A Cognitive Grammar Account of Case for L2 Students of German

Carlee Arnett & Harriett Jernigan, University of California – Davis

ISSN 1470 – 9570

A Cognitive Grammar Account of Case for L2 Students of German

Carlee Arnett & Harriett Jernigan, Davis, California

This paper provides an overview of the theory of Cognitive Grammar highlighting the aspects that can be applied to classroom second language acquisition. The paper begins with a brief introduction to CG and then focuses on the concepts that are most relevant for teaching case to German language learners such as transitivity and the functions of the cases. It concludes with a suggested lesson plan on how to include CG lessons on case in an established curriculum.

1. Introduction

The theory of Cognitive Grammar (CG) can be used to account for a number of syntactic structures in a variety of languages in a way that is useful to L2 students (Janda & Clancy 2002 for Russian; Achard 2004 for French, Achard & Niemeyer 2004 for German; Cadierno 2004 for Danish, Lam 2005 for Spanish; Masuda 2005 for Japanese; Zyzik 2006 for Spanish). Cognitive Grammar is a usage-based theory that assumes there are no underlying structures posited, as in theories of generative grammar. Furthermore, CG assumes that speakers extract the "rules" of a language from the linguistic data they hear; there are no underlying structures or derivations. CG is concerned with providing a representation of language as it is produced and understood as well as the dynamics of this interaction. The usage-based character of CG makes it ideally suited for understanding the language produced by second language learners as well as a rubric for students' knowledge about grammar.

Cognitive Grammar is not a theory of second language acquisition; it is a theory that can describe the properties of language as a system. Like cognitive and sociocultural theories of second language acquisition such as Vygotsky's, it rejects the Sausurean/ Chomskian model of language as an abstract, autonomous system. Cognitive Grammar

assumes that language structures vary based on context and the speaker (Ellis 1998; MacWhinney 1997; Tomasello 2003). Thus the theory is equipped to handle an analysis of dialectal variation or the variation in grammar by an L2 speaker. In this paper, we take a sociocultural approach to second language acquisition by suggesting a way of talking about grammar that is dialogic in character and fosters the co-construction of knowledge.

The teaching module(s) presented here activate cognitive processes. Following Doughty & Williams (1998), Ellis (2001), Robinson (2001), as well as many others, we argue that a metalinguistic explanation of grammar has its place in the SLA classroom, although not at the expense of language use. A metalinguistic explanation of the German case system serves many functions. It draws students' attention to the function of case, which allows them to activate the cognitive processes involved in SLA (e.g. Anderson 1983, 1985). Metalinguistic explanations show that the structure under consideration is important. Furthermore, the knowledge that German has a case system, the functions of case, the knowledge of case and the metalanguage to talk about these grammatical items can further a humanistic education. It has also been shown that novice learners benefit from explicit, metalinguistic explanations of errors (Ellis et al. 2005). Given that students will be novices with respect to most aspects of the German case system until after two years of instruction and preferably six months abroad, a metalinguistic explanation is suited to the elementary and intermediate classroom.

In this paper, we present a description of the German case system based on L1 research in CG that is suitable for learners of introductory German. We begin with an introduction of the theory of Cognitive Grammar and the basic concepts necessary for the language instructor to understand and use the theory. The paper concludes with a description of lessons that can be presented to the students in order for them to better understand the German case system.

2. Literature Review

There is ample research within the framework of formal grammar on the acquisition of a case filter and structural and inherent case (cf. Zobl 1995; Lakshmana 1995). This type

of study may contribute to the overall understanding of language acquisition, but it does not shed any light on the particular situation in German.

To our knowledge, there are five studies that are specific to the acquisition of German case (Ritterbusch et al. 2006; Kempe & MacWhinney 1998, 1999; Tracy 1986; Jordens 1992). Kempe & MacWhinney (1998, 1999) focus on input and student comprehension. Jordens (1992) is an early cognitive study. However, the most relevant study for this paper is Ritterbusch et al. (2006). This study draws interesting conclusions based on four research questions. First, there is a positive correlation between student accuracy and their ability to understand English grammatical metalanguage. Second, there is a positive correlation between students' desire for accuracy and accuracy in case marking. Third, poor problem solving strategies, i.e. first nominal=nominative, result in inaccurate case marking. Fourth, when looking at the German case system it is very difficult to determine whether the problem is case, gender or form. Ritterbusch et al. show that given form and case students can identify gender 83% of the time, given form and gender they can supply case 77% of the time, but given case and gender they can only supply the form 60% of the time. This study used a fill-in-the-blank type assessment that, although it doesn't approximate reality, can be very accurate in assessing student proficiency. Although this paper does not address whether or not CG is an effective way to teach case with a classroom study, Ritterbusch et al.'s study is useful in that it shows that students attend to case markings but have more trouble producing them. We suggest here a way to focus attention on case in order create better accuracy with forms.

3. Cognitive Grammar

The theory of Cognitive Grammar, developed by Langacker (1982, 1986, 1987, 1991), can be used to analyze a variety of semantic and syntactic structures (Winters 1989; Geerarts 1998; Sweetser 1991). In CG, the grammar of a language represents conventional linguistic knowledge. This knowledge includes all linguistic units which are necessary for the description of a language, e.g. symbolic, semantic and phonological units (Langacker 1982, 1987). A symbolic unit is a phonological unit paired with a semantic unit. There is no syntactic unit. Thus, semantic and syntactic structures are not viewed as distinct, autonomous levels of language. CG is also sign-based.

Semantic structure is 'conventionalized conceptual structure, and grammar is the conventional symbolization of semantic structure' (Langacker 1982: 23), which means that conceptual structure is meaning and conventional symbolization is form. Semantic structure is dependent on the conceptual imagery established in a speech community. Speakers learn semantic and syntactic structure through exposure to the conventional patterns of their language. Langacker (1982: 23) claims that semantic and syntactic structure is language specific and as such can vary across languages and dialects. Semantic and syntactic structure can also vary within speech communities, within speakers and within learners. The theory of CG is equipped to handle variations among and within speakers and speech communities. CG can contribute to the learning of students who are emergent multilinguals, rather than privilege one language variant over another.

Conventional patterns acquired as a result of belonging to one or more speech communities are stored in the mind as schemas. Speakers extract schemas from specific expressions that actually occur and these are used to construct and understand new expressions (Tomasello 2000). The meaning of an expression is derived from the conceptions that it activates in a speaker's mind (cf. Chafe 1970; Jackendoff 1983; Lakoff 1987). Processing an expression involves a speaker activating knowledge structures or cognitive domains (Langacker 1987: 147-166). Any concept or experience can function as a cognitive domain, a schema, for an expression. For example, knowledge of the Internet would be the domain for e-mail, instant messaging and social networking websites.

