

Language and Karate-Do

A Comparison of Self-Preservation Systems



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INTRODUCTION

Identification

This thesis applies to two kinds of systems in our human world: 1) Language - A type of communication system; 2) Karate Do - A type of self-preservation system.

Purpose

This thesis has the following purposes:

- To provide a brief overview of Language and Karate-Do as Systems, in order to support a comparison in that respect
- To persuade the reader that Language compares to Karate-Do in several ways, not the least of which is that they are both systems intended, in part, for self-preservation.
- To show that Language is a necessary system for humans, especially for Self-Preservation, while Karate-Do per se is not.
- Lastly, to pique the reader's interest in learning a new spoken or written language :)

Target Audience

With these purposes outlined above in mind, this thesis specifically targets the audience who are already familiar with, considering practicing, or currently practicing some form of martial arts or hand-to-hand combat art or sport (e.g., any style or variation of Karate, Judo, Ju-Jitsu, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Muay Thai, Tae Kwon Do, Kung Fu, Vovinam, Wrestling [Greco-Roman, Collegiate], Boxing, Kickboxing, Mixed Martial Arts [MMA], or even the modern international version of the Ancient Greek unarmed combat sport known as Pankration, etc.)

OVERVIEW OF THE TWO SYSTEMS

Language and Karate-Do are indeed systems in their own right, since a system is “an **arrangement** of **parts** or elements that together exhibit behavior or **meaning** that the individual constituents do not.”

Function - In order to exhibit *meaning*, a system must perform at least one function useful to at least one stakeholder. For example, an iPhone is a system because it has components (i.e., *parts*) arranged in such a way that the smart phone *as a whole* can perform the *function* of

carrying out phone calls (voice communication) between two or more users. By itself, no single part of the phone can fully carry out any phone call.

External Interface - In order for a user to use any system, there must be an interface between the user and that system. Since the user is often considered external to the system of interest, this type of interface is considered external. In the iPhone example, one interface between the phone user and the iPhone is the multi-touch screen that allows one to use applications to request phone calls. Other user interfaces in this example are the iPhone's mic and the iPhone's speaker.

Internal Interface - In order for one part of the system to interact with any other part of that system, there must be an interface between those two parts. Since the interacting parts are internal to the system, their interface to each other is an internal interface, relatively to the system.

Environment and External Systems - A system of interest does not stand alone. It is sometimes, if not often, part of another larger system. A system is always surrounded by some physical environment. It often must interact with some external systems.

So in summary, a system: must provide a service or perform some meaningful function; has at least two parts; has at least one external interface; has at least one internal interface; it has external physical environment; it may have to interact with external system (e.g., technological systems, bio-mechanical systems such as human users)

Language as a System

Language is a system because it satisfies all the "what is a system" criteria above.

Function - A primary function of Language is to use it to communicate with others. The nature of Language is the stakeholder needs it satisfies. Stakeholders need the Language system in order to express/give/instill thoughts, ideas, needs, wants, desires, wishes, information, knowledge, warnings, notices, emotions, gratitude, persuasions, etc. Some reasons (rationale) for such needed uses of Language are: to gain or retain trust, favor, needed or wanted resources; to teach; to assist; to love; to transfer knowledge; defend oneself, to deter enemies; to win unavoidable conflicts, especially when they threaten human life or national sovereignty.

External Interfaces - The people who use the system of Language (i.e., everyone alive) must have at least one mechanism to learn, use, teach, maintain the language.

Parts - In order to perform its intended functions (its uses), the Language system has various conceptual subsystems: Speaking, Listening, Interpreting, Writing, Reading , a set of one or more languages, each of which has forms.

The forms of any particular language consist of perceivable signs transmitted or “shown” by one party with the intent of them being received in context and interpreted by the recipient(s) as intended by the transmitter. Signs (symbols) in Language may be of many kinds (e.g., nonverbal, vocal, words only.¹) Components of a Language System include the components of a language itself: words, vocabulary, parts of speech (noun, adjective, verb, adverb, subject, predicate, preposition, preposition phrase, sentence, question, punctuation, emphasis). Written language has writing systems consisting of graphical symbols (e.g., Kanji character set, English alphabet, syllabaries like Japanese’ Katakana and Hiragana). Language Teaching mechanisms (e.g., books, lessons with learning objectives, dictionaries, evaluation subsystems with measures, standards.) Spoken language forms include phonetic parts: consonants, vowels, intonation, syllabic emphasis, speed of speech, accent (native vs. non-native).

