ToK Commentary

IA Prompt 22: What role do experts play in influencing our consumption or acquisition of knowledge?

Introduction

This IA prompt aims to establish a connection between expert influence and the process of learning. Per my understanding of ToK, experts can usually play one of three roles in individuals' acquisition of knowledge: an exemplary role, an interpretive role, and a self-inquisitive role. The objects I have chosen reflect examples of these three roles from my everyday life.

Magic: The Gathering CCG Deck

The first object is a deck called Gruul Control from Magic: The Gathering, a combat card game that I've been playing since elementary school. The deck is important to my exhibition because it is symbolic of the first of the three roles of an expert I have identified: the exemplary role.

Gruul Control is a deck archetype that I first saw being used by my favorite MtG player, MegaMOgwai. After watching his livestreams, I was intrigued to try out this deck archetype for myself, and it proved to be incredibly effective across my games. Understanding Mogwai's deckbuilding process dramatically improved my understanding of concepts such as mana curve, matchup wincons, etc., which are forms of knowledge relevant to the scenario. Experts in the exemplary role often set a standard that learners aim to follow, and in the gaming world, this is called a meta. Visible in the example, any tactics that experts create or use quickly become the meta among gamers—the community of knowers for this example. Therefore, experts play an exemplary role in our acquisition of knowledge; by following in

the footsteps of an expert, individuals' understanding of certain processes or subjects improves significantly.

However, there are limitations to this role, just like the other two. In the exemplary role, the limitation to experts' impact on our acquisition of knowledge is their inability to directly influence the knower's interaction with knowledge. This limitation is evident in the example. There are two components to games such as MtG: creating a deck, and piloting it, and the latter is a process that experts cannot dictate for you—you must learn what cards to play and at what times, and how to adapt the deck to your opponent by yourself.

Philadelphia Eagles @ New York Giants NFL Game Log

The second object is a copy of the official National Football League gamebook for the (American) football game between the Philadelphia Eagles and the New York Giants in Week 10 of the 2020 NFL season. I've been a diehard football fan since age 6, and this gamebook is important to my understanding of the knowledge question because it illustrates the second role I identified: the interpretive role.

The NFL publishes detailed game logs for every game of the season. These are usually more than six pages long, replete with complex statistics that are almost impossible to understand and contextualize in a vacuum. However, when analyzed by professional statisticians or coaches, these stats can uncover new knowledge about the performance

of certain schemes over time or the development of diamonds-in-the-rough that nobody has noticed. It was after analyzing this very game, for example, that leading statistical source PFF (Pro Football Focus) noted that Giants linebacker Blake Martinez could be a dark horse candidate for the NFL's Pro Bowl. This object therefore shows the interpretive role experts can play in knowers' acquisition of new knowledge; trained statisticians and scouts who write at PFF were able to interpret otherwise abstract tables, diagrams, and jargon to generate knowledge that is easily understood by the average fan.

A limitation to this role, however, is the possibility for multiple experts to interpret knowledge in ways that run contrary to each other. This can cause a lack of clarity on the true nature of the knowledge in question.

'A World Without Whom' by Emmy Favilla
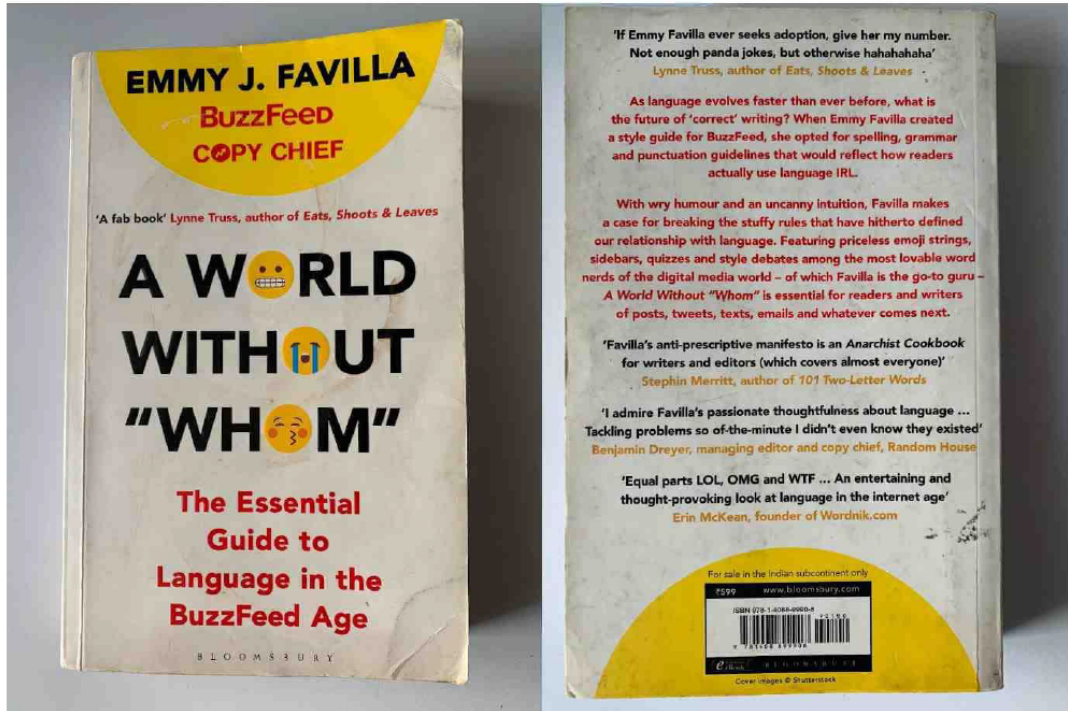
The third object is a non-fiction book by the global copy chief of BuzzFeed Inc., Emmy Favilla, titled "A World Without Whom." It examines the changing linguistic trends in the 21st century as a result of the advent of social media.

This book focuses on new perspectives on English language conventions—as individuals and linguists shift from prescriptivist to descriptivist mindsets. The book closely examines the nature of internet-driven language in molding how humans communicate, how language has adapted to be less discriminatory, and how globalization has caused the emergence of pidgin languages like Spanglish, Franglais, etc. It therefore aptly embodies the third expert role in knowers' individual acquisition of knowledge, making it relevant to the exhibition. It allows readers to reflect on common knowledge, in

this case, their knowledge of English and how it may be inaccurate or outdated. Readers of Emmy Favilla's book are able to reconsider what they know and believe about language and uncover their biases within the subject. The book therefore fulfills the self-inquisitive role of an expert, causing readers to reconsider existing knowledge, and perhaps form new knowledge altogether using new perspectives.

A limitation of this role of an expert, however, is that knowers tend to be drawn to contrarian perspectives to seek novelty—this can lead to widespread misinformation if not verified. However, experts are usually cognizant of this possibility and communicate contrarian knowledge accordingly.