The meaning of an expression contains both content and construal. The content is the activated cognitive domain and the construal is the way content is represented in language. It is the speaker's choice to represent content in any number of ways sanctioned by the speakers of a language. What is relevant for construal is the degree of prominence assigned to the elements that make up the content. Thus semantics is conceptual, rather than truth-conditional.

The schemas or conventional conceptual patterns that are activated can be characterized as semantic prototypes. Since syntax is considered to have meaning, this model of semantic prototypes can be extended to include syntactic structures. The concept of a syntactic/semantic prototype is key to the analysis of case presented in this paper. The cases in German have meaning that is marked morphologically and secondarily by word

order (Dürscheid, 1999; Welke, 2002). The meaning of each case can be characterized by a prototype.

Prototypes are a key component of the theory of Cognitive Grammar (Rosch 1973, 1974, 1975a, 1975b; Lakoff 1987; Taylor 1989). Syntactic prototypes associate a syntactic structure with a prelinguistic concept or image. Speakers are able to judge the degree to which a syntactic structure matches the prototype. Membership in the category is determined by approximation to the best member, i.e. prototype, rather than a set of discrete and necessary features (Lakoff 1972, 1987; Fillmore 1975). The members of the category have some of the characteristic features of the prototype, but they do not need to have all of the features (van Oosten 1986: 142). The prototype schema can be defined as follows (Coleman & Kay 1981: 27):

1. it contains a finite list of properties
2. individual properties are scalar or gradient
3. membership in the category is a gradient phenomenon

Membership in a category is a matter of degree because the satisfaction of each individual property does not contribute equally to overall membership in the category. The prototype is the *best* instance of a category. Categorization takes place by comparison with the prototype or schema and varying degrees of deviance are tolerated. Instances that deviate from the prototype are extensions of the prototype.

In the next section, we will explain some terms in CG that will be useful for the description of case. These are trajector/landmark, profile/base, thing and relation, the billiard-ball model, the action chain and the stage model. The notion of prototype is universal in that grammatical structures in any language can have a prototype. However, the prototype of a structure that may have the same grammatical label across languages is most likely different from language to language. Thus some languages may have similar prototypes for some items and different prototypes for others. For the purposes of this paper, the description of the accusative prototype in English is similar to that of German. The dative case, however, is quite different in German than in English, even if we assume for the purpose of argument that English has a dative case. The prototypes discussed in this paper are meant to be descriptive tools derived from Cognitive Grammar that can be useful for learners.

In any linguistic relation, one item can be construed to be more prominent than another item or the background. The item that is prominent is the trajector and the additional items or the background is the landmark. For example, the configuration in physical space is the same for *über* 'over' or *unter* 'under' but the trajectory/landmark designations are reversed. In the sentence, *Die Pflanze hängt über dem Tisch*. 'The plant is hanging over the table', the plant is the trajector and the table is the landmark. This is the reverse for the sentence, *Der Tisch steht unter der Pflanze*. 'The table is under the plant'. In this case, the table is the trajector and the plant is the landmark. This is shown in the following schematic diagram.

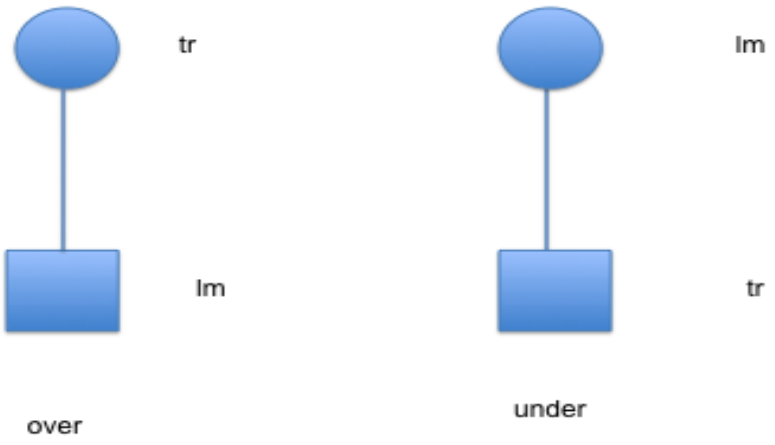


Figure 1: [OVER] and [UNDER]

The configuration in physical space does not dictate the construal. Instead, the speaker determines which item will be prominent.

Semantic structure inherently involves profile and base (Langacker 1982: 46). The profiled is the *Planze* and the base is *Tisch*. There is no way to separate the profile from the base and the profile is identified by its relationship to the base. Profile and base are dependent on each other for conceptual existence; one cannot exist without the other. The concept of the knuckle cannot exist without the notion of the hand. In this example, the hand is the base and the knuckle is the profile. In the sentence given above 'The plant hangs over the table', the plant is set in relation to the table, so the plant is the profile and the table is the base. In the sentence, 'The table is under the plant', the table is set in relation to the plant, so the table is the profile and the plant is the base. Profile and base are concepts that are similar to, but not identical to, trajectory and landmark. Where trajectory and landmark refer to objects in relation to each other, profile and base

refer to schema and cognitive domains. In English, these relationships are shown by word order and in German they are shown primarily by case.

In CG, the most basic distinction is between things and relations. Things are bound regions in physical, temporal, social, metaphorical space. For example, [CHAIR] is a bound region in 3-dimensional physical space. [KNUCKLE] is a bound region in the domain of the hand. Physical objects are prototypical things, but the category can also include abstract concepts like [DEMOCRACY]. In CG notation, circles represent things.

A relation is a structure whose most salient portion, or profile, consists of the interconnections between two or more things (Langacker 1987: 215). Relations are conceptually dependent, in that one cannot conceive of the relations without also conceptualizing the things that are related. For example, [OVER] locates two things relative to one another in physical space. In the case shown in Figure 1, space is organized vertically and both things are profiled. In CG notation, relations are represented by lines connecting things.

Langacker (1991: 13ff) uses the image of billiards balls moving and interacting with each other to describe transitive or asymmetrical events. This is shown in Figure 2 (Langacker 1986: 4):

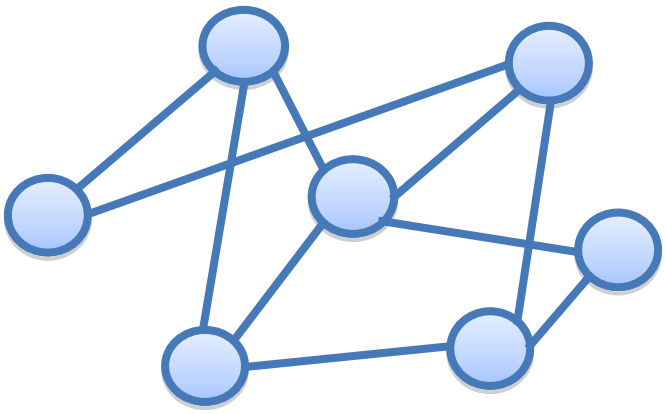


Figure 2: Billiard Ball Model

An observer views two or more discrete objects that interact through physical contact. Energy, represented by lines in Figure 2 or by arrows, is transmitted from one object to the next. This event takes place within a setting and can be expressed by a viewer who is removed from the action.