Internal Interfaces - Every conceptual subsystem must interface to at least one other subsystem or component of the system. Otherwise, the conceptual subsystem would serve no purpose in the Language system. For example, in order for communication to occur, the Speaking subsystem provides sequences of spoken symbols / signs (in a language) to the Listening subsystem.

Physical Environment - The system of Language is used throughout the world, of course, but in several types of physical environments whether outdoors or indoors: forests, fields, stadiums, schools, offices, homes, brick and mortar shops and stores, cyber space, and yes, of course, dojos, just to name some. The particular attributes of the physical environment can drive the need for specific environmental interfaces and also impact how well the Language System performs. For example, communicating by voice in a large auditorium or temple with poor acoustics can be significantly different than having a conversation with someone in the family room.

Karate-Do as a System

Just as Language is a system, Karate-Do is a system too. Karate-Do has a primary function; it consists of parts and external interfaces with external systems; the parts have internal interfaces, and an external physical environment.

Functions: A primary function of Karate-Do is to provide a way of improving the mind, body, and spirit of oneself and of the community of Karate practitioners in the dojo through the teaching, learning, and practice of Karate.

¹ How Much of Communication is Non-verbal -

<https://online.utpb.edu/about-us/articles/communication/how-much-of-communication-is-nonverbal/#:~:text=The%2055%2F38%2F7%20Formula&text=He%20found%20that%20communication%20is,%2C%20and%207%25%20words%20only.> (Accessed 14 JULY 2024)

External Interfaces: Karate-Do as System interacts with a community. The system requires physical space (real estate), typically relies on available utilities and transportation of infrastructure of the city, town, or village. Karate-Do works in hot, warm, and cold climates, so it must have mechanisms to adapt to each.

Physical Environment: Climates, Plazas,

With that written, as an active learner of Karate and an aspiring practitioner of Karate-Do with approximately 6 years of cumulative experience at the time of this writing, I tend to characterize Karate Do as a system for Self Defense ultimately aimed at optimal Self-Preservation, not inconsistent with Nagamine's discussion of Karate-Do in his book titled "The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do". In light of this characteristic and what it means to be a system, I view myself at once as being all of the following:

a part of the system of Karate-Do; a trainee of the system; a user of the system; an operator of the system; a maintainer of the system; an input into the system; an output, from the system, that **is not only better (more well preserved) version than my previous input self**, but also an output that feeds back into the Karate-Do system as a new "input" each time I elect to engage in Karate practice and go to Karate class; both a subject *and* an object, since I am part of the system as well as an input and transformed output; a student (of and in the system) who is not only training to become a worthy beginner and ever-improving karateka, but also aspiring, learning, and practicing to be an instructor/teacher/trainer of and within the system.

LANGUAGE AND SELF-PRESERVATION

Human Beings Need Language

Two things that almost all human beings have in common are the ability and the necessity to communicate using language. For the vast majority of people, notwithstanding the overwhelming dominance of "body language", structured language is spoken, first and foremost. For most who can see and have the faculties of using their hands, language is also written so that it can be read. For the deaf, visible sign language is particularly important. For the blind, listening is extremely important. For those who can neither see nor hear (e.g., Helen Keller), relying solely on some combination of the remaining three senses (touch, smell, and taste) is crucial, with touch arguably being the most important of the three (e.g., direct physical contact with people as a substitute for real-time "spoken" language; and braille as an effective form of "reading", reasoning of space/size/shape, and pattern recognition.)

Language, Effective Communication, Joy and Meaning

One of the reasons that language is important for humans is because we are complex, intelligent, **social** beings. For most of us, interacting and sharing with others in varying degrees by communicating adds meaning and joy to our lives. After all, we create, maintain, and feel a connection, we form bonds with others through communication.

