

## 0. Introduction

Over the past two decades, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been introduced quite successfully into foreign language teaching methodology in wide parts of the world and a sizable number of current and especially future foreign language teachers have become acquainted with this approach during their studies as well as during diverse internships and trainings-on-the-job. However, task-based teaching has not yet found a solid way into foreign language classrooms. Textbooks do not integrate this approach, nor do curricula, as task-based teaching is seen as being partly incompatible with current views on didactic progression. This situation is understandable insofar as task-based language teaching does not – and does not want to – follow the rigid routine of a traditional foreign language textbook. This may be seen as a disadvantage by those teachers who have learned to rely exclusively on a text book series, but for teachers with a more creative mindset the integration of task-based teaching bears many advantages, which outweigh the disadvantage just mentioned, as it allows the teachers (as well as their learners) a lot more freedom to deal with everyday situations and current issues, which is usually perceived as immensely motivating by both teachers and learners alike.

Task-based language teaching stands in the tradition of the multitude of available communicative approaches, which is the reason why it mainly focuses on communication. Fostering communicative skills is certainly far from being a bad idea, but at the same time an exclusive focus on communication may frequently come at the expense of form. Many task-based language classrooms (as well as a sizable part of the task-based language teaching literature) therefore largely avoid grammar teaching, as the concepts of ‘grammar teaching’ in the teachers’ minds are generally connected to something negative, something that “has to be done” but is not necessarily fun. This rather negative attitude towards grammar is observable in many teachers and teacher trainees, who transport it subconsciously – and probably unwillingly – to their learners.

Yet, how can grammar be seen as fun or even as interesting when not even the teachers like it? Such a view of grammar is presumably still heavily influenced by the grammar drills and/or PPP methods (“presentation, practice, production”) that the teachers have encountered in their own school, university or internship days, where grammar was presented as a set of abstract structures with rules and exceptions which had to be learned by heart, and where grammar was not necessarily related to meaning. However, today, as CELCE-MURCIA (2001: 466) correctly claims, “grammar can no longer be viewed as a central, autonomous system to be taught and learned independent of meaning, social function and discourse structure”.

This book even goes a step further because it argues that grammar is as meaningful as lexis (just in a more abstract way) and that teaching grammar is therefore at the same time teaching meaning. This perspective is owing to the fast-growing body of research in theoretical cognitive grammar and in applied cognitive grammar, an approach which is seen as usage-based, i. e., as a descriptive and not a prescriptive way of looking at grammar in usage events, and which has already managed to develop meaning-based explanations of various grammatical

phenomena and has empirically proven their effectiveness (although hardly ever in task-based classrooms). According to ACHARD/NIEMEIER (2004: 7), applied cognitive grammar is a good starting point for grammar instruction, “because the kinds of generalizations it posits to describe linguistic organisation can easily be made explicit, and thus incorporated into classroom practices”.

As grammar will definitely be an ever-present ingredient in any foreign language classroom, grammar teaching will always be a necessity. What will hopefully change is the perspective that teachers have concerning the concept of ‘grammar’, no longer seeing it as a necessary evil but seeing it as what it really is, namely a tool in the learners’ hands which enables them to say exactly what they want to say, thus contributing to and sometimes even establishing the meanings of the utterances the learners intend to make. Only if learners know how to flexibly use this tool in diverse situations will they be able to communicate efficiently.

This idea is quite close to PENNINGTON’s view, who argues that “grammar is a process of choosing forms and constructing language to respond to communicative demands, it essentially involves the learner’s creative response to context and circumstance” (1995: vii). If such a functional concept of grammar is then coupled with insights from cognitive grammar, which presents grammatical phenomena as bearing meaning and as the language users’ deliberate choices of construal and not just – as in traditional views on grammar – as prescriptive and rule-governed ways of using the language, learners have the chance to stop seeing grammar as a straightjacket and to start seeing it as the tool it is, which should also enable them to use the foreign language creatively and not just reproductively. This is certainly easier the more advanced a learner is, but also less advanced learners can use language creatively, although with certain restrictions, as of course their linguistic repertoire is smaller than that of more advanced learners. Using language creatively will also benefit an outside-of-the-classroom use of the foreign language, as a creative use of language is exactly what happens in ‘real’ communication, which is quite different from the pseudo-communication that can be found in the majority of more conventional foreign language classrooms.

