

## Back to the future? The role of temporal focus for mapping time onto space

Journal:	<i>Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology</i>
Manuscript ID	QJE-STD-18-122.R2
Manuscript Type:	Standard Article
Date Submitted by the Author:	25-Jun-2019
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Keywords:	temporal focus, conceptual metaphor, cross-cultural, space, time

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3 Title:

4 Back to the future? The role of temporal focus for mapping time onto space  
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8 Word count:

9 5952  
10  
11

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## Back to the future? The role of temporal focus for mapping time onto space

Do we conceptualise the future as being behind us or in front of us? While this question has traditionally been investigated through the lens of spatiotemporal metaphors, new impetus was recently provided by the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis (de la Fuente et al., 2014, *Psych Sci*). This hypothesis holds that the mapping of temporal concepts onto the front-back axis is determined by an individual's temporal focus, which varies as a function of culture, age, and short-term attention shifts. Here, we instead show that participants map the future on to a frontal position, regardless of cultural background and short-term shifts. However, one factor that does influence temporal mappings is age, such that older participants are more likely to map the future as behind than younger participants. These findings suggest that aging may be a major determinant of space-time mappings, and that additional data need to be collected before concluding that culture or short-term attention do influence space-time mappings.

Keywords: temporal focus; conceptual metaphor; cross-cultural; space; time, gesture

Humans have a prepotent tendency to map concepts of time onto spatial frames. Not only do we often talk about the future as being in front of us (Evans, 2013; Haspelmath, 1997), but we tend to think about it in the same way (e.g., Boroditsky, 2000; Miles, Nind, & Macrae, 2010; Torralbo, Santiago, & Lupiáñez, 2006). A possible explanation for these conceptualisations may be found in our interactions with the physical world: as we move through space, the distance we have passed lies behind us, and the distance yet to be covered lies ahead of us (Clark, 1973; Radden & Dirven, 2007). However, while this perceptuo-motor experience is arguably universal, some languages and some cultural groups nonetheless conceptualise future events as behind, and past events as in front (e.g., Dahl, 1995; de la Fuente, Santiago, Roman, Dumitrache, & Casasanto, 2014; Núñez & Sweetser, 2006) - if using a sagittal axis at all (Boroditsky, 2001; Boroditsky & Gaby, 2010; Núñez, Cooperrider, Doan, & Wassmann, 2012). The embodied experience of moving through time and space thus fails to account for this variation.

A radically different possibility, recently captured in the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis (de la Fuente et al., 2014), is that the mapping of time onto spatial frames is ultimately determined by how much attention you devote to the past and the future. The underlying assumption here is that our focus of attention is literally in front of our eyes. In a series of experiments, de la Fuente and associates

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3 showed that thinking about the future renders you more likely to conceptualise it as in front and the  
4 past as behind, whereas devoting attention to the past yields the reverse pattern.  
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6 By introducing temporal focus as a determinant of the mapping of time onto space, the  
7 Temporal-Focus Hypothesis directs the spotlight on a concept that hitherto has been used in  
8 economics, health, and memory research (e.g., Guo, Ji, Spina, & Zhang, 2012; Ji, Guo, Zhang, &  
9 Messervey, 2009; McKay, Percy, Goudie, Sumnall, & Cole, 2012; Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009).  
10 An accumulating number of studies now suggest that temporal focus may successfully account for the  
11 spatialisation of time at the three crucial levels of analysis identified by Núñez and Cooperrider  
12 (2013): At the highest level, temporal focus seems to explain cross-cultural variation in space-time  
13 associations, as seen in correlations reported between culture-specific temporal attitudes and front-  
14 back mappings (de la Fuente et al., 2014; Li, Bui, & Cao, 2018). At the intermediate level of analysis,  
15 temporal focus seems to account for individual variation within cultures, as seen in differences in  
16 mappings associated with pregnancy, age, and circadian rhythm (de la Fuente et al., 2014; Li, 2018; Li  
17 & Cao, 2018b). Finally, at the finest level of analysis, that of moment-to-moment variability within  
18 individuals, changes induced in temporal focus have been reported to trigger corresponding changes in  
19 front-back mappings (de la Fuente et al., 2014; Li & Cao, 2018a).  
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29 The current paper replicates de la Fuente et al.'s (2014) methodology along the three levels of  
30 analysis proposed by Núñez and Cooperrider (2013) with the following new populations: at the  
31 highest level, we compare British and Afrikaner participants' temporal focus; at the intermediate level  
32 we test young and old Afrikaner participants; and at the finest level, we test British, Afrikaner, and  
33 Swiss French participants. Finally, we also run a series of meta-analyses of past and current findings,  
34 as a more stringent test of the effects of temporal focus on temporal cognition to date, allowing us to  
35 discuss the currently available evidence in context, and thus propose several avenues for future  
36 research.  
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### 43 **Experiment 1. Do cross-cultural differences in temporal focus, but not in gesture, yield** 44 **contrasting space-time mappings?**

