

Does language play a role of equal importance in different areas of knowing?

To answer this question properly there are some terms that need to be defined. First of all what is actually a language? It can be defined as a form of communication, mainly through the use of sounds and symbols. It is also one of the ways of knowing. Language can be divided into three different types. First there is body language, which has no significance in this essay so it will only be mentioned. Then there is written language. Here communication is through symbols that have been put together in order to form chains of symbols which have a meaning that has been agreed upon. Lastly there is spoken language. Spoken language works in the same way as written language, only here sounds are used instead of symbols. Both spoken and written languages are abstract and concrete.

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The areas of knowing also have to be addressed. Since they will be explained in more depth later on in the essay they will only be stated here. They are: the arts, the natural sciences, ethics, math, the social sciences and history.

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The most important term to define in this essay is « equal importance ». Equal importance is the degree of significance things have. In other words if one thing should be preferred over an other. In this essay equal importance is comparing whether written and spoken language have the same weight in communication in the different areas of knowing.

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Spoken language is defined as a « phonic substance »¹, in other words, it is made up of sounds that you can make and hear. These sounds can change between different places, and the person who is being talked to can often influence the sounds that are being used. An example of this is a child. In the beginning when he or she is a baby, a language consistent of simple sounds is being used, then as the child grows the sounds in the language become more and more complicated.

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¹ David Crystal. The Cambridge encyclopaedia of the English language. Cambridge University Press. 1995.

Spoken language is also addressed directly to the listener, which in most cases means that it is more personal. It will also be more spontaneous since the speaker can be affected by factors such as the body language of the person the speaker is speaking to. In spoken language there are also many different variations of the language, such as slang or various dialects.

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Written language is defined as a « graphic substance »², in other words, it is symbols that can be understood by looking at them, just like the letters and words in this essay. Whereas spoken language is a direct and spontaneous language, written language is meant to be read later than when it is written and therefore more work may have been put into it. In many cases this will also make the text more organized.

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Written language can be written over and over again until the writer is satisfied with the work, this can not be done in spoken language. This allows the writer to correct mistakes and when the final result is finished no one will know about them. The fact that written language is kept as documents will also make them easier to keep. This will allow us to have things such as historical documents that are written in the past.

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Although there is a distinct division between these two types of language, each of them can be the other. For example; a teleprompter is used in places like news programs on TV. Here someone has written down exactly what the news anchor is supposed to say. The news anchor knows a special technique which allows him or her to read exactly what is written and make it look like he or she isn't reading what they are saying.

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The arts are neither written nor spoken, although musical lyrics may be counted as spoken language. The arts are a way of communicating emotions. This does so that not everyone can understand that it is a form of communication. Words or symbols can be important aspects of paintings, just like lyrics to a song, but this is not true for all. Therefore it can be said that neither written nor spoken language have any significant importance to the arts.

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² David Crystal. The Cambridge encyclopaedia of the English language. Cambridge University Press. 1995.

In the natural sciences both written and spoken languages are used, but they differ greatly. The spoken language that names the actual names of compounds are used in most cases, however the names of the biggest compounds are not spoken because they are too complex. For the written language the natural sciences almost have its own language. This language consists of notation, and it is mainly used for naming compounds. A notation would have a different spoken name, which could also be written the spoken way. An example of this is NaCl, which in full terms would mean sodium chloride, which to most people is common table salt.

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For most people ethics is something they have learnt through common sense or things they were told during their childhood and adolescence. Ethics mainly consists of oral traditions and things we have been told, and later on in life conclusions we draw based on the things we have been told. However, there have been written books about ethics, but then again this is just spoken ideas that have been written down. So it can be said that spoken language is more important to ethics than written language.

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In math there is not a complete spoken language because there are many things that cannot be said so that they make sense. However it is a complete written language. If someone who knows mathematical language sees the equation $x+y=37$ they will understand what it means and from the context they will know what to do in order to solve the problem. Therefore it can be said that written language is more important in math than spoken language.

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In the social sciences the most important thing is to be able to speak to others. In order to get information it is important to ask people questions and listen to what they have to say. Questionnaires can be used in order to get information as well, but in a way this is the same as interviewing people. You can also have various written terms such as medical and economic terms. Although these mainly are written they can be spoken as well, so they will not have a big importance when it comes to finding the most important language. Therefore we can see that spoken language is most important in the social sciences because it is the main way information and knowledge is communicated.

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In history there are several documents such as movies and recorded speeches that are

very important. However there are far more documents that are written, and many of the speeches are also saved as transcripts. Through documents such as the Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Mayan inscriptions historians have learnt a great deal about the past. Here it can be seen that everything that is written down is easier to keep, mainly because it can be stored away for years without any of the information getting lost, and it can still be read sometime in the future. This can be done with things such as speeches as well, but since the quality decreases for each time they are played, and since technology is improving so rapidly, it will be more difficult to play them in the future. Therefore it can be seen that written documents are a better way of keeping documents, and since that is how we have learnt so many things about the past, written language is more important than spoken language in history.

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To conclude it can be said that language does not play a role of equal importance in the different areas of knowing. It varies from area to area, and the different types of language have different levels of importance on the areas of knowing. However it can be said that language is least important in the arts, because spoken and written language as we know it is not used that much.

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It can also be concluded that written language in many cases is more important than spoken language. This can be seen in history, math and the natural sciences. However, it is difficult to agree upon the levels of importance in many areas because different people will rate the importance level differently.

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