

Theory of knowledge (tok) – language



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TOK Essay – Language??? Does language play roles of equal importance in different areas of knowledge??? Language, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary is ??? the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way???. However, in Theory of Knowledge we see that it is so much more than that, as the Oxford Dictionary limits language to ??? the use of words in a structured and conventional way???, whereas we see that words do not have to be used to communicate something to another being, as we are often able to communicate to animals which do not understand our system of communicating, as well as in body language, where we even subconsciously convey to others. However one may question whether language plays roles of equal importance in different areas of knowledge, especially in the four most contrasting areas: history, art and mathematics.? Language as a concept is abstract, as we as humans have named something that was not invented; it simply exists as part of the many laws of nature.

Organisms need to communicate with one another in order to qualify as being alive. Language is a method of communicating with other organisms. It is not only a very specific concept, as it has one and only direct purpose, but also a vague one as there are almost infinite methods of communication. In history, language is used to preserve facts concerning past events and to then communicate these events to organisms present and/or in the future. In art, the purpose of language is a complex concept due to the great variety of the techniques of applying language in each of the sub-components of this

Area of Knowledge; including visual arts, performing arts, music, literature and many others.

In the scientific area of knowledge language is used to describe, communicate and analyse empirical data. In mathematics, the sole role of language is to convey the logic of the laws of the universe to us as humans. Language is used to a varying extent in each of these areas of knowledge, but in each it communicates in a certain way.

? History is only known through the continuous communication of past events that cannot be empirically perceived after they have occurred. Therefore, the manner in which these archival facts are presented to individuals in the present, can alter how one perceives the events that occurred. Exactly the same factual details can be presented in two differing ways as words can themselves imply different things according to the way that they are used.

? For example, the differences between the introductory sentence of two websites concerning the Nazi genocide during World War II demonstrate how the same facts can be distorted to create a certain impression on the reader simply by adding several words to a sentence. On a German website, the introductory sentence translated into English states: ??? An estimated six million people were killed in the Holocaust.??? ([http://www. dieterwunderlich. de/](http://www.dieterwunderlich.de/)). This statement contains no subjective language, and is simply a statement of the fact that around six million people were killed. However, on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's website, the first sentence one sees on their website is: ??? The Holocaust was the systematic, <https://assignbuster.com/theory-of-knowledge-tok-language/>

bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

??? (ushmm. org). We can immediately see the enormous difference between the short and non-subjective statement from the German website, contrasted with the almost aggressively emotionally laden language used on the USHMM website. The statement from the museum??™s website, instead of creating a neutral factual statement that would allow the reader to determine for themselves what emotions they feel towards the particular event, directly influences the reader's attitude towards the historical events that occurred. In order to maintain a fair and unbiased view of past events, the language that is used to relate history to present and future generations must be neutral and state facts as they are. Historians are obliged to examine both sides of a conflict in history in order to gain an unbiased and equitable view of these events, and are compelled to relate their findings in a manner of the same fashion. In the area of knowledge known as art, it is incredibly difficult to determine the true role of language due not only to the different ways that every individual interprets a piece, but also because there are many different types of art.

Using visual arts such as paintings to narrow down the true purpose of language in this area of knowledge will reveal the essence of its complexity. Art itself is language as each piece has the potential to communicate something to the viewer, and does not simply depict something in the real world. One must look deeper than the surface to determine what the artist was trying to communicate to his or her audience. In Picasso??™s Guernica, depicting the bombing of the small town of the same name during the

Spanish Civil War. If one simply observes the painting without attempting to interpret it, then all that one sees is an abstract painting of human and animal like figures.

However, if one looks beyond the initial observation, the painting begins to communicate much more than abstract shapes. Every object and person in the painting symbolises the pain and suffering of the innocent civilians of Guernica. However, due to the nature of Language in this area of knowledge, interpretations vary widely between different individuals. Picasso himself when pressured to explain the painting states: ???...

this bull is a bull and this horse is a horse... If you give a meaning to certain things in my paintings it may be very true, but it is not my idea to give this meaning.

What ideas and conclusions you have got I obtained too, but instinctively, unconsciously. I make the painting for the painting. I paint the objects for what they are.

??? We can see from this quote how Picasso painted things as he saw them and the abstract nature of the painting was his subconscious portrayal of the suffering felt by those depicted, yet he leaves the continued interpretation of what is symbolised within the painting mysterious for it to communicate a divergent message to each individual that views it. One example of a difference in what an element of the painting communicates to it??™s audience is the difference between interpretations of the lightbulb at the top of the painting. The scholar Beverly Ray interprets it as a representation of the sun in dark times. However, Charlie LeBel of Paris interprets it as

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symbolising ??? the electric eye of the modern age which made the whole world audience to the Guernica atrocity???. The role of language in art is difficult to determine as one can say that art itself is language, or that there is no language in art, simply individuals??™ interpretation of what they perceive with their senses. The role of language in mathematics is straightforwardly that mathematics is itself a language based on pure logic. Mathematics will not exist in a different form in China than in Peru, as different spoken languages do.

However, in order to communicate efficiently to us as humans, mathematics often requires a translation from the symbols such as \pm , π , e , and i and the numerical values such as 6, 0.4, 374 and π . Without this translation, learning mathematics would be almost impossible.

It is the same with learning a new spoken language, one must begin with learning translations of words from a language that one already knows and then once the individual has a certain amount of knowledge of the language they are learning, they can begin to understand the behaviour and eccentricities of the new method of communication. Language has a different role in each of the areas of knowledge, depending on the extent to which the area of knowledge relies on communication to be understood. In the reliable conveying of history, language needs to be used in a neutral and unbiased manner in order for current and future inquirers to have the opportunity to make up their own mind on conflicts. In the arts, language is not used in the same manner as in the other areas of knowledge, as each individual interprets a piece in differing methods. However, mathematics is in itself a language based on pure logic, however in order to be understood it

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often needs to be translated into a spoken language in the same manner that one uses when learning a new spoken and/or regional language. Word

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