45 To test whether cultural differences in temporal focus yields differences in temporal thought, we  
46 assessed temporal focus and front-back mappings in individuals with Afrikaner (South Africa) and  
47 British English (UK) cultural background. British English culture is generally described as being  
48 future-oriented, whereas Afrikaner culture is commonly characterised as more traditional and  
49 conservative (Brook Napier, 2007; Giliomee, 2011; Johnston, 2014), and therefore, more past-  
50 oriented. According to the predictions of the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis, Afrikaners should map the  
51 past as in front, because they devote substantial attention to it (similar to the Moroccan Darija tested  
52 by de la Fuente et al., 2014). The English, in contrast, should have their temporal focus set on the  
53 future and thus conceptualise it as in front (as did the Spaniards in de la Fuente et al.'s experiments).  
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3 To test the robustness of the effects of cultural temporal focus on space-time mappings, we  
4 introduce a crucial difference to previous research: while Afrikaners may be past-oriented, they do not  
5 gesturally place the past in front of them, but behind them (see Pre-experimental study below). In  
6 other words, if Afrikaners exhibit greater past-focus than the British, then they should also map past  
7 events as in front, no matter how they gesture about them.<sup>1</sup> However, if Afrikaners do not  
8 predominantly map past events as in front but nonetheless exhibit greater past-focus than the British,  
9 then temporal focus would appear to be guided by different mechanisms.  
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## 16 ***Method***

### 17 *Participants*

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19 Participants were 70 Afrikaners ( $M_{\text{age}} = 21.2$  years) and 70 British ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.8$  years), all University  
20 students in South Africa and the UK, respectively.  
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### 23 *Materials and procedure*

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25 A temporal diagram task, originally introduced by Casasanto (2009) and adapted by de la Fuente et al.  
26 (2014) was used to assess participants' front-back mappings. The diagram showed a cartoon character  
27 seen from above, with one box in front and one box behind him (Figure 1). Participants read that the  
28 character ("John" in English and "Jan" in Afrikaans) had visited a friend yesterday who liked plants,  
29 and would visit a friend tomorrow who likes animals, and were told to mark which box belonged to  
30 the past and future visits with A (for animals) and P (for plants). The order of yesterday/tomorrow and  
31 plants/animals was counterbalanced.  
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36 Participants' temporal focus was measured with a questionnaire developed by de la Fuente et al.  
37 (2014). Participants indicated on a 5-point-scale their dis-/agreement with statements regarding the  
38 past (e.g. "Traditions and old customs are very important for me") and the future (e.g. "Traditions are  
39 not useful to the present and future society").  
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43 As in de la Fuente et al. (2014), participants first performed the temporal diagram task and then  
44 answered the questionnaire.  
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### 47 *Design*

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49 In this and subsequent experiments, we have aimed to obtain comparable sample sizes to previous  
50 research. More importantly though, we report Bayes factors to assess the relative strength of our  
51 evidence, which is particularly useful in determining whether non-significant results are due to data  
52 insensitivity (e.g., lack of statistical power) or true support of the null hypothesis over the alternative  
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58 <sup>1</sup> Note that the link between gestural and other kinds of behavioural space-time mappings need not be  
59 straightforward: In a study by Román, Santiago, Jasmin and Casasanto (2014, cited by de la Fuente et al., 2014),  
60 Spanish speakers showed only "a weak tendency" (p. 1683) to gesturally place future events in front, yet on a  
temporal diagram task exhibited an overwhelming preference (88%) for future-in-front mapping.

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3 hypothesis (in this case, the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis) (Dienes, 2014, 2016). Following standard  
4 procedure, Bayes factors were calculated using 0 as lower bound, and (converted) effect sizes reported  
5 in previous research as rough estimates of the upper bound (see Supplemental Materials Online, SOM  
6 1). Following Jeffreys (1961), Bayes factors less than 1/3 were interpreted as substantial evidence of  
7 the null hypothesis, and factors greater than 3 as substantial evidence for the Temporal-Focus  
8 Hypothesis.  
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#### 14 *Pre-experimental study: Temporal gestures in Afrikaans*