Langacker (1991: 298) calls the energy transmission from one object to another the action chain. This is shown in Figure 3. Physical objects in this model are depicted as circles and energetic interactions are depicted as lines with arrows. In more familiar terminology, this can be stated simply as follows: nouns are represented by circles and verbs are represented by arrows.

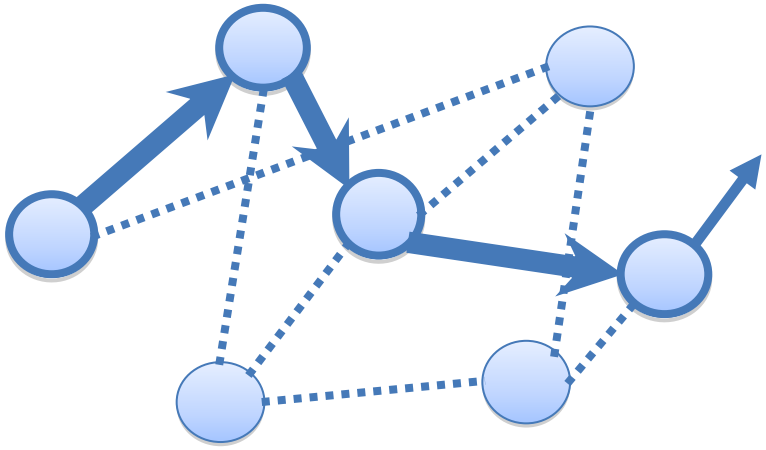


Figure 3: Action chain

Although the participants of a network can interact with each other in many ways, a finite clause typically covers only a limited portion of the billiard ball model. The other participants remain outside of the scope of predication, which is shown in Figure 4.

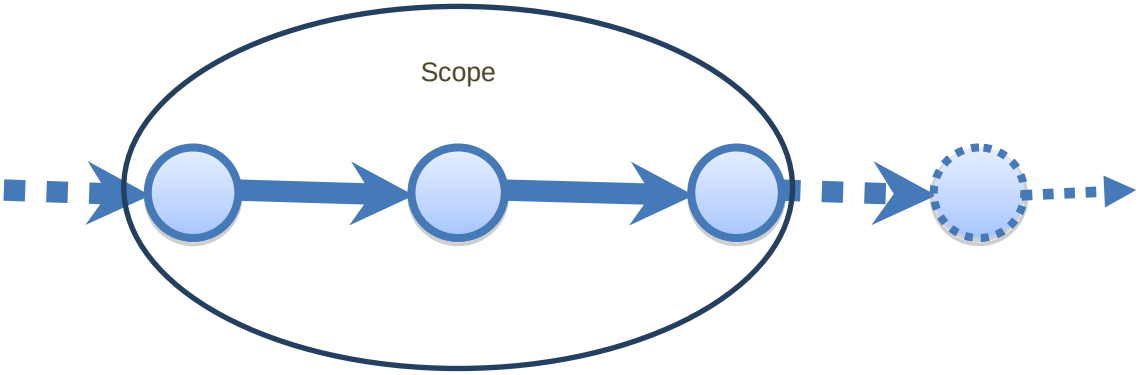


Figure 4: Scope of Predication

The scope of predication illustrated in Figure 4 can be represented by the following scenario: *Christian hat das Glas mit einem Hammer zerbrochen* 'Christian broke the glass with a hammer'. The left-most circle is Christian, the second circle is the hammer and the third circle is the glass. This sentence includes all the participants in the event. The speaker could also say *Christian hat das Glas zerbrochen* 'Christian broke the

glass', and only include the first and the third participants. The speaker is aware that Christian used something to break the glass, either his own body or a tool, but this need not be represented in the speaker's sentence. Another example of the scope of predication is the sentence *Das Glas zerbrach* 'The glass broke'. Christian and the instrument are not included in the sentence but they exist in the background. The third element becomes the only participant in the scope of predication and the profiled participant in the sentence. Thus, within the scope of predication, the speaker can highlight or background certain items by a variety of linguistic means such as the passive, the use of case, prepositions, etc.

A stage model is a simple variation on Figure 4, the scope of predication. A viewer is located outside the scope of predication and is describing the event. It is also possible for the describer/speaker to be part of the event, but the stage model is more basic to human cognition (Langacker 1986: 3). In the next section, we will provide an explanation of the German case system that is intended for instructors.

3.1 The CG Conception of the Nominative

The notions of subject, direct object, indirect object are relevant for the description of German, but case-marking systems vary cross-linguistically. Langacker (1987: 234) states that

> no specific inventory of cases can be posited as an absolute universal instantiated in all languages. Moreover, the search for all-encompassing schematic characterizations would not appear promising; case semantics is better approached in terms of language-specific families of senses organized around prototypical values.

Furthermore, Langacker (1987: 235) argues that the morphological markings of case have meaning, even if that meaning overlaps with other grammatical structures. In CG, all syntax has meaning and even if the choice of case is governed by a verb, adjective or preposition, it still has meaning. Case marking is not viewed as purely mechanically induced, but rather as the function of the type of role that a nominal entity plays with respect to some event/relation.

The nominative case in German is the subject of the clause. If there is more than one nominative item in a clause, it is because one item is coreferent with the other or one item is being judged with respect to another. These two schemas cover such examples

as *Das ist ein Tisch.* 'That is a table'. and *Charlie ist größer als der Tisch.* 'Charlie is taller than the table.'

3.2 The CG Conception of the Accusative

In this paper, we will be concentrating on case as part of a grammatical relation and not as triggered by a preposition or adjective, which is also found in German. The accusative involves the grammatical relation of an asymmetrical event that encodes a transfer of energy. The participant upstream in the action-chain transfers energy onto the downstream participant causing it to move or undergo a change of state. This arrangement results in a prototypical transitive clause. The prototypical clause encodes an event that transpires in physical space and in a physical setting in which both participants are distinct: the first acts of its own volition and the second is affected. The two objects involved in the transaction are usually encoded as the subject and an accusative object. The prototype for an accusative object is that it is distinct and undergoes a change as a result of the action of another participant. This is shown in Figure 5:

