

Koko the gorilla

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



Jocelyn bolanos Anthropology 118 22 October 2012 Koko the Gorilla Koko is an extraordinary gorilla that is able to communicate to humans by the use of American Sign Language. Although there may be many linguists who discredit this notion, AOL chat was able to provide transcripts between penny, who is Koko's translator, and Koko the gorilla through the use of American Sign Language The transcripts provide evidence of gestures, behaviors, and thoughts that Koko does through her conversation with penny.

To begin with, Koko's symbolic behavior lacks compared to that of penny and AOL behaviors, but let us take into consideration that we, as humans have developed language as part of culture for several centuries and as for Koko the gorilla she has only been trained for only a couple of years, I suspect. Through out the transcript Koko shows gestures and behaviors that to many would believe can symbolize her way of understanding and comprehending rationalized ideas. For example, when penny asked Koko if she believed people loved her, Koko responded by saying, " Love no. (headshake). This simple yet sophisticated answer can provide evidence that Koko is able to communicate with humans even if the form of the sentence is not correct the way people would assume it to be. However, because Koko has her own grammar system of rules it allows for the combination of those words into meaningful sentences. This could also be seen in human language, if the sentence formatting was wrong we would still be able to decipher what the message is trying to saying. Another example that can be seen of a symbolic behavior of language is when Koko says, " people apple give me. Penny recognizes the signs that Koko gives, therefore both have an understanding

for each other's sign even if the sign are arbitrary. Furthermore, I would consider Koko a speaker of language. A language is the capacity of acquiring and using complex systems of communication. All languages rely on the process of semiosis to relate sign to particular meanings. There are many examples in the transcript that show Koko relying on language as a way to convey a message. For example, when Koko says, "Browse for there hurry," Koko is relying conveying an action to relate to a sign which is food to convey a meaning, which is for Penny to hurry up and give her food. Human language is thought to convey of two parts; one is lexicon and second is grammar. Koko is able to communicate with her translator Penny with her own lexicon, which would be 1000 words of sign language and who also understand over 2000 words of spoken English. Koko is able to convey her thoughts into sign that Penny is able to understand. For example, when Koko says, "mouth give me." Koko uses sign to communicate with Penny, telling her to give her food.

Because linguistic signs are arbitrary, Penny and Koko both had to have an understanding with each other, they both had to agree to assign a valuable meaning on that specific sign. Language separates us from others and because we cannot determine whether animals have "thought," many people can say that Penny is interpreting small gestures and actions into a series language that many not actually be within Koko's intellectual capacity. I still believe that Koko is a speaker because language is a natural organism, that grows and evolves in accordance with fixed laws and not determinable by the will of humans.

Since Koko is able to form her own sentence using her lexicon, I would consider her to a speaker of language. Language is not a function of the speaker, but it is passively assimilated, that too could mean the same to for Koko. In addition, I believe that these transcripts do not provide sufficient evidence to decide whether Koko is a speaker of language or not. Although I believe Koko is understandable of human language there are further question to address. Koko could just be one in a million chance that is able to comprehend human language or it could all be sign and actions misinterpreted into a so called language.

To further conclude that this is not the case, I would need to have more information on other cases of gorillas that can also speak in American Sign Language. This could further prove that Koko is just not an extraordinary case but it is seen in other gorillas. I would also like more information on Koko's life and if she chosen for any specific reasons as for learning Sign Language. Did she show more intellectual capacities than other gorillas? I would also like to know if Koko only uses American Sign Language as the only form of communication with others or does she resort to her natural way of communication with humans and other gorillas.

I would also like to know the process of teaching her American Sign Language and how she interacted back in the process of learning. This information could give me a clear understanding for the reasons why she was she and give me evidence that she was actually thought something and was not misguided or misinterpreted into something that it truly was not. In conclusion, Koko is a very special gorilla that I believe is a speaker of language because she is able to understand and comprehend rational ideas.

Language is always changing, words are always being added, Koko has her own language that is understood through her translator Penny, she is not only able to communicate but one is led to believe she is capable of rationalize thoughts and comprehension of sign language. Although her ideas may not be clear she has an understanding of the human language that is clear enough for the human to interpret what it is she is trying to say. Koko has her own lexicon and grammar to which in turn provides a meaningful sentence that not only she can understand but to Penny as well.