15 To examine Afrikaners' typical temporal gestures, deliberate temporal gestures were elicited from a  
16 total of 40 Afrikaners (university students residing in South Africa, with an average age of 21.1 years).  
17 The method used was the gesture elicitation paradigm established by Casasanto and Jasmin (2012),  
18 which contains a set of questions starting with "how would you gesture about something that..."  
19 followed by an imagined future or past event (see SOM). Participants were approached by a native  
20 Afrikaans speaker and asked to produce gestures according to the specific set of questions they were  
21 asked (translated into Afrikaans). Each participant answered two questions, one about the future, and  
22 one about the past. Their responses were recorded and analysed with regards to the spatial axis (e.g.,  
23 lateral, sagittal) they used in their gestures. Seventy (or 87.5%) out of the 80 elicited gestures made  
24 reference to a sagittal axis. Crucially, all of the sagittal gestures (100%) adhered to the future-in-front  
25 and past-behind pattern, making reference to the front for future events and to the back for past events.  
26 A lateral axis was used in 11.25% (n = 9) of the gestures: of these, 66.67% (n = 6) placed the past to  
27 the left. One (1.25%) gesture was produced referring to a vertical axis, indicating the future upwards.  
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### 38 **Results**

#### 39 *Temporal focus*

40 A 2 (cultural group: Afrikaners vs. British) x 2 (temporal focus: past vs. future) mixed ANOVA of the  
41 groups' responses on the temporal focus questionnaire revealed a significant interaction, thus  
42 corroborating that the Afrikaners and the British differed in their temporal focus,  $F(1, 138) = 28.15, p$   
43  $< .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$ . A Bayes factor of  $B_{H(0,0.99)} = 4.57 \times 10^5$  indicated that the data was powerful enough  
44 to truly detect an interaction (i.e.  $B > 3$ ). Afrikaners showed greater agreement with past-focused  
45 statements than the British ( $p < .01$ ), who in turn showed greater agreement with future-focused  
46 statements than the Afrikaners ( $p < .01$ ) (Figure 1). This finding thus resonates with previous  
47 anthropological and sociological research, and lays a fruitful ground for comparing the space-time  
48 mappings of these groups.  
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57 [FIGURE 1]

58 [FIGURE 2]

### *Front-back mapping of time*

Contrary to what would be predicted on the basis of their divergent temporal foci, the Afrikaner and the British participants did not differ in their front-back mappings, Wald  $\chi^2(1, N = 140) = .05, p = .82$ , Odds Ratio = 1.11, 95% CI = [.45, 2.72] (Figure 2). Instead, both groups showed a strong preference for locating the future event in the front box (around 83%). The Bayesian analysis shows that the data constitute substantial evidence of the null hypothesis over the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis,  $B_{H(0, 3.75)} = .15$  (i.e.  $B < 1/3$ ).

These results thus indicate that gestural behaviour that maps the future in front and the past behind may be dissociated from culture-specific attitudes towards the future and the past. On a more general level, this finding also raises questions as to the general robustness of the effects of cultural attitudes on space-time mappings. This issue is best approached by running a meta-analysis of the effects reported in previous studies, which produces a reliable indication of the overall strength of the effect of cultural attitudes on spatial mapping. For this purpose, we used the Exploratory Software for Confidence Intervals (Cumming, 2013) to run a random effects meta-analysis<sup>2</sup> to integrate results from four experiments testing cross-cultural differences in front-back mapping (i.e., de la Fuente et al., 2014: Exp1; Gu et al., 2016: Exp1; Li et al., 2018,<sup>3</sup> and this study: Exp1). The integrated effect size was medium to large,  $d_{\text{unbiased}} = .71$ , 95% CI [.01, 1.57], yet the CIs were indicative of a rather large heterogeneity of the effect. In other terms, whilst there is some evidence of cross-cultural differences, more data would need to be collected to examine this effect, as well as the source of its heterogeneity.

### *Correlations between cultural temporal focus and front-back mappings*

To further assess the apparent dissociation between cultural temporal focus and spatial mappings, we followed de la Fuente et al. (2014) calculating a temporal focus index based on the participants' responses on the temporal focus questionnaire ( $(M_{\text{future-focused statements}} - M_{\text{past-focused statements}}) / (M_{\text{future-focused statements}} + M_{\text{past-focused statements}})$ ), and then correlated this with performance on the temporal diagram. To maximise the likelihood of finding a significant relationship, correlations were run both across and within groups. However, temporal focus index did not successfully predict mapping preferences across groups, Wald  $\chi^2(1, N = 140) = .4, p = .53$ , OR = .35, 95% CI = [.12, 9.57],  $B_{H(0, 10.00)} = .11$ , nor within groups: Afrikaners, Wald  $\chi^2(1, N = 70, \text{Afrikaners}) = .07, p = .79$ , OR = .5, 95% CI = [.00, 82.28],  $B_{H(0, 10.00)} = .21$ ; the British, Wald  $\chi^2(1, N = 70) = .32, p = .57$ , OR = .23, 95% CI = [.00, 39.56],  $B_{H(0, 9.996)} = .17$ .