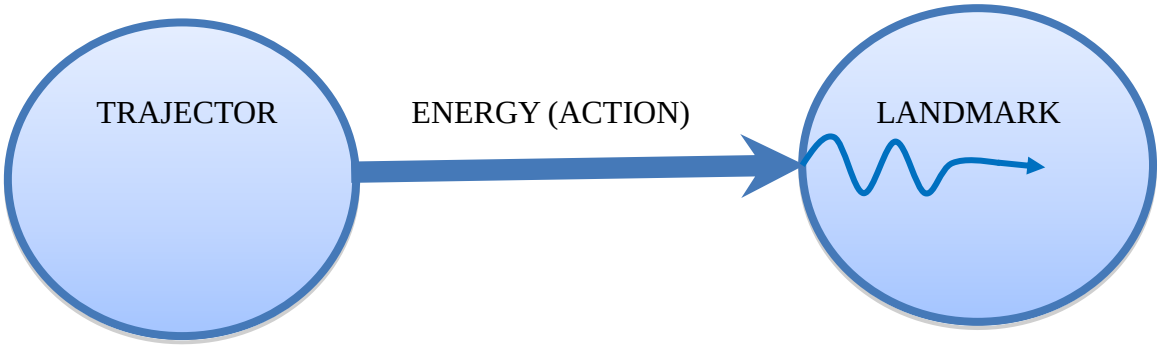


Figure 5: Prototypical transitive

The left circle represents the first participant and the initiator of the action. The block arrow represents the transfer of energy between the participants and the circle on the right is the second participant. The line arrow inside the right circle shows that the second participant has undergone a change of state. This is, in fact, a simple way to graphically represent a transitive event for the students. A prototypically transitive event is shown in the clause *Die Krankenschwester hat den Physiker ermordert* 'The nurse murdered the physicist'. The first participant is encoded with the nominative and the second participant is encoded with the accusative.

In the CG view, transitivity is a property of a clause and not of a verb. According to Langacker (1991: 302), "transitivity is not definable just in terms of nominals occurring in a particular structural configuration. It is instead a matter of degree and depends on the meaning of the clause as a whole". Lakoff (1987), Hopper & Thompson (1980), Hopper (1985), and Rice (1987) have shown that various factors determine the "transitiveness" of a certain clause: (1) a transitive clause must have two participants expressed by overt nominals, which function as subject and object; (2) the clause describes an event (not a situation); (3) the event is energetic, relatively brief, and has a clearly defined ending point; (4) the subject and object represent discrete, highly individuated physical entities; (5) these entities already exist when the event takes place, and they are not products of the event; (6) the subject and object are fully distinct and participate in a strongly asymmetrical relationship; (7) the subject participates volitionally, while the object's participation is non-volitional; (8) the subject is the energy source, and the object is its target; (9) the object is absolutely affected by the action of the subject. Any transitive clause can have some, but need not have all, of these factors in order to be transitive. Furthermore, these factors do not contribute equally to the transitivity of the clause. The event and the speaker's construal of it determine which factors are relevant. These parameters affect all aspects of the German grammar that are characterized by transitivity, such as auxiliary selection, passivization and the ability to form participial adjectives.

Transitivity in view of CG is not binary, but a matter of gradation (Sorace 2000). It is the degree to which the subject/agent affects the direct object/patient by means of its action. We can then speak of "high" or "low" transitivity. This is precisely the parameter that will form the distinction between the accusative and dative case in German.

3.3 The CG Conception of the Dative

The first use of the dative case involves an asymmetrical event that involves a transfer of energy and three primary participants. This is the prototypical ditransitive clause. In the prototypical ditransitive scenario, the subject can be animate or inanimate, the patient tends to be an inanimate object and the dative object tends to be animate. Frequency studies suggest that this is not necessarily the case for German, but the above scenario is the prototype. This prototype is transferable from English, so the students

have few problems grasping the concept. A typical example of a ditransitive event is *Der Mann gibt der Frau eine Blume* 'The man [nom] gives the woman [dat] a flower [acc]'. The prototypical ditransitive clause is shown in Figure 6:

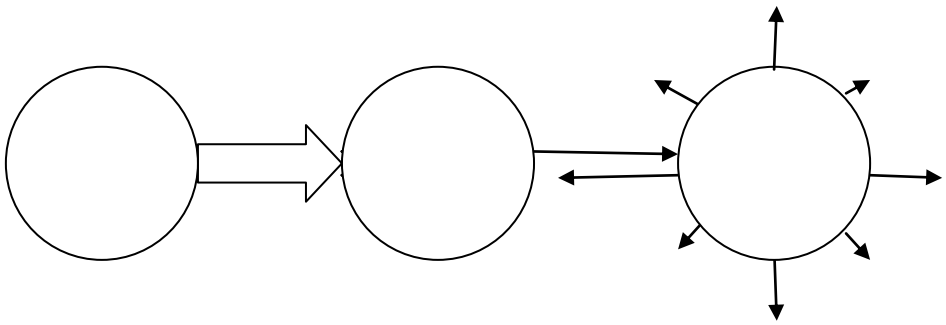


Figure 6: Prototypical ditransitive

The first part of the scenario is the asymmetrical relationship shown by the use of the nominative and the accusative, thus the man is the first participant in the nominative and the flower is the second participant in the accusative. The left circle is the volitional participant, the block arrow is the transfer of energy and the middle circle is the accusative or affected participant. The right-most circle is the third participant, the woman, which is affected by the change of the second participant. The third participant may move, change or react in some way that affects the first or second participant. Unlike the second participant, the third participant is not totally affected. The third participant is often an experiencer, which is encoded by the dative case. Participants in the accusative can also be experiencers if they are animate or are construed to be. But they are more affected by the action of the nominative participant than a participant in the dative case and more closely fit the prototype of an accusative participant. We return to a discussion of experiencer participants below.

The second basic use of the dative case is with dative verbs. Like the event construal with the accusative case, the agent or first participant in the action-chain is highly volitional such that it acts upon the second participant. But, in the event construal with the participant in the dative case the first participant is low in potency and the second participant is generally an experiencer of the action rather than one that undergoes a physical change in the same manner as an accusative participant. An experiencer is "an individual engaged in some type of mental process, be it intellectual, perceptual or emotive" (Langacker 1990: 236). The experiencer participant is often syntactically encoded with the dative case cross-linguistically (Foley & Van Valin 1984: 101;

Shibatani 1985: 833). In German, as in many languages, the dative case is used to mark nominals in the sentence or clause that fit the experiencer prototype (Rudzka-Ostyn 1992: 334 for Polish; Smith 1992: 406; Maldonado 2002 for Spanish). In German, these nominals are indirect objects (third participants in ditransitive clauses) and objects of dative verbs.

There are more than 126 dative verbs in German (Drosdowski 2005), although only about 15 are listed in first year textbooks. Dative participants with these verbs are typically in a psychological state, beneficiaries, recipients or lacking something (Maldonado 2002). The following figure shows a typical dative verb.

