

A Cognitive Grammar
Approach to Teaching
Tense and Aspect in
the L2 Context

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By

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ABSTRACT

The volume addresses a significant issue in the field of applied cognitive grammar by exploring the effectiveness of cognitive grammar theory for L2 instruction of less advanced learners in English tense and aspect forms. This is one of the few attempts to link cognitive grammar to the area of second-language teaching and learning. The volume's outcome is a contribution to the body of empirical evidence promoting the new perspective on the process of teaching and learning about English language structures. The language structures in focus are English tense and aspect forms, which represent a great challenge for second-language learners. The volume focuses on examining the effect of cognitive-grammar-inspired instruction covering the form and meaning use of the tense and aspect system in English on the second-language development and places emphasis also on comparing its effects on the language learning process with those of teaching that employs more traditional grammatical descriptions. It thereby examines the extent to which cognitive grammar, which provides semantically as well as psychologically grounded explanations of the mechanisms of grammatical rules and structures, can be successfully applied to pedagogical instruction in second-language pedagogy and, accordingly, can contribute to new ways of understanding the nature of language and language learning. The intent has been to offer valid results and explanations that justify the interdisciplinary aspects of this kind of research.

The study reported upon incorporated various aspects of the cognitive grammar analysis of English tense and aspect structures from Brisard (2013), Langacker (e.g., 1987; 1991; 2008b), Niemeier (2013), and Turewicz (2000; 2007) into novel materials and pedagogical techniques. The quasi-experimental design, with two groups at two levels participating (total $N = 116$), explored the efficacy of cognitive grammar and traditional descriptions grounded in pedagogical grammars in teaching and learning of the target language structures in a second-language learning context. The target language structures investigated encompass the present progressive, the simple present, the present perfect, and the simple past. The participants in the study were less advanced learners of English. To investigate the participants' progress in learning use of the tense and

aspect structures context-appropriately in written productions, *t*-tests and ANCOVAs were carried out.

Overall, the statistical findings show that the participants dealt with in the cognitive grammar conditions gained in their use and understanding of the target structures, attesting to a positive effect of the semantically oriented instruction type on the second language's development. This positive contribution of cognitive grammar to the second-language learning process was manifested particularly strongly in the participants' use of the present progressive and simple present. In comparison with traditional-description-informed instruction, the results point to greater effectiveness of the cognitive-grammar-inspired teaching in promoting the participants' use of the target structures. However, in order to be suitable in argument for the superiority of cognitive grammar as a foundation for language instruction, the results reported upon here have to be interpreted in light of a number of issues that may constrain the generalisability of the study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aims and Structure

This volume investigates the applicability of Cognitive Grammar (henceforth herein 'CG'), a sub-branch of Cognitive Linguistics (CL), to instruction of English in the context of second-language (L2) teaching and learning. It focuses on testing the usefulness of adapting CG to teaching of the English tense and aspect system in an instructed L2 learning environment and on comparing the effects of the new paradigm on acquisition of the target structures with those of the more traditional paradigm. Specifically, the study served as an attempt to determine the effectiveness of descriptions rooted in CG and traditional grammars on the L2 development in teaching of selected facets of the tense and aspect system to learners at lower levels of advancement. The investigation of these effects was designed for shedding light on hitherto little-examined aspects of the usefulness of CG: i) its applicability to the teaching of tense and aspect forms, ii) its applicability for teaching learners of English at lower levels of advancement and iii) its applicability to fostering various areas of knowledge, such as receptive and productive knowledge. The target language structures investigated in the empirical part of this volume are the present perfect, the simple past, the present progressive and the simple present.

