

Theory of Knowledge exhibition written commentary

Prompt 10. What challenges are raised by the dissemination and/or communication of knowledge?

Theme: Knowledge and the knower

Word Count: 950

In this commentary, I explore how the generalisation of knowledge sources, underlying assumptions, a lack of objectivity, and the method of explanation lead to the challenges of miscommunication, discrimination, and misinterpretation in the communication/dissemination of knowledge.

Object 1: Page 205 from *Collins easy learning Spanish Verbs & Practice book*

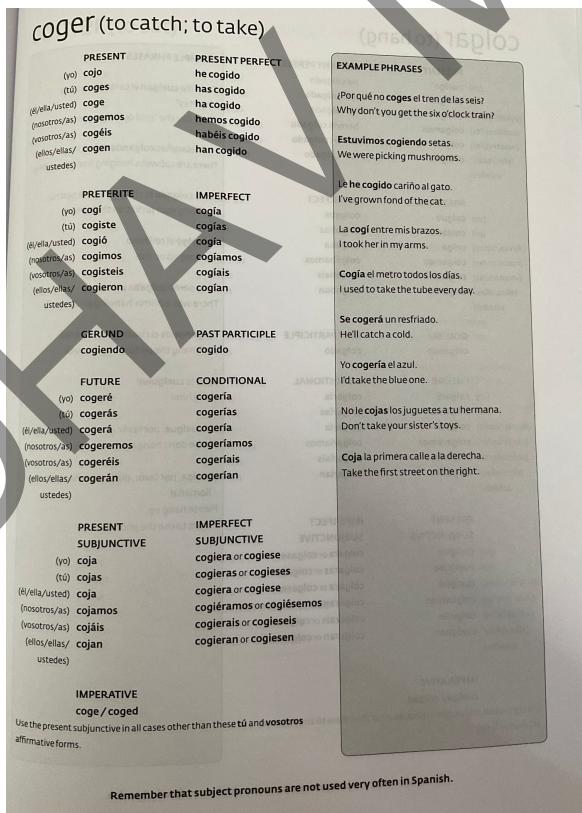


Fig 1. Page 205 from *Collins easy learning Spanish Verbs & Practice book* by Collins (Collins, 205)

Spanish is the national language of 21 countries with over 116.70 million speakers worldwide (Worlddata). As a Castilian Spanish learner, I use resources, like this book, specifically dedicated to this variant. I presumed differences between variants of Spanish boiled down to vocabulary and idioms, not basic components of language like verbs—a reasonable assumption since Castilian Spanish and Mexican Spanish are considered very similar.

The word “coger” means “to take” in Castilian Spanish (Collins); however, in most Latin American countries it has a vulgar and sexually suggestive connotation (“Coger meaning”).

After accidentally offending and simultaneously confusing a native Mexican speaker by using this word, I now understand that the challenge faced in this communication of knowledge is the miscommunication that would occur between me, the knower, and the person I was talking to. Many resources, like this object, do not include warnings/explanations in order to avoid potential misunderstandings between a learner and a native speaker. This increases the chance of miscommunication as it is unlikely the person I am communicating with would know the variant of Spanish I learned, the level of understanding I have of other variants, and whether I intended to use that word in the first place.

Therefore, the onus lies on me to understand the cultural differences and contexts between languages and their variants, especially for one spoken so widely. However, this is difficult when this book, which I rely heavily on, generalises the knowledge it contains and assumes that it caters to everyone’s needs.

This object also illustrates how disseminators of knowledge, the author in this case, have a responsibility to understand the primary audience of their knowledge and not assume they do not require a sound understanding of cultural differences solely because they are beginners of a language. This will help avoid knowledge gaps which would otherwise lead to the challenge of miscommunication.

Object 2: *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will) by Leni Riefenstahl



Fig 2. Poster for the film *Triumph des Willens* (Poster).

Triumph des Willens (TDW) is a German propaganda documentary directed by Leni Riefenstahl and released in 1935. It focuses on the 6th Nuremberg Rally—a Nazi Party (NP) rally held in 1934. This movie is considered an excellent example of how film can be used to disseminate propaganda (“1935: Triumph”) as it cleverly employs stylistic elements to glorify Adolf Hitler and the NP (“1935: Triumph”).

TDW depicts Hitler as a powerful leader and obscures their horrific ideology of trying to establish a pure Aryan population, thus showing a skewed perspective of the NP.

