


Language Matters

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Differences in expressing time

As a new year dawns, the occasion highlights our preoccupation with the measurement of time. We use calendars, diaries, watches, clocks and various other devices to keep track of time.

But how does language “keep time”? In grammar, we use the word “tense” to talk about time. But time is also expressed by adverbs, like *yesterday*, *tomorrow*, *soon*, and temporal expressions, like *on Monday* or *in July*. But tense is the grammatical machinery specifically designated to express time, and, typically, is found on words denoting actions (verbs).

English makes a distinction between present and past. For example, *the children play* denotes an event that takes place regularly but also at the time of speaking or writing, whereas *the children played* denotes an event that took place in the past (before the time of speaking/writing).

The present tense does not receive any special marking, but does take -s for some forms: *the clock ticks*, *she/he talks*, *Jane calls*, and it is seen as the default. The past tense is formed by adding the suffix -ed to verbs deemed to be “regular”: *frown-frowned*, *walk-walked*, *jump-jumped*.

Irregular verbs, like *see*, *go* and *know*, have different forms (*saw*, *went*, *knew*), which need to be learned separately. Although there are some patterns among irregular past tense verbs, speakers acquire these forms by rote learning, making irregular verbs highly unpopular with second language speakers.

And some verbs simply “hang” suspended between regular and irregular forms, with both forms being in use. Some speakers say *dreamed*, others *dreamt*, some say *texted*, while others use *text* for both present and past.

The waters get murkier when we look beyond past and present to future tense(s). Some scholars argue that English has only two tenses (present and past), because the future is expressed by means of a helping verb (auxiliary), *will* or *shall*: *the children will play*. Using auxiliaries is seen as “cheating”. Others propose a four-way tense system, encompassing past, present, future and near future: *the children are going to play*.

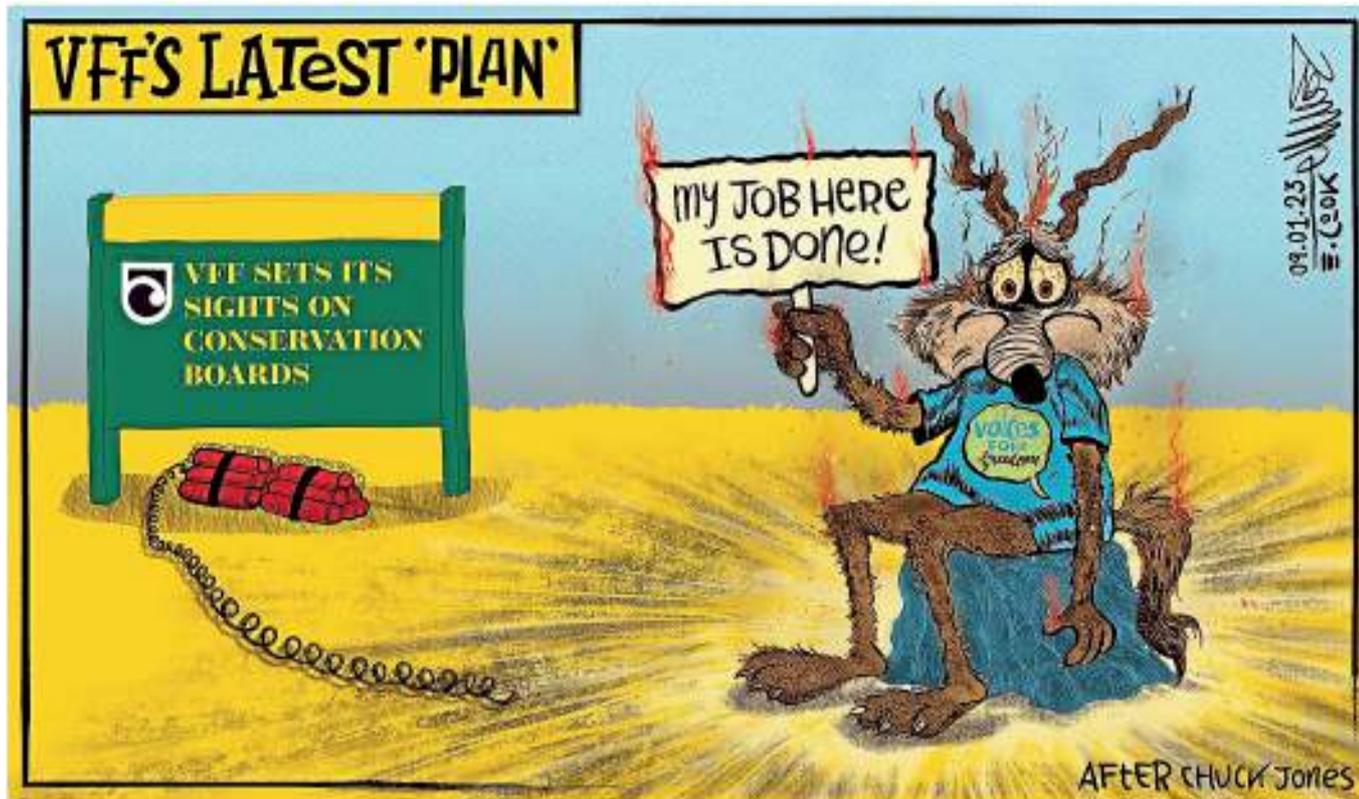
Then there is also the distinction between events which are completed (termed “perfective”) and those which are not. English has a present perfect (*I have worked here since May*) and a past perfect (*I had worked there for ages*).