Research on L2 teaching and learning has long attempted to explore specific ways in which L2 instruction can support and facilitate successful acquisition of, for instance, grammatical and lexical components of the target language. The place of grammar instruction in L2 teaching and language curricula has been challenged numerous times, particularly with the advent of communicatively oriented syllabi in the 1970s, which opted for an exclusive focus on meaning and language use in communicative contexts. Not only the presence or absence but also the nature of grammatical instruction has been subject to numerous debates among L2 pedagogues. As Achard puts it,

the kind of grammatical instruction dispensed in the L2 classroom obviously depends on the teacher's view of what grammar is and how students process it. Virtually every practical decision the instructor makes from the conception of the syllabus to the design of the activities themselves implements a set of hypotheses about the nature of the grammatical organization and the manner in which its units are learned. (Achard, 2008, p. 432)

While no definite answer can settle the debate, contemporary researchers agree that several teaching techniques can be efficient, depending on the given context and the instructional situation. However, certain target language structures remain challenging for L2 learners, on account of their internal complexity, other language-specific characteristics, or the inadequacies of those teaching approaches focused exclusively on the presentation of grammatical form. English tense and aspect forms represent one such area of grammatical structures that L2 learners struggle with, even at more advanced levels in their language education. The lack of learners' adequate use of the target language structures may be ascribed to the nature of their description in current pedagogical grammars and traditional instructional materials. Fairly often, tense and aspect forms are categorised and described on the basis of formal rather than meaning-oriented characteristics. Moreover, it appears that the descriptions are presented quite schematically and not linked with a current, coherent and systematic linguistic theory (Tyler, 2012). The employment of a systematic, conceptually grounded linguistic theory that offers clear, precise and meaningful explanations of the target grammar may contribute to the correct conception of grammar on the part of the language learner.

Over the past 15 years, researchers have turned to the frameworks of CG and CL, hypothesising that applying these frameworks to the L2 learning of grammar in an instructional context may have potential to make a beneficial contribution to the learners' language development. The theoretical framework associated with Ronald Langacker, CG has been one of the most influential cognitive approaches to grammar to date. Overall, it constitutes an attempt to explain the formation and use of linguistic structures of varying complexity by means of our general cognitive processes. It has been argued that cognitively oriented theories of language structure can offer new and exciting insights into the systematicity of both language and language use and that these are of particular use to language learners and in the language learning process (Achard, 2004; Achard & Niemeier, 2004; Bielak & Pawlak, 2013; Bielak, Pawlak, & Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2013; Boers & Lindstromberg, 2008; Broccias, 2008; De Knop & De Rycker, 2008; De Knop, Boers, & De

Rycker, 2010; De Rycker & De Knop, 2009; Evans, 2005; Jacobsen, 2012; Holme, 2009; Langacker, 2008a, 2008c; Littlemore, 2009; Littlemore & Juchem-Grundmann, 2010; Niemeier, 2005a, 2005b; Reif, 2012; Taylor, 1993; Turewicz, 2000; Tyler, 2012; Tyler, Ho, & Mueller, 2011; Verspoor & Tyler, 2009). Among these insights are the importance of a strong emphasis on meaning-making as the purpose of language; the meaningfulness of all aspects of language, ranging from grammatical to lexical items; the notion of the speaker's active role in shaping the meaning of his message to convey a particular perspective to the interlocutor; and the role of embodiment and the way it determines the structure of language.

In particular, applying CG to L2 language instruction allows one to account for a usage-based perspective on language and provides conceptual tools with which certain aspects of linguistic knowledge can be made salient. The new paradigm offers a more principled motivation for the way morphological, lexical and syntactical patterns of language are structured and how they derive from recurring interactions with the world. Additionally, rather than subsuming the arbitrary nature of language, CG emphasises the meaningful relationships among various morphemes and other linguistic elements. In an ideal situation, language learners can benefit from these guiding principles that underpin the new approach. With regard to the target grammar of the study discussed here—English tense and aspect forms—CG research provides analysis that highlights the temporal and non-temporal functions and usage types, alongside the semantic contribution of individual forms, such as morphemes, to the meaning of larger and more complex structures. Accordingly, this work addresses the beneficial effects of instruction that emphasises the intrinsic meaning of inflections.