According to ALLWRIGHT/HANKS (2009: 51), task-based language teaching “puts learners in an unconventional and perhaps unusually proactive relationship to their classroom learning. They have more room to show seriousness of purpose, some capacity for decision-making and space to be unique”, an important quote which already mentions several crucial aspects of this approach. Task-based language teaching can be seen as an action-oriented approach, which can be enhanced by integrating grammar teaching in a non-explicit way, i. e., “by the backdoor”, while the learners may not even notice that what they are learning IS indeed grammar. They will be involved in situations that they may, at least to a certain extent, also encounter outside their classrooms and they are given communicative tasks they are to work on and solve, usually with a partner or in small groups.

These situations and tasks have to be carefully chosen and developed by the teacher so that in order to fulfil a task the learners need to use a specific grammatical phenomenon. In this way, not only the communicative topic is foregrounded in the lesson, as is usual in task-based classrooms, but the lesson focus is instead two-pronged, as a grammatical topic goes hand-in-hand with the communicative topic. What teachers need to invest for preparing such lessons is

especially their creativity, as they have to come up with communicative situations which more or less force the learners to use a specific grammatical structure and which additionally cater to different learner types. This book suggests to use WILLIS' task cycle in a modified way (cf. WILLIS 1996). During the pre-task the teacher already uses the grammatical phenomenon in question but does not yet expect the learners to use it, while during the task itself the structure may and should already be used by the learners. Only after the learners have presented their task outcomes is the grammatical structure in question explicitly focussed upon. In other words: in this book, the task-based approach is enhanced and coupled with insights into (cognitive) grammar, and these two approaches jointly become a very useful tool for the foreign language classroom.

So far, task-based language teaching and cognitive grammar have not frequently been brought together. TYLER (2012) has presented some suggestions, but has not delved deeply into the topic. CADIerno/ROBINSON (2009) have used pedagogic tasks to teach the construal of motion events and JACOBSEN (2016) has conducted an experiment on the task-based teaching of the English conditional from a cognitive grammar perspective, the results of which show that the cognitively based way of teaching was more successful than the task-based approach on its own and that both of these ways of teaching worked better than traditional methods. The connection between task-based teaching and cognitive grammar definitely seems to be a fruitful one, although this can only be claimed with caution, as there is still a lack of studies.

This book intends to show that a connection of task-based teaching and cognitive grammar is indeed a very fruitful one, as the two approaches can be integrated in order to yield the approach of task-based grammar teaching (TBGT). The book consists of two main parts, a more theoretical one and a more practical one, and is structured as follows. The first part discusses the didactic as well as the linguistic theoretical background, starting with some general reflections on the role of grammar teaching in various didactic approaches and pointing out the necessity of grammar instruction. Chapter 2 summarises the development of task-based language teaching, discusses its advantages and disadvantages as well as various unresolved questions that researchers do not all agree upon, such as the role of grammar in this approach. It furthermore outlines general ways of implementing the approach into the foreign language classroom, focusing mainly on WILLIS' task cycle. Chapter 3 offers a concise introduction to cognitive grammar and its applications and additionally outlines their potential for the foreign language classroom. Chapter 4 then brings the two approaches of task-based language teaching and applied cognitive grammar together and explains how one can profit from the other.