<sup>2</sup> To obtain standardized Cohen's effect sizes from the odds ratios, we used the equation  $d = L_{OR} \sqrt{3} / \pi$  (as advocated by Sánchez-Meca, Marín-Martínez, & Chacón-Moscoso, 2003), where  $\pi = 3.14159$  and  $L_{OR}$  is the natural logarithm of the odds ratio.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the authors tested cultural attitudes *within* a same culture/country in this study (i.e., North vs. South Vietnam)

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3 Again, this result provides substantial evidence for the null hypothesis over the Temporal-Focus  
4 Hypothesis, showing that also at the level of individuals, cultural attitudes towards the past and the  
5 future are not necessarily associated with the spatial mapping of these concepts. Although our results  
6 contradict those of de la Fuente et al. (2014), they can only be considered as cumulative, or  
7 complementary, in that they may well illustrate what Cumming (2014) coined as the *dance of the CIs*.  
8 In a nutshell, any sequence of an experiment replication will produce different  $p$  values as well as  
9 different confidence intervals. To test this, the current result were entered into a random-effects meta-  
10 analysis together with previous findings on the temporal focus index (i.e., de la Fuente et al., 2014:  
11 Exp4; Li et al., 2018;<sup>4</sup> Li & Cao, 2018b: Exp1; and our study: Exp1), although the questionnaire to  
12 measure temporal focus was not always the same. The Exploratory Software for Confidence Intervals  
13 (Cumming, 2013) yielded an integrated effect size that was medium to large,  $r = .58$ ,<sup>5</sup> 95% CI [.29,  
14 .86], yet, the CIs were indicative of a rather large heterogeneity of the effect. Again, whilst there is  
15 some evidence for the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis, our data seem to suggest this evidence to be not  
16 entirely conclusive.

## 27 **Study 2: Does age influence space-time mappings?**

28 Next, we tested whether individual differences could predict front-back mappings of time. The  
29 individual factor we examined was age. Based on the insight that older people primarily rely on past  
30 achievements in their self-perceptions and dedicate more time on reminiscing the past (Butler, 1963;  
31 Wong & Watt, 1991), along with the finding that the direction of space-time mappings systematically  
32 varies as a function of age (de la Fuente et al., 2014), we expected this effect to also obtain in a novel  
33 population, Afrikaners residing in South Africa, such that older individuals would be more likely to  
34 place past events in front than younger individuals.

## 41 **Method**

### 42 *Participants*

43 Sixty-one younger (University students,  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.4$  years) and 49 older (retirees,  $M_{\text{age}} = 74.9$  years)  
44 Afrikaners participated. The older participants were chosen against their performance on an Afrikaans  
45 version of the Mini Mental State Exam.

### 50 *Materials, procedure, and design*

51 In a direct replication of de la Fuente et al. (2014), front-back mappings were assessed with the  
52 temporal diagram of Experiment 1. See SOM 1 for statistical details.

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57 <sup>4</sup> Note that the authors tested cultural attitudes *within* a same culture/country in this study (i.e., North vs. South  
58 Vietnam)

59 <sup>5</sup> To obtain an approximation of Pearson's  $r$ , we used Cohen's  $d$  and transformed it using the equation  $r = \sqrt{\frac{d^2}{d^2 + 4}}$



[FIGURE 3]

## **Results**

Consistent with de la Fuente et al. (2014), the older group mapped past events in front significantly more often than the younger group (49% vs 20%), Wald  $\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 10.07, p = .002, OR = 3.92, 95\% CI = [1.69, 9.12]$  (Figure 3). With a Bayes factor of  $B_{H(0, 2.14)} = 51.73$ , this replicates the findings of de la Fuente et al. (2014) in a new population and provides considerable support for the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis over the null hypothesis, thus suggesting that age may reliably account for individual variation in space-time mappings. We further ran a random effects meta-analysis to give us a better indication of the overall strength of the effect of age on space-time mapping, based on our data and that of de la Fuente et al. (2014) (Experiment 3). The integrated effect size was rather large,  $d_{unbiased} = .97, 95\% CI [.54, 1.39]$ , and the CIs were indicative of a high probability of the effect being present.

### **Experiment 3. Does shifting the temporal focus reverse space-time mappings?**

While findings from previous studies (de la Fuente et al., 2014; Li & Cao, 2018b) (and Experiment 2) show that space-time mappings may undergo changes during the life-span of an individual, we now turned to examine whether space-time mappings may also be flexibly altered on a much shorter timescale. Previous research has shown that priming and novel category learning may alter human time conception (Boroditsky, 2001; Casasanto & Bottini, 2013; Miles, Tan, Noble, Lumsden, & Macrae, 2011; Román, Flumini, Lizano, Escobar, & Santiago, 2015). However, most of this research has relied on different kinds of spatial manipulations (e.g., spatial metaphors) of time representation, largely leaving aside the potential impact of attention/focus shifts. Ultimately, if the amount of attention devoted to the past or the future indeed determines front-back mappings, then shifting a person's temporal focus should yield corresponding differences in their mappings (de la Fuente et al., 2014). Experiment 3 tested this particular prediction of the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis.

