Profesyonel Aktörlerin Uzmanlıklar: Son Araştırmalar Üzerine Bir Eleştiri
The Expertise of Professional Actors: A review of recent research
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EXTENDED SUMMARY

This review summarizes recent research into the mental processes of professional actors. It has sought to respond to questions in this study: Ask any actor what question he or she is asked most frequently, and the answer will almost always be, “How do you learn all those lines?” Yet, to highly experienced Professional actors, memorization would never be considered the essence of acting. What then, is the essence of an actor’s expertise? Can it be determined empirically or must researchers depend on actors’ introspective self-reports?

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, the research was devoted primarily to the first half of this two-part process. These early experiments employed both verbal protocol analysis and traditional empirical methods, with the former determining the nature of the actors’ learning strategies and the latter providing evidence for their efficacy. Throughout the early studies, actors often referred to a categorization scheme they called “finding the beats”. The most interesting finding of the early experiments was that the actors (none of whom had had any specialized training in psychology) nevertheless were unwittingly using almost every learning principle that had been identified by cognitive researchers as facilitating recall. Another difference that emerged between novices and actors was that employment of the same learning principles resulted in retention of much of the exact wording of the text by actors.

In the study, it is examined whether a general undergraduate population might benefit from instruction in the actor’s natural learning strategy. Recent studies have taken a closer look at the active experiencing principle. Volunteers from an introductory psychology class were presented with a short scene from a contemporary play volunteers from an introductory psychology class were presented with a short scene from a contemporary play. The students were taught the analytical processes typically used by actors. A control group was instructed to deliberately memorize the same material. Contrary to expectations, the results showed that the control group far outperformed the experimental group. This finding suggested that the enhanced retention observed with actors might be a product of their years of experience rather than a stable psychological outcome of their analytical strategy.

Another research topic is the emotion in the actor. A number of researchers have used scientific devices to assess emotion of actors and acting students by measuring galvanic skin response, heart rate, respiration, blood chemistry, etc. during participants’ imagined situations of varied emotional valences. As interesting as this type of inquiry is, it rarely addresses the actual expertise involved in actors’ performances on stage. In general, the Noice and Noice program of research showed that actors had relatively little concern about emotion as a completely separate entity. These participants appeared to view their job as “doing” what the character was doing within the dramatic situation. Some late research deals primarily with determining the cognitive mechanisms underlying expertise rather than examining expertise itself. One finding that emerged was that, months after the final performance of a play, dialogue that had originally been accompanied by actors’ movements about the stage was better recalled than dialogue that had been spoken when the actors had remained in one place. The effects of movement on other types of text have been extensively investigated, most notably in connection with subject-performed tasks. Researchers have frequently demonstrated that phrases such as “lift the cup” are better remembered when actually performed (with real or imaginary objects) than when acquired under standard verbal learning instructions.