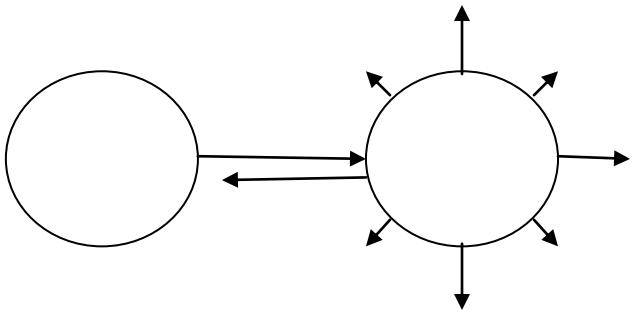


Figure 7: Prototypical dative verb

The left circle represents the nominative participant that acts on the second participant. The second participant is not maximally affected and can act in its own right to change itself or influence the first participant in some way. The following examples show the typical uses of dative verbs.

1. *Der Lehrer hat der Studentin geholfen*.
   'The teacher [nom] helped the student [dat].' (beneficiary)
2. *Die Bluse gefällt mir.*
   'The blouse [nom] pleases me [dat].' (psychological)
3. *Nach ihrem Tod hat seine Frau ihm sehr gefehlt.*
   'After her death, he [dat] missed his wife [nom].' (lack)

The dative verb in German and its relationship to the other uses of the dative case is a topic well beyond the scope of this paper. The few examples above of the prototypical uses of the dative case serve as a general guide to this difficult syntactic issue (cf. Maldonado 2002; Dabrowska 1997; Wegener 1985).

4. Practical Applications

The following lesson plan applies the principles of CG and demonstrates CG's accessibility to both student and instructor. The target group is composed of students in a first-year German class. The lesson plan relies on the basic tenets of CG: using a body of knowledge to activate schemas and using pre-linguistic concepts and images to teach and learn grammar.

We begin with the assumption that communicative and literacy-based methods are used in instruction, and as such, the instructor does not initially focus on grammar. Students are first prompted to become accustomed to patterns, such as *Ich heiße* 'My name is', *Ich bin* 'I am', *Ich komme aus Florida* 'I am from Florida', *Ich bin Studentin* 'I am a student'. Recognition and production of typical patterns take precedence over explanations of grammar. As such, the instructor introduces grammar in class sessions in 'Grammar Sidebars', 5-to-10-minute explanations and practices of grammar relevant to the lesson using CG concepts which take place at the end of the class session. The following lesson plan sequence demonstrates how CG is employed in order to conduct the Grammar Sidebars that center on the argument structure of the nominative, accusative and dative cases and provide students with a grammatical metalanguage and conception of grammar.

For this lesson plan sequence, the instructor uses pictures of a well-known celebrity, Actress X, who has enjoyed a great amount of success over the last seven years. Her image and name are ubiquitous, and she is a regular topic in print media, so virtually all students are familiar with her and have formed some kind of opinion about her, which makes her a suitable cognitive domain that can be revisited throughout the semester. One should note that the celebrity used as the cognitive domain does not have to be an actress. Depending on the culture, the celebrity can be a singer, musician, writer, political figure, etc., so long as most of the class is familiar with the figure chosen.

The first part of the lesson plan sequence focuses on introducing the nominative case and CG symbols as a grammatical metalanguage. After completing exercises in the textbook that practice *heißen* and *sein*, the instructor makes the transition to grammar instruction with a Grammar Sidebar. The instructor first displays a picture of Actress X, who is carrying a shoulder bag and holding her baby son. Once the instructor has given the students a chance to look at the picture, the instructor asks the following questions:

1. *Wer ist das*? 'Who is that?' 2. *Was ist X von Beruf*? 'What does X do?' 3. *Wie alt ist X*? 'How old is X? *Wer ist das Kind*? 'Who is the child?' As the students answer, the instructor records the answers, adjusting slightly to suit instructional needs. The answers should appear as follows: 1. *Das ist X*. 'That is X.' 2. *Sie ist Schauspielerin*. 'She is an actress.' 3. X *ist 31 Jahre alt*. 'X is 31 years old.' 4. *Das ist Xs Sohn*. 'That is X's son.' Once the instructor has recorded the responses, she returns to each statement and writes the corresponding CG symbols next to each statement:

1. *Das ist X.* ○

2. *Sie ist Schauspielerin.* ○

3. *X ist 31 Jahre alt*. ○

4. *Das Kind ist Xs Sohn*. ○

At this point, the instructor asks the students what all the sentences have in common, why they can all be represented with the same symbol. Someone will recognize that the sentences are all formed with *sein*. The instructor then explains that this kind of sentence employs the nominative case, the "naming" case. Since the entire sentence focuses on naming something, it can be represented with the circle. The instructor can also show the students another way of conceiving of the nominative:

○ = ○

Sein (like *heißen*) functions like an equals sign, and as such the sentence employs only the nominative case. The instructor then shows the students that they can use *Eigenschaften*, 'characteristics', to name someone or something. *X ist jung* 'X is young', *X ist talentiert* 'X is talented'. The instructor then asks the students to write as many ○ sentences as they can for one minute. The students can write their sentences on the board and compare. The instructor can give corrective feedback as necessary, and then end the lesson for the day.

The second part of the lesson plan sequence focuses on introducing the accusative case and expanding the use of CG symbols. This lesson can be introduced when the accusative case is presented in the materials or textbook for the course. The instructor follows the same procedure as before, completing textbook exercises with the students that relate to the accusative case, and then transitioning to the Grammar Sidebar that

will address the accusative case. The instructor displays another picture of Actress X that shows her with her son and a friend. She is in a parking lot, pushing a shopping cart filled with a variety of food and household items. The instructor lets the students examine the picture while writing the following questions on the board: 1. *Was hat X*? 'What does X have?' 2. *Was kauft X*? 'What is X buying?' 3. *Was sucht X*? 'What is X looking for?' The instructor then records the students' responses on the board and writes the corresponding CG symbols next to each statement:

1. *X hat einen Sohn.* ○ ⟶ ●

2. *X kauft Lebensmittel.* ○ ⟶ ●

3. *X sucht das Auto.* ○ ⟶ ●

After placing the initial CG diagrams next to the sentences, the instructor returns to the first sentence, underlines "X" and asks the students what grammatical function the word has. Someone will identify it as the subject of the sentence. The instructor writes an "S" below "X" and "Agent" below the clear circle. Then, the instructor underlines *hat* and asks the students what part of speech that is. Someone will reply that it is a verb, and the instructor writes "V" under *hat* and "Action" under the arrow. Then, the instructor underlines *Sohn* and asks the class what part of speech that is. Typically, at least one student will call this a direct object. The instructor writes "O" under *Sohn* and "Patient" under the second circle:

Sie hat einen Sohn. ○ ⟶ ●

S V O Agent Action Patient

This process of labeling allows the instructor to show the students that the elements in the sentence are not simply discrete elements such as subject, verb and object, but that they have relationships to each other: an agent performs an action on a patient. This demonstration does not necessitate the continued use of the new terms "agent," "action" and "patient," but the terms do help explain various relationships between elements in a sentence.