#### **Experiment 3a**

##### *Participants*

Two-hundred and one Afrikaners (University students,  $M_{age} = 19.4$  years) took part in Experiment 3a.

##### *Material and Procedure*

De la Fuente et al.'s (2014) Temporal Induction Task was used to induce a shift in individual temporal focus. Participants were randomly allocated to either the past-induction condition ( $N = 101$ ), where they had to write down answers to questions that forced them to focus on the past (e.g., "What made you feel afraid when you were little?"), or the future-induction condition ( $N = 100$ ), with future-related questions (e.g., "What about the future makes you feel afraid?"). Once they had answered the

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3 questions they moved on to the Temporal Diagram (as used in Experiments 1 & 2). The tasks were  
4 presented amidst a series of other, unrelated tasks.  
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6 See Experiment 1 and SOM1 for statistical procedures.  
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### 9 *Results*

10 Contrary to expectations, front-back mappings did not differ between participants in the past- and  
11 future-induction conditions, Wald  $\chi^2(1, N = 201) = .20, p = .655, OR = .83, 95\% CI = [.36, 1.89]$ .  
12 Instead, participants in both conditions showed an overwhelming tendency to place future events in  
13 the front box (Figure 4a). The obtained Bayes factor indicates substantial evidence for the null  
14 hypothesis over the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis,  $B_{H(0, 2.78)} = .11$ .  
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### 20 *Experiment 3b*

21 While there was no apparent reason to believe that the immutability of space-time mappings was  
22 specific to the Afrikaner participants, we nonetheless tested two additional populations, British and  
23 Swiss French students, to test the generalisability of this finding. As in English and Afrikaans, future-  
24 in-front metaphors are predominant in French.<sup>6</sup>  
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### 30 *Method*

31 A total of 161 Swiss French ( $M_{age} = 20.6$ ) and 104 ( $M_{age} = 21.3$ ) British University students in  
32 Switzerland and the UK, respectively, were randomly allocated (within their respective group) to  
33 either the past-induction (Swiss sample:  $N = 87$ ; British sample:  $N = 52$ ) or the future-induction  
34 condition (Swiss sample:  $N = 77$ ; British sample:  $N = 52$ ). Materials, procedure and design followed  
35 Experiment 3a.  
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41 [FIGURE 4A-C]  
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### 44 *Results*

45 The Swiss French participants showed no effect of temporal induction in their performance on the  
46 temporal diagram, Wald  $\chi^2(1, N = 161) = .04, p = .845, OR = .91, 95\% CI = [.34, 2.42], B_{H(0, 2.78)} =$   
47  $0.15$ . Instead, participants from both conditions showed a clear preference for future-in-front mappings  
48 (Figure 4b).  
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52 The British participants exhibited a similar degree of immutability in their mappings, with no  
53 significant difference between conditions, Wald  $\chi^2(1, N = 104) = .07, p = .791, OR = 1.15, 95\% CI =$   
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58 <sup>6</sup> For instance, *le future est devant nous* ('the future is ahead of us'), *le passé est derrière* ('the past is behind').  
59 These linguistic patterns are however of little relevance here. The temporal induction task should yield a  
60 significant effect in the expected direction, irrespective of the conceptual metaphors of these languages.

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3 [.41, 3.26],  $B_{H(0, 2.78)} = 0.23$ . Here too, participants clearly preferred future-in-front mappings (Figure  
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5 4c).

6 For both the Swiss and British samples, the Bayes factors indicate substantial evidence for the  
7 null hypothesis over the Temporal-Focus Hypothesis, showing that the immutability of space-time  
8 mappings in young Afrikaners indeed generalises to other populations.  
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11 In all, for the three samples used in this experiment, we found no evidence of a successful  
12 induction of a shift in individual temporal focus. We further ran a random effects meta-analysis to give  
13 us a better indication of the overall strength of the shift in individual temporal focus effect, as primed  
14 by de la Fuente et al. (2014). For this purpose, we used the Exploratory Software for Confidence  
15 Intervals (Cumming, 2013) to run an initial random effects meta-analysis to integrate results across  
16 our three samples and that of de la Fuente et al. (2014). The integrated effect size was rather moderate,  
17  $d_{\text{unbiased}} = .36$ , 95% CI [-.42, 1.14], and the CIs were indicative of a high heterogeneity of the effect.  
18 Essentially, these values indicate that a shift in temporal focus using the temporal induction priming  
19 technique may well be difficult to induce, although not impossible.  
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## 28 **General discussion**

