

Sabine De Knop and Teun De Rycker (eds.), *Cognitive Approaches to Pedagogical Grammar: A Volume in Honour of René Dirven*. 2008. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter. ISBN-13: 978-3-11-019595-8. 444 p.

**Reviewed by Eloy JM Romero-Muñoz (University of Namur)**

Do not let the title of the book under review fool you: this is no ordinary *Festschrift*. And we can hardly blame De Knop and De Rycker for breaking with tradition either. This type of volumes is indeed often perceived as a kind of scientific swan song, which, for a recipient like René Dirven who is as involved and productive as ever, could not be further from the truth. Besides, Dirven had already been honored *in illo tempore* (Smieja, 1997). Rather, the book under review reflects current research into grammar pedagogy within the Applied Cognitive Linguistics (ACL) framework (Pütz et al., 2001a, 2001b), especially the need to identify, and subsequently focus on, the underlying conceptual nature of linguistic knowledge in language teaching.

The book may not seem to add anything new to the discussion at first, especially in its first part, which is essentially a state-of-the-art review of Cognitive Grammar (CG) and its possible applications to pedagogical grammar. Langacker's contribution for instance is a slightly revised version of an earlier paper (2008), which was itself an elaboration on his foundational volumes on Cognitive Grammar (1987, 1991). In similar vein, Taylor's and Broccias' contributions are largely based on earlier research (1993 and 2006 respectively), but their inclusion here helps make CG palatable to education specialists not familiar with the framework.

However, most contributors do manage to pinpoint key issues and, at times, to make provocative suggestions. One such issue is the usage-basis of language as a challenge for descriptive and educational purposes alike. Taylor's observations are consonant both with the rationale of the book (the belief in the underlying conceptual nature of language / teaching construal) and with Meunier's discussion of the complementarity between corpus linguistics and the cognitive paradigm. Corpus linguistics has indeed opened new avenues in pedagogical grammar research by providing the tools to concretise the usage basis of language.

This brings us to what could very well be the ultimate, and hopefully not insuperable, problem in cognitive-pedagogical grammar research: how to adapt a usage-based model of language with its inherent fuzzy nature to the FL classroom and the now well-documented necessity, even within the ACL framework (see Cadierno's contribution to the volume), for some focus on form (see for instance

Doughty and Williams, 1998)? The structuralist approach to language teaching (Lado 1957), for all its faults, has the mitigating advantage of allowing teachers to sequence language learning, which is also probably why the 'discrete-item syllabus' view is still very much at the core of most present-day FL textbooks (Grundy 2004: 122). Despite Langacker's description of grammar as a structured *inventory* of conventional linguistic units (1987), CG and its siblings — Goldberg's Construction Grammar (1995, 2006), Croft's Radical Construction Grammar (2001), Fauconnier and Turner's Blending Theory (2002) — have redefined the nature of language in such a way that it actually complicates any teaching endeavour. How is the CG-friendly teacher to teach schemata, constructions and other abstract notions like prototypicality and usage events? Representative suggestions from the book include the following. Meunier advocates 'a web-based, hyperlink kind of grammar' as the best — if not the only — viable solution for the long term. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez suggests we start with conceptual similarities and gradually 'depart from them into the usage areas where [the languages] differ' (147). Yet the wordy kinds of rules he recommends are likely to confuse, rather than help, FL students. Much in the same way, De Knop and Dirven argue that conceptual fluency depends on helping students realize, on the basis of simple contrastive examples, to understand how the FL works. But how can we do that concisely and in a structured way? Broccias's reappraisal of Lewis's 'lexical approach' (1993, 1997), however interesting in its own right, does little to address this problem of user-friendliness, which, to my mind, is the main challenge ahead, and one which is insufficiently faced up to in the volume under review.

The book also features slightly more applied discussions characterized by a general interest in 'a conceptually-based contrastive analysis,' best expressed in Danesi's contribution. One can only agree with Danesi when he contends that recognizing conceptual errors as likely sources of interference in L2 is a necessary step in language pedagogy. Unfortunately, such a contrastive approach is premised on the idea that students share one and the same L1, which is not necessarily the case considering the increasingly multilingual nature of teaching environments (Extra and Yagmur, 2004; Miller et al., 2009).