The study of the efficacy of using CG in teaching a second language has relevance for CG (and CL) research, for second-language learning and teaching research and for teachers and learners of a second language. From the standpoint of CG, the applicability of this linguistic theory to language pedagogy represents “an important empirical test” (Langacker, 2001a, p. 3) that can pinpoint possible inadequacies of the theory in question; research on L2 teaching and learning can profit from this endeavour as it reveals important elements related to the learners' language development and the effects that certain instruction types may have on this progression. The study is also relevant to language teachers and learners, since they may gain new insights connected with the novel instruction type and hence critically review the nature of contemporary grammar teaching.

Prior research demonstrates that CL and its various sub-branches can be presented to L2 learners in a learner-appropriate and accessible manner. The majority of applications of CL to language pedagogy are concerned predominantly with instruction in vocabulary (Boers, 2000; Verspoor & Lowie, 2003), idioms (Csábi, 2004), prepositions (Ho, 2008; Tyler & Evans, 2003; Tyler, Mueller, & Ho, 2010), phrasal verbs (Kövecses & Szabó, 1996) and metaphors (Beréndi, Csábi, & Kövecses, 2008; Boers, 2000; MacLennan, 1994). Positive effects of teaching the formal structures of language from a CL perspective, known as Cognitive Grammar, have been suggested in a number of theoretically oriented proposals (Achard, 2004; Chen & Oller, 2008; Niemeier & Reif, 2008; Turewicz, 2000), whereas research that provides empirical evidence is still scarce. Whilst research into applying CG in L2 learning and teaching has gained popularity, the investigation into its effectiveness in teaching of tense and aspect forms has not attracted much attention. Moreover, though empirical studies have been conducted in diverse educational contexts, it appears that most of them have applied the novel linguistic paradigm in higher-education courses, wherein the L2 learners' levels of language proficiency are already fairly high. This study is intended to contribute to the related body of knowledge and address these hitherto little-investigated issues of testing the efficacy of using CG in the L2 teaching and learning context. Simultaneously, this work demonstrates how the theoretical guidelines can be translated into accessible and meaningful instructional materials for promotion of the L2 learning process and explores whether the complexities underlying the new linguistic theory can be adapted to instruction of tense and aspect forms in a classroom context. An additional aim with the study was to assess the effects of CG-oriented instruction on the language development of less advanced learners. This work also compares the effectiveness of teaching based on CG with that of grammar teaching informed by traditional descriptions. Finally, the research is an attempt to present empirical evidence of how the new instruction type manifests itself in the learners' receptive and productive knowledge.

To ascertain whether teaching from a CG perspective positively affects the learners' language development and how this type of instruction compares with the effects of instruction based on traditional grammar descriptions, a set of quasi-experimental studies was conducted in four secondary-school classrooms in Germany. The research questions have to do with exploring the efficacy of two types of instruction, CG-oriented teaching versus teaching rooted in standard descriptions, for the L2 development of English tense and aspect structures. The results of this study are discussed in light of prior research findings in the Applied

Cognitive Grammar field, with possible limitations of the study and implications for future research also being highlighted.

To this end, the contents of the study are organised thus: Chapters 2 and 3 give an overview of the general theoretical background of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the framework of CG and its basic tenets. The first part provides a brief description of the CL enterprise, discussing the guiding principles of the framework: the Cognitive Commitment and the Generalisation Commitment. Section 2.3 is devoted to the key commitments and the perspective on language and language acquisition postulated in CG theory, while Section 2.4 addresses the specific characteristics of the CG model, thereby highlighting the formal features of how grammar is represented in this approach. Since CG subscribes to the Cognitive Commitment, thus attempting to model the cognitive principles that license language use, Section 2.5 takes a closer look at the cognitive mechanisms that are relevant for adequate description of the tense and aspect system.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed summary of the target structures featured in the experiment, focusing on the explications articulated in CG theory and on the reasons for which analysis of the target structures with an outspoken CG perspective is particularly beneficial (in Section 3.2). The notion of how finite clauses are grounded by tense in CG is presented in Section 3.3. Section 3.4 is devoted to discussing the framework of tense, alongside its meaning and representation in English. The function of aspect markers in English is examined in Section 3.5, as is their interaction with tense. The detailed exemplification of the target structures chosen for the quasi-experimental studies is addressed also.