While the movie was greatly acclaimed at the time by German society (MoMA), it is now condemned for promoting anti-semitic ideas and furthering the Nazi cause which ultimately led to the deaths of over six million people (United States Holocaust).

The main challenge that was raised by the dissemination of the knowledge in the movie was the discrimination and persecution of the Jewish—and other—communities by the NP. Riefenstahl, the knower, was unaware of the impacts of her movie until after it was released and of the extent to which the knowledge she disseminated would be exploited in order to further the NP's cause. Thus, knowers not only have a responsibility to have the foresight of what their knowledge could be used for but also maintain objectivity in the dissemination of knowledge. A lack of objectivity can cloud the judgment of many individuals and prevent them from truly understanding the impacts that the knowledge they are consuming can have.

However, one must also consider whether it is fair to judge the knowledge Riefenstahl disseminated from a retrospective lens. Riefenstahl's spatial and temporal context was 1930s Nazi Germany wherein propaganda was considered a strategic military tool (PBS). Thus, the environment she was in clearly affected the knowledge she disseminated.

Nevertheless, the knowledge that Riefenstahl disseminated contributed to the persecution and deaths of millions of people.

Object 3: *Aṣṭādhyāyī* by Pāṇini

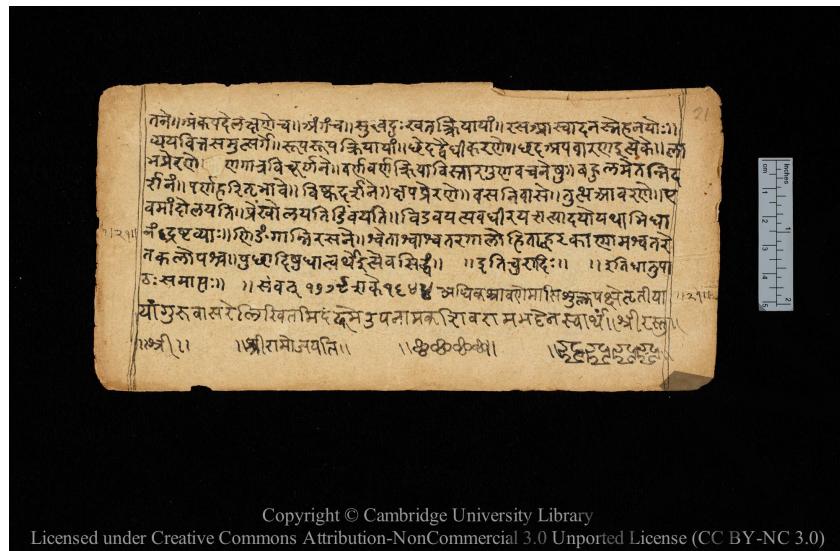


Fig 3. Manuscript from the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (Pāṇini.)
<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk//view/MS-ADD-02351/42>

The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is a series of 8 books composed by the Indian grammarian Pāṇini in 6 BCE (Britannica). It contains rules that detail how to compose grammatically accurate sentences in Sanskrit—an ancient Indian language. These rules are known for being notoriously difficult to interpret.

In total, the series contains approximately 4000 rules that were explained using as few words as possible (Rajpopat). Hence, the sheer density of knowledge made interpreting the rules themselves difficult.

A problem arose wherein multiple rules could be applied to form a sentence. To counter this, Pāṇini created a meta-rule (a rule-governing rule) that would help scholars decide which rule had to be applied. This meta-rule was so brief that it was only three words, and was consequently interpreted incorrectly (Rajpopat) as sentences formed by applying the meta-rule were not grammatically accurate. This incorrect interpretation was considered an unsolved problem in linguistics for over 2,500 years.

The nature of the Sanskrit academic community is such that scholars follow the interpretations of other scholars (Learn Sanskrit Online). This led to the misinterpretation of the meta-rule being disseminated even further and the problem remaining unsolved. This poses a problem as Sanskrit scholars, the knowers, are knowledge authorities and therefore are expected to propagate credible information.

The *Aṣṭādhyāyī* also assumes entrenched prior knowledge of other Sanskrit works (Learn Sanskrit Online). Thus, scholars with varying levels of personal knowledge would interpret the text differently, further leading to the dissemination of conflicting interpretations. As a result, there is an inherent “loss of truth” in the knowledge shared by the Sanskrit community.

This object shows that the method through which knowledge is disseminated is important. By using a terse method and one that assumes prior knowledge, Pāṇini left his rules up to interpretation, which led to the challenge of misinterpretation and subsequently a problem in linguistics that remained unsolved until 2022 (Williams).

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