

Investigating Time Horizon of Taiwanese Speakers: A Circle Test

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Abstract: In crosslinguistic investigations, expressions of TIME are closely connected to SPACE (Alverson, 1994; Boroditsky, 2000, 2011; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Radden, 2003; Haspelmath (1997). The manifestations of TIME IS SPACE metaphor should, however, be scrutinized from a relativist viewpoint. Different cultures' concepts of TIME may differ as a result of life experience, shared community beliefs, and available spatial representations. In cross-cultural communication, such differences may lead to communication breakdowns or misunderstandings, and should be tackled with extra prudence.

In this study, we use the Circle Test (Cottle 1976) to assess the concept of TIME in spatial representations. 61 Taiwanese college students were asked to draw three circles on a computer screen to respectively represent PRESENT, PAST, and FUTURE. The size, distance, and overlapping areas were analyzed, and the result shows that Taiwanese college students have a relatively larger zone for FUTURE, but only slightly bigger than NOW. The PAST is the smallest. Zone relatedness is found between now and future (33 out of 40/61), and now and past (33/61), but not for past and future (16/61). We also gave the same group of participants a duration inventory questionnaire (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997). Taiwanese college students are found to have long-termism. The average time zone of past is 6.18, and 6.13 for future. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) reported Hong Kong, as an extreme case of long-termism, had an average of 6.17 for past and 5.8 for future. In our study, we found Taiwanese college students had a prolonged concept of future, even longer than Hong Kong. Studies of time zone are an example of how human beings use spatial ideas to manage time, and how cultures differ in terms of perceived length or size of temporal domains. The data from Taiwan is expected to increase our understanding of time zone.