Chapter 4 is intended to offer an overview of a key recent trend in grammar teaching in L2 educational contexts, along with the role of grammar and that of tense and aspect forms, in contemporary L2 instruction. Section 4.3 illustrates the benefits and challenges associated with the application of CG to grammar instruction, and constitutes an attempt to show why, from the standpoint of this study, introducing CG in the L2 classroom is a worthwhile and beneficial endeavour. This chapter also highlights prior research in the field of Applied Cognitive Grammar, summarising and analysing the empirical results.

Chapter 5 lays out the methodological scope of the study and addresses the research questions and research design (in sections 5.2–5.3). The data-collection context, research material, techniques employed for analysis of the material and ethics considerations are discussed in sections 5.4–5.7.

Chapter 6 and 7 are devoted to presentation and discussion of the results from a quantitative point of view. As the study conducted involved

quite different learner groups, the findings obtained from the set of quasi-experimental studies are discussed in a separate chapter. While Chapter 6 presents the results from the quasi-experimental study that was concerned with teaching of the present progressive and simple present, Chapter 7 outlines the findings from the quasi-experiment that featured the present perfect and simple past. Each chapter provides an overview of the research hypotheses and participants relevant for the endeavour, followed by description, analysis and discussion of the results. Each research question is answered in detail and discussed in light of previous research on Applied Cognitive Grammar.

Finally, Chapter 8 draws together the results presented in chapters 6 and 7, interprets their relevance for research on CG and L2 teaching and learning and discusses the pedagogical implications. The chapter also highlights the contribution and limitations of the study. The appendices make available several of the documents mentioned in the course of this work, such as research materials.

1.2. The Choice of Target Grammar

The study's attention to the teaching of tense and aspect in English with special focus on i) the present progressive and simple present and ii) the present perfect and simple past is motivated by theoretical, practical and time-related factors. Primarily, these particular areas of interest arose from a desire to intertwine CG-driven research on tense and aspect with current L2 teaching practices in such a way that learners of English could raise their level of grammatical proficiency holistically. The ubiquitous premise that motivation in language is both primary and pervasive may imply the learners' awareness of motivated form–meaning connections just as much as learning practices that are not associated with mere memorisation may arise. Specifically, the goal is to raise the learners' awareness such that they grasp the motivation behind the function and use of the semantic properties associated with the present progressive and present perfect.

Secondly, the choice of the target grammar is determined by the fact that even advanced learners of English tend to experience considerable difficulties when applying grammatical constructs whose underlying structure and concepts do not exist as a grammatical category in their L1 (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995). As Close (1962) observed a full 50 years ago, the choice of “whether to say I write or I am writing, have written or wrote” (p. 38) constitutes a major source of erroneous use for advanced and less advanced learners of English alike. This type of deviant use is also observed in German learners' use of English, with aspect-related

