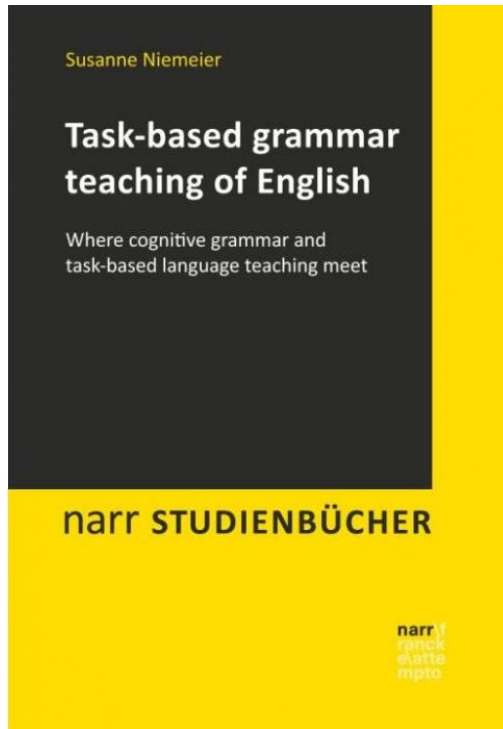


**Task-based Grammar Teaching of English: Where Cognitive and Task-based  
Language Teaching Meet**  
(Book Review)

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## **Introduction**

The book reviewed here is about suggesting a way to integrate grammar into Task-based language teaching. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a language teaching approach that is designed to integrate real-life communicative activities in the classroom. Tasks are defined by multiple scholars in the field of ELT, however, there is not a single definition for what a task is. One of the earliest definition of a task is given by Nunan (1989) stating that a task is a part of a classroom duty enabling students to take part in language learning processes while focusing on meaning instead of form.

Because of the fact that tasks are communicative activities not giving a complete focus on form, TBLT and grammar teaching have been regarded as conflicting with each other. This rather old-fashioned idea is aimed to be refuted in this Niemeier's book. The aim of the book is to bring forth a new perspective to the way TBLT and grammar teaching is regarded together, claiming that they can be well implemented together in classrooms. The author introduces a linguistic theory called as Cognitive Grammar (CG) developed by Langacker (1987) who suggests that grammar forms are to be processed through reasoning, in other words, there are logical explanations of the usages of each grammatical item. Hence, the author claims that this theory when combined with TBLT is can be a highly effective way to integrate grammar teaching to TBLT.

The book comprises of two parts and 15 chapters and in the first part, the first four chapter explains the theoretical foundations of grammar teaching, task-based language teaching, cognitive grammar and the mixture of TBLT and CG. In the second part, in the chapters between 5 and 14, each chapter gives a detailed explanation of a grammar subject in terms of CG and later presents a task cycle in which the grammar subject at hand is taught communicatively and explained within theoretical foundations of CG.

The grammatical descriptions for language focus are suggested for German speakers of English because the suggested readers for this book are English teachers working with

German students learning English. However, the task ideas presented in the book can be utilized by any English teacher working in an ESL or EFL setting only adapting the explanations for the language focus for his/her own context.

## **Part I: Didactic and Linguistic Theory**

### **Chapter 1: Grammar in the Foreign Language Classroom**

The first chapter gives a short history of approaches and methods through which grammar was taught, from the earliest methods like Grammar-Translation method to the more current communicative approaches like TBLT and explains whether grammar was taught implicitly or explicitly. It also talks about how grammar was regarded throughout this period and explains whether grammar had a central or a side role. As a last remark, it points out that Focus on Form is suggested to be used in communicative classrooms because the primary focus is on meaning and it is consistent with implicit way of grammar teaching, however, the author hints that a new approach will be suggested.

### **Chapter 2: Task-based language teaching**

This chapter mentions the theoretical foundations under which TBLT was developed. It specifies the fact that the meaning aspect and communicative focus is being maximized in tasks. Therefore, it is stated that TBLT came out in contrast to methods like Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual Method and originated from Communicative Language Teaching. It also gives multiple categories of tasks such as information gap and problem solving tasks and how they function as tasks. Furthermore, details of the task cycle (pre-task, task, language focus) and how each of them should be prepared according to some guidelines are given. On a final note, the issue of inclusion/exclusion and implicitness/explicitness of grammar in TBLT is explained in regards to the views of multiple scholars.

