trust, or, to put things bluntly, mutually apparent convenience?

They may love each other now, but their future together is uncertain. This narrow focus on the present implies a mindset where their relationship is not really expected to last. The improviser is most likely doing this on purpose to set the tone and pique the audience's interest.

The improviser is building rapport with the audience. She is emphasizing the prestigious place she's studying at, the MSU. When talking about the new course and their professor, or her internship, her language is guarded, yet she is dismissive when talking about her academic achievements. Then come two hot-button current affairs topics: the first one is familiar to all present, the new MIR bank card they've been issued. The card's name is controversial: it is a polysemantic term that means both the absence of conflict (peace) and the multitude of nations (the world) in Russian. Yet the card is only accepted in Russia. The improviser is paying for her tuition and is not receiving an educational allowance, so she has no use for the card whatsoever. Why issue it in the first place?

The second topic is the conflict in Ukraine. It is as if this emotionally relevant part of the session is foreshadowing the more recent events. This is a candid; personal narrative filled with deep symbolism. There is a lighter in the handbag (which, you may recall, does not belong to her) that won't work.

A cigarette lighter that is temporarily not producing any flame: a metaphor for the conflagration between the two countries that was, at that moment, not in its ‘hot’ phase. A complicated family history: the improviser's grandmother is living in Ukraine, opposed to Crimea's annexation (2014), and Russian policy in general; her granddaughter is studying in Moscow. The public's reaction to the 2014 events has been mixed. The workshop was held in 2019, three years before the present armed conflict. The lighter is not producing any flame, though it is operational and can, theoretically, be refilled. The lighter as a mini eternal flame to commemorate the troubles in Odessa and the loss of life there. The audience is dead silent. She has completely captured their attention.

3.3 The Improviser's Personality Traits

The improviser is controlling herself quite well, she is **confident**.

She wants to observe everything through his own eyes no matter what, to have her perspective on everything. This is something she regards as a plus. The improviser clearly owns the workshop's Improvisation as a Way of Developing Communication Skills theme. Fully cognizant of her strong points, she is at ease addressing the interviewer. She is demonstrating her grasp of the role of visual contact in communication by reinterpreting an ‘imaginary’ disadvantage as her strong point.

Nevertheless, she is aware of other types of situations in which one needs to see things clearly, for example, when there is a greater social distance involved. The improviser understands and respects the boundaries.

The **courage** to be oneself is demonstrated by her choice of complicated, sensitive topics, her willingness to play challenging video games, and her bold style choices.

We can also see **self-reflection** in her awareness of both herself and the things she is saying. She is providing alternative suppositions, discussing the situation from several perspectives, and demonstrating **flexibility**.

Table 2. Finalized list of themes

Superordinate theme	Subthemes	Relevant data
The Improviser's Self-portrait	Place of residence/favorite hangouts/ leisure/study/personal preferences	<i>I'm from Krasnodar.</i> <i>'The Gallery' loyalty card. It's a beauty parlor. I go there all the time. It's a really decent place. Inexpensive, you know. That's the main thing, inexpensive. I do nails and hair there.</i> <i>I mean, it's not like there's something I actively love about it [Shokoladnitsa]. It's a decent enough café. Good enough to go to once in a while. I do love the staff there, the ones that work outside, in those funny uniforms...</i> <i>There's a church not far from our campus. One of the most venerated saints there is St. Nicholas [...] But I did buy an icon of him. I carry it with me all the time.</i> <i>I now mostly play Grand Theft Auto on my notebook.</i> <i>It's just your average tablet. I use it all the time. Like, for watching TV series. What else? I do stuff on it, take notes during lectures, that kind of stuff...</i> <i>It's just that I adore brown. And leather.</i> <i>Well, I do love unisex clothes, something leather, dark-colored.</i> <i>Superman, he's my favorite one.</i>