phenomena counting among the major obstacles faced in the L2 acquisition process (see Westergren Axelsson & Hahn, 2001; Dürich, 2005; Rogatcheva, 2009). This observation was corroborated by the teachers participating in the study. The list of grammatical elements representing immense hurdles on the learners' (L1: German) path to successful learning in written, oral, free, elicited, impromptu and controlled language production that they were requested to compile revealed two predominant areas posing problems for the learners' successful L2 development: i) the progressive versus non-progressive aspect and ii) the correct and appropriate use of the present perfect. On one hand, in the context of applied linguistics and L2 teaching, it has been noted that these grammatical stumbling blocks to learning may be attributed to their sometimes simplified and overgeneralised description in the respective textbooks (Niemeier & Reif, 2008; Römer, 2005; Schlüter, 2002). The following section is provided to review an example of such insufficient representations of progressives and the present perfect in the reference grammars used in L2 teaching in Germany. On the other hand, the problems with appropriate, target-language-like use of the grammar may be due to cross-linguistic variation. The target items may be more difficult for the learners, as the L1 patterns are likely to exert a (negative) influence on the L2 learning process. Subsection 1.2.2 addresses possible cross-linguistic differences in the acquisition of the target grammar by offering a brief contrastive analysis of the German and English tense and aspect system.

1.2.1. Representation of the Target Grammar in L2 Teaching Materials

Römer (2005) investigated the presentation of progressive forms in a slightly modified version of the textbook that was used for the grammar instruction within the comparison group in my study. She compared the representation in German teaching materials with a detailed empirical account of progressives in spoken British English. From her analysis, it appears that

the presentations of progressives in EFL teaching materials is not fully in accordance with their use in natural English and [...] we might want to change a few things in the textbooks and school grammars in order to bring the English we teach more fully into accordance with real-life language use. (Römer, 2005, p. 242)

She (2005, p. 242) continues the argument by stating that textbooks and reference grammars employed in L2 teaching in Germany contain frequent presentation of progressives connected with only a limited set of functions and, alongside the prototypical function of current ongoingness associated with the construction (see the discussion in Subsection 3.5.3), particular focus is given to the functions of framing and (negative) attitude, while the spectrum of other contextual uses, such as ‘gradual change’ or ‘politeness’ (2005, p. 242), is left marginalised. She also found that the grammar references explicitly state that imperfectives do not usually occur in the progressive form, suggesting that a wide range of verbs are dismissed as exceptions, which learners are required to simply memorise (Römer, 2005, Section 5.8). Römer gives the following example from one set of materials in her study of how the progressive in the present tense is introduced to the learners:

Present Progressive:

form, function (action in progress, unfinished), not used with stative verbs

Example:

MISS HUNT: OK then, go and find your animals. See what they’re *doing*.
Are they sleeping? Or eating? Or playing? Where and when do they usually *sleep, play* and *eat*?

(English G 2000 A)

An interesting finding is that, with examples such as that above, textbooks often fail to offer an explanation as to why stable situations are construed perfectly when used in present-time-reference situations and thereby resist the simple present tense, instead taking the progressive form (e.g., *is sleeping* or *is sitting*). Since the attempt to embrace and explain the complexity of the progressive, especially its flexible use with perfectives and imperfectives (see Chapter 3), in current English-grammar accounts in German textbooks appears to be unsuccessful, learners may be better served by cognitively oriented descriptions that acknowledge both prototypical and peripheral types of usage of the progressive form.

A similar observation is made by Niemeier and Reif (2008, p. 332), who emphasise that the presentation of the present perfect in the corresponding teaching materials in German L2 classrooms is overly generalised, leaving the students in the dark about the temporal interaction of speech, event and reference time (more detailed description of these notions is provided in Chapter 3). This conclusion is in line with the research of Schlüter (2002), who outlines that insufficiently designed concepts and exemplification of the present perfect can be seen as factors contributing to the difficulties German learners of English encounter when

learning the target structure. For instance, general rules such as the following serve as a basis for introduction of the present perfect:

You use the present perfect when you're only interested in *what* has happened (not the time when it happened). The present perfect tells me what has happened, but not when (Except: I've *just* seen a ghost).
(Beile et al., 1996a, p. 132, cited by Schlüter, 2002, p. 320)