Subsequently, the second part of this book translates the rather theoretical perspectives of the first part into actual teaching practice. It discusses ten case studies on diverse grammatical phenomena, which were chosen according to their relevance for the foreign language classroom, starting out with the TAM complex that every verb entails (tense, aspect, modality – treated separately due to ease of explanation although they actually belong together), continuing with conditional clauses and the passive voice, tackling prepositions and phrasal verbs, and finally focusing on verb complementation in complex sentences as well as on pronoun usage and article usage. The book does not intend to provide model lessons or teaching recipes but instead uses one teaching example in each of the chapters to explain in

detail how the grammatical phenomenon in question can be implemented in a task-based way into a communicative situation. Further possible communicative situations and tasks are briefly indicated after the explanations of the teaching examples. Most grammar topics are discussed with a secondary school audience in mind. Those topics which are also suitable for a primary school audience (or for (pseudo-) beginners in secondary school who do not have a solid foundation from their primary school English years), such as prepositions, pronouns and articles, are discussed for an audience of less advanced learners but can also be used with more advanced learners in order to help them reorganise their grammar skills.

The references following each chapter list the publications which are quoted in the chapters and which can be consulted for more in-depth information. In some instances, further basic texts have been added.

### Further reading

- ACHARD, Michel / NIEMEIER, Susanne (2004): "Cognitive linguistics, language acquisition and pedagogy". In: ACHARD, Michel / NIEMEIER, Susanne (eds.): *Cognitive linguistics, second language acquisition, and foreign language teaching*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1–12.
- ALLWRIGHT, Dick / HANKS, Judith (2009): *The developing language learner: An introduction to exploratory practice*. Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- CADIerno, Teresa / ROBINSON, Peter (2009): "Language typology, task complexity and the development of L2 lexicalization patterns for describing motion events". *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 6, 245–277.
- CELCE-MURCIA, Marianne (2001): *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- JACOBSEN, Natalia D. (2016): "The best of both worlds: Combining cognitive linguistics and pedagogic tasks to teach English conditionals". *Applied Linguistics*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw030>.
- PENNINGTON, Martha C. (1995): "A situated process view of grammar". In: PENNINGTON, Martha C. (ed.): *New ways in teaching grammar*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL Inc., i–xvi.
- TYLER, Andrea (2012): *Cognitive linguistics and second language learning: Theoretical basics and experimental evidence*. London: Routledge.
- WILLIS, Jane (1996): *A framework for task-based learning*. Harlow: Longman.

## **PART I: Didactic and linguistic theory**

## **Introduction to part I**

This part of the book starts off from a didactic perspective on grammar teaching, elaborating its role in various approaches and methodologies and then concentrates on the approach of task-based teaching, especially focusing on its development, the definition of the concept “task”, on a suitable methodological framework for an implementation of this approach, and on the role of grammar in this approach. Subsequently, the discussion turns towards the linguistic theory, which is based upon the research area of cognitive grammar. The cognitive-linguistic paradigm and its major tenets and beliefs are introduced before the more specialised area of cognitive grammar is explained in detail. The connection between cognitive grammar and foreign language teaching is scrutinised and, in a final chapter, the didactic and the linguistic theories are brought together.

# 1. Grammar in the foreign language classroom

This chapter starts with some brief comments on the current situation of grammar teaching in English classrooms in Germany, in the majority of which the PPP method (presentation – practice – production) is used, before describing the role that has been devoted to grammar in different language teaching approaches over the ages, starting with the Grammar-Translation Method, continuing with the Audiolingual Approach, ending with the communicative approaches, including the relatively recent focus-on-form movement, and leading up to task-based language learning.

## 1.1 Current situation

In most German foreign language classrooms, the so-called PPP (presentation – practice – production) approach is currently chosen when it comes to grammar teaching. In this approach, a new grammatical feature is first presented to the learners, normally via the coursebook, which usually contains one or more didacticised texts with an inauthentically high number of occurrences of the phenomenon in question. In a second step, the teacher then explains this phenomenon deductively or lets the learners discover it inductively. This is followed by an analysis of the form and use of the new structure, and finally rules (and sometimes signal words) are formulated, which have to be written down by the learners and learnt by heart. The third step focuses on the learners' controlled production and use of the targeted phenomenon, frequently in exercises consisting of isolated sentences. However, the meaningfulness of the new grammatical structure is hardly ever touched upon and the PPP procedure does not necessarily enable the learners to use the grammatical phenomenon in naturally occurring conversation outside of the classroom.

