Complementarity of space and time in distance representations

Over 30 years ago Lakoff and Johnson (1980) pointed out that we systematically talk and think about time in spatial terms by metaphorical extension, but not vice-versa, which makes time asymmetrically dependent on space. However, in a recent study of space–time (dis)analogies in language, Langacker (2012) discusses certain linguistic parallelisms closely tied to time and space, which make it plausible to view space and time in a complementary manner. On the one hand, space is more basic as the object of conception, which is indicated by the direction of metaphorical conceptions of time in spatial terms. But on the other hand, the dynamicity of spatial conception, where time functions as the medium of conception, makes time more basic as the fundamental prerequisite for cognitive processing of space.

This paper demonstrates a complementarity of spatial and temporal representations of distance in language. Objectively verifiable frequencies of language patterns found in the British National Corpus show that in the semantic context of motion events English speakers have a tendency to denote distance in space both in spatial and temporal terms, with temporal representations being used more frequently. This inclination was found previously to occur for semantic attributes of motion manner and instrument (Walinski, 2013). This study demonstrates that a similar tendency can be found for the semantic aspect of motion medium. Taken together, the results indicate that in the semantic context of motion events neither time or space should be regarded as metaphorical extension of the other.

References