The instructor then writes a list of verbs on the board including *haben*, *kaufen*, *brauchen*, *sehen* and *suchen* and asks students to write at least one sentence for each

verb with the agent-action-patient pattern about the picture. The students then write their answers on the board. The instructor provides corrective feedback and can end the lesson here. Alternatively, the instructor can give students a text about Actress X and have them identify sentences that match the ○ diagram and the ○ ⟶ ● diagram.

The third part of the lesson plan sequence focuses on the dative case, specifically ditransitive verbs. Following the same procedure as before, the instructor completes textbook exercises that practice using the dative case with ditransitive verbs. The instructor displays the same picture from the previous lesson, provides the proper names of the son and the friend with Actress X, and then writes the following questions on the board: 1. *Wem kauft X Orangensaft*? 'For whom does X buy orange juice?' 2. *Wem gibt X Schokolade* ? 'To whom does X give chocolate?' 3. *Wem schenkt X Kekse*? 'To whom does X give cookies?' The instructor then records the students' responses on the board, using the proper names of the son and the friend, and writes the corresponding CG symbols next to each statement:

1. *X kauft ____ Orangensaft*. 
2. *X gibt _____ Schokolade*. 
3. *X schenkt _____ Kekse*. 

The instructor then asks the students to identify the patient in these sentences. The students may need assistance in seeing that the patient is the *Orangensaft, Schokolade* or *Kekse*. But some students will make the conclusion independently. This will then lead to the conclusion that the hatched circle above the arrow is the indirect object.

At this point, the instructor can display another picture of Actress X, seated with her son at a table topped with breakfast foods. She is helping her son butter some toast. The instructor then asks the students to produce sentences based on the above diagram, using *geben* or *schenken*, and requiring the use of the proper noun as well as the personal pronoun. The instructor reviews the sentences with the students, provides corrective feedback and can stop the lesson for the day at this point.

The final part of the lesson-plan sequence focuses on demonstrating dative verbs and distinguishing them from ditransitive verbs. Following the same procedure as before, the instructor completes textbook activities that practice dative verbs. The instructor

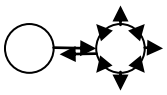
then transitions to the Grammar Sidebar, once again displaying the picture of Actress X sitting at a breakfast table with her son, helping him butter some toast. The instructor writes some of the sentences created from the previous lesson on the board with the corresponding CG diagrams as a reminder of how ditransitive verbs function, asking the students to once again identify agent, action, patient and object in order to distinguish between accusative and dative objects.

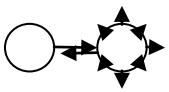
The instructor then reminds the students that, as they just experienced during the textbook exercises, dative objects are not always accompanied by accusative objects. The instructor then gives the examples of *helfen* + dative object, and *gehören* + dative object. The instructor then writes the following questions on the board: *Wem hilft X?* 'Whom is X helping? *Wem gehört der Toast?* 'To whom does the toast belong?' The instructor records the answers on the board:

X hilft _____.

Der Toast gehört _____.

The instructor asks the students if the CG diagram for the ditransitive argument structures can be applied to the new sentences. They will most likely agree that the diagram cannot be used. The instructor then asks the students how they might diagram the new sentences. The students will make attempts and possibly ask if the diagram for accusative argument structures can be used here. The instructor then draws the CG diagram for dative verbs next to the sentences:

Actress X hilft _____. 

Der Toast gehört _____. 

The instructor asks the students what this diagram has in common with the accusative argument structure diagram and lists their answers on the board: both diagrams have only two circles; both diagrams have an arrow moving from left to right; both diagrams have an agent, an action and a patient. The instructor then asks the students what the new diagram has in common with the diagram of the ditransitive argument structure and records those answers on the board, ensuring that the students notice that the dative verb

diagram is similar to the ditransitive diagram in that they both have a circle with arrows entering and leaving it. If time allows, the instructor can guide the students' further examination of similarities and differences between the three diagrams, allowing them to deepen their understanding of the grammatical principles they have been learning through the practice of patterns.

Once the students have developed an appreciation for the difference between ditransitive verbs and dative verbs, the instructor asks the students to create sentences about the picture using the verbs *gehören* 'to belong to', *schmecken* 'to taste,' and *gefallen* 'to appeal to'. The students write their sentences on the board, and the instructor gives corrective feedback. At this point the instructor can stop for the day.

When the instructor reviews dative verbs and ditransitive verbs afterwards, the instructor can begin by reviewing sentences generated from the other lesson, reviewing the diagrams. The instructor then gives the students a text about Actress X, such as a basic biography, and has them categorize selected sentences in the text according to the CG diagrams, identifying nominative, accusative, ditransitive and dative-verb argument structures. In the process, students will recognize that some sentences are not perfect representations of the prototypes, but are nonetheless members of specific categories. They may also ask if certain sentences can belong to more than one category, which offers an opportunity for further exploration.

The instructor can continue to use Actress X throughout the semester to review or teach new principles of grammar, and thereby maintain a consistent cognitive domain that the students can quickly access. The instructor can also start integrating pictures of German-speaking figures the students are now familiar with, for example, Angela Merkel, Gisele Bündchen, or Arnold Schwarzenegger, in order to achieve more cultural authenticity.

5. Synthesis

The above lesson plan reflects not only the principles that distinguish CG from other grammars, but also demonstrates the potential of meeting and overcoming several instructional challenges at once, such as the diversity of speech communities and prior grammatical metalanguages acquired in other FL classrooms. The diversity of the

contemporary language-learning classroom presents a challenge to the adoption of a workable grammatical vocabulary that is accessible to almost all students involved. From the community college to the Ivy League university, language classrooms are composed of a variety of learners, from the native-born English speaking in-state resident who has never taken a foreign-language class, to the multilingual international student. Socio-economic, educational, political, religious and cultural differences are abundant as well. As a result, knowledge differentials regarding native and foreign-language proficiency make it difficult to select a contextual framework for discussions of grammar that the majority of students can identify with.

CG meets this challenge in that it initially transcends the lingual and provides a framework within which the instructor and students can discuss, teach, and learn grammar. CG symbols carry the burden in this model, allowing students to focus more on patterns than discrete elements. Instead of focusing on accuracy, which draws the students' attention away from sentence generation and toward word-crunching, CG draws the students' attention to discerning meaning and relationships between elements. More specifically, CG prompts students to recognize patterns and prototypes alongside discrete grammatical elements such as subject, object, noun and verb, which gives the student the freedom to adjust for extensions of a prototype in the target language grammar, which becomes apparent when students are asked to identify and produce sentences that fit particular prototypes.

Using a picture of a celebrity, upon cursory inspection, may appear superficial, or to drift away from the culturally authentic experience desired in the L2 classroom, but it in fact speaks to CG's most basic principles. Actress X activates schemas and functions as a cognitive domain, one that remains clear and consistent throughout grammar instruction. A picture of a woman with blond hair is far more concrete than the noun-phrase "the woman with blond hair." The noun phrase does not prompt the consistent production of the same body of knowledge by all language learners. "Actress," although a large body of knowledge, does not prompt the same pre-linguistic image or concept in every learner, either. But a picture of a well-known celebrity, one that virtually all students know and already have some kind of pre-linguistic feeling about, does.