R. ELLIS (2003: 29) mentions that “implicit in PPP is the idea that it is possible to lead learners from controlled to automatic use of new language features”. However, such use would normally still be decontextualised, i. e., it is not pragmatically anchored in a specific usage context. R. ELLIS continues his convincing arguments against the PPP approach by criticising that “PPP views language as a series of ‘products’ that can be acquired sequentially as ‘accumulated entities’” (ibid.), that “SLA research has shown that learners do not acquire a language in this way” (ibid.) and that “L2 acquisition is a ‘process’ that is incompatible with teaching seen as the presentation and practice of a series of ‘products’” (ibid.). Furthermore, PPP is a very teacher-centred approach and the learners normally only react to the teacher's and/or the coursebook input, but do not become the pro-active and collaborative learners which they are meant to be from a more modern perspective, which is also the perspective of task-based language teaching.

Grammar is an omnipresent phenomenon in the foreign language classroom and it is generally not liked too much, neither by the learners nor by the teachers. Learning to master a foreign language certainly involves learning (about) the grammar of this language as well, however, there are many different opinions on what ‘grammar’ actually is. Most people

would probably say that the term relates to the structural aspects of language and they would contrast it with the notion of ‘vocabulary’. Indeed, when it comes to the competences to be acquired in foreign language teaching, most current EFL textbooks still differentiate between ‘vocabulary’ and ‘grammar’ / ‘structures’ in their tables of contents. Cognitive grammar, on the other hand, argues that lexis and grammar are inseparably intertwined and form two ends of a continuum, sharing many organisational principles (such as categorisation, (un)boundedness and metaphorization, among others) – this is explained in more detail in the third chapter.

Language cannot be defined without these two poles of the continuum. If there was only vocabulary, people would run around and utter single words – and this is certainly not what is meant by “communication”. If there was only grammar and no words, nothing could be said or even thought at all. Both ingredients are necessary and work together. Even a very simple sentence like “Mary runs” does not only contain words, but is full of grammar as well. On the one hand, the sentence follows the English word order in that the subject is placed before the verb. As the verb is intransitive in its motion meaning<sup>1</sup>, it cannot have an object. Furthermore, the sentence is tensed (third person singular present tense) and the non-use of the progressive aspect states that the sentence does not describe an ongoing activity but instead a habitual one, as Mary may be a member of a running team with regular running meetings, or that Mary always runs when under stress, for example. What is still more, the sentence talks about reality, as otherwise modal auxiliaries would be used (*Mary could run, Mary may run, Mary ought to run* etc. – all of them indicating various extents of distance towards reality and all of them indicating that it is not a proven fact that Mary runs).

Therefore, even in the very first English lessons for beginning learners, in which simple sentences such as the one mentioned above are used on a regular basis, grammar is an ever-present asset and contributes a lot to the meanings of the utterances made, although in a more abstract way than vocabulary does. This is why grammar should never be neglected in the foreign language classroom and why learners need to be made aware of the meaning components that grammar contributes to the overall meaning of an utterance. Although WIDDOWSON (1990: 97) correctly argued already thirty years ago that “language learning is essentially learning how grammar functions in the achievement of meaning”, this sound piece of advice has hardly been accepted and grammar has rather been taught “for grammar’s sake”.

## 1.2 A brief history of grammar teaching

Over the history of second language acquisition theories, the importance of grammar instruction has varied quite extensively, from playing a key role to being of hardly any importance, depending on the theories that were fashionable at certain times. The following paragraphs briefly elucidate in a simplified way the major theories on second language acquisition with respect to the role that grammar plays in them.

1 “Run” can have other meanings than the basic motion meaning mentioned above, for example in “Mary runs a company”. In this case, it has become a transitive verb and demands a direct object. In this case, the basic motion sense has been metaphorically extended.



Foreign languages have been taught since the Middle Ages, when Latin and Ancient Greek were the languages to be learnt. When at a certain point of time foreign language teaching no longer focused on the teaching of ancient languages that were no longer spoken but turned towards modern languages instead, the way of teaching foreign languages did not change but was simply taken over from the teaching of the classical languages. This first approach to the teaching of modern foreign languages was called the ‘Grammar-Translation Method’ – definitely a misnomer, as a method needs a theory behind it, which was absent in this case.

