

Is language necessary to think essay



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If to think or in the process of thought is doing logic problems, or if thinking is a habitual response to actions for example, flinching when a baseball comes too close, or eating with a knife and fork, then one can think without language. But, on the other hand, if by thinking you mean an action by the active intelligence to a purpose, then the problem becomes more of “ to what extent language defines or causes to come into being, reality”.

Heidegger, among others, would say that a meaningful world is “ always-already” ¹ there and by learning language we learn the meaning of the world. Wittgenstein would probably add that “ thinking” really describes many activities, all of whom share a family resemblance, but all these descriptions might not have one single characteristic in common. Think of all the ways one commonly talks about thinking, and the varying situations in which the individual uses “ thinking. ” We tend to hold real thinking to one specific model or logical standard, but this seems to be just one special case.

One such special case would be a hypothesis introduced by Benjamin Whorf which is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (linguistic determination). He believed that our thoughts are completely limited by our language, an example of this would be an event probably most people experience, it occurs when you are having a conversation and you suddenly find that you get caught up on a word and say something else but not expressing yourself clearly in the way you wanted. This shows that to an extent people’s thought can be limited to their language. This hypothesis however leaves room for misinterpretation and thus people are not entirely convinced as critics say that the Inuit have many different words for snow and in the long run this shows that language does not determine reality but reality determines

language, however this is not a valid conclusion and regarding the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis there is fact evidence to suggest that thought is possible without language.

Before the fact evidence we must first determine what language is before we can what it is to think. Language is rule-governed, intended, creative and open-ended. We as humans use it to interpret ideas we are faced with and put meaning behind it. The most important use of it probably is that it is used to understand the world around us and to communicate ideas with each other.

“ There are 1020 grammatically correct sentences in English up to 20 words in length” Steve Pinker Although that is a big number of sentences with a lot of zero’s behind it we must agree that there is a limitation and also to accept that although Mr. Pinker is one of the leading studiers in this area of study, how he came up with that number is very complex and is only to be viewed on a very basic level. In saying this I mean that everyday new things are being found new words are being created and just over the time span of a month it could prove that calculation vastly incorrect. Now imagine a world without language. This suggests that theoretically that if no language existed, how any normal human being would be able to express that he is in the process of thought without expression of their ideas through language to each other, would be incomprehensible.

Facial expression and hand gestures would not prove nearly as useful and could be very limiting as humans would not know what to associate with that hand gesture. This would of course alter the way humans develop and slow it

down tremendously. If a person was to find a new idea or thing, there would be no way for that person to communicate his/her ideas. By saying this however we encounter a problem.

How did the world evolve to what it is today when right in the beginning of man-kind when the cavemen existed? They did not have language to begin with, how did they deal with this universal problem? Keeping this idea in mind, it is fair to say with some doubt that language is not needed to think. An attempt to explain this very point would be the idea of people experiencing thought process without them knowing themselves. A very clear example of this is the idea of dreaming no matter which type of it dream its may be, lucid, nightmare or day dreaming. These dreams are very often not linked to language therefore suggesting that a person can think without the use of language. This leaves error from my analysis because humans are always in a sub-conscious state when experiencing these dreams and this suggest that it is not entirely factual evidence that no language is experienced in the dream. I created a good experiment to understand this idea a few days ago.

Imagine you feel the urge to urinate. You go to the bathroom, unzip your pants, sit on the toilet (works for both females and males), and urinate. Afterward, you turn the tap on, wash your hands and then you dry them. Were you thinking in language about any of the above while you were doing them? Did you think to yourself, " I'm unzipping my pants"; " I'm sitting on the toilet"; " I'm urinating! ", " I'm going to turn the right knob of the faucet for cold water"; " I'm going to put my hands under the water and wash

them". This experiment of expressing ourselves without words is very important.

It demonstrates a number of things necessary in dream interpretation. Firstly, it shows that the dream may be our heritage from the past. It could be the method of thought used prior to humanity's use of words. If so, it suggests that human consciousness is arranged in a sequence of grades or ranks, and our present type of consciousness is built over and developed from the older level. It also clearly shows how we link up ideas such as 'urinating' with an object such as a 'Toilet'. Going back to the idea presented earlier about the cavemen, who had no language in the beginning of time.

This idea hints to some conclusion that thought without language is achievable. Babies communicate through various actions and emotions eg. crying. They express these actions and emotion when they feel hungry or when they need or want various things, although people can say that their crying and actions are a crude form of language.

Babies however show that they possess' primordial ways of thinking by associating actions with their very own language to communicate with their parents. I came across a very good example in my past to show this phenomenon. A baby is lying in its cot and suddenly the most amazing creature comes in through the window. It's a magnificent and dazzling fusion of light, sound and movement. A second later the baby's mother comes into the room and says " baby, it's a bird, it's a bird".

By the time the child is a few years old he sees a bird and says " it's a bird" and doesn't think twice about it. The amazing reality of this creature has

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been conveniently cemented over with a word. This shows that language is necessary to develop thought, but on a fundamental level it is possible to think without language. In schools subjects this problem can be understood better because it is put into categories for analysis. In Sport class there are many instances where the idea of thought without language is quite evident.

For example a person is playing a game of cricket he stands in the cricket field and suddenly the batsman cracks a speeding ball at him. The fielder does not have time to think how the ball is traveling towards him he just automatically tries to catch it. In Art the artist paints his ideas onto paper there is no use of language but of course critics could say that art is a form of language it all depends on what definition of thought it is. In more important subjects like mathematics and English (language) there is a very important need for language as both subjects need advanced language to achieve the desired results. Although there is a need it does not prove that language is necessary for thought, it merely proves that language is necessary for development and understanding as discussed earlier.

Overall language can be concluded to be not needed to think, however language is needed when humans want to communicate, develop and understand their complex thought. Language can be considered a limitation of thought but also without it there would be very slow or no development. Doing activities that involve actions or visual experiences e. g. sport and art deal less with language and so language is not necessary.

Thoughts can be created both consciously and sub-consciously but we cannot determine for sure if in our sub-conscious state that we think in

images not language. The exploration of language and thought linked together will not be resolved but people can come to decent summations of what both arguments are saying. Language is needed to think but it is considered necessary to communicate thought. Thought is experienced whether or not language is involved.