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30 In a series of experiments, we tested whether the concept of temporal focus can successfully predict  
31 implicit sagittal timelines at three levels of analysis. At the intermediate level – that of individual  
32 variation – the findings from Experiment 2 show that age is indeed a successful predictor of space-  
33 time mappings, with older participants being more prone to place the past in front of them than  
34 younger participants. This is consistent with previous research on age-related temporal focus and  
35 orientation in general (e.g., Wong & Watt, 1991), and space-time mappings in particular, replicating  
36 de la Fuente et al.'s (2014) findings from young and old Spaniards and Moroccan Arabic individuals in  
37 young and old Afrikaner individuals (2014), and corroborating this particular prediction of the  
38 Temporal-Focus Hypothesis.  
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44 However, at the highest level of analysis – that of cultural variation (Experiment 1) – substantial  
45 differences in the temporal focus of the groups under examination did not yield corresponding  
46 differences in space-time mappings. It thus seems that while temporal focus *may* reflect space-time  
47 mappings, as demonstrated by de la Fuente et al. (2014), such relationship may not be applicable to all  
48 cases. The fact that cultural differences in temporal focus were dissociated from temporal thinking in  
49 our samples questions the causal role of cultural temporal attitudes for spatial mapping.  
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54 At the finest level of analysis – that of moment-to-moment variability (Experiment 3) – the  
55 results show, across three independent populations, that future-in-front mappings are not altered by  
56 short-term shifts in temporal focus. In view of Casasanto's (2016) observation that space-time  
57 mappings in language are less likely to be flexibly modulated as linguistic conventions change slowly,  
58 it could be expected that temporal mappings driven by attention exhibit greater malleability, as  
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3 attention is readily primed. However, the fact that no effect of temporal induction was found suggests  
4 that the attested front-back mappings are resistant to short-term shifts in temporal focus, thus  
5 questioning the power of temporal focus in priming space-time mappings (compared to, e.g., priming  
6 through spatial metaphors).  
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10 The series of meta-analyses that we conducted sheds considerable light on the potential  
11 underlying principles of the temporal focus hypothesis, but they also reveal an increasingly complex  
12 nexus of the interplay amongst culture, age, religion, and varieties of attention to time that is likely to  
13 be the focus of a prolonged series of future investigations. In Experiment 1, the meta-analyses showed  
14 that the effect of cultural background presents with a large heterogeneity. Differences in the ways in  
15 which different cultures assign value to the future or the past may well be idiosyncratic to the specific  
16 culture's historical and political characteristics. For example, Li et al. (2018) found that Southern  
17 Vietnamese were more future focused than Northern Vietnamese and attributed this to the assumption  
18 that the former place more value on economical and technological development while the latter tend to  
19 value more tradition. Our Afrikaner participants, like the Northern Vietnamese, tend to attach greater  
20 importance to tradition, but unlike the Northern Vietnamese, whose past focus seems to be intertwined  
21 with the current political regime that may value and promote conservative attitudes (Li et al., 2018),  
22 the Afrikaners live in a country with a troubled political history, associated with the apartheid regime  
23 that enforced racist policies of separation and oppression. For this reason, the past may carry implicit  
24 negative connotations that preclude any inclination by young Afrikaners to place it in front. However,  
25 this also has to be understood in the context of Afrikaner culture that places respect on elders,  
26 tradition, and the Church (Cloete, 1992; Giliomee, 2011; Johnston, 2014). This could explain the  
27 finding that our Afrikaner population in Experiment 1 are found to be past-focused when they have to  
28 consciously evaluate statements about the past and the future in the temporal focus questionnaire, but  
29 future focused in the more implicit measurement of temporal focus outside of any value judgment  
30 about the past or the future, such as that measured by the temporal diagram task. This phenomenon  
31 may be so pervasive that it may also account for the resistance of the same population to change their  
32 temporal focus in a rapidly-induced training context (Experiment 3). However, in Experiment 3 we  
33 also failed to replicate de la Fuente et al.'s (2014) rapidly induced changes in temporal focus in  
34 Spaniards to British and Swiss French participants. Indeed, the meta-analysis here suggests that a shift  
35 in temporal focus using the temporal induction priming technique may be very difficult to replicate.  
36 Cultural differences as to the connotative valence of the past may exist amongst Spaniards, Brits, and  
37 Swiss French, but we are unable presently to locate or articulate any possible locus of such differences  
38 that resides in those countries' historical and political past. The explanation here may lie on other  
39 cultural aspects or temporal experimental context. For example, Li and Cao (2018) found strong  
40 effects of religion on temporal focus (e.g., Taoists are more future-focused than Buddhists), and it is  
41 even the case that among Buddhists the extent of past or future focus can be modulated by a religion  
42 prime (Buddhists primed with Buddhas of the future are more future-focused than Buddhists primed  
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3 with Buddhas of the past). It may well be the case that religious beliefs may affect the extent of the  
4 rapidly induced malleability of temporal focus, and one could attribute the lack of effect that we found  
5 in our populations to the fact that they are predominantly Christian, and therefore more future focused  
6 because of Christianity's emphasis on the second coming of Christ and the life ever after (this could be  
7 an additional factor on the Afrikaners participants' future in front predilection in the temporal diagram  
8 task – see previous paragraph). However, this would still fall short of explaining the presence of  
9 rapidly induced temporal focus changes in Spaniards in de la Fuente et al.'s (2014) study, who also  
10 come from a predominantly Christian background. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that the degree  
11 of religious conviction/religiosity among Christians may play a role here, as it may be the case that our  
12 sample inadvertently included more religious Christians and/or fewer atheists, whereas de la Fuente et  
13 al.'s sample of Spaniards included more atheists and/or fewer religious Christians. Li and Cao (2018)  
14 found temporal focus shifts even in atheists when primed with religious prompts, but no study exists  
15 that has examined the effects of religiosity using the original temporal induction task by de la Fuente  
16 et al. (2014), also used in this study. Clearly, the interplay between religious belief and cultural  
17 background in shifting temporal focus certainly warrants further exploration. Finally, Li (2018) found  
18 that Chinese participants were more future focused if they were tested in the morning than in the  
19 afternoon. While this has not been examined using de la Fuente et al.'s (2014) temporal induction task,  
20 it opens up for the possibility that the time of day modulates the extent to which an individual may  
21 shift their attentional focus as a function of rapid training.

