

Clare Davies - University of Winchester

Less Is More? Surprising suggestions from studying spatial language

For many years now, researchers have studied how people's speech reflects their mental 'map' of the world around them, and possibly even shapes that knowledge. In English in particular, a rich variety of spatial terms (especially prepositional phrases) lets us choose among dozens of ways to tell people what's where within a scene. It seems to imply that mapping space is **so** important that other domains of thought and language (e.g., time, social and moral judgments) must rely on it for analogies and problem-solving. Yet often in our spatial research studies, linguistic data fails to give us what we expect - information that precisely reveals people's detailed cognitive 'map'. How can this be? This talk will explore the suggestion that in reality, language may reflect some surprisingly different ways of knowing the spaces around us.