But communication is only carried out effectively if each party in the affair ultimately understands what the other is trying to convey. Language provides a structured and familiar mechanism to facilitate such communication. Without the use of some true, structured language, while communication between two or more individuals would be possible, it would be ad hoc and terribly inefficient at best. Since people are sometimes impatient (e.g., they often have places to go, people see, things to do) Therefore, structured language is

Language is necessary for Self-Preservation

Effective communication, and therefore language, is not only meant to add significance and happiness to our lives, it is necessary for **self-preservation**. Even if joy and meaningful existence were no object, if we were to go without communicating, we would not only be far less likely to acquire essential resources for survival (food, shelter, water, etc.) but also inept to avoid conflict with individual or collective strangers (foreign or domestic) with whom we might come into contact while traveling, migrating, emigrating, or immigrating.

As a brief example, consider the Pilgrims who came to the New World in the 15th century. Had the Pilgrims not used some form of compelling sign language (combined with appropriate “body” language), the otherwise cooperative native North Americans would not have welcomed them or exchanged important information, tips, or necessary goods. Had the Pilgrims not been able to or had they chosen not to effectively communicate using at least one practical language within their own group, they would not have successfully completed (perhaps not even begun) the trip westward across the Atlantic in the first place.

KARATE-DO & SELF-PRESERVATION

Human Beings Need A System that helps with Mind, Body, and Spirit

Just as humans need Language for reasons provided above, everyone of us needs a system that helps with Mind, Body, and Spirit.

Mind: Kokoro - Karate-Do does helps the Mind through learning and teaching techniques, stances, steps, kata, commands, mental and physical challenges, mokuso, exercise and physical exertion also demands a mental attitude of perseverance to begin, sustain practice daily if not several times a week.

Body: Karate-Do elements such as Seiza, warm-ups (including calisthenics such as push-ups and sit-ups), proper stretching, and actual practices of drills of techniques, yakusoku kumite, kata repetition helps build and strengthen the muscles and joints, muscle memory. Makiwara helps condition key striking points of the body for strength and resilience in the face of high forces of impact.

Spirit: Ki - Karate-Do - (I want to believe this is the main reason I chose to re-engage in Karate after a 33-year hiatus.) Mind, Body, and Spirit are all linked, just like the Heart, Liver, and Kidney in human anatomy. If the Spirit is poor the mind suffers, and often the body is ignored or even overworked. The Spirit is what provides meaning to even having a healthy Body and Mind. For example, an extremely intelligent person certainly has very strong mental attributes in terms of knowledge and intellect. But if he is not spiritually sound, he is likely to become or already be emotionally or psychologically troubled more easily, or behave unwisely regarding certain important situations that pose health risks. Consider the numerous rock stars with extreme talent for playing musical instruments and writing poetic lyrics. The lyrics are beautiful, yet very sad, a cry for help applauded by those entertained by their music. Many of these people, in spite of the fame and recognition and praise, become depressed, start or increase use of addictive or otherwise harmful drugs. In spite of their financial success and world-reknown status of being geniuses and masters of their tradecraft, some having spouses and children, several rock stars have committed suicide or died of drug overdoses in recent years (e.g., Chris Cornell of Sound Garden).

If any of these rock stars had been involved in a positive, confidence-building system such as Karate-Do as child, adolescent, or young adult, they might not have ever become famous writing dark-yet-honest touching lyrics and melodies, but they would probably still be around today living productive, happy lives.

Karate-Do, Effective Communication, Joy and Meaning

Karate-Do requires effective communication between the student and the instructor(s).

Karate-Do employs language necessarily, structured language and even body language alike.

As mentioned above, Karate-Do helps MBS, which helps add Joy. Karate-Do is a system that helps bring meaning and drive to people's lives. It gives people tangible physical goals to strive for, learn, and practice.

Karate-Do Is Effective for Self-Preservation

As stated above, Language as a system is *necessary* for Self-Preservation, because, in so many words, humans as social beings cannot really function for very long and with much meaning without Language.

Karate-Do is not necessary for Self-Preservation. After all, Karate-Do is just one of many systems that can help with this triad essential to happiness, growth, maturity, and longevity. There are other Martial Arts, combat sports, and athletic sports that, when practiced for the right reasons, and purpose can aid with Self-Preservation. With that said, I played many years on organized teams of football, a few years of basketball, some soccer, one year of wrestling, three years of track, years of tennis as a leisure sport. None of these involves or brings what Karate-Do has brought to my life. I first experienced that difference when I first started learning Karate for a couple of years as a child in 1985.