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33 To conclude, while temporal focus may be associated with cultural attitudes towards time and  
34 with short-term attention shifts to different degrees and as a function of cultural particularities, it  
35 seems to hold great potential in predicting long-term shifts in implicit sagittal timelines. Conceptual  
36 representation is increasingly viewed as flexible and dynamic, shaped by a variety of experiential  
37 factors (e.g., language, culture, context; for overviews: Casasanto, 2016; Casasanto & Lupyan, 2015).  
38 One factor that, to the best of our knowledge, is seldom included here is aging. While age itself has  
39 been assessed from a developmental perspective in the study of conceptual representation in children  
40 (e.g., Bowerman & Levinson, 2001), the current findings from Experiment 2, in robustly replicating  
41 those of de la Fuente et al (2014), and the subsequent meta-analysis, show that age is a strong factor of  
42 temporal focus. A useful research tool that may immediately emerge from the currently available  
43 evidence is a biographical questionnaire used in conjunction with the temporal diagram task and all  
44 other relevant research tools (temporal focus questionnaire, temporal induction task) that captures not  
45 only age and cultural background, but also religious beliefs, political inclinations, attitudes towards  
46 cultural-historical past, parenthood and expectant parenthood, and gestural preferences for the past and  
47 the future. At present, it appears that the extent to which temporal focus is malleable is likely down to  
48 a combination of several factors, the exploration of which opens up a fruitful line of investigation into  
49 the temporal focus hypothesis in particular and into the wider issue of the cultural underpinnings of  
50 time conceptualization more generally.

**Supplementary Material**

The Supplementary Material is available at: [qjep.sagepub.com](http://qjep.sagepub.com)

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**Figure Captions**

Figure 1. Past- and future statements ratings among British English and Afrikaners (Experiment 1).

Note. Errors bars represent standard error of the mean.

Figure 2. Front-back mappings in British English and Afrikaners (Experiment 1).

Note. Errors bars represent standard error of the mean.

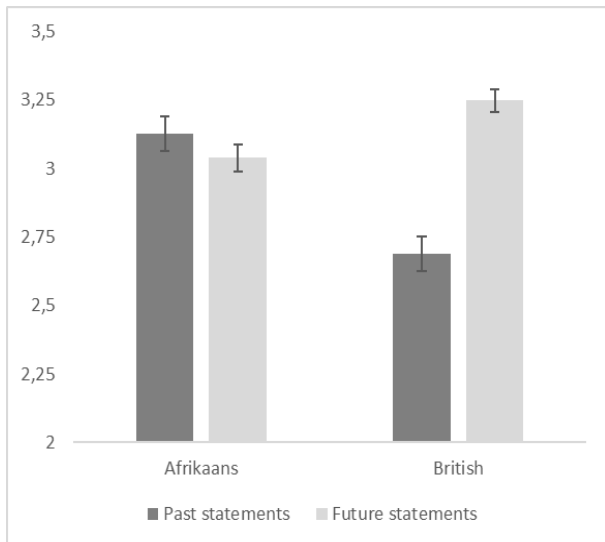
Figure 3. Front-back mappings in different age groups (Experiment 2).