		<i>I think I love to wear... prominent, large-sized things, so glasses would have to be oversized, too. Not something you put on and feel cramped.</i> <i>I do it from time to time, like those one-liners from our lecturers that really get to you, or something. I write them down here.</i> <i>[About cash] Just to have something in case of, you know, emergency. Also, something to lend to my friends.</i>
The Improviser and the Audience. Interacting with the interviewer	<i>The procedure</i>	<i>Like, whatever's in there? [Meaning the contents of the bag; are we interested in anything specific]</i> <i>Should I... describe how he looks, or... [Meaning the appearance of a person; how should she describe them]</i> <i>Should I do it again? [Meaning going over a person's description again]</i> <i>Damn, there's personal documents... do I need to show them, too? [This is uncomfortable territory; she asks whether personal documents qualify]</i> <i>Should I go on?</i> <i>Everything? There's so much stuff in there, you know!</i>
	<i>Commenting on the procedure</i>	<i>Ugh... another document...</i> <i>I think I better move on.</i> <i>It's just your regular ID. Nothing special about it, I guess.</i> <i>I think that's about it. The rest is just unimportant stuff.</i>
	<i>Commenting on the questions</i>	<i>You know, some people say that, others say it's the other way around. Some say dairy is bad for you, and some say it's good for you. And this goes for everything, so, you know...</i> <i>Well, even the minor things. Like, here're you standing before me [...] but I can't see you very clearly, so I feel it's OK for me to look you in the eye.</i>
	<i>Rhetorical questions</i>	<i>The coupon. Now, what did I take it for?</i> <i>Huh. Why did I take so much with me today... [Talking about cash]</i>
	<i>Recommendations</i>	<i>You know, literally this very day. I've been watching This is Us while getting ready for this interview. It's a TV series. Very well made, you know. You should totally watch it.</i>
	<i>Leading questions</i>	<i>You're gonna ask me about this card? I really can't remember.</i> <i>Have you read Igor Guberman?</i>
The Improviser and the Audience. Interacting with the audience	<i>Education, a common theme for everyone presents</i> <i>A pen with the MSU logo; a student record-book unique to their year (wrong page numbers)</i>	<i>Funny. I think it's just our year that had the page numbers mixed up. Really knocked me sideways as a freshman. I mean, it's MSU. How could they get the numbers wrong? Look: 1, 2, 4, 3.</i>
	<i>A new Startup Planning course.</i> <i>Circumspect and coy when answering my Is it any good?</i> <i>Makes everyone smile.</i>	<i>Oh, sure, very good – in case Alexey Nikolayevitch [the lecturer] sees it [the interview] ... No, really, it's very good [laughs], I love attending it.</i>
	<i>Moscow City Government internship</i> <i>Even more coy when answering my How was it? Did you like it?</i> <i>The audience smiles knowingly.</i>	<i>Oh, I don't know. I mean, I didn't say bad things about Alexey Nikolayevitch, did I? Not that there was anything to tell, of course. So I sure won't say anything bad about the city government either. I think I better move on. But if you're really interested... A special whistleblower interview, sure, no problem.</i>
	<i>The improviser's attitude to studying</i>	<i>[The marks are] Varied. A bit of everything. I got Cs, I got As, but not a lot of Cs, really. Only five in total, that's all the years combined. So, on the whole, you might say I'm a good enough student. Somewhere between Cum laude and Magna cum laude. Nah, who am I kidding? I'm dumb.</i>
	<i>Current affairs. A hot-button topic in Russia</i>	<i>The MIR card. People are cracking jokes about this one, yeah. It's the new card we got for our educational allowance. Dunno what to say about it, really.</i> <i>I mean, it's some Russia-only payment system, and they call it 'MIR' [peace/the world]. It's, like, a contradiction in terms, right? I don't even know if they accept it in other places.</i>

The Improviser's Personality Traits	<i>Personal life</i>	He [her boyfriend] is tall, older than me. Much older. I'm not entirely comfortable to talk about it. He's 65. He's a businessman. We moved in, like, three years ago. We've been traveling a lot, living together... We love each other, and all. But what's next for us is, well...
	<i>A cigarette lighter; a metaphor for the Ukraine conflict viewed through the lens of inter-family relationships</i>	My grandmother lives in Ukraine. So, when this whole conflict between our countries started, she was very skeptical [...] It was tough going, and we all felt kind of oppressed by it. We were all very uncomfortable about it. But, not going into details, things got better over time. Last October she came to visit and she brought me this lighter. And she told me she found it [the lighter] right there, in Odessa, where the troubles were. It was lying in the street, so she picked it up and brought it for me. So, for me, it's a memorable thing, an important thing. But it's also, like, loaded with this suffering, unpleasant stuff. It works, by the way. Kinda strange it went off and won't work right now.
	<i>Courage</i>	You can try out unisex clothes and still feel your femininity, feel that you're hot-looking. Challenge yourself, and still succeed. I think it's a nice videogame to play. The world is tough, and Grand Theft Auto definitely doesn't make it look any tougher than it already is, the things you'd see out there.
	<i>Self-confidence</i>	I think I'm one of the few people who look good on their ID. I would actually hate to have it reissued. I use a walking stick, and there's, like, a green light for people like me everywhere. They don't even ask for my student ID.
	<i>Self-reflection</i>	I don't want to marry. Marriage is not my thing. Maybe that's why I have a boyfriend who's 65. I think I'm slowly unlearning handwriting. It's just something I realized. Whenever I need to write something by hand, it just won't move properly. The fingers are, I dunno, feeling all wrong... they begin to ache, and my handwriting turns bad.
	<i>Flexibility Turning a drawback into an advantage</i>	No, I don't wear glasses. But my eyesight is not very good, around 20/50, and I don't want to wear glasses or contact lenses. I want to see things with my own eyes. But you know, I think sometimes seeing things all blurry is a plus...

