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Lost words

by Sandra Banks

Time has lost its way.

As children, we used to measure it by counting the seconds from the lightening flash to the thunderclap.

Towns used to set their clocks differently. A bit like time zones, but arbitrary. That was just human tinkering. The early railways had no cosmic difficulty in introducing unified timetables in Great Britain. All clocks had to change to ensure you did not miss your train.

But time doesn't fly like an arrow from the past to the future. The present becomes somewhat arbitrary. Space and time now have high mountains, deep valleys and sometimes strange effects when the landscape is stretched – or squeezed - by some enormous mass like a black hole.

What will this do to the words we use? Some people already do not use the same concepts as we do. They use the incoming breath to make speech as well as the outgoing. They do not use “near and far” and their concept of time may be more flexible and more meaningful than hours.

As we roam space, today tomorrow and a thousand years become meaningless. Running up a timehill, time will slow. Coming down a timehill, time will speed up. Time Surfing will become a new sport when we have the equipment to play the game.

Time may take us backwards, like exposed rock strata, twisting and bending under immense pressures as the moving continents smash into one another.

“Yes, my dear, I would love to see you. I am too busy today and tomorrow looks no better. How about yesterday?”

The lunar clock will have to go. Earth itself will become even more cosmically insignificant. It matters only now to us that it is preserved and the sadness is that it will be known in the future as a ruin with traces of wonder. Attractive to space tourists as the remains of our early culture.

Inevitably dictionaries will change. So many current words only have meaning on Earth. Gladioli, duck-billed platypus, church and mosque. The list is endless. These words will no doubt be placed in travel dictionaries but the cosmic dictionary will concentrate on things which have a wider meaning. If they have the space they may include some Earth terms marked “Obs.” Gradually all Earth languages will become the sphere of specialists.

But a technological future does not mean that accessible dictionaries as we know them will disappear. Each culture will document its own way of communication and will assign it to a central location like a dictionary. A-Z is not a universal system even on earth and will surely not survive.

Entities who have found symbolic communication will always want to interact with others as far as they can. Dictionaries, whatever the form, will continue as long as culture. Always changing, like the red-breasted Zintu of Alpha Centauri.