In a sense, it is difficult to appreciate what any system is really like without looking at other languages to see how else it could be.

Another language with a four-way distinction is the Trans New Guinea language Soq. But Soq carves up time slightly differently, and a little more precisely. Recent work by Don Daniels found the following distinctions: remote past (before yesterday), close past (yesterday), present (today until now), future (after now).

On the other hand, there are languages which are timeless, like (Native American) Yucatec Maya and (Australian Aboriginal) Dyirbal, relying on other resources (adverbs) to signal timing. These observations show that while languages can express temporal ordering of events in different ways, some are forced to do so by their grammatical systems, while others are not (and can optionally do so). But does it matter?

Researchers have pondered whether being forced to consider time might have an impact on other behaviours, such as a propensity to save for retirement, or live in the moment. Answers to these questions remain hotly debated, but they remind us of the importance language plays in how we make sense of the world and our place in it.



Make the impact of poor driving decisions clear

Wannabe drivers need to see what really happens to the human body when it is forced to stop at 50kph, 80kph and faster, says Rachel Taylor.

Last year, 378 people died on our roads, the highest toll since 2018, when the same number died. The tally was 60 up on the toll in 2020.

It's such a large number that it's hard to comprehend, so when you're at the pub on Friday night, look around. There are probably about 200 people there. Now imagine them all dead. And then add another 178 people.

The number of people who were involved in car crashes and survived in 2022 is not on the ACC website yet, but in 2021, it was more than 48,000. The cost of repairing and rehabilitating those 48,000 people was \$568.6 million.

These numbers are horrifying. The Road to Zero campaign aims to introduce “incremental reductions in road deaths, leading to a 40% reduction in death and serious injuries by 2030”.

This reduction will be achieved through a combination of “median barriers and intersection treatments, speed limit changes and increased levels of enforcement by safety cameras and police officers”.

A 40% reduction sounds like a lot, but reducing 378 by 40% still leaves us with 226.8 people dead as a result of road accidents.

Our police are burdened with the task of lowering the road toll, but ultimately driving behaviour comes down to individual responsibility. The threat of enforcement is not enough of a deterrent and the Road to Zero document missed on driver education.

The key issue here is encouraging drivers to display better driving behaviour. How do we do that? By adding an extra compulsory step to driver education.

After successfully completing the restricted driver practical driving test, but before receiving their driving licence, there needs to be a mandatory seminar on the consequences of poor decision-making for new drivers. We could call this seminar *Impact*.

Let's show wannabe drivers what really happens to the human body when it is forced to stop at 50kph, 80kph, 100kph and 120kph.

The seminar could begin by explaining that medical students take

classes on how to treat seatbelt injuries. Show wannabe drivers real photos of seatbelt injuries.

Following that, a crash survivor could speak to the attendees about life before their crash, the experience of the accident itself, how long they spent in hospital, what kind of medical treatment they required, what kind of rehabilitative therapies they needed to access afterwards.

They could also talk about how their need for ongoing care impacted on their family, and how life changed as a result of the accident.

Then explain to our wannabe drivers that these survivors are the lucky ones. Show them real photos of people who have died in their vehicles. Tell them what speed the deceased was travelling at and what substances were present.

Explain to them that some bodies are so badly damaged by high-speed collisions that they can't even be sent to a regular funeral home. Those mangled bodies need to go to specialist undertakers.

This is the reality. Our young drivers need to fully understand the true consequences of bad driving decisions.

The thought of driving while impaired, or driving over the speed limit, should make them feel sick.

Rachel Taylor is a former journalist. Her grandfather was a traffic officer.

The Korea Herald

The reality of deterrence

This opinion is not necessarily shared by **Stuff** newspapers.

North Korea is on the brink of completing intercontinental

ballistic missiles that can strike US cities. If it finishes the job, it would be difficult to expect Washington to use nuclear weapons to strike back against a North Korean attack on South Korea.

Few US presidents would take the risk of sacrificing a large number of US citizens for the sake of defending South Korea.

South Korea and the international community have striven to denuclearise North Korea but the North has kept on increasing its missile and nuclear capabilities. Denuclearising the North should remain an objective for Seoul and

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Washington, but attaining it has become practically impossible. South Korea

needs to focus on a more realistic objective, and that is nuclear deterrence.

A sure way for Seoul to prevent a nuclear attack would be to possess its own nuclear weapons. But in reality, it is difficult to put the idea into practice.

The US has barred South Korea from accessing nuclear weapons and instead offers its nuclear umbrella. Given the North's nearly complete nuclear missile programme, the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence must be raised.

If the US puts the pledge into practice early, it will be a significant progress in that direction.