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The richness and flexibility of temporal thought across cultures, languages, and individuals

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Abstract

Our direct experience of time is limited to a few seconds, the conscious here and now. In order to support thought and reasoning about events and series of events that span longer intervals, the human mind draws upon other conceptual domains, chiefly, but not only, the domain of space. Through the operation of conceptual metaphor, time comes to be understood as an example of the source domain (e.g., a line), providing a stable grounding and allowing new inferential possibilities. In this talk we will survey the surprising variability of conceptual metaphors of time across cultures, languages, and individuals; we will peek on the images of time along history; and discuss different causes that lead to the establishment of a particular metaphor and its selection among the available alternatives in a given moment.

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