

‘In search of flowing time: Evidence from tensed and tenseless languages’

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Abstract

The flow of time is a phenomenon that attracts attention of experts across many disciplines, from (i) astrophysics and metaphysics, where time is (normally) conceptualised as static dimension(s) of spacetime; through (ii) philosophy of mind and psychology, where the experience of the flow of time has engendered many different theories, ranging from the illusion of flow to realism about the flow; to (iii) linguistics, where the conceptualisation of the past, present and future, as well as the flow itself, have led to many theories in syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. In my talk, I focus on the representation of time in natural languages, considering examples of tensed as well as tenseless languages, in search of semantic universals that would explain the experienced time flow. I conclude that in spite of the considerable differences in which temporal reference is conveyed in languages, there is a discernible level of semantic universals, but these do not pertain to dynamicity of time but rather to the properties of the experiencing subject. These include the *ego*-perspective on eventualities (most importantly the epistemic commitment to what we *think* we experience) and the metarepresentational (‘semi-understood’) character of beliefs about time. I also briefly address the debates surrounding tense as a proposed syntactic universal, siding with those who deny its existence. Finally, I present an example of a contextualist-semantic representation of temporality in my theory of Default Semantics.