Contradictory to the rule, the L2 teaching materials place great emphasis on the occurrence of the present perfect with particular time adverbials such as *since*, *for* and *just* to underpin the definite time frames invoked by the construction. According to the formula above, however, sentences including the present-perfect construction and definite reference times, such as *I haven't had enough time for my hobbies since last summer*, would not quite comply with the guidelines proposed above. Naturally, learners might get confused and tend to mis-conceptualise the temporal relations of speech, event and reference time of the present perfect, along with their importance in contrasting against the simple past. Furthermore, a glance at the contemporary use of the present perfect by American and British English speakers shows that this is the case in about 33% of all occurrences (Schlüter, 2000). Although teaching materials on the present perfect abound, learners are frequently offered rules to learn by heart, which occasionally neither allow full comprehension on a conceptual level nor fully reflect the use in contemporary spoken English. Most importantly, there are no explanations as to how changes in construal operations affect the use of various grammatical structures. On top of this, no adequate attempt is made to relate the form function and meaning function of the present perfect and simple past on a conceptual level to highlight the apparent semantic differences between the two forms. Integrating the “conceptual-semantic dimension” (Niemeier & Reif, 2008, p. 333) into L2 teaching materials and practices in the German context may overcome some of the obstacles that learners encounter when employing the target grammatical items. The empirical part of this study is an attempt to determine whether this hypothesis can be supported.

1.2.2. Cross-linguistic Differences in the Categorisation of the Target Grammar

Findings from several studies (e.g., Lucy, 1992; Ameel, Storms, Malt, & Sloman, 2005) have shown that “the second language learning process results in the formation of a blend between L1 and L2 categorisation systems” (Littlemore, 2009, p. 31), thereby suggesting that L1 construal

patterns may influence the L2 learning process occurring for the target grammar. In consequence of cross-linguistic variation, the target grammar of the empirical study in my research project may be difficult for German L2 learners to learn. By drawing upon a contrastive analysis of the English (L2) and German (L1) tense and aspect system, the final section of the chapter briefly illustrates this variation of the target grammar and hence highlights the difficulties that German learners of English may encounter.

Firstly, in contrast to English, the German language lacks the property of a grammaticalised progressive aspect to describe the internal structure of a situation, event, or process; instead, it employs time adverbials such as *gerade* [now], *noch* [still] and *momentan* [at the moment] to emphasise the continuity, or ongoingness, of the situation in question (Klein, 1995). However, attempts have been made to find constructions equivalent to the English progressive construction in the German language, such as *am/beim/im V sein*, (*gerade*) *dabei sein*, *X zu V* or the so-called absentive, as in *einkaufen sein* (Römer, 2005, p. 173). So far, none of these counterparts have found their way into the written standard (for a detailed discussion of German counterparts, see, e.g., Krause, 2002). The example below is presented to illustrate the distinctive use of the progressive form in English and a counterpart with comparable function in German.

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------------|
| 1.1 | He <i>is running</i> down the hill. | [progressive aspect] |
| 1.2 | Er <i>läuft (gerade)</i> den Hügel hinunter. | [verb + time adverbial] |

Especially significant in this example are the different conceptual frameworks evoked in the English and German statements. English clearly differentiates between temporally bounded and unbounded situations; i.e., speakers of English use the non-progressive form when they view the situation in its entirety or, on the other hand, use the progressive form to adopt an internal perspective on the situation. German, in contrast, lacks this choice of grammatical aspect to indicate the ‘zooming in’ function of the progressive; it must instead, as demonstrated in the example above, apply temporal markers (such as *gerade*) or rely on non-standardised constructions to convey the meaning of duration or incompleteness. The conceptual representation of tense and aspect in English is addressed in Chapter 3.