Using pictures of Actress X has several advantages. The image activates a consistent cognitive domain in all language learners without a word ever being uttered. In addition, the body of knowledge, "Actress X," is a large one, and is ripe for a number of

exercises, from the simple to the complex. The body of knowledge is broad enough that any number of schemas, conventional sentence patterns, can be produced. Students can create sentences that state facts about Actress X. Students can provide opinions about Actress X. They can speak about Actress X in the past, present, and future tense, use the subjunctive I and II, or place Actress X in larger discussions that include other cognitive domains. This means that the instructor can continually refer to the body of knowledge throughout the semester, and re-anchor students when teaching new grammatical concepts. The instructor can always begin with examples based on the same body of knowledge, which provides a consistency and reliability that the students appreciate.

As the body of knowledge is independent of anything in a textbook and simultaneously transcends specific cultural boundaries, unlike the cognitive domains *Weihnachten*, *Ostern*, *Karneval* or *Fasching,* the use of Actress X to introduce a grammatical meta-language allows all speakers, regardless of background, to immediately participate in the conversation about Actress X. Students who may not be able to identify with certain individuals or practices that are culture- or language-specific can more readily access grammatical concepts through Actress X. The lesson plan focuses on showing the learner the commonalities in the creation of meaning. These skills can be transferred to more culturally specific discussions once the students have understood the grammatical concept.

Based on the awareness that student accuracy is positively correlated to their ability to understand English grammatical meta-language, it serves the instructor well to conduct these mini lesson-plans as soon as possible, starting in English. It is necessary to use the grammatical terms introduced by CG. Although it may seem to complicate matters by adding to the grammar vocabulary that some students possess, it ensures two things: First, it ensures that all students have terms to use when discussing grammar in class. As mentioned above, not all students have been equally exposed to grammatical meta-language. Second, introducing CG terms highlights the concept the instructor is trying to teach, that we are not only talking about the function of an element, but its relationship to other elements. As stated earlier, in CG the most basic distinction is between things and relations.

CG also allows the instructor to move beyond the bounds of scripted dialogues that one encounters so often in textbooks. Although the exercises found in textbooks are necessary and provide solid support for grammar instruction and acquisition, they do

not prompt students or instructors to generate "spontaneous" sentences. Using CG to discuss Actress X and generate sentences about her will allow students to create the relationships between elements that are most natural.

CG promotes diversity and bridges cultural gaps in the classroom, not only in the use of materials that exist outside the scope of the textbook, but also in the fact that students will activate schemas about Actress X in their own languages, and they will be able to actively draw on the knowledge from their own speech communities. In contrast to the discussion generated by *Einkaufen gehen*, or *Wie ich wohne*, the discussion about Actress X allows for cultural variance. True, students should be learning about German culture and practices, but we cannot necessarily engage in the idealized notion of "one" German culture, which happens all too often. By remaining open to prototypes, patterns, and schemas, while using materials that cross cultural lines, we can draw students in to language learning rather than alienate them.

6. Conclusion

Because Cognitive Grammar is usage-based and focuses on relationships rather than discrete elements seemingly arbitrarily linked together in a sentence, it provides instructors and students with an accessible grammatical meta-language with which they can teach, learn and discuss grammar. The knowledge of a metalanguage will serve to focus student attention on the most basic form and function of case as it represents the basic argument structure of a verb. It will also give them an organizing rubric for future input. Lastly, explicit explanation can be effective for elementary and, most likely for this aspect of the case system in German, intermediate learners.

In applying the theory of CG to the foreign-language learning classroom, we see that typical instructional stumbling blocks disappear. The nature of CG diagrams, combined with the use of a body of knowledge that moves beyond task-based bodies of knowledge (searching for an apartment, talking about one's family, etc.), allows student and instructor alike to develop and recognize schemas that exist in and outside the instructional setting. This approach to explicit instruction meets the needs of cognitive theories of SLA because it addresses the inner-processes of acquisition. This approach

also fits with socio-cultural theories of learning in that is relies on a co-construction of knowledge and a scaffolding approach to teacher/learner interactions.

As teachers, we know that the dative case is hard to teach and hard for students to learn. Most students will only use the dative case in unstructured speech or writing after six months abroad. Ellis (1997) suggests that the teaching of one grammatical structure may trigger the acquisition of another structure. The accessibility hierarchy predicts that the existence of a marked structure requires the existence of unmarked structures. Students can generalize from the marked structure to the unmarked ones. Teaching students a marked function such as an indirect object, i.e. the dative case, triggers the acquisition of unmarked structures such as the direct object and subject functions (Ellis 1997: 83).

Remarkably, CG, because it focuses on prototypes instead of rules, eliminates one aspect of foreign-language teaching and learning that causes a great deal of confusion and frustration. Because it emphasizes relationships and schemas rather than rules and exceptions, CG provides the student with stronger and broader problem-solving strategies, which promotes language acquisition. In short, the more easily a student can perceive and understand a clause, that is, the relationships between the elements of that clause and the meaning created by those relationships, the more easily the student can produce grammatically accurate clauses. CG gives foreign-language instructors the much-needed universal language with which they can lay the foundation upon which all discussions of grammar, regardless of complexity, can take place.

References

Achard, Michel (2004) Grammatical Instruction in the Natural Approach: a Cognitive Grammar View. In: Michel Achard; Susanne Niemeier (eds.) *Cognitive Linguistics, Second Language Acquisition, and Foreign Language Teaching*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 165-194.

Achard, Michel & Niemeier, Susanne (eds.) (2004) *Cognitive Linguistics, Second Language Acquisition, and Foreign Language Teaching*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Cadierno, Teresa (2004) Expressing Motion Events in a Second Language: a Cognitive Typological Approach. In: Michel Achard; Susanne Niemeier (eds.) *Cognitive Linguistics, Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Teaching*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 13-50.

Chafe, Wallace (1970) *Meaning and the structure of language*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Coleman, Linda; Kay, Paul (1981) Prototype Semantics: The English Word *Lie*. *Language* 57, 26-44.

Dabrowska, Eva (1997) *Cognitive Semantics and the Polish Dative*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Doughty, Cathy; Williams, J. (eds.) (1998) *Focus on form in classroom Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge,

Drosdowski, G. (1984) *Duden Grammatik der deutschen Gegenwartssprache*. (Band 4). Mannheim: Dudenverlag.

Dürscheid, Christa (1999): *Die verbalen Kasus des Deutschen. Untersuchungen zur Syntax, Semantik und Perspektive*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Ellis, Nick (1998) Emergentism, connectionism and language learning. *Language Learning* 48, 631-64.