### **Chapter 3: Cognitive grammar**

This chapter talks about the history of the language theory, Cognitive Grammar and its implications in teaching grammar. CG is a theory of cognitive linguistics that gives more importance to meaning of structures rather than syntax, as opposed to generative linguistics. In the essence of CG, each issue is described with explanations that are based on reasoning rather than rules to be memorized. In sub-chapters, further explanations are given on the issues CG give importance to such as how CG regards teaching vocabulary and grammatical item and the extent to which meaning is being focused. In addition to these issues, a highly important aspect of CG is emphasized; construal. It is described as a speaker's unique choices in interpreting and producing language, which is mentioned excessively in the forthcoming chapters of the book. Lastly, it presents strong claims on the effectiveness of CG in language classrooms based on research, which is a good presentation of this approach to convince the reader to give a chance to apply it in his/her classroom.

### **Chapter 4: Cognitive grammar and task-based language teaching**

This is a very short chapter explaining how CG and TBLT can be best combined together and implemented in the classrooms and most importantly why it should be done so. The point the author makes here in suggesting this combination is as such; while focusing on meaning, form has the risk to be disregarded. However, with CG that risk is eliminated because the way the grammar is regarded is to be changed already with this approach, hence alleviating the integration of grammar into tasks much easier.

### **Part II: Case Studies**

The second part of the book follows a specific pattern in each of its chapters except the final one, 15<sup>th</sup>. Firstly, a grammar topic is explained through the lenses of CG, then form and meaning aspect is explained. After that, a communicative situation is briefly mentioned regarding TBLT. In the final subchapters within each chapter, the actual task cycle with detailed explanation of its implementation and alternative task ideas are

provided. While describing the task cycle, the author presents a very detailed lesson plan on how a teacher should implement the given task within his/her classroom. Moreover, very specific examples on teacher speech, instructions to give to students and materials are given to include within tasks. However, it is important to note that these are all in textual format not in tables, graphs or pictures, which would work better for practicality.

### **Chapter 5: Tense**

Tense is a highly occurring and significant grammatical aspect, therefore, this chapter explains how CG grammar deals with both the present and the past tense in detail and later on gives ideas for task cycle for each tense. In explaining the tenses, the time period pertinent to each tense is detailed with its meaning aspect. Moreover, regarding form, logical reasoning behind tense inflections such as -s, -es, -ed, -ied are provided on the basis of both morphological and phonological aspects. Regarding the fact that tense in general is a problematic and hard to comprehend grammar topic, giving such explanations sounds highly reasonable to learners with sufficient cognitive levels.

### **Chapter 6: Aspect**

A grammatical phenomena referred as aspect is dealt here in this chapter. Aspect in CG relates to progressiveness and perfectiveness of a situation and categorizes the events as having clear boundaries of where it begins and ends or having unclear boundaries. The former refers to grammatical aspect and the latter refers to lexical aspect. In the following subchapters, form and meaning of aspect are described and task ideas are given in detail. Since the form of the progressive aspect is -ing the focus of the task is emphasized on teaching this inflection in progressive tense.

### **Chapter 7: Modality**

Another extremely frequent grammatical phenomena, modality is dealt thoroughly in this chapter. Modality refers to hypothetical expressions reflected through the speaker's

perspective. In this subchapter, form, different categorization of modal verbs and their syntactic use are given. Moreover, in this subchapter, meaning, the underlying meaning of each modal verb is specified under CG standards, hence providing the readers with ample explanations to make use of in their teaching processes. In addition to the explanations, differing from the other chapters, in this chapter visuals describing the functions of some modal verbs are given to be used for students' easier comprehension. In the task cycle, only 4 modal verbs are used yet task ideas of other modal verbs are given in the alternatives.