To their credit, the editors have ventured beyond the boundaries of lexis as has seldom been the case in ACL research so far. Witness the contributions by Maldonado (on Spanish middle syntax), Valenzuela Manzanares and Rojo López (on constructions and interlanguage), Chen and Oller (on the use of passives in English by Chinese learners). I do realize the apparent paradox of the previous assertion, especially considering the CL belief in a lexico-grammatical continuum. Yet I still feel the real challenge for advocates of the CL framework lies not so much in persuading teachers and students of the validity of the paradigm itself or of the conceptual nature of language as it does in providing tools for dealing with more

syntactic aspects of language or, at least, with aspects of language that are traditionally perceived as such.

Overall, the volume under review proves both comforting and immensely frustrating for any education specialist who believes in the merits of CG for L2 acquisition. On the one hand, I share Taylor's enthusiasm (58), for the resilience of Langacker's CG augurs well for the future, albeit a distant one. Most authors in this volume convincingly underscore the inherent limitations of traditional methods and do an equally good job when offering a CL-inspired alternative. Moreover, the solutions that are being put forward within the ACL framework clearly converge, which also attests to the coherence of the framework. On the other hand, this is as close as we have gotten so far to a cogent theoretical account of an operative cognitive-pedagogical grammar, which is not very far. There is also a fundamental methodological flaw in current ACL research. While CL approaches to pedagogical grammar may be gaining credit among researchers, little is known about how actual practitioners — read: teachers and learners — feel about this new theoretical paradigm, let alone its putative application(s). Experimental studies are still scarce; when they do exist, these studies overlook the influence of the teacher and learner variables despite the research on teacher and learner cognition that has underscored the influence of beliefs on attitudes and actual practices (Borg 2006). In other words, our attempts at popularizing CL in FL teaching may eventually prove vain unless we manage to get teachers and students on board.

While there are thus some elephants in the room which have remained unnoticed, in the end the overarching theme, editorial choices and convergences among the contributions truly reflect Dirven's life-long commitment to applied linguistics as much as they attest to his extensive involvement with this book project itself.

## References

- Achard, Michel and Susanne Niemeier (eds.). 2004. *Cognitive linguistics, second language acquisition, and foreign language teaching*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Borg, Simon. 2006. *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*. London: Continuum.
- Broccias, Cristiano. 2006. "Cognitive approaches to grammar." In: Kristiansen et al. (eds.) 81–115.
- Croft, William. 2001. *Radical construction grammar: Syntactic theory in typological perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Doughty, Catherine and Jessica Williams. 1998. *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Extra, Guus and Katlay Yagmur (eds.). 2004. *Urban multilingualism in Europe: Immigrant minority languages at home and school*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

- Fauconnier, Gilles and Mark Turner. 2002. *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goldberg, Adele. 1995. *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument structure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goldberg, Adele. 2005. *Constructions at work: The nature of generalization in language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grundy, Peter. "The figure / ground *Gestalt* in language teaching methodology." In: Michel Achard and Susanne Niemeier (eds.). 119–42.
- Kristiansen, Gitte, Michel Achard, René Dirven, and Fernando Jose Ruiz de Mendoza Ibañez (eds.). 2006. *Cognitive Linguistics: Current Applications and Future Perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lado, Robert. 1957. *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Langacker, Ronald. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol 1 : Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press.
- Langacker, Ronald. 1991. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol 2 : Descriptive Application*. Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. "Cognitive grammar as a basis for language instruction." In: Nick Ellis and Peter Robinson (eds.). 66–88.
- Lewis, Michael. (1993). *The Lexical Approach: The State of ELT and a Way Forward*. Hove, UK: Language Teaching Publications.
- Lewis, Michael. (1997). *Implementing the Lexical Approach: Putting theory into practice*. Hove, UK: Language Teaching Publications.
- Miller, Jennifer, Alex Kostogritz and Margaret Gearon (eds.). 2009. *Culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms: New dilemmas for teachers*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Pütz, Martin, Susanne Niemeier and René Dirven (eds.). 2001a. *Applied Cognitive Linguistics. Vol. 1 : Theory and language acquisition*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Pütz, Martin, Susanne Niemeier and René Dirven (eds.). 2001b. *Applied Cognitive Linguistics. Vol. 2 : Language pedagogy*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Smieja, Birgit (ed.). 1997. *Human Contact through Language and Linguistics: A Festschrift for René Dirven*. Frankfurt: Lang.
- Taylor, John. 1993. Some pedagogical implications of cognitive linguistics. In *Conceptualization and mental processing of language*, Richard A. Geiger and Brygida Rudzka-Ostyn (eds.), 201–223. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.