Ellis, Nick (2001) What makes for successful second language learning. *New Zealand Language Teacher* 26, 37-48.

Ellis, Rod (1997) *SLA research and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, Rod; Loewen, S.; Erlam, R. (2005) Implicit and explicit corrective eedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 28, 339-368.

Fillmore, Charles (1975) An Alternative to Checklist Theories of Meaning. *Berkeley Linguistics Society* 1, 123-31.

Foley, William; Van Valin Robert (1984) *Functional Syntax and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hopper, Paul J. (1986). Discourse function and word order shift: A typological study of the VS/SV alternation. In W. P. Lehmann (ed.) *Language Typology 1985: Papers from the Linguistic Typology Symposium, Moscow, 9–13 Dec. 1985*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 123-140.

Hopper, Paul J.; Thompson, Sandra (1980) Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse. *Language* 56, 251-299.

Jackendoff, Ray (1983) *Semantics and Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Janda, Laura; Clancy, Steven (2002) *The Case Book for Russian*. Columbus, Ohio: Slavica.

Jordens, P. (1992) The Cognitive Function of Case Marking in German as a Native and Foreign Language. In: Sue Gass; Larry Selinker (eds.) *Language Transfer in Language Learning*. Philadelphia: Benjamins, 138-175.

Kempe, Vera; MacWhinney, Brian (1998) The Acquisition of Case Marking by Adult Learners of Russian and German. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 20 (4), 543-587.

Kempe, Vera; MacWhinney, Brian (1999) Processing of Morphological and Semantic Cues in Russian and German. *Language and Cognitive Processes*. 14 (2), 129-171.

Lakoff, George (1972) Hedges: A Study in Meaning Criteria and the Logic of Fuzzy Concepts. *Chicago Linguistics Society* 8, 183-228.

Lakoff, George (1987) *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakshmana, U. (1993) 'The Boy for the Cookie': Some evidence for the nonviolation of the case filter in second language acquisition. *Language Acquisition: A Journal of Developmental Linguistics* 3(1), 55-91.

Lam, Yvonne (2005) Using Radial Categories to Teach Spanish Prepositions. Ninth International Cognitive Linguistics Conference. Seoul, Korea.

Langacker, Ronald W. (1982) Space Grammar, Analysability, and the English Passive. *Language* 58 (1),22-80.

Langacker, Ronald W. (1986) Settings, Participants and Grammatical Relations. *Pacific Linguistics Conference* 2,1-32.

Langacker, Ronald W. (1987) *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar: Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Langacker, Ronald W. (1990) *Concept, Image and Symbol: The Cognitive Basis of Grammar*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Langacker, Ronald W. (1991) *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

MacWhinney, Brian (1997) Implicit and explicit Processes: Commentary. *SSLA* 19, 277-281.

Maldonado, Ricardo (2002) Objective and Subjective Datives. *Cognitive Linguistics* 13, 1-66.

Masuda, Kyoko (2005) Learners' conceptualization of semantically complex particles in Japanese: A cognitive approach to Japanese locative postpositions. Ninth International Cognitive Linguistics Conference. Seoul, Korea.

Ritterbusch, Rachel; LaFond, Larry; Agustin, Marcus (2006) Learner Difficulties with German Case: Implications from an action research study. *Die Unterrichtspraxis/ Teaching German* 39 (1-2), 30-45.

Robinson, Peter (2001) *Cognition and Second Language Instruction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rosch, Eleanor (1973) On the internal structure of perceptual and semantic categories. In: T.E. Moore (ed.) *Cognitive development and the acquisition of language*. New York: Academic Press.

Rosch, Eleanor (1974) Linguistic relativity. In: A. Silverstein (ed.) *Human communication: Theoretical explorations*. New York: Halsted.

Rosch, Eleanor (1975a) Cognitive representations of semantic categories. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 104, 192-233.

Rosch, Eleanor (1975b) Universals and cultural specifics in human categorization. In: R.W. Brislin; S. Bochner; W.J. Lonner (eds.) *Cross-cultural perspectives on learning.* New York: Halsted.

Rudzka-Ostyn, Brygida (1992) Case Relations in Cognitive Grammar. *Leuvense Bijdragen. Tijdschrift voor Germaanse Filologie* 81 (1-3), 327-373.

Sorace, Antonella (2000) Gradients in auxiliary selection with intransitive verbs. *Language* 76.4:859-890.

Shibatani, Masayoshi (1985) Passives and Related Constructions: A Prototype Analysis. *Language* 61, 821-848.

Smith, Michael (1992) The Role of Image Schemas in German Grammar. Leuven Contributions in Linguistics and Philology. *Leuvense Bijdragen*. *Tijdschrift voor germannse filologie* 81.1-3, 385 - 410.

Sweetser, Eve (1991) *From Etymology to Pragmatics. Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure.* Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, John (1989) *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory*. New York: Oxford.

Tomasello, Michael (2000) First steps toward a usage-based theory of language acquisition. *Cognitive Linguistics* 11, 61-82.

Tomasello, Michael (2003) *Constructing a language: a usage-based theory of language acquisition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tracy, Rosemarie (1986) The Acquisition of Case Morphology in German. *Linguistics* 24, 47-78.

van Oosten, Jeanne (1986) *The Nature of Subjects, Topics and Agents: A Cognitive Explanation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club.

Wegener, Heide (1985) *Der Dativ im heutigen Deutsch*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

Welke, Klaus (2002): *Deutsche Syntax funktional. Perspektiviertheit syntaktischer Strukturen*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

Winters, Margaret (1989) Diachronic Prototype Theory: on the evolution of the French subjunctive. *Linguistics* 27, 703-730.

Zobl, Helmut (1995) Markedness Aspects of Case-Marking in L1 French/L2 English. In: Lynn Eubank; Larry Selinker; Michael Sharwood Smith (eds.) *The Current State of Interlanguage*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 197-203.

Zyzik, Eve (2006) Learners' overgeneralization of dative clitics to accusative contexts: Evidence for prototype effects in SLA. In: C. Klee; T. Face (eds.) *Selected Proceedings of the 7th Conference on the Acquisition of Spanish and Portuguese as First and Second Languages*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 122-134.

Biographical details

Carlee Arnett (PhD Michigan) is an Associate Professor of German and Russian at the University of California/Davis. She is the supervisor of first and second year German and Russian language courses and the Director of the Davis Second Language Acquisition Institute.

Harriett Jernigan (PhD Stanford) has been a lecturer in German as a Foreign Language and English for 17 years, teaching at Stanford, San Francisco State University, RWTH Aachen, University of San Francisco, UC Davis and Bauhaus-Universität Weimar. Her research interests include language proficiency testing, practical applications of English composition theory and cognitive grammar in the FL classroom, and project-based curriculum development.

Key words

German, Cognitive Grammar, case, teaching