We discussed above how Karate helps Mind, Body, and Spirit. If a healthy & happy mind, healthy body, and enriched Spirit is not necessarily a major part of Self-Preservation, I would like to see an example of a Self-Preservation system that does not include the MBS triad.

ADDITIONAL COMPARISON & CONTRAST

How Language is Similar to Karate-Do

Karate involves communication, instruction, learning of concepts and techniques, evaluation, advancement. Learning and practicing karate stimulates the mind and the spirit, as does Language learning. Language learning allows one to expand horizons and increase one's chances of learning more or enjoying oneself more if traveling to a foreign country or encountering someone who does not speak his language. Analogously, Karate-Do increases the chances of minimizing injury or increasing chances of survival or ability to aid or even protect a friend, family member, or stranger when the going gets tough.

Proper rest is required for both to make optimal gains in learning and improvement in technique, skill, abilities.

Nutrition plays a role in both.

Another observation is that Karate-Do even involves a limited set of Language instruction, practice (outside of Karate class), and actual usage (e.g., in Karate class).

At least some of these similarities directly or indirectly relate to Self-Preservation.

Both are very time consuming and require frequent practice (multiple times a week if not daily). Shorter, more frequent learning, practice, and usage sessions are better than very long, much less frequent.

Language learning and practicing Karate both bring me great pleasure (short-term) and contribute to my joy and happiness over the long run.

How Language Differs from Karate-Do

Obviously there are very many differences between Language learning and Karate-Do. To point out a couple: The details and depth of Language learning only goes so far in Karate-Do. For example, even though some language instruction is included, there is not necessarily any substantive treatment of grammar or actual conversation practice in Japanese or Okinawan.

Unlike Karate-Do, while Language is essential to Self-Preservation, and learning and applying a new language indirectly leads to improved mental health and acuteness, it does not have any significant direct impact on improved cardiovascular fitness, endurance. One must do physical exercise to gain in those areas.

While language learning and usage does require some preparation and some brain warm-up, explicit warm-up of the body and physical stretching are not necessary.

Speaking from experience of having learned to speak, read, and write two languages fluently (my native language of English, and Spanish) and having studied and practiced several other modern languages (including learning speak, read, and write different alphabets and writing systems) and can make the following assertions:

- Learning, practicing, and using a foreign language for practical purposes (e.g., when traveling abroad to places where my native language is not spoken or understood) is very rewarding.
- It makes me feel good about myself.
- It instills further confidence in me that I can continue learning that language, and adds building blocks that I can use when embarking on a venture to learn yet another language.
- But with all that said, Karate-Do brings something even more substantial, more valuable to me as a family member, father, friend, colleague, employee, and member of my community. It helps reinforce principles, values, behaviors, and practices that I have learned in my own Christian faith, that language learning does not.

CONCLUSION

Having analyzed and depicted Language as a kind of system used for Communication intended to achieve certain and varying ends for individuals and groups alike, one conclusion of this thesis is the notion that Language is not only a Communication system, but one that, when used properly, is essential to Self-Preservation. This is especially pertinent when understanding “Self” to mean not just the individual Self, but also the collective “Self”, whether it be a group with similar interests (e.g., a family, a dojo, an organization requiring membership, an enterprise, a community, an association, a federation) or a much broader collection of groups that certainly does not have all the same exact interests and goals, but nonetheless collectively shares an interest in preserving the Human Race as a whole (i.e., not even the worst of arch-enemies should desire for *everyone* to go extinct.)

While Language as a System is necessary for Self-Preservation, foreign language learning as a hobby can bring pleasure to those interested in, stimulated, and fascinated by it. Yet, foreign language learning is not only NOT generally necessary for Self-Preservation (at least not for most), I cannot even conclude that it would significantly help most with Self-Preservation. One could easily get lost in language lessons for days or weeks on end. I can speak from experience,

that this would not necessarily take them to any long-lasting place of Mind-Body-Spirit “substance”. Set practical goals, have a meaningful objective and you will enjoy the process.

Lastly, while Karate-Do is NOT necessary for Self-Preservation (there are other systems that could be used instead.), Karate-Do is indeed a practical and effective aid to Self-Preservation.

REFERENCES

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