Similar to the teaching of classical languages, the language of instruction for the modern languages was usually the learners’ mother tongue, and when learners left school after many years of foreign language instruction they were in most cases utterly unable to hold a conversation in the foreign language, as this had usually never happened in the classroom, in which the focus was nearly exclusively on written and not on spoken language. Sophisticated texts were read and translated in class and grammar structures in these texts were explained and discussed, not with the aim to prepare the learners for being able to communicate with native speakers of the foreign language but with the aim of acquainting the learners with the literature of the foreign culture and educating them to be persons with a taste for what was seen as ‘high culture’ in those days.

The aim of language education was not to enable the learners to use the foreign language, but education was rather seen as ‘cultivation’. Furthermore, grammar analysis was meant to train the learners’ capacity for logical thought. Language was thus not used as an everyday communicative tool but dissected in a quasi-academic way. As communication was of no special interest, grammar played a decisive role in this type of instruction. Interestingly enough, this way of foreign language instruction is still popular in wide parts of the world (cf. also NUNAN 2015: 8).

Although criticism of the Grammar-Translation Method came up relatively early, nothing much changed until World War II, during which the necessity for people to actually speak foreign languages became vital. New methods, among them what VANPATTEN / WILLIAMS (2013: 17) call the “Army method”, were developed, which were meant to lead the learners towards an ability to really speak the language in question. This was partly inspired by the thought that the enemy should be understood, partly inspired by the wish to send diplomats and soldiers or even smuggle spies into a foreign country who had to speak the foreign language flawlessly in order not to be detected, and certainly also inspired by the wish for a teaching method which focused more on oral production than on reading, analysing, translating and interpreting classic literature.

The so-called Audiolingual Approach, based on behaviouristic theories of conditioning via stimulus-response, was therefore developed in the USA, but reasonably quickly also found its way to Germany. In the 1970s, many German schools invested heavily in language laboratories, in which the learners were sitting in single cubicles, listening with headphones to tapes playing sample sentences of the foreign language. They were expected to repeat the sentences they heard and transform them in so-called ‘pattern drills’. The teacher could listen in to every single one of the learners and could also correct them. This way of teaching focused on oral production, repetition and automatization. Grammar was ‘performed’ in these pattern drills,

where, for example, an active sentence was presented which the learners had to transform into a passive sentence, but the transformation was not explained any further. Therefore, the importance of grammar in this approach was rather minor, as the students were expected to learn from analogies and as an explicit analysis of grammatical phenomena did not happen. The method relied instead on the automatization of a grammatical structure by repetition, i. e., by ‘habitualisation’: whenever the learners heard a specific stimulus, they were expected to give a conditioned response.

Although oral production had finally entered the foreign language classroom and every learner had maximal speaking time, in the end the method did not really work and came in for severe criticism from the 1970s onwards. One of the reasons for its failure is certainly the fact that language learning is a far more complex endeavour than, for example, learning to ride a bike or learning to tie one’s shoe laces, which can both easily be learnt by stimulus-repetition-response action chains, another reason was the fact that the kind of language used did not frequently approximate normal communication, as no learner would ever encounter a native speaker who, for example, would utter an isolated sentence in the active voice in order for the learner to transform this sentence into the passive voice. Therefore, the learners were still not prepared for everyday communication, although they will have had a far better pronunciation than the learners having been taught according to the Grammar-Translation Method. For all these reasons, the audiolingual method was abandoned reasonably soon and many schools only used their expensive language laboratories for writing classroom tests, as the learners could sit at a distance from each other.

