I recently had a discussion with Jacob Mitchell regarding how we label certain types of computers. One of the first questions between us was “can Apple computers be considered as a PC or personal computer?” Now, within computer enthusiast circles, the label of PC is usually applied to computers that use Microsoft’s Windows, or more generally/commonly: computers that aren’t made by Apple; if I go to ‘Ebay.com’ to look at computers, which I have done a lot recently, we can see that computers there are separated by PC and Apple. But one observation that I made was that if we consider what PC really stands for, it refers to a personal computer, a computer used in everyday life, a daily driver as some computer enthusiasts call their main computers; and if we follow this definition, then pretty much all laptops and desktop computers should be considered PCs, including the Apple computers. I think the important question that relates this to ToK is “How do we know the definition of a PC? Did we learn the definition from other people, or did we consider the definition ourselves?” Certainly for the common definition of PC, has been learned from other people, but if we consider what it means for a computer to be a PC, we see that all of our daily computers are personal computers, we label our computer as a personal one.

We can consider this from another perspective. If we are asked if a computer is a personal computer, we would have to know how the computer is used, and how many people use it. For example, consider a computer in a library, anyone can access them, and anyone can use them if you have your library card. I do not consider this computer to be a personal computer as it is not reserved for any one person, perhaps it is while a person uses it, but it is not one specific person at all times. Or if we are considering our own laptop that we do all of our work, and play all of our games on, I consider this computer to be a personal computer as we know that the computer is ours at all times, and we use it all the time as it seems.

There was also one other question between us: “Can a computer be both a PC and a server at one time?” For context, if a computer is a server, then it is running some software that makes it an important node in a network with other computers; servers put simply, serve data to other computers, hence the name of the label. Some common servers are those that host websites or databases as another computer can send/request data to/from other computers. Commonly, servers are dedicated computers that run by themselves without other people interacting with them, and are likely large computers that are hidden away from all people. The main question here is whether the status of being a server, and a pc is mutually exclusive or not. I argue that they are not mutually exclusive as I have used a PC as a server. I think that the label of being a server is not within the hardware of a computer itself, but in the software that is running on the computer. I have personally ran server software on a computer that I would consider to be a PC.

I think that the fact that we are having this discrepancy shows that the computer enthusiast community has not considered properly the relationship between all of these labels. I think it also shows that utility of items affects our knowledge of said knowledge, as most people think of a server computer to not be a personal computer; a server computer is not usually used as a typical personal computer. Because if you are running server software on a computer, you have probably planned to use it as a daily computer for work.

This shows that things that are common affect the shared knowledge of knowers, people who enter the computer enthusiast community search for information and understanding of the terminology and simply learn what the rest of the community has agreed upon, and the newcomers would not consider for themselves the denotation of the terminology. I think that as a knower, I would look for commonly mentioned terms in any part of my hobbies and life in general perhaps, and consider whether the common connotation of a term and it’s denotation, as I do not think that I have done that before.