### **Chapter 8: Conditionals**

All three conditionals, their underlying meaning, differences between three of them and logical reasoning to explain them in CG are given emphasis in this chapter. Resembling to modal verbs, conditionals also signal hypothetical situations (type II and III), therefore the implications behind the unreality of situations are thoroughly discussed. In addition to this, a theory about the speaker's aspect of speech time, Mental Space Theory, is referred as being connected to understanding conditionals. Finally, a task cycle idea for secondary school students focusing on conditional type I is given with other alternative ideas.

### **Chapter 9: The passive voice**

While explaining the underlying meaning behind passive construction, this chapter points out the difference between active and passive voice. Referring to an abovementioned issue, construal, it is stated that passive voice is the result of choice of the speaker upon choosing to highlight a person/thing over another. Explanations on the choice of passive voice through CG is given extensively, therefore making it easier for students to comprehend the use of V3 and verbs with -ed endings rather than just having to memorize without making any sense. Consequently, a highly interesting task cycle about solving crimes is provided.

### **Chapter 10: Prepositions**

A problematic grammar topic in terms of comprehension of correct uses for learners, prepositions is dealt with in this chapter. Theories related to metaphorization are given about this topic to explain it through CG. Among the prepositions, in, on and at are emphasized and their different underlying meanings are explained. Then, a task cycle is given for younger age or lower level learners with added alternatives.

### **Chapter 11: Phrasal verbs**

Another problematic topic, phrasal verbs are dealt in this chapter. The main reason of their being problematic lies in the fact that they are mostly regarded as lists to be memorized without attaching meaning to single items in the verb + preposition combination. Therefore, CG opposes to that tradition of memorization and brings up new explanations for the comprehension of phrasal verbs. Thus, it explains the root meanings and alternative meanings of verbs and prepositions within the combination and relates them to each other while making its intended meaning. Finally, a task cycle idea is given related to creating stories by using phrasal verbs.

### **Chapter 12: Verb complementation**

The underlying meaning and teaching ideas of connecting two clauses by using complementizers, such as to-infinitive and gerund, is dealt with in this chapter. 4 of the complementizers are explained in detail through tense and aspect as they are used to connect clauses. Also conceptual differences in the choice of one connector over another are mentioned by giving reasons referring to CG. In conclusion, a task cycle for higher level learners are given for the for connector explained beforehand.

### **Chapter 13: Pronouns**

Compared to the other grammar topics dealt with in other chapters, this chapter's focus, teaching pronouns is a relatively easy for learners' comprehension. Hence, the intended learner group for task idea in this chapter is lower level learners. While explaining

pronouns each subcategory is described and discussed in terms of CG explanations, with the focus being on personal and possessive pronouns. Later in the subchapter describing the task cycle, possessive pronouns are chosen to be taught.

#### **Chapter 14: Articles**

Although there are many more grammar items and topics to be dealt with, due to author's preference in not covering all grammar topics, this chapter is the final one explaining a grammar topic, in this case articles. Articles in English is a topic that seems basic and yet also confused a lot by learners at the same time because of the lack of reasoning put forward by teachers while explaining them. Therefore, to overcome this confusion, as it did in other chapters, here CG also plays a big role in explaining this grammar topic, hence making it easier to be comprehended.

#### **Chapter 15: Conclusion**

In concluding this book, the author rephrases her aims in writing this book and mentions the possible effects of the idea she puts forward may have in the field of ELT.

The author all in all makes her case very clear and convincing in claiming that grammar is something to be taught while assigning meaning to it rather than just stating rules to be memorized. In suggesting a new way to integrate grammar into TBLT through CG, this book brings forth a contemporary idea that has yet to be encountered in literature. The explanations given in this book while describing each grammar topic may be hard to comprehend for teachers in the field, so further look into suggested readings are recommended. Besides, considering the book for teachers as possible readers although the task cycle ideas are fruitful in providing examples, they are not presented in a structured way as it is done in lesson plans. Therefore, teachers need to keep in mind to adapt these ideas into their own teaching contexts, learner age, levels, their L1 and so forth.



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