



Representation of Mental Timeline in the Language Structure of Persian Speakers

Hossein Matoori¹, Elkhas Veisi^{2*}, Bahman Gorjian³, Mehran Memari⁴

Received: 16/08/2019

Accepted: 22/04/2020

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the metaphors that has gained a lot of attention is “Time is Space”. This Metaphor is based on a theory that we perceive an abstract concept like time through a concrete concept like space and conceptualize it in our mind and language. To this end, the present research aims to examine space-time mapping in Persian based on conceptual metaphor theory proposed by Johnson & Lakoff to find out temporal frames of reference and their sources in Persian. To describe the relations, people have to choose a frame of reference, which is a coordinated system to describe relations between the movements of objects or events. Different cultures and speech communities have different construals of time. Three frames of reference to be investigated in Persian are adopted based on Levison’s (2006) model: Absolute, Intrinsic, and Relative. Other frames of reference to be examined are horizontal axes including sagittal (front to back and back to front) adopted from looking direction and linguistic metaphors which depict that future is front and past is back and lateral axis: right to left consistent with Persian writing/reading direction or left to right consistent with mathematics writing direction; however, vertical axis includes up-down and bottom-up axis as well as sagittal axis front to back and back to front.

2. METHOD

As a result, three tasks were designed for 137 male and female students ranging from 18 to 30 years of age at Islamic Azad University of Khorramshahr and Abadan Medical University.

Task 1: Arrangement of temporal stickers/tokens

Four time expressions including morning, afternoon, evening, and night were labeled on four stickers respectively. Participants had to arrange them on the table. No reference point was given.

In another similar task yesterday, today, and tomorrow were labeled on three

¹ Assistant Professor at Department of TEFL, Khorramshahr International Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khorramshahr, Iran; dr.matori@iaupg.ac.ir

² Associate Professor at Department of Linguistics, Payame Noor University, Iran (corresponding author); drvaisi@iaupg.ac.ir

³ Associate Professor at Department of General Linguistics, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Iran; b.gorjian@iauabadan.ac.ir

⁴ Assistant Professor at TEFL Department, Farhangian University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran; m.memari@cfu.ac.ir

stickers. Again, they had to arrange them on the table, however, 'today' regarded as the reference point.

Task 2: Picture arrangement

Participants were asked to arrange seven sets of three or four pictures that illustrate the growing stages of living beings such as chicken, beans, and human, as well as events like seasons, meals, building a tower, and presidents. The pictures had to be arranged on a table in sequence from the earliest to the latest stage. Meals, which are breakfast, lunch, and dinner, were given a reference point with lunch.

Task 3: Co-speech gesture

Two basic temporal concepts were chosen to examine frames of reference in Persian: tomorrow and yesterday. Participants were asked to use body gestures to demonstrate yesterday and tomorrow.

3. RESULTS

Task 1: Arrangement of temporal stickers/tokens

Two arrangements for both yesterday, today, and tomorrow as well as morning, afternoon, evening, and night illustrate that horizontal-lateral right to left pattern has the highest frequency of occurrence which is compatible with Persian writing direction. This frame of reference also demonstrates a timeline where right is earlier and left is later.

In addition, both tasks demonstrate an absolute frame of reference.

Task 2: Picture arrangement

All the seven task results point out that horizontal-lateral right to left pattern, that is % 61.62, has the highest frequency of occurrence which is compatible with Persian writing direction. Like task 2, this frame of reference also demonstrates a timeline where right is earlier and left is later. Meals had an intrinsic and the other 6 tasks had an absolute frame of reference.

Task 3: co-speech gesture

Horizontal-lateral right to left pattern gestures compatible with Persian writing direction, that is 46%, were used to act out future gestures; and horizontal-sagittal gestures incompatible with looking direction, walking direction, and linguistic metaphor were used to demonstrate yesterday.

Both tasks also show an absolute frame of reference.

Sample's percentage and frequency of occurrence illustrated that lateral axis from right to left adopted from Persian writing direction; sagittal axis back to front adopted from walking direction, looking direction, linguistic metaphors; lateral axis from left to right adopted from mathematics writing direction are the main sources of adoption of abstract temporal concepts in Persian. In addition, absolute frame of reference was the major frame of reference in all tasks. Intrinsic and relative frames of references were also respectively used by the participants.

4. CONCLUSION

This research implied that the adopted frame of reference and the type of sagittal or lateral axis are strongly influenced by the type of task, pattern and design of the experiment, the given concepts, language and linguistic metaphors, and cultural artifacts. Although biological evolution may have laid the groundwork for the basic spatial construal of temporal experience in the broadest sense, it is cultural evolution that has determined its complexities and specificities.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor; Persian Language; Time Line