3.4 Positionality

I am a teacher of psychology and a foreign language, and improvisation plays a key role in my professional practice. For me, it is not just a teaching tool but also a readiness for uncertainty, novelty, and spontaneity. Furthermore, it is a crucial skill to develop in one's students.

Improvisation in communication is always a collaborative effort between the improviser and the audience, so in our workshops, both the participant and the instructor are engaging in improvisation.

In this paper, I aim to explore the experience of one participant from such a workshop—experience gleaned not through direct questioning but through analysis of their improvisational work using IPA methods. In doing so, I paid attention not only to the improviser's responses but also to my own prompting questions, which, I must admit, were not always successful.

Personally, improvisation makes me feel unselfconscious, at ease, trusted. I feel the audience's support and emotional involvement, which, for an educator, is very helpful. But this is my personal experience.

Analyzing the data, I noticed that qualitative research methods like IPA enable the researcher to look far ahead and identify social trends through metaphors and narratives. For example, a lighter, which

for the improviser turned out to be a symbol of the conflict between two countries, and which at that moment failed to ignite—it was out of fuel—needed only to be refilled to flare up again, just as happened a few years later.

4. Discussion

The present study aims to demonstrate how IPA can be used to examine and evaluate this improvisational work.

It gives specific examples of the ways an improviser can keep the audience's attention, win their confidence or, depending on the situation, sympathy, how an improviser's image is formed during improvisation and what personality traits are revealed through this process.

Currently, research on improvisation in communication can primarily be found in articles focused on medical staff training (Fekete et al., 2024) or in works mentioning its positive effect on foreign language acquisition (Zondag, 2024). I have not encountered any studies that utilize the IPA method to investigate verbal improvisation.

Using IPA, the analysis of a 28-minute improvisation revealed the performer's portrait to the audience, including their place of residence, favorite leisure spots, attitude toward learning, and personal preferences. The subsequent research question focused on how the improviser manages audience attention and rapport. The improviser consistently built communication by asking questions and making comments directed at the interviewer, as well as by offering recommendations. While adapting to a new role, the improviser established contact with the audience and joined them. The performer discussed common educational topics by joking, sharing personal stories, and narrating family experiences. Regarding personal qualities, little can be conclusively determined based solely on the interview results. However, we observed a courageous, self-confident individual with well-developed self-reflection.

These findings not only extend the applicability of IPA and advance the understanding of improvisation in communication, but also hold practical value for designing targeted improvisation training exercises and offering high-quality participant feedback.

5. Conclusion

Despite the significance of improvisation as a subject of interdisciplinary research—ranging from artistic practices to philosophical aesthetics—this field retains numerous underexplored aspects that require further investigation.

This study demonstrates that video recordings and transcripts of an improviser's performance, obtained during communication skills training, serve as a primary data source for the application of IPA. The IPA enabled me to focus on a participant's improvisational communicative session during the

training. In an unexpected communicative situation within the training, the participant shares their thoughts and feelings. In my view, it is precisely the necessity for the participant to respond spontaneously, and at times without premeditation, that yields compelling material for analysis. This material is then interpreted through the lens of both social and individual context. By focusing on the improviser, this analysis reveals new dimensions of improvisation: how the performer's public image is created, how audience rapport is built, and what personal characteristics emerge during performance.

Although the study of improvisation presents methodological challenges, and the application of IPA is notably time-consuming, the systematic continuation of this research is essential for accumulating a critical mass of data. This will unveil the mechanisms of improvisation and advance the IPA methodology itself.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

The study has the following limitations. First, this is a single-author article, prepared without academic supervision. I recognize that this mode of work may limit opportunities for independent verification and discussion of results at various stages of the research, which is an important aspect of ensuring scientific rigor. I hope that this detailed audit trail, which includes all materials and reflective notes from the work process, will provide a useful foundation for planning future studies. It is my intention to apply these insights to develop methodologies that enhance the validity and reliability of future findings.

Second, as a rule, each improvisational session is usually accompanied by a discussion where the participants speak of their experience. During the workshop in question, this took the form of a group discussion and was not itself recorded, although some aspects of the discussion had been published (O. B. Temezhnikova & Bazarov, 2020). IPA demands that its results should be discussed with the interviewees themselves and modified. The present analysis and notes had been emailed to the interviewee, but no feedback has been received (an understandable, though regrettable, outcome given the current state of affairs). Another possible point of criticism is the fact that it analyzes only a single interview, something the author would love to address in subsequent publications.

I would like to focus on all the materials gathered during the training sessions, as well as to collect new materials, taking into account the accumulated experience and research findings. Future research may be directed towards investigating the specifics of perceiving improvisational work.

Ethical Approval: This study, conducted at Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU) Faculty of Psychology, is part of an educational program and was carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the local ethical guidelines of Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU). After obtaining written informed consent from each participant, video recordings of improvisational work in class were used to collect data.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study, ensuring respect for confidentiality and voluntariness principles.

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