Other second language acquisition theories followed suit, but none of them lasted for long until the upstart of communicative language teaching began. According to NUNAN (2015: 10), “communicative language teaching was less a method than a broad philosophical approach to language, viewing it not so much as a system of rules but as a tool for communication”. One of its earliest appearances is to be found in KRASHEN’s ‘Monitor Model’<sup>2</sup>, consisting of five hypotheses which claim, for example, that acquisition and learning are two different processes. According to KRASHEN, acquisition is what happens in natural foreign language settings, for example, when a child and its parents move to a country where another language is spoken and the child starts to pick up the language from everyday interactions with native speakers of that language. This happens subconsciously and the aim is communication. Learning, on the other hand, happens consciously, usually in an instructed setting, and its aim is the mastery of the structural rules of a language. KRASHEN claimed that learning can never become acquisition<sup>3</sup> and that acquisition is the better process.

2 For more information on KRASHEN’s model see, for example, VANPATTEN / WILLIAMS 2013: 24–27.

3 Incidentally, this is not completely true, as on the one hand also natural language settings can involve a focus on language structure, for example, when a second language speaker says something to a native speaker and then asks a metalinguistic question, such as “Did I say that correctly?” or “Can one say it like this?”. On the other hand, also language instruction can involve acquisition elements. For instance, when learners first encounter the past tense *-ed* morpheme, they need to pay attention to adding it to every regular verb form when using this verb in the past, but once they have passed this initial stage, they just add the morpheme automatically, without thinking about it any longer. Indeed, newer research

Although KRASHEN's model plays a fundamental role in the development of second language acquisition theories, it has been heavily criticised as being too rigid (and also untestable) in all its claims. Concerning the role of grammar, KRASHEN had claimed that it would develop on its own during communication and did not need to be taught explicitly. ACHARD (2008: 433) sums up the situation quite adequately by claiming that "the rise of the communicative models of instruction made instructors so suspicious of undue focus on structure that in the 1980s and early 1990s systematic grammatical instruction was banned from many language classrooms".

Altogether, it can be stated that the importance of grammar started to lose more and more ground in the foreign language classroom. Thus, the pendulum swung from grammar's all-importance in the Grammar-Translation Method via its lesser importance in the Audiolingual Approach to its lack of importance in most communicative approaches.

However, implicit instruction (i. e., grammar developing on its own during communication, such as KRASHEN had claimed) does not seem to work that well either, at least not for all grammatical phenomena<sup>4</sup>. This fact is well-known from studies on Canadian total immersion projects<sup>5</sup> (see, for example, TARONE / SWAIN 1995 or SWAIN 2000), which have shown that grammar does not develop on its own just by exposing the learners to rich input but that the result is rather one of fossilised reduction.

What is more, various meta-analyses of SLA studies over the last fifteen years have come to the conclusion that "instruction that incorporates explicit (including deductive and inductive) techniques leads to more substantial effects than implicit learning" (NORRIS / ORTEGA 2000: 500) and that the effect sizes for an explicit instruction of both simple and complex language features were a lot more pronounced than those for an implicit instruction (cf. SPADA / TOMITA 2010). Along these lines, CAMERON (2001: 108) argues that "grammar may emerge naturally in first language (...) but the grammar of a foreign language is 'foreign', and grammar development requires skilled planning of tasks and lessons, and explicit teaching".

frequently uses only the term "acquisition" in order to refer to both acquisition (in KRASHEN's sense) and learning.

- 4 HULSTIJN & DE GRAFF 1994 argue, for example, that simple forms or rules are best acquired through the use of implicit methods, whereas more complex grammatical phenomena are easier to acquire through explicit methods.
- 5 These projects were located in Québec, which is officially bilingual in French and English with French as the majority language. Whereas the native French speakers are usually able to communicate in English as well (mainly due to the fact that they are geographically surrounded by huge English language majorities), the English speakers are generally monolingual. In order to change this imbalance, school projects were developed in which native English speakers went to a French-speaking school and were surrounded by French from the very first day onwards, all day long, where every subject was taught in French and where some of the schools did not even tolerate English during the breaks. When these learners left the schools, they were usually quite fluent in French and had furthermore developed an interest for Franco-Canadian culture. However, the grammatical correctness of their French utterances left a lot to be desired, as the learners had only received communicative input in French but grammar had never been taught explicitly or been explained to them and had not developed on its own, which contradicts KRASHEN's claim that grammar develops as a by-product of communication.