A study by Bardovi-Harlig (1995, pp. 158–159), examining the acquisition of tense and aspect in combination with lexical aspect by learners of English, points to the simple form as less frequently applied by low-level learners of English to verbs denoting duration and activities, whereas the progressive aspect tends to be overused in the environment of activity verbs at first. The second-language use of the progressive aspect

by German learners has received scant attention, with most research focusing on lexical aspect within the framework of the Aspect Hypothesis (Rohde, 2002). Recently, the topic has been investigated by corpus-oriented researchers (Westergren Axelsson & Hahn, 2001; Rogatcheva, 2009), who examined the use of the progressive in authentic writings by advanced German learners of English. Westergren Axelsson and Hahn (2001) have ascertained that “German learners’ frequencies of the progressive do not deviate from Standard English” (p. 13) in quantitative terms, while qualitative analysis of the learners’ written output indicates a great deviation of their use of the progressive from native-like accounts in the corpora. As the text was written by 20–25-year-old learners of English at university level, the results and their transferability to the study at hand must be interpreted with caution.

In a similar vein, Rogatcheva (2009) conducted a corpus-assisted study examining the second-language use of the progressive in argumentative essays among advanced German learners of English¹ and compared them with essays produced by American and British students. In her analysis, she points out that the “German subcorpus is [. . .] identical with the normalised frequency of the progressive for the American subcorpus” (Ibid, p. 262). In her comparison with the British sub-corpus, she discovered that German learners of English overuse the progressive in argumentative writing considerably. In addition to presenting quantitative results, she explored the data from a qualitative perspective: here, relative to the native speakers’ choices, “the evaluation reveals significantly more instances of ungrammatical and unidiomatic use of the progressive [. . .] in the German learner subcorpus” (Ibid, p. 266).

Contrastive analysis of the German and English present perfect and simple past might reveal why appropriate use and successful application is repeatedly referred to as an obstacle to successful learning for learners from various L1 backgrounds. The German *Perfekt* and English perfect tenses are similar with respect to their meaning and their use for expressions that profile continuation, through the present time, of a non-processual relationship that existed before the time of speech but remains currently relevant to the speaker (Dürich, 2005; Hahn, 2000; Klein, 1995; Löbner, 2002). However, the German *Perfekt*, which is structurally similar to the present-perfect form in English, has become a hybrid form and is

¹ To my knowledge, Rogatcheva does not mention specific learner-related variables, such as age or educational background. As the learners were writing argumentative essays, we may hypothesise that her sample group differed significantly from the participants in my study, especially with respect to the learners’ level of proficiency, years of English instruction and age.

now the only past tense in many varieties of German (Löbner, 2002). The gradual shift from using the *Präteritum*, which is equivalent to the simple past form in English, to using the *Perfekt* in German is termed ‘Präteritumsschwund’ and is a phenomenon that has also found its way to the written standard (Löbner, 2002). Because of the *Präteritumsschwund*, a major complication arises when German learners of English are learning the two forms: the appropriate combination of time adverbials with the two constructions. While it is possible for definite and indefinite time adverbials to occur freely with the *Perfekt* and *Präteritum* in German both, English demands a more strictly defined combination of definite and indefinite time adverbials with the target forms.

The deficient use of the present perfect among German learners of English is attested to in Rogatcheva’s (2009) study, wherein it was found that these learners “tend to misuse the perfect as a narrative tense for relating events that happened at a definite point in the past” (p. 268), which may be interpreted as an L1 transfer from German. Moreover, her study reveals that the learners initially hesitate to apply the present perfect and this leads to significant under-representation of the present perfect in comparison with writers of British English. However, no significant differences in the use of the present perfect could be found when the comparison was made with written text produced by American English writers. These results are in line with research conducted by Dürich (2005), who investigated the distribution of tense/aspect errors in narrative compositions by adult German learners of English. According to Dürich (2005), the present-perfect tense is “more often used to cover the meaning of the past non-progressive than the past non-progressive is used to cover the meaning of the present perfect” (p. 89).

When one takes into account that the grammatical features of the L1 and L2 discussed here may “overlap and exert a strong influence on each other” (Littlemore, 2009, p. 31) during the L2 learning process, it appears that explicit teaching of the varying L2 construal patterns of the target grammar could foster learners’ awareness of the differences between their L1 and the L2 and, ultimately, increase their L2 language proficiency.