Note. Errors bars represent standard error of the mean.

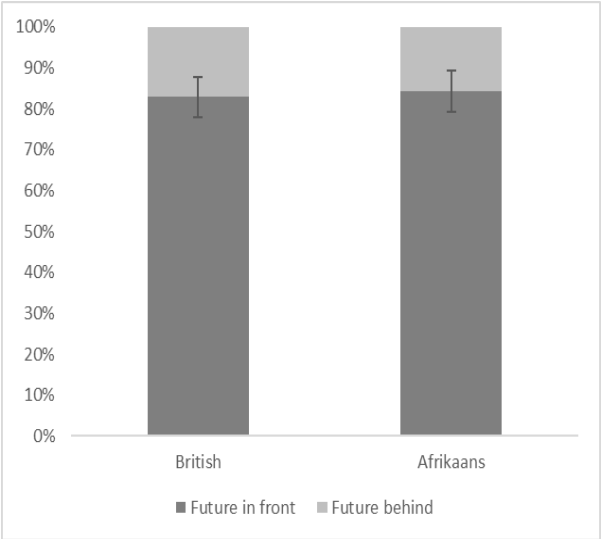
Figures 4A-C. Front-back mappings under temporal induction (Experiments 3a & 3b)

Note. Errors bars represent standard error of the mean.

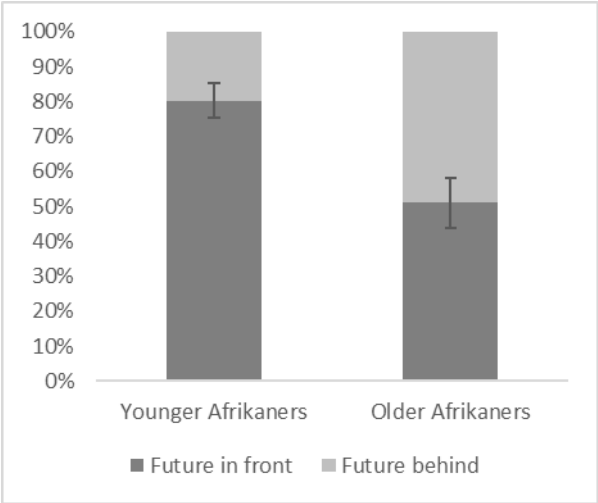
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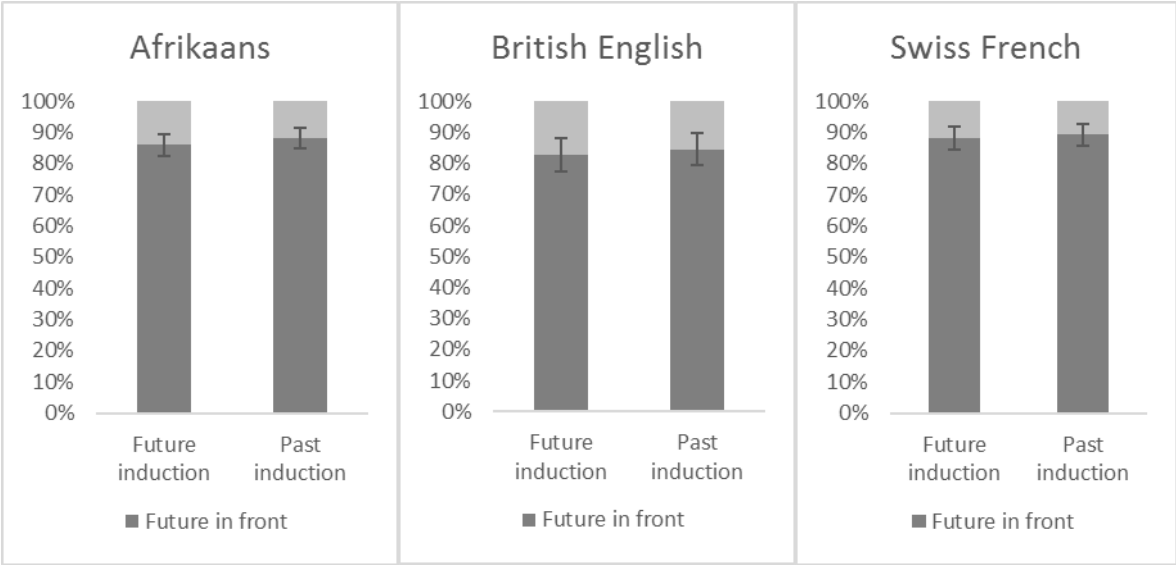


Figure 4A

Figure 4B

Figure 4C