

THE MEANING OF TIME

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The English word TIME has multiple meanings which would require at least three distinct words when translated into other languages. Consider the following three answers to the simple-sounding question "What time was it?"

a. It was 9 a.m. b. It was the third time. c. It was during the tenth century.

In German, to elicit these three answers, TIME would be: a. UHR, b. MAL, c. ZEIT. In French, it would be: a. HEURE, b. FOIS, c. TEMPS. In Danish, it would be: a. KLOKKEN, b. GANG, c. TID. In Hebrew, it would be: a. SHA'AH, b. PA'AM, c. Z'MAN. For meaning "a.", other languages ask "How much is the clock?" or "What hour is it?", or even "What is the clock?"

These questions are themselves subject to misinterpretation. To the question (e.g. in Danish) "How much is the clock?" the answer might be "The clock costs 300 kroner." To the question (e.g. in Hebrew) "What is the hour?" The answer might be "The hour is one twenty-fourth of a day." To the question (e.g. in Swedish) "What is the clock?" the answer might be (as once given mischievously by Pippi Longstocking) "The clock is a machine that goes tick-tock."

For meaning "b." (as also in "the next time" or "the last time") languages use the TIME of multiplication, as in "Two times three is six." For the concept of TIME in Physics, they use meaning "c."

Languages may use a single word, or their own idiom, for "spare time," as in "What did you do in your *spare time*?" (English can use the single word "leisure.") Two different expressions or idioms may be used to translate "good time" in the following two contexts: i) "Did everyone have a good time?" ii) "It will happen in good time."

A large English dictionary may list 30 or more meanings for TIME as a noun, but most languages content themselves with the three words corresponding to a., b., and c. above. (Many languages including English also use TEMPO for *musical time*.)

For "At the present time" most languages would simply use a word for "now." For "At this time" they would use their TIME-word for meaning "c.", with their word(s) for "at this"; but for "This time we'll do it right" the TIME-word would have meaning "b."

For "Now is the time..." some languages would use their TIME-word with meaning "a.", while some would use the one with meaning "c." (For meaning "a.", "Now is the hour..." would usually have to make sense, though in Danish "The clock has become many" can be used to mean "The time has gotten late.")

If TIME is used in compounds like *daytime*, *springtime*, *mealttime*, *standard time*, etc., the TIME-word with meaning "